Online Task Force, Meeting #6

Monday, November 17, 2014

Link to the meeting recording:

http://connect.enetcolorado.org/p5zveu2xv8j/

Meeting Notes

The meeting of the Online Task Force (OTF) was called to order by Ethan Hemming, Task Force chair. Task Force members and guests introduced themselves.

OTF members and staff in attendance:

Judy Bauernschmidt
Brian Bissell
Scott Campbell
Joe Dinnetz
Leanne Emm
Diana Gamboa
Ethan Hemming
Chaille Hymes
Renee Martinez
Dale McCall
Kim McClelland
Gretchen Morgan
Dan Morris
Amy Valentine (by virtual link)
Linda VanMatre
John Myers
Melanie Sloan

Guests in Attendance

Heather O'Mara
Kris Enright
Karen Alikhan
Michael Vente

Housekeeping

Public Comment

John Myers asked OTF members if they want to allow public comment via phone, as well as at the OTF meetings.

OTF members agreed to allow it at today and all future meetings, if time allows.

Those wanting to provide public comment by phone need to:

- sign up online (http://connect.enetcolorado.org/online/)
- call: 866-645-5820

Each public comment is given five minutes to speak.

OTF members wanted all public comment received by CDE via email to be shared with them (via email) and to be read aloud, if time allows, during the public comment portion of the agenda.

OTF Meeting 5 Notes:

Ethan asked OTF members to review and provide edits/changes to the meeting notes from the 5th OTF meeting.

An OTF member asked that the number of OTF members (six) who ranked the pilot and other recommendations be stated in the meeting notes. Concern was for the rankings of pilot programs being construed as OTF member priorities. John clarified that the rankings were for internal OTF use to prioritize discussion, rather than a prioritization, and did not need to be mentioned in the final report. Additionally, John stated that the lists of pilot programs and other recommendations are not definitive and are open to additions and/or removals.

An OTF member sought clarification of the funding, and associated deadline, for pilot programs. The fiscal note for the OTF said pilot programs were funded. Gretchen clarified that the OTF was funded but not pilot programs. The CDE requested a larger amount of money to fund both the OTF and pilot programs. The funding received was less and that fiscal note specifically stated pilot programs were not funded—therefore the deadline does not apply. John noted that this would also be in the legislative record. Gretchen offered to follow up with the OTF member regarding this.

Agenda

John Myers reviewed the agenda for the meeting and asked if there were any comments or questions; none were offered.

OTF Report Outline

OTF members reviewed the draft final report outline.

An OTF member questioned the inclusion of the other recommendations in the report, given the previous conversation about rankings. John clarified that the vote of the OTF will not be included in the final report but the final other recommendations will be included.

An OTF member asked if rationale behind other recommendations will also be included. John and Ethan stated that they may, and/or it may be necessary to do so.

After this discussion, the OTF members approved the general outline.

John solicited language and/or writing of sections of the report from OTF members, if they were interested in doing so.

The first draft of the final OTF report will be provided to OTF members by December 1, 2014.

Presentations

Alex Medler, NACSA

Alex spoke to the national, state, and local level regarding authorizer standards.

At the national level, three things are being discussed: 1) frustration with the performance of full-time, online schools "just about everywhere;" 2) finances incentivize operators to attract and succeed with the right students (though the work in Colorado is opposite of this trend); 3) is charter the right space for online—the modality with online is clear and students without resources, capacity, or technology won't success—it is harder to match a kid to the school within charter framework.

At the state level, it is difficult to deal with poorly performing schools using the traditional accountability measures. Additionally, there is a real problem, seen nationally, with schools reconstituting themselves—Ohio provides examples of this. This is a problem for brick and mortar schools, but more so for online schools.

