

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 17, 2017  
8:00 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens  
Senator Cathy Giessel  
Senator John Coghill  
Senator Tom Begich

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: VIRTUAL EDUCATION FROM A STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE;  
FLORIDA VIRTUAL SCHOOLS; NEW YORK STATE DISTANCE LEARNING  
CONSORTIUM

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

VIRGINIA GESLER, Digital Education Consultant  
Florida Virtual Schools (FLVS)  
Tampa, Florida

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on Florida's Virtual  
Schools.

HOLLY SAGUES, Executive Director  
Government Affairs and Strategic Solutions  
Florida Virtual Schools (FLVS)  
Tampa, Florida

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on Florida's Virtual  
Schools.

MIKE BAYBA, Co-President

New York State Distance Learning Consortium  
Buffalo, New York

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on New York State Distance Learning Consortium (NYSDLC).

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:00:52 AM](#)

**CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Giessel, Coghill, and Chair Hughes. Senator Stevens arrived shortly thereafter.

CHAIR HUGHES said the presentation on virtual education would be by two organizations that are leading the way nationally. The Florida Virtual School (FLVS) offers full-time and part-time virtual education for students throughout the country. She understood that a few Alaska School Districts have purchased content from FLVS. The New York State Distance Learning Consortium (NYSDLC) connects school districts throughout New York to exchange virtual education courses with other districts. The presentation by NYSDLC will be using video conferencing software.

**PRESENTATION: VIRTUAL EDUCATION FROM A STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE;  
FLORIDA VIRTUAL SCHOOLS; NEW YORK STATE DISTANCE LEARNING  
CONSORTIUM**

[8:02:23 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on Virtual Education from a Statewide Perspective; Florida Virtual Schools; New York State Distance Learning Consortium.

She noted that Senator Stevens joined the committee.

[8:02:51 AM](#)

VIRGINIA GESLER, Digital Education Consultant, Florida Virtual Schools (FLVS), presented information on Florida's Virtual Schools. She noted that FLVS was the first virtual school in the nation. She shared the history of FLVS:

1996-Orange and Alachua Counties receive a \$200,000 grant from the Florida Department of Education and pilot a "Web School" with five online courses.

1997-Florida High School (now FLVS) launches with seven staff members.

2003-FLVS joins forces with Florida school districts to increase the capacity of students who can be served online through an in-state franchise program.

2003-FLVS becomes fully funded as a statewide virtual school and becomes part of the Florida Education Finance Program.

2012-FLVS experiences continual growth in student enrollments and now delivers more than 120 courses.

2013-275 FLVS Full Time 12th grade students graduate and receive high school diplomas.

2014-FLVS reaches a milestone of 2 million completed semester courses.

8:06:49 AM

MS. GESLER related how FLVS looks today:

440,300 half-credit courses completed 2015-16

In Florida, we offer Full-time and Part-time enrollments

License our rigorous curriculum in every state throughout the U.S. and internationally

Over 150 Courses - Core, Elective, Honors, AP, Credit Recovery

Over 1,200 full time teachers

Accredited and NCAA approved

Courses meet SREB Essential Principals of Quality and the iNACOL Standards for Quality Online Content

FLVS Global is a non-profit entity

8:07:58 AM

HOLLY SAGUES, Executive Director, Government Affairs and Strategic Solutions, Florida Virtual Schools (FLVS), presented information on Florida's Virtual Schools. She shared FLVS's results of end of course exams in Algebra, Biology, Geometry,

Civics, and U.S. History. She said since FLVS is a public school they are held to the same accountability standards as every other public school. She noted that FLVS exceeds or matches the state average in all areas.

[8:09:31 AM](#)

MS. SAGUES described FLVS funding. They began as a line item grant for the first years. The legislature would award FLVS a specific amount. In 2003, the legislature included FLVS into the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). She explained that the formula FLVS and all virtual education funding, is unique in that they are funded upon successful completion by each student. She said they have fewer funding categories and a lower funding level than regular education funding.

She explained that Florida has a unique funding categorical - class size. Virtual schools used to receive class-size dollars. Today, those dollars are removed from the formula, which decreases their funding. The legislature recognized that problem and provided a "hold harmless" account. The first year the floor was set at \$4,800 and, since that time, it has increased to \$5,230. If the total does not come to that amount per student, the state kicks in the remainder. FLVS's funding floor will not change until the Virtual Education Contribution (hold harmless fund) is depleted.

[8:15:16 AM](#)

MS. SAGUES showed a graph of how FLVS is stretching Florida tax dollars. She noted the funding has remained stable. She detailed the funding per year and per student for public and FLVS funding.

