



Virtual Schools and Students with Disabilities: State-level Practices and Policy Recommendations

April 11, 2011



NEW ENGLAND
COMPREHENSIVE
C E N T E R



NEW YORK
COMPREHENSIVE
C E N T E R



Webinar Agenda

The goal of today's webinar is to develop an understanding of how states are serving students with disabilities in K-12 virtual education programs.

Today we will:

- Discuss how states are serving students with disabilities through K-12 virtual education programs
- Identify benefits and challenges of serving students with disabilities in K-12 virtual education programs
- Provide a forum for attendees to share how their state virtual education programs are serving students with disabilities; and share successes and challenges



About our Speakers

Paula Burdette, PhD

Director

Project Forum @ NASDSE

Eve Müller

Consultant

Project Forum @ NASDSE

About our Discussant

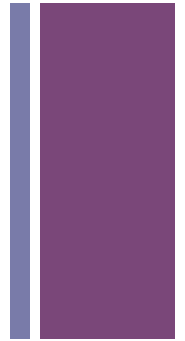
Mary Burns

Senior Technology Specialist

EDC



+ Project Forum at NASDSE

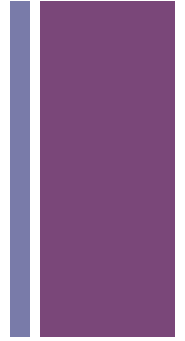


- Background
 - OSEP-funded
 - 30 years providing special education policy leadership
- Goals and Objectives
 - 15 documents per year
 - 2 policy forums per year



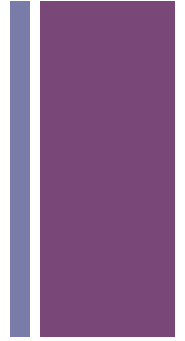
Project Forum

+ Project Forum and Virtual Special Education



- How we selected the topic of virtual education for students with disabilities
 - Background research document
 - Policy forum
- How we selected participants and who was included

+ Project Forum and Virtual Special Education



- Structure of Policy Forum
 - Goals and objectives
 - Timeline
 - Activities
 - Background “source” document
 - Virtual Focus Group
 - Face-to-Face Policy Forum



Serving Students with Disabilities in State-level Virtual K-12 Public School Programs

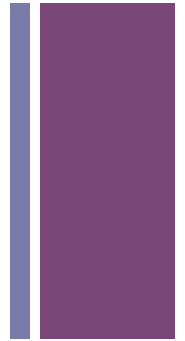
A Summary of Findings from Project Forum's 2009 Survey of States

Eve Muller, Ph.D.

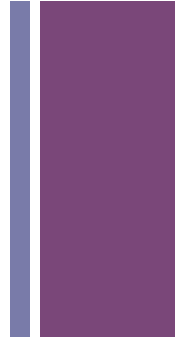
<http://www.projectforum.org/docs/ServingStudentswithDisabilitiesinState-levelVirtualK-12PublicSchoolPrograms.pdf>

+ Definitions

- Virtual education
- State-level virtual K-12 public school programs

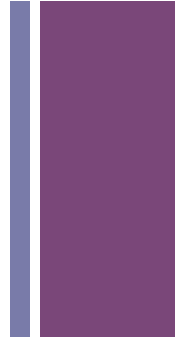


+ Purpose of Study



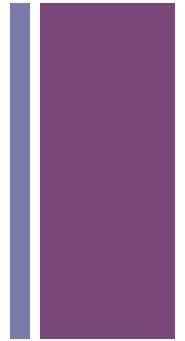
- To describe how state-level virtual public school programs are serving students with disabilities
- To identify benefits and challenges of virtual special education

+ Data Collection



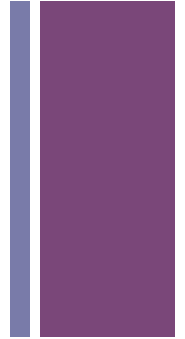
- Data collected *May-June, 2009*
- Survey of states and non-state jurisdictions using Zarca Interactive
- Total responses = 38