Alex suggested:

1. The OTF should clarify that the OTF recommendations augment existing state standards. These should be equal in rigor and scope to state accountability standards.
2. Authorizer standards address transfers of schools to new authorizers. Alex suggests that schools with Turnaround or Priority Improvement ratings cannot transfer authorizers.
3. To be careful when using other measures of student performance because anecdotal evidence suggests that credit and completion is being awarded without students earning them.
4. OTF recommendations ensure that the space for blended learning not be compromised, rather are focused on child centered learning and incentivized performance and accountability.

Alex closed by urging the OTF to "push the markers forward."

Questions

An OTF member asked what types of schools were, anecdotally, reported to be granting credit without earning. Alex said that he had been told of three charter schools using this practice.

An OTF member asked Alex if he had authorizer certification information, because he spoke solely to the operator level. Alex responded that his comments were framed in due diligence, and the OTF recommendations should focus on the prior performance record of the authorizer rather than assuming that they are a strong authorizer.

Gretchen shared information about Course Choice, a state run online supplemental course program to provide parity in course offerings across the state (with specific focus on rural students). The CO BOCES receives $400,000 - $500,000 in annual funding, while Course Choice received $10 million in funding.

An OTF member asked if NACSA has looked at the performance of schools that change authorizers. Alex stated that Ohio provides some data, but mostly show reconstitution.

Heather Hiebsch, PSD Global Academy

Heather discussed what is working at Global Academy and what could be replicated elsewhere.

Global Academy originated as a fully online school (K-12) and now operates as a blended school. Students are required to be in school two days a week. This was instituted because their data showed that high school students who voluntarily opted into two days per week in school performed four times more successfully as those who were online only. Middle school data showed seven times greater success with two days in school.

Heather emphasized:

- The importance of an online school being part of the authorizer's plan—the school participates in the authorizer's principal meetings, they hare teacher professional development, etc.
- The authorizer giving them the ability to remain "fluid and dynamic"

Heather gave two suggestions for change and/or improvement:

1. Come together: remove the contention between brick and mortar and online schools; celebrating the successes of online schools is part of this
2. Online schools need to be an avenue for personalization rather than an avenue for kids to avoid real school

Heather identified the following characteristics of a good authorizer for online schools:

- The authorizer needs to demonstrate their plan for the online school(s), including development, teacher pedagogy, improving curriculum, etc.

- The authorizer needs to be able to build trust so that their schools can take the necessary risks to improve results. Authorizers can demonstrate their record for supporting personalized online education.

Questions

An OTF member asked if Global Academy used readiness or fitness tools, and if so, did it change their demographics?

Heather stated that Global Academy does two things:

1. They require the student and parents to both submit writing samples.
   a. If these cannot be met, it is likely that online learning will be difficult for that family. This acts as a soft screen.
2. All students and parents of Global Academy are required to attend a full week of intense orientation

An OTF member sought validation of their distillation of Heather's comments:

- standards require authorizers to show how the online school(s) is part of their plan, vision for school improvement, and student success;
- Authorizers demonstrate both their history of using innovative approaches and their review and response to the results of these approaches. Heather affirmed these would be successes.

Another OTF member added to this list:

- an authorizer demonstrate expertise through demonstrating the training of staff and parents

Public Comment

Heather O'Mara, Hope Online

Heather represents Hope Online, a nonprofit charter school serving 3,000 elementary, middle, and high school students. Hope is the only multi-district online school in Colorado with learning centers (Hope has MOUs with each district in which they work). Hope also switched authorizers, changing from providing no support to one providing full support.

Heather read a statement and will share a copy of her complete statement to CDE.

Heather encouraged the OTF to treat all schools similarly, regardless of modality.