[8:16:51 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked how many Title I students FLVS serves.

MS. SAGUES said there are about 7,000 students in the full-time virtual school, and about 200,000 part-time students throughout the state. The virtual school is considered a Title I School with 40 percent of students in Title I.

[8:17:37 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked what the governance of the school is.

MS. SAGUES said FLVS has a seven-member board that is appointed by the governor.

[8:18:13 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL thanked the presenters. He asked if there is a charge for the courses and how those dollars are folded into the formula.

MS. GESLER explained that FLVS does license out courses to other districts in several ways. If a state or district needs teachers, as well as courses, it is one price; for the course only, it can be done per enrollment - one set price for each enrollment of each student. There is also a per-seat license so one student can take many courses using the district teacher.

SENATOR COGHILL noted that is money coming into the district. He asked how the state views that income.

8:20:25 AM

MS. SAGUES said there is special language in the statute that states FLVS seek those types of revenue streams and the money must go back toward new course development to benefit all Florida students and students in other states.

SENATOR COGHILL asked if the school board reports that income to the state and whether it is used for matches or for regular schooling.

MS. SAGUES replied that there are no matching funds from the state, but it allows FLVS to supplement their funding. Their school does go through a financial audit every year.

8:22:10 AM

SENATOR BEGICH asked if the creation of FLVS has reduced staffing or administrative costs in other public schools, or if virtual school is an alternative for students.

MS. SAGUES replied that Florida is beginning to see a teacher shortage. There has not been a decrease in teachers at the district level because Florida is growing. Students can take virtual courses at their district programs or through FLVS. There are many reasons students take the courses. She provided examples. She pointed out that virtual education saves districts money when they do not have to fund a teacher. She has not seen instances of teacher reductions.

8:24:34 AM

SENATOR BEGICH stated that virtual education offers an opportunity for rural districts to access more courses. He asked if that was the fundamental mission.

MS. SAGUES said yes. Within FLVS there are three priority populations; rural districts, low performing schools, and home school students.

[8:25:40 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked how funding works for public schools when their students take virtual courses. He asked how the formula is modified when a student spends half-time in a virtual school.

MS. SAGUES responded that before 2013, it did not impact the local school district at all. In 2013 there was a modification to the funding formula that provided that a student could not generate more than one FTE. She explained how the funding works for public schools and for virtual schools. She provided an example of a student taking 6 courses in a traditional school and one course from a virtual school, the school district would receive 6/7 of a full FTE and the virtual would receive 1/7 FTE. She noted that it is difficult on a district level to determine the budget because it is complex when using fractions of FTEs.

[8:28:46 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL referred to the slide about virtual school and public school results and asked if there is a similar comparison of outcomes for Title I students.

MS. SAGUES offered to provide that information.

[8:29:47 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked whether 200,000 students take part-time courses.

MS. SAGUES said yes.

CHAIR HUGHES asked how many of the 200,000 part-time students come from out of state.

MS. SAGUES said that number does not include out-of-state students. She deferred to Ms. Gesler to answer.

MS. GESLER said she did not have the exact numbers, but she could provide them. She added that most out-of-state virtual education is managed by the other states.

[8:31:07 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if middle schools are served.

MS. SAGUES said they serve students in K-12; most are high school students.

[8:32:02 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked for the breakdown.

MS. SAGUES thought it was 70 percent high school students. She offered to provide that information.

CHAIR HUGHES asked what grades full-time students are in.

MS. SAGUES replied they are K-12 students.

CHAIR HUGHES requested the breakdown of students by grade level and how the academic results compare to brick and mortar students.

MS. SAGUES offered to provide that information.

CHAIR HUGHES asked how their building looks and is set up.

[8:33:36 AM](#)

MS. GESLER replied that in Florida the teachers work out of home offices. It varies where the students work; home, school lab, or centers, or a combination. Courses are available to students 24-hours a day.

[8:34:53 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if the delivery is synchronous or asynchronous.

MS. GESLER explained that teachers provide live lessons and one-on-one lessons, which allow for opportunities to reteach and build relationships. It also aids in academic integrity.

CHAIR HUGHES asked for the student/teacher ratio.

MS. SAGUES said there is no hard ratio, but generally teachers are limited to a 150-student load. Some courses have more, such as AP courses.

[8:37:36 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if it is a special type of teacher who does this kind of work, especially for two-way teachings. She asked if the quality of teachers is different.

[8:38:34 AM](#)

MS. GESLER opined that it takes a different mindset to be a virtual teacher. Usually, experienced teachers apply.

[8:39:44 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if they provide training to the teachers.