+ Number of State-Level Virtual Public School Programs



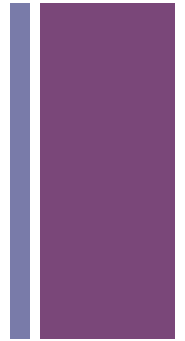
- 15 states with state-level virtual public school program & 2 in planning phases
- 13 provided additional information about their programs

+ Types of Virtual Public School Programs



- Grade levels of virtual public schools
 - High school = 13
 - Middle school = 9
 - Elementary school = 7
- Full-time versus supplementary
 - Full-time = 4
 - Supplemental = 4
 - Full-time & supplemental = 3

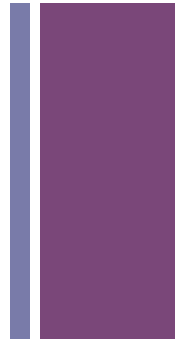
+ Serving Students with Disabilities



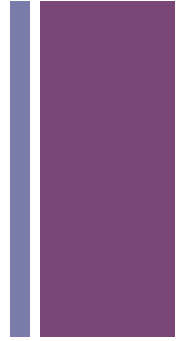
State	Total Enrollment	# of Students with IEPs	Percentage Students with IEPs
Kentucky	Less than 10	0	0%
Virginia	2,500	13	1%
Louisiana	6,000	110	2%
Hawaii	700	28	4%
South Carolina	3,000	200	7%
Idaho	4,527	356	8%
Nevada	2,414	208	9%
Missouri	1,575	156	10%
Pennsylvania	19,525	2,759	14%

+ Disability Categories

Disability Categories	# of States Reporting Disability Frequently Represented
Specific Learning Disability	9
Emotional Disturbance	8
Other Health Impairment	6
Speech or Language Impairment	6
Autism	3
Hearing Impairment	3
Orthopedic Impairment	3
Visual Impairment	3
Deafness	2
Deaf Blindness	1
Multiple Disabilities	1

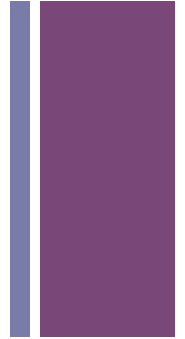


+ Courses for Students with IEPs



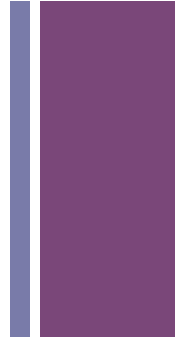
- States offer
 - General education classes with or without inclusion support (n = 11)
 - Special education classes (n = 6)
 - Credit-recovery classes (n = 6)
 - Remedial classes (n = 5)
 - Supplemental education services (SES) (n = 2)

+ Personnel



- Virtual public school staff include:
 - Special education coordinator (n = 6)
 - Special education teacher(s) (n = 7)
 - Physical therapist(s) (n = 4)
 - Occupational therapist(s) (n = 4)
 - School psychologist or social worker(s) (n = 4)
 - Paraprofessional(s) (n = 4)
 - Speech and language therapist(s) (n = 3)

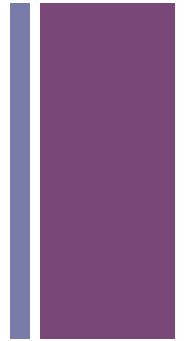
+ Evaluation and Identification



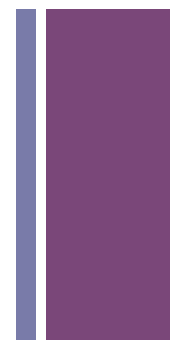
- Most commonly handled by:
 - Home school
 - LEA
- Occasionally handled through:
 - Agency managing virtual school curriculum
 - Contracted assessor
 - Multi-disciplinary team made up of staff hired by school and contracted personnel

+ Implementation of IEP

- Most states described implementing the IEP in much the same way as in traditional educational environments.