Heather urged the OTF to make the authorizer standards:

- Guidelines and not statutory requirements
- Include a process for CDE to follow
- Recognize CDE's role of supporting innovation

- Not be prescriptive
- Allow for local school district autonomy
- Address the fact that some districts haven't taken accountability seriously
- Does not adopt a timeline that will force a shutdown of schools mid-year if the process is not completed in time
- Does not make additional recommendations

Three public comments were received via email and were read aloud:

Shane and Margaret Chavez (email)

Dear Online Task Force Members,

Our family is involved in online schools in Colorado. We are concerned that the outcome of this task force will negatively affect our family's choice in education. We ask that you do not make decisions that will harm choice. We ask that you do not create a certification for authorizers, just guidelines. Furthermore, we ask that our authorizer and our school be grandfathered into these new guidelines. Finally, we believe that we do not need to ask permission from our home district to send our children to the school of our choice. Please consider the needs of parents before you make your recommendations.

Thank you for your time in listening to our concerns,

Shane and Margaret Chavez

Gary Potts (email)

Dear Online Task Force Members:

My family is involved with online schools in Colorado. I am concerned that the outcome of this task force will negatively affect my family's choice in education.

My Son, Patrick Potts, attended Branson School Online for all four years of High School.

Our reasons for Home Schooling and using an Online School were many:

We were tired of the violence in the school system, the bulling of certain students who didn't look or act "Right"

We had a student commit suicide in the parking lot, in his parent's car, at lunch time, from Bulling and not "fitting in"

The drugs that was available to anyone near the schools

The run-away sex that was going after the Gym class

The music that was forced on students with many sexual, demonic and "hate the authorities" themes are just a few…….

Patrick is now a rounded, courteous, respectful Junior College student with a 4.0 grade point avg. as a Science / Mathematics Major
With most all his classes Online!

I ask that you do not make decisions that will harm choice.

I ask that you do not create a certification process for authorizers, just guidelines.

Furthermore, I ask that my authorizer and my school (Branson School Online) be grandfathered into these new guidelines.

Finally, I believe that I do not need to ask for permission from my home district to send my child to the school of my choice.

Please consider the needs of parents before you present your recommendations.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns.

Gary Potts

Emerald Zeitz (email)

Dear Online Task Force Members,

My family is involved with online schools in Colorado. I am concerned that the outcome of this task force will negatively affect my family's choice in education. My daughter did not thrive as she is at the regular brick and mortar school she attended for 7 years. She is now thriving doing online public school at Colorado Public Academy.

I ask that you do not make decisions that will harm choice. I ask that you do not create a certification process for authorizers, just guidelines. Furthermore, I ask that my authorizer and my school be grandfathered into these new guidelines. Finally, I believe that I do not need to ask for permission from my home district to send my child to the school of my choice.

Please consider the needs of parents before you present your recommendations.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns.

Sincerely,

Emerald Zeitz

Authorizer Standards

The OTF members began review of the Further Recommendations section of the Authorizer Standards.

The first recommendation related to determining the date by which all reviews and certifications of existing authorizers must be completed.

OTF members had a lengthy discussion about whether the authorizer standards should be standards or guidelines.

Support of charge, per HB 14-1382
The OTF members were asked to vote on whether they want to proceed:

- (4)(a)(I) of HB 14-1382:
  - o To review the best practices and standards for overseeing and operating multi-district on-line schools that are used in this state and in other states and countries and to recommend quality standards and practices for authorizers of multi-district on-line schools in Colorado
    - ▪ OTF members unanimously voted yes
- (4)(a)(III) of HB 14-1382:
  - o To make recommendations concerning the system and process for certifying authorizers, including but not limited to the frequency and timing of certification and recertification and the effect on a multi-district on-line school if the school's authorizer loses certification
    - ▪ OTF members unanimously voted yes

Requirements of System & Process Elements
OTF members had a lengthy discussion on the requirements being placed on authorizers by the standards. This directly impacts the timeline for renewal/certification of authorizers of multi-district online schools.

OTF members wanted to minimize the burden on authorizers by leveraging existing processes (such as charter school renewal processes), timelines (coordinating with other application/renewal timelines), and documents (by providing crosswalks between other process documents and authorizer standards requirements).

