

**Montana Distance Learning Task Force
Findings and Recommendations – Part I
January 2007**

The Distance Learning Task Force shall provide to the Board of Public Education recommendations for amendments to ARM 10.55.907 Distance, Online, and Technology Delivered Learning. Recommended amendments to the ARM will comply with MAPA rules for public hearing.

In September 2006, the Montana Board of Public Education (BPE) established the Distance Learning Task Force to address issues of currency, flexibility, quality and accountability pertaining to its rule governing distance, online, and technology delivered programs and/or courses serving Montana public school students. The BPE established the purpose, guiding principles and charge of the Distance Learning Task Force, and asked for Phase I recommendations by January 2007. Phase II will consider other recommendations to be made later in 2007.

Members of the Task Force met on three occasions: December 4, 2006; December 15, 2006; and January 6, 2007. The Distance Learning Task Force requested that a sub-committee focus on: supplement, not supplant; licensure, facilitator qualifications, role, and training; provider registration; local control; and definitions of basic terms. The sub-committee met on December 20, 2006, and January 2, 2007, to provide 14 specific recommendations for consideration at the January 6 meeting. That meeting was devoted to consensus recommendations made to the BPE concerning possible Distance Learning rule changes. The Distance Learning Task Force submitted this report of findings and recommendations to the Montana Board of Public Education (BPE) on January 18, 2007. A full report will be published and available at a Web site by March 15, 2007.

1.
Proposed Change: Addition of five definitions to ARM 10.55.602; the terms impact changes made in 10.55.701 and 10.55.907 [Proposals 10-14, but considered first because of possible impacts on rule language].

Vote: Approved by consensus with one abstention.

2.
Proposed Change: Local Control Issue—Addition of a statement to ARM 10.55.701—a requirement that local Boards of Trustees have a written policy which addresses distance, online and technology-delivered learning [Proposal 9, considered second because of the impact on ARM 10.55.907].

Vote: Amended and approved by consensus, with one abstention.

3.
Proposed Change: Distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs and/or courses shall meet the learner expectations adopted by the school district and be aligned with state content and performance standards. [Proposal 1]

Vote: Approved by consensus with one abstention.

4.
Proposed Change: If a student takes a majority of courses during a grading period via distance, online, and technology delivered programs, the school shall provide a report to the Office of Public Instruction documenting how it is meeting the student's needs under the accreditation standards. [Proposal 2]

Vote: Amended and approved by consensus, with one abstention.

5.

Proposed Change: Teachers of distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs shall be licensed and endorsed in Montana in the area of instruction taught. School districts receiving distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs described in this rule shall have a learning facilitator for each course and available to the students. [Proposal 3]

Vote: Amended and approved by consensus (3 voting no, 1 abstention)—minority report rationale provided from those voting no.

6.

Proposed Changes: [Proposals 4—8 were considered together as the proposed changes were closely related.]

Proposal 4: When a teacher of distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs and/or courses does not possess the qualifications specified in (3) above, the facilitator must be licensed and endorsed in Montana in the area of instruction facilitated.

Proposal 5: When a teacher of distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs is qualified as provided (3) above, the receiving school district's facilitator shall be a licensed teacher or a para-educator.

Proposal 6: School districts receiving distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs and/or courses must provide qualified facilitators for synchronous delivery, requiring physical presence of a facilitator, and for asynchronous delivery, requiring facilitators be available to students.

Proposal 7: All providers and coordinating entities of distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs, other than Montana school districts, shall annually, no later than October 1 [report]:

Proposal 8: Document the professional qualifications, including Montana teacher licensure and endorsement if possessed, of their teachers of distance, online, and technology delivered programs and/or courses.

Vote: Proposals 4,5,6,8 were approved by consensus, with 3 members voting no, and 1 member abstaining. Proposal 7 passed 10 - 8 with 1 abstention. Minority issues were articulated by Task Force members and are included in the full report.