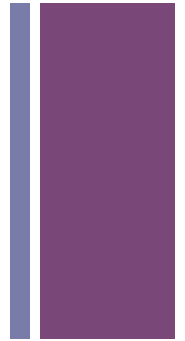


+ Related Services



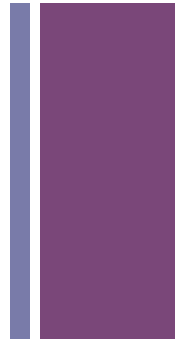
How Related Services Provided	# of States
Local school building	9
On-line	8
Student's home	5
Via telephone	5
Provider's office or other face-to-face setting	4

+ Accountability



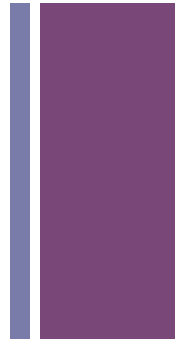
- 11 states reported that students with disabilities attending the state's virtual public school program are included in accountability measures
- 1 state unsure

+ Challenges



- Opening of virtual schools before they are prepared
- Lack of established standards
- Revising curriculum for accessibility
- Lack of appropriateness of model
- Meeting the needs of students with more severe needs
- Lack of communication
- Ensuring proper support
- Inadequate numbers of related services providers
- Lack of adequate funding

+ Benefits



- Accessibility of curriculum for students on long-term suspension or homebound placement
- Individualized attention
- Self-pacing of online education
- Availability of multi-media content and supplementary resources
- Students' needs for fewer behavioral supports
- Creation of an additional placement option



**For more information visit
Project Forum at:**

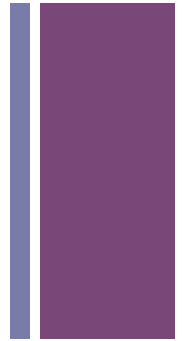
www.projectforum.org

For this document search “Virtual Public Schools” or visit:

[http://www.projectforum.org/docs/
ServingStudentswithDisabilitiesinState-
levelVirtualK-12PublicSchoolPrograms.pdf](http://www.projectforum.org/docs/ServingStudentswithDisabilitiesinState-levelVirtualK-12PublicSchoolPrograms.pdf)

+ Questions for Discussion

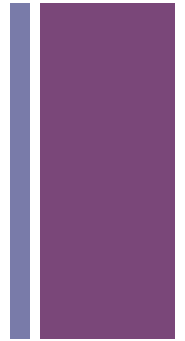
with Eve Muller, Paula Burdette and Mary Burns



- Please type your questions into the chat box or raise your hand and we will unmute you to ask your question
- We will have the opportunity for more discussion throughout the session in the chat box and towards the end of the presentation

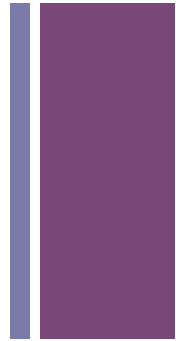
+ Policy Forum: Key Issues and Recommendations

- Attitudes and expectations regarding virtual special education
- Personnel quality and preparation
- Accessibility for students with disabilities
- Accountability
- IEP issues
- Roles and responsibilities
- Financial issues



+Personnel Quality and Preparation

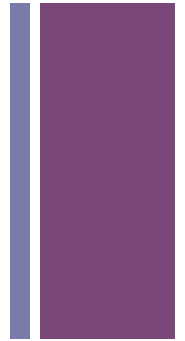
Sample Issues and Recommendations



- **Key Issue:** *Accommodating special education teachers working across state lines*
 - Adopt the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) or a legal model for teacher hiring in multiple settings and for streamlined reciprocity.

+ Personnel Quality and Preparation

Sample Issues and Recommendations

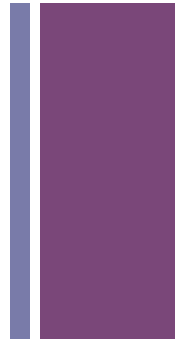


- **Key Issue:** *Developing and assessing specialized skills/competencies/dispositions to work in virtual special education context*
 - Establish competencies required to teach effectively in an online environment.
 - Establish standards for online teaching.
 - Build the same competencies into hiring of virtual special education teachers.
 - Encourage adoption of International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) teacher standards for virtual schools.