Assurances & Documentation
The OTF members decided to review the System & Process Elements of the authorizer standards to label each section and sub-section whether it is an assurance (A) or documentation (D) requirement, for both new and existing authorizers. These changes are reflected in the revised Authorizer Standards document.

Performance Contracting
An OTF member requested that the performance contracting section of the System & Process elements document be separated for EMPs (EMP is the recognized term for education service providers in the state of Colorado). . The current draft does not reflect these requested changes.

Timeline

New Authorizers

Gretchen provided a timeline for the OTF to consider when determining the timelines for new and renewing authorizer.

Timeframe	Context
January – May, 2015	Legislative Session
July, 2015	If the resolution does not pass until the end of May, 2015, would rely on the state board of education, which meets in July, 2015.
August, 2015	The soonest the state board of education could set rules, unless emergency rules are created.
October, 2015	Rules enacted
November, 2015	Earliest date application could be accepted, per 60 day review statute requirements.
February, 2016	The earliest new authorizers could be approved by the state board of education (need a three week lead time to be placed on the board's agenda).
May, 2016	Second round of new authorizers begins, under "normal" timeline.

John summarized that a new authorizer could be in process by 2016, with school on a fast track could be opened by 2016, assuming both schools and authorizers have planned prior to applying.

Renewing Authorizers

Some OTF members were opposed to "grandfathering" authorizers, while others were in favor; no consensus was reached by the OTF on grandfathering.

OTF members wanted the renewing process for existing authorizers to be timely.

An OTF member suggested using a three or five year schedule for renewal with staggered starts based on the authorizer's dates of current authorization. Students in schools whose authorizer lost certification would have one year of continuation.

It was noted that the reauthorization schedule used by the state for multi-district authorizer standards started on a three year cycle and changed to five years. Gretchen stated these changes usually are due to a burden of process—external and/or internal (to the CDE).

An OTF member suggested using tiered renewal processes based on the district's performance rating: those rated at or below an identified rating would be on a three year renewal track; those above the identified rating would be on a five year renewal track.

OTF member discussed which rating (the district or its schools) would be used for determining the track. Homework was assigned to address this.

Homework:

OTF members are to identify the ways to respond to score (district and/or its schools) at time of review. Is there some logical relationship that can be brought to the renewal of authorizer timeline work? It is possible to use use rigor and timing together. What do OTF members most want to hold multi-district online school authorizers accountable for? Should only online schools or all schools in their portfolio be used?

Other Recommendations

OTF members requested additions to the Other Recommendations:

- When a school is having challenges achieving standards, determine how they can get help.
- A comprehensive study on what is and is not working in multi-district online schools and their authorizers to identify what can be learned and/or replicated. This needs to be shared in accessible form.
- Give the CDE a role to learn the bright spots and to share those across the state.

Homework

OTF members will provide additional edits to the authorizer standards, pilot programs, and/or other recommendations to APA (Melanie) by November 24th.

APA will provide to OTF members by December 1st:

- A Draft Final Report
- The authorizer standards separated into two documents: Standards & Practices, and System & Process Elements
- Revised authorizer standards document
- Revised pilot program document
- Revised other recommendations document

Wrap-Up

Pilot Programs

There was no time left to discuss pilot programs, and so the 7th OTF meeting will need time budgeted for that.

Votes

For the 7th meeting, APA will create language that can be voted on, using a recorded or non-recorded vote, to be binding in the final report.

Focused Public Comment

OTF members were asked to solicit input from their networks, and through the CDE website, public comment on the proposed timeline, pilot programs, other recommendations, and authorizer standards.

OTF members wanted specific feedback from current authorizers. If the draft timeline for new and renewing authorizers is completed in the 7th meeting, CDE will solicit feedback directly from existing authorizers.

7th Meeting

The 7th meeting of the OTF will be a full day meeting: 9:00am to 7:00pm, at