

SENATE EDUCATION

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# Montana Distance Learning Initiative

Senate Bill 313

The Future of Montana Education

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# Montana Distance Learning Initiative

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## **Montana Distance Learning Initiative Pilot Program Program Goals**

- 1.) The primary goal of the Distance Learning Initiative is to allow students in the State of Montana to gain access to educational opportunities through the use of technology that they would otherwise not have. Communities that cannot afford to hire highly qualified, specialty topic teachers would be able to provide their students with this educational opportunity through distance learning.
- 2.) The Distance Learning Initiative provides students with learning environments that maximize individualized attention and interpersonal interaction at a level not possible in traditional large-group classroom setting.
- 3.) The Distance Learning Initiative allows Montana's most talented teachers to share their expertise with students in any part of the state. Any teacher with an Internet connection is able to interact online with any student in the state via computer.
- 4.) The Distance Learning Initiative provides parents with a technological system to monitor their child's instruction and assignments. It allows working parents the opportunity to interact with their child's teacher in a private, personal and un-intimidating manner.
- 5.) The Distance Learning Initiative provides each participating student with an electronic portfolio containing their progress reports, aptitude testing results and complete academic record along with examples of student's work. This portfolio data can be used to aid students transferring from one school to another, allowing them to be placed in precisely appropriate academic environments.

## Montana Distance Learning Initiative Pilot Program

<b>Scope:</b>	13 teachers 13 courses 20 max per class 260 students Statewide studentbody
<b>Legislative Sponsor:</b>	Senator Rick Laible
<b>Funding Source:</b>	Governor's Grant
<b>Delivery System:</b>	Blackboard 6.0
<b>Pilot Duration:</b>	2004-2005 school year
<b>Training Cost:</b>	Covered by Grant
<b>District Cost:</b>	Onsite coordinator and text books
<b>Future:</b>	Legislative Line Item 2005, National and International Possibilities

# Montana Distance Learning Initiative

## Pilot Program

### Mid-Pilot Evaluation

#### What went well:

- 224 Montana students had the opportunity to take classes that they would have otherwise missed.
- Montana students with special needs were able to take classes that they could not attend in person.
- Montana students were able to fulfill the requirements for foreign languages that could not be otherwise offered in their districts.
- Montana students were able to fulfill the requirements for Indian Education for All that could not be otherwise offered in their districts.
- Montana students were able to take Advanced Placement U.S. History and thus take the advanced placement examination for college credit.
- Montana students were able to take upper-division math courses that were not offered in their schools.
- Montana students were able to repeat courses that they had failed, thus allowing them to graduate on time with their class.
- Montana teachers were able to use their expertise to earn additional income in their Montana district rather than being attracted to another state by higher wages.
- A Montana teacher who is a new mother was allowed to continue her exemplary teaching career while taking care of her new baby at home.
- University instructors with Montana k-12 Teaching Certification were able to use their expertise to help high school students.
- Montana home-schooled students were able to take online courses through their local school district thus allowing the district to receive the student's ANB funding.

# Montana Distance Learning Initiative Pilot Program

## Mid-Pilot Evaluation Continued

What we hope to improve:

- Online students need access to e-mail accounts so that they can communicate privately with their online instructors.
- Districts need to be consistent about the quality of the onsite coordinators that they provide. Most are excellent. Some could use improvement.
- Montana districts need time to examine the potential for online instruction and be made aware of the various ways that it can benefit their school systems operation.

## Montana Distance Learning Initiative Perpetual Program

<b>Scope:</b>	60 teachers 60 courses 20 max per class 1,200 students Statewide studentbody
<b>Legislative Sponsor:</b>	Senator Rick Laible
<b>Funding Source:</b>	Two year startup funding followed by self-support
<b>Delivery System:</b>	Blackboard 6.2
<b>Pilot Duration:</b>	Perpetual Online Operation
<b>Training Cost:</b>	Instructors responsibility (one 3 unit graduate course)
<b>District Cost:</b>	Onsite coordinator, text books and tuition
<b>Future:</b>	Statewide, National, and International Participation

# Montana Distance Learning Initiative

## Pilot Program

### Instructor Evaluation

Marilyn Todorovich  
English I Instructor  
Evaluation of MDLI After One Semester

I would say that I would rate the overall effectiveness of the Montana Distance Learning Initiative as highly effective. Although I have run into many new problems in the teaching of this class, as compared to a face-to-face class, I feel that I handled those problems efficiently and creatively, and with the help of other online instructors and on-site coordinators, most situations were resolved successfully.