Personnel Quality and Preparation

Sample Issues and Recommendations

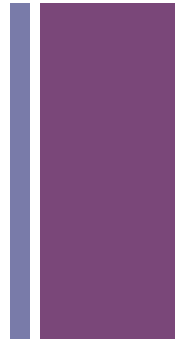


- **Key Issue:** *Accommodating licensure requirements for related service providers across state lines*

- **Key Issue:** *Lack of higher education training programs for special education providers preparing to work in online environments*

+ Personnel Quality and Preparation

Sample Issues and Recommendations

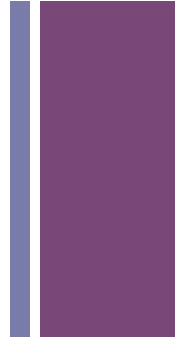


- **Key Issue:** *Training parents to support online learning*
 - Build parent training into online/virtual programs.
 - Offer training to parents as part of enrolling students.
 - Engage parent training and information centers (PTICs) to conduct parent training and use IDEA language about supplementary aids and services to free up funds for parent training through LEAs.



Accessibility for Students with Disabilities

Sample Issues and Recommendations

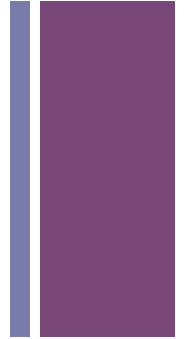


- **Key Issue:** *Establishing standards for accessibility of virtual curriculum to students with disabilities*
 - Require uniformity of standards/criteria for online content, tools, supports, software and/or websites used as part of the curriculum to ensure accessibility to the variety of students with disabilities



Accessibility for Students with Disabilities

Sample Issues and Recommendations

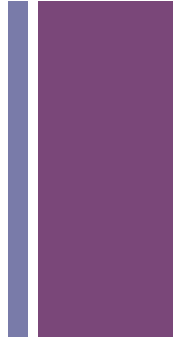


- **Key Issue:** *Ensuring that the relationships among the SEA, LEAs and virtual schools do not result in students with disabilities being denied admission*
 - Obtain guidance from U.S. Department of Education on best practices or guidelines for admitting students with disabilities to virtual schools.
 - Develop a decision tree set of questions to direct states' development of guidelines/policies/recommendations regarding admittance procedures that recognizes cross-state differences.
 - Ensure that the funding model supports accessibility for all students in virtual schools.



Accountability

Sample Issues and Recommendations

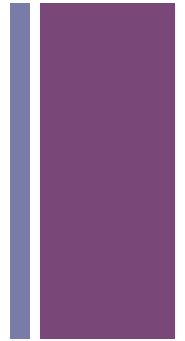


- **Key Issue:** *Ensuring that virtual schools do not open before they are ready to handle students with IEPs*
 - Provide virtual school operators with necessary TA during the application and implementation processes to ensure that special education issues are adequately addressed.



Accountability

Sample Issues and Recommendations

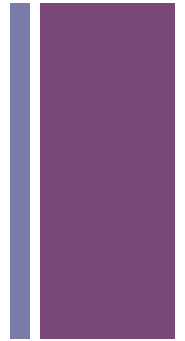


- **Key Issue:** *Monitoring of virtual public special education programs*
 - Establish system for monitoring of services to students with disabilities in state- and local-level virtual public schools
 - Add a section to OSEP's monitoring document to include virtual schools.



IEP Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations



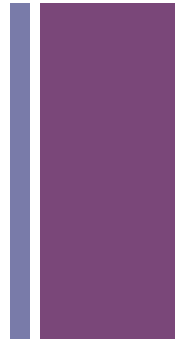
- **Key Issue:** *Identifying roles and responsibilities in implementing the IEP (e.g., virtual school staff, LEA staff, contractors; as well as general educators, special educators, paraprofessionals, related service providers and/or parents as appropriate)*
 - Develop a “Primer for Special Education in Virtual Schools”
 - Provide clear information for parents on expectations for their role in the education of their child with a disability.



Roles and Responsibilities

Sample Issues and Recommendations

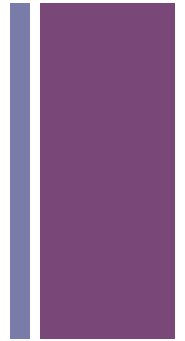
- **Key Issue:** *Identifying who is responsible for what activities within various virtual school contexts (e.g., SEA, LEA where student resides, LEA where schools resides, virtual school, virtual charter school, home school, etc.)*
 - Clarify roles and responsibilities for supporting students with disabilities in applications for virtual schools.





Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations

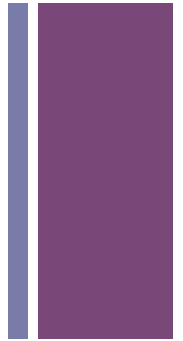


- **Key Issue:** *Understanding costs of delivering special education in a virtual environment*
 - Conduct detailed financial audit of costs associated with delivering special education and related services in a virtual environment.
 - Analyze value of economies of scale and diseconomies associated with geographic dispersion specific to provision of special education and related services.



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations

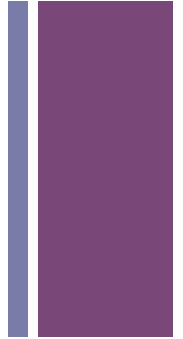


- **Key Issue:** *Determining how virtual schools are reimbursed for educating students with disabilities*
 - Conduct national research to document how virtual schools are reimbursed for educating students with disabilities (include variables such as students with higher cost needs and lower cost needs).
 - Allocate federal funds to virtual schools the same way as to brick-and-mortar schools.



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations

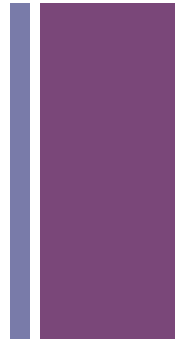


- **Key Issues:** *Addressing excess cost issues*
 - Define parameters of access accommodations needed for purposes of IDEA.



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations

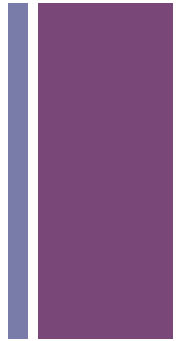


- **Key Issues:** *Addressing high costs of research and development for virtual special education content*
 - Build research and development into virtual school budgets/ start-up costs.
 - Allocate state and federal dollars for creation of virtual schools in all states, including dollars to accommodate providing access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities.
 - Develop partnerships with local IHEs or corporations for research and development.



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations

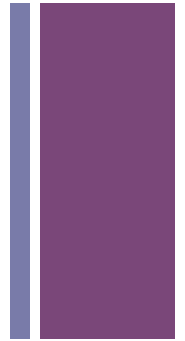


- **Key Issue:** *Addressing costs of extra-curricular activities*
 - Develop state policies to ensure that all children enrolled in virtual/online schools can access extra-curricular activities (e.g., athletics, music, etc.).



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations



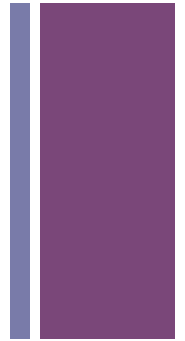
Key Issue: *Addressing the cost differential based on different intensity of needs*

- Assess costs to determine if there is a difference in costs for different levels of intensity of need.



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations



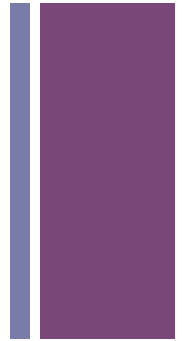
Key Issue: *Addressing costs associated with medical-related services*

- Ensure that states have established policies to reimburse virtual schools for services covered by Medicaid.



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations



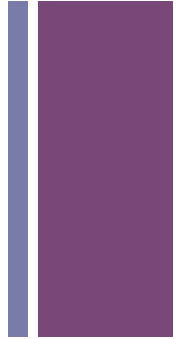
Key Issue: *Addressing future financial equity issues for brick-and-mortar and virtual schools*

- Develop funding mechanisms that accommodate per unit enrollment versus average daily attendance.



Financial Issues

Sample Issues and Recommendations



Key Issue: *Addressing shifting enrollment after Child Count dates*

- Ensure state and federal funding formulas accommodate fluid enrollment.



