Bill Number: SB 377   **51st Legislature, 1st Session, 2013**

Tracking Number: .191245.1

Short Title: Statewide Digital Learning Task Force

Sponsor(s): Senator Linda M. Lopez and Representative Sheryl M. Williams Stapleton, and Others

Analyst: James Ball   **Date: February 14, 2013**

Bill Summary:

SB 377 creates a statewide digital learning task force to function from the date of its appointment until December 15, 2013. The task force is composed of 14 members, as follows:

- two members from the House of Representatives appointed by the Legislative Council;
- two members from the Senate appointed by the Legislative Council;
- one member appointed by the Governor;
- six members from public schools who are knowledgeable in the field of digital learning, appointed by the Legislative Council to represent small, medium, and large districts, from lists submitted by a statewide coalition of school administrators and a teachers' organization, including at least:

  - one teacher;
  - one administrator; and
  - one tribal leader;

- one member representing a statewide organization of charter schools appointed by the organization's board of directors;
- one member representing teacher preparation programs; and
- one member who is an acknowledged national leader in digital learning appointed by the Legislative Council.

Staff for the task force is provided by the:

- Legislative Council Service (LCS);
- Legislative Education Study Committee; and
- Public Education Department (PED).

The duties of the task force are to:

- develop a workplan and budget for approval by the Legislative Council;
- approve a request for proposals with specific components identified in SB 377 for a contractor to study and advise the task force to facilitate the implementation of a statewide digital learning system;

- select a contractor; and
- complete and present a final report with recommendations for the Legislature and the Governor by December 15, 2013 on implementing a statewide digital learning system with short- and long-term goals.

SB 377 makes an appropriation to pay the expenses of the statewide digital learning task force and the cost of a contractor to study and advise the task force in making its recommendations.

Fiscal Impact:

$30,000 is appropriated from the General Fund to the LCS for expenditure in FY 13 and FY 14. Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund at the end of FY 14.

Substantive Issues:

It is important to understand the difference between the terms "distance learning" and "digital learning" as they are generally used.

- Distance learning, according to common dictionary definition, refers to the online delivery of coursework, perhaps whole courses, usually provided from a remote location.

- Digital learning, according to Digital Learning Day, a national awareness campaign aimed at spotlighting successful instructional practice and effective use of technology in classrooms, refers to teaching practices both in the classroom and sometimes online that can make learning more personalized and engaging for students through the use of creative technologies. Digital learning, strives to encourage innovation that changes policies, shifts attitudes about the delivery of education, and supports adoption of a combination of innovative instructional practices.

It should be noted that distance learning and digital learning are not mutually exclusive although distance learning emphasizes the delivery of whole courses online while digital learning will generally combine in-class, face-to-face time with a teacher who is using multi-media approaches for instruction often with some online components to enrich the educational experience in a concept known as blended learning (see "Background," below for an example).

According to the University of New Mexico (UNM), school districts and institutions of higher education currently are using assorted learning management systems with limited learning plans and no real measure of their effectiveness. A unified set of standards that provide assurance of a quality learning system and the content that is being delivered is highly desirable. Creating a statewide learning system together with the implementation of Common Core State Standards seems to imply that these two initiatives would be connected.

According to the analysis of SB 377 by New Mexico State University, inclusion of two higher education leaders on the task force would be desirable in order to adequately address the transition from K-12 to higher education, considering the existing dual credit and early high school initiatives.

According to the Public Schools Facilities Authority (PSFA), the New Mexico Department of Information Technology and PSFA are managing the New Mexico Broadband Program and PSFA Information Technology Advisory Group respectively, addressing both statewide

broadband coverage and educational information technologies in schools. PSFA suggests that both entities provide technical assistance.

According to both PED and PSFA, much research has already been done on educational technology standards and technology-enhanced curricula and instruction both at the state and national levels. PSFA notes that in August 2012 the Statewide Broadband Summit was convened by the New Mexico State Library, as part of its Fast Forward New Mexico project that is funded by a grant from the US Department of Commerce. The outcome of this summit produced 18 recommendations, including items on digital literacy. PSFA suggests that these recommendations, listed in the Final Report, August 3, 2012, should be considered and addressed as part of the comprehensive study identified in SB 377.

Technical Issues:

The responsibility to appoint each member of the task force is specified in SB 377 with the exception of the representative for teacher preparation programs. The sponsor might consider this appointment to be made by the Council of Deans of the colleges of education.

Background:

According to an August 27, 2012 article in *Education Week*, one of the typical teaching strategies of digital learning is known as the "flipped classroom." This concept illustrates the combined use of classroom work with a teacher along with an online activity. The term "flipping" comes from the idea of swapping homework for class work. Students might be assigned to watch a lecture or presentation online either by their teacher or from a tutoring video product, then come to class for discussion of the material. Using this practice as a time-shifting tool, the classroom experience is available for more interaction with the teacher and with other students. In this sense, homework prepares the students for class rather than serving as typical follow-up exercises.

Committee Referrals:

SEC/SFC

Related Bills:

None as of 2/14/2013