The main problem that I had was a standard rule in most Montana schools that email usage in schools is forbidden. What could and should have been our best means of communication was cut off from the very beginning. I had to communicate to a few schools by emailing coordinators and having them pass on reports, evaluations, and other pertinent information. While that worked, it took more time, and it did not allow me to send quick emails asking a student to, for example, put a composition in paragraphs. I could tell the coordinator, but then I couldn't get a quick response from the student saying, for example, "How do I do that?" Therefore, I had to work around that, and I felt that slowed down my program significantly. This would be a problem in any online program whether university sponsored or not.

Another problem I encountered was the gradebook for Blackboard. I have since changed to another online gradebook, but it still confuses students a great deal. (It has to be used somewhat for assignments and tests.) And one more problem for the high schools was the late start date. I feel that we need to start more closely to the average high school.

But, my successes have far outweighed those problems. I found that students online are very similar to students we face in person. Some are very motivated, and they are such a pleasure to work with. My time spent with them online was used to teach the basics and then to enrich. Then, of course, there were students who had very little motivation. In a course like English I, many students were in this category, as many were taking the class as a recovery class. But with constant "encouragement" and constant communication with coordinators, I feel that most finally got on board. I did NOT relax my standards at all, so I do not feel that I compromised any state standards in any way. So, of course, there were those who failed the class. But most passed.

I had a group of students from an alternative school, and the success rate with them was high. I was sorry that they were not going to continue in this program, due to program and population changes. The students were just getting used to this class and doing very well.

Another success I had involved a student who had some physical disabilities and was having some problems with regular class situations. That student has

been extremely successful. His supervisor told me recently that she wishes more students could take advantage of this program based on his success.

It took me longer than I thought to get students to respond to my assignments and the Blackboard system. But once they got going, the class accelerated and great things happened. I feel that the program, for me, is a terrific experience and a great learning experience. I hope that it is for my students as well.

Shaun Gant  
Creative Writing

As far as attrition goes, I had four students drop out very early because they felt overloaded with the number of courses they had signed up for in their regular school day, plus sports. One other graduated after first semester, so she's on to college now and just needed that extra 1/2 credit, I suppose, or just wanted to take it. I have added three new students this semester, so I have 18 total (about the same as first semester). From my experience teaching high school, it seems about the same as when you have a regular classroom.

I am working with some students who have heavy class loads to design their own schedule of reading and writing. It's working well. Another nice flexible thing about this on-line course is that I post assignments and grades Monday, then they hand them in on Fridays. That way, if they miss school, they know what's expected for the week.

Alicia Gignoux  
Spanish 1  
Evaluation of Program:

I am happy to have the opportunity to work with this program. It is exciting to think that I can help onsite coordinators work with their students and help students working independently without the support of the onsite coordinator. This program allows educators to reach areas and students that they would have not been able to reach before distance learning. In addition, I am interested in continuing as an instructor next year.

Drop Out Rate:

Some of the reasons that some of the students dropped follow:  
Of course a few students dropped because they moved. One moved out of the state and another one moved out of the country. One student decided to be home schooled. Some students dropped because their schedules were too busy with sports activities. One student dropped because she found a course that would benefit her future more than this course. For a high school student to succeed, the student must work well independently and be motivated.

One counselor thought that maybe older students would do better in the course because they would be more serious. I am not sure this is true, but it is her opinion and is based on her freshman students.

In one case, a student did not get along with the computer lab monitor. Therefore, the student dropped. According to the monitor, the student was off task and this bothered the monitor. However, the student is bright and did well in the course. I think the traditional thought is that the students should be doing busy work all of the time.

However, students work at different rates. From a distance, it is difficult to control or judge how much they should be doing and when they should do it. I believe it should be up to the student. Ultimately, the grade and work completed determine what they have accomplished.

Also, I think overall, we should also be looking at the approaches taken by the teachers giving the online courses. Could it be possible that there is a learning curve because this is a new system to some of them? Could it be possible that we are all learning how to make the online learning environment productive to the students? ... comprehensible to the students? .... useful for the students?  
Extra Comment:

One onsite coordinator has been very successful. She is taking the course with the students and working with them. I like the idea of allowing the districts the flexibility to do this in districts where they do not have a certified teacher. I enjoy providing this service to students working independently and am open to being a resource to onsite coordinators that want to be involved also.