Both documents referenced today are available at

<http://www.projectforum.org/docs/>

1. ServingStudentswithDisabilitiesinState-levelVirtualK-12PublicSchoolPrograms.pdf
2. VirtualK-12PublicSchoolProgramsandSwD-IssuesandRecommendations.pdf

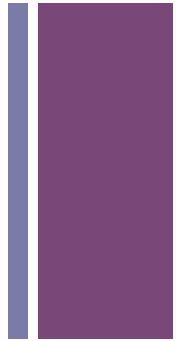
Paula Burdette, Ph.D.

Project Forum Director

Paula.Burdette@nasdse.org

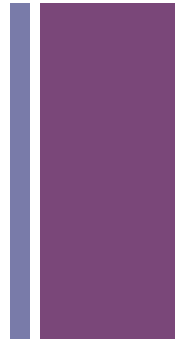
Eve Muller, Ph.D.

Consultant



+ Questions for Discussion

with Mary Burns



- What has “worked” and have you been able to address the challenges Eve and Paula bring up in their presentation?
- In what areas do states feel they need particular help in terms of serving diverse learners through virtual education?

+ Additional Resources



Regional P-12 Virtual Education Initiative

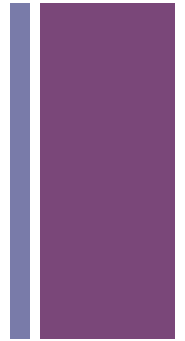
Webinar #2: Virtual Schools and Students with Disabilities: State-level Practices and Policy Recommendations

Additional Resources

- [International Conference Series on Disability, Virtual Reality and Associated Technologies](#)**
As its name suggests, this conference expands the boundaries of what we typically think of as "virtual learning" to include types of online technologies such as augmented reality, virtual worlds and virtual reality. The conference also has a particular focus on using these technologies with learners who have severe special needs, emotional or psychiatric disorders and physical disabilities. This site brings together much of the work occurring in Europe around the area of severe special needs and various forms of online technologies. This particular link houses the proceedings and papers from the 1998-2006 conferences. The 2010 papers and proceedings will be available in May 2011.
URL: <http://www.icdyrat.reading.ac.uk/>
- [Serving Students with Disabilities in State-level Virtual K-12 Public School Programs](#)**
One of the few documents researchers found that examines the relationship between virtual schools and students with disabilities. This document was written by one of today's Webinar speakers, Eve Mueller, for the [National Association of State Directors of Special Education](#).
URL: <http://www.projectforum.org/docs/ServingStudentswithDisabilitiesinState-levelVirtualK-12PublicSchoolPrograms.pdf>
- [Online Learning Policy Survey: A Survey of the States](#)**
The Center for Digital Education (CDE) surveyed state education officials across the nation (44 of 50 states participated) to evaluate state policy regarding online learning.
URL: <http://www.convergemaq.com/paper/Online-Learning-2009.html>
- [Special Needs Opportunity Window \(SNOW\)](#)**
Part of the Inclusive Design Research Centre at Ontario College of Art & Design University (OCADU) and dedicated to universal design practices in education. This site has been designed as an accessible interactive virtual hub for people with disabilities, parents, educators, technologists and others to engage in topics and forums related to inclusive education and accessible technologies.
URL: <http://snow.idrc.ocad.ca/>

Prepared by Mary Burns, Education Development Center, Inc. (April 2011)

+ Evaluation

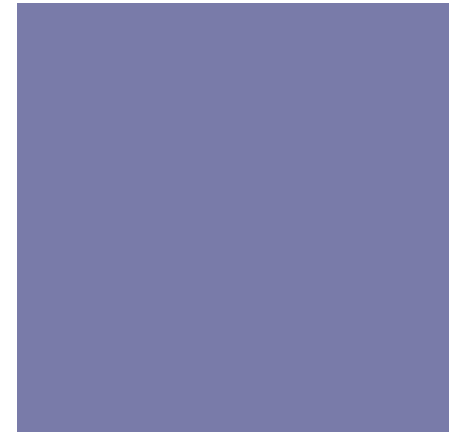


- Please take a few minutes to complete a brief survey evaluation for this webinar. The link is as follows:
 - <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BM8GQ7X>



Virtual Schools and Students with Disabilities: State-level Practices and Policy Recommendations

April 11, 2011



NEW ENGLAND
COMPREHENSIVE
C E N T E R



NEW YORK
COMPREHENSIVE
C E N T E R