Thanks for the opportunity to be involved with the program.

Kathy Sharbono  
Indian Education for All  
Thoughts and Experiences:

My first semester experience with the 4<sup>th</sup> graders was great! I worked very closely with the classroom teacher. She even went beyond my expectations in many different lessons. I didn't have as much computer contact with the students as Blackboard was hard for them to use, and there was no access to e-mail accounts. Time was also a factor. She only had so much time to devote to this class. I was quite impressed with all they had accomplished. The teacher would send pictures of what the class was doing along with pictures of themselves. It was quite rewarding when I actually personally visited their classroom. I read with them—they weren't quite finished with the novel I had assigned, and they showed me all of the wonderful artwork they had done. It was a great opportunity to have discussions with them. This class was more of an enrichment class—something they don't get in their regular curriculum. The on-site coordinator hopes to continue this for every 4<sup>th</sup> grade class next year.

Second semester at the high school level is going well. All schools have e-mail accounts, so we can communicate daily. I have 6 very motivated students from Harlem and 2 from Cutbank. The one from Custer is experiencing computer difficulties, but she is still with me. I think this class is similar to regular face to face classroom teaching. We all have students who are self-motivated and do the work, and we all have students who choose not to do the work no matter how hard we try to motivate them. It seems to me we are forming good relationships with these students, even though we have no face to face contact with them. These on-line classes are a great benefit for those who do want to learn and excel. I am pleased with the way this semester is going.

Loyd Rannaker  
Geometry  
First Semester Experience

I agree with your assessment of the students we are serving. In my class, one of the students is in upper elementary grades (6<sup>th</sup>) and usually sets the curve on all assignments. He is very conscientious regarding due dates and completing all assignments. The three students from Dutton are all using this as a class that is not offered in their school. For the most part they keep up and participate appropriately. I do have one student who only needed a half credit, so she is choosing not to continue.

A couple of ideas I feel will be helpful in the future; 1. Use a calendar similar to more school districts. I believe all schools had begun before we started on September 15<sup>th</sup>. 2. Develop a consistent method of sharing final grades with schools.

A couple of impressions I really like; 1. The students in my school (Darby HS) have really enjoyed the opportunity to take classes that we do not normally offer. They were all motivated students and have been very effective in their classes. 2. The student that needed to recover credit was able to do so in a different way. In small schools, it is not pleasant to have a student re-take a class from the same teacher they had when they didn't pass.

I am grateful for the opportunity to teach this class, and truly hope this model continues. I know with some effort it can benefit many of Montana's brightest and worthy students, as well as fill in curricular holes for many districts.

# K-12 Distance Education for Montana - Budget

	-----Year 1-----	-----Year 2-----		
<b>PERSONNEL:</b>				
<b>Salaries:</b>				
Project Director (FY Research Rate)	\$ 131,670	\$ 136,937		
Part-time Administrative Support (.40 FTE @ \$10.00/Hour)	8,320	8,653		
<b>TOTAL SALARIES</b>	<b>\$ 139,990</b>	<b>\$ 145,590</b>		
<b>Fringe Benefits:</b>				
Project Director	\$ 29,491	\$ 31,040		
Part-time Admin. Support	1,305	1,358		
<b>TOTAL FRINGE BENEFITS</b>	<b>\$ 30,796</b>	<b>\$ 32,398</b>		
<b>TOTAL PERSONNEL</b>	<b>\$ 170,786</b>	<b>\$ 177,988</b>		
<b>OPERATIONS:</b>				
Contracted Services (60 Classes @ \$8,000/Per Class)	\$ 480,000	\$ 480,000		
Supplies	6,000	6,000		
Blackboard (\$12.50 x 20 Students x 60 Classes)	15,000	15,000		
Communications - Postage	1,000	1,000		
Communications - Long Distance	1,000	1,000		
Travel	10,000	10,000		
<b>TOTAL OPERATIONS</b>	<b>513,000</b>	<b>513,000</b>		
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</b>	<b>\$ 683,786</b>	<b>\$ 690,988</b>		<b>\$ 1,374,774</b>