MS. GESLER said specific online training is provided in Florida. Outside of the state there is professional development available.

[8:41:08 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said in Alaska districts solve their own problems in distance education; some are successful, some not. He asked if Florida districts are involved in determining their programs or if it is left to FLVS.

MS. SAGUES replied that it is a partnership. Districts can have their own program within FLVS's system. Almost every district participates in a franchise. In some cases, it makes more sense to have a local teacher to provide distance learning opportunities. Students can choose either method.

[8:43:16 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if any teachers live outside of Florida.

MS. SAGUES said 95 percent live in Florida, however, some are specialized and live somewhere else.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked the presenters. She introduced the next presenter.

[8:44:45 AM](#)

At ease

[8:45:39 AM](#)

MIKE BAYBA, Co-President, New York State Distance Learning Consortium, presented information on New York State Distance Learning Consortium (NYS DLC). He began with the overview of NYSDLC. There are 37 Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) serving 700+ districts. They are intermediary service organizations that are assigned to groups of school districts to deliver services in a cost-effective manner. Many of the BOCES offer some sort of distance education, two-way interactive video, online, or a combination of both. Any district can join, and it costs \$300 per year.

He said NYSDLC consists of 29 members. The purposes of the consortium are joint planning, sharing of expertise, policy influence, support for new members, and sharing courses.

[8:49:22 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA provided an overview of NYSDLB's funding. They have been doing interactive video for about 20 years. Their purpose is to pursue academic opportunities for students using technology. Each BOCES has the unique status of being both a school and a service provider. The state encourages BOCES participation by incentivizing BOCES service use through a complex aid formula. He said the formula is based on district wealth.

[8:52:28 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA described NYSDLB's course delivery. Distance education classes are offered to students through their home school district via teacher-created content or vendor purchased curriculum. Students do not get to select courses; the districts do. This does not prevent districts from purchasing online curriculum directly from a vendor. Consortium course are taught either by member school district or BOCES NYS certified teachers.

[8:54:57 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA explained that course costs vary and are set by each individual BOCES. He compared NY to AK in size and costs. In the current range, cost varies from free to \$10,200 per course. Video courses are usually charged by the course; online courses by the student. Online courses must have a NYS certified teacher assigned, either from the district or from BOCES.

[8:57:14 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA emphasized that courses are selected by school district personnel, not by students individually. The consortium practice is that distance education will not be used to supplant existing staff positions. The following barriers, if changed, could dramatically increase utilization - the common calendar and common bell schedule.

[9:00:16 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA shared NYSDLC's academic results. He said no formal study has been done to compare student performance at remote locations, but he has not heard of lower scores. AP results have exceeded the national and state averages. He said the teacher return rate is well over 95 percent in BOCES. The teachers choose to teach in this environment. The course catalog is

expanding annually. There are college tuition savings through college professor adjunct-status high school faculty to award dual credit. Community colleges are tuition free within his region and many others. In the last 15 to 20 years, BOCES programs have probably saved students \$1 million in college credits. Many BOCES have a reduced tuition rate.

[9:04:30 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA turned to the future of NYSDLC. He stated that virtual classes are not going to disappear any time soon. Video based synchronous classes have become a real boom. Online based, teacher created, and vendor supplied classes are very popular. Blended classes, consisting of teacher-determined blend levels are the wave of the future.

He related that NYSDLC does an evaluation of best practices for all models and evaluates new technologies to aid the delivery of instruction, such as the technology being used for this presentation.

[9:08:12 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA offered a link to their shared catalog: [dlcourses.e@ccb.org](mailto:dlcourses.e@ccb.org). User name - alaska; password - alaska. He showed it available on NYSDLC's web page and explained how to search the site. There are 815 entries, some active and some inactive. This year there are 334 active courses.

He showed specific examples of courses.

[9:11:49 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if they could see a teacher teaching.

MR. BAYBA said there is a separate video library for those. He offered to forward the links.

CHAIR HUGHES was thinking from a marketing perspective.

[9:13:02 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH shared his experience working with juvenile justice. He asked how large a BOCE is and whether it could work outside of the government model, such as in a non-profit.

MR. BAYBA explained that the BOCES are educational entities created by statute, and NYSDLC is treated as a school district, as well as a provider. Private schools do not belong to any BOCES; however, they can buy individual courses. He thought it could be done as a private enterprise.

He spoke of the problem of losing sight of the cost-effective nature of the BOCES. The overhead gets large because the BOCES are large. He said in his BOCES, student enrollment is 30,000 with 27 districts and is large geographically. He gave an example of a BOCES with dense population, noting that each BOCES is unique.

[9:16:54 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked about demographics and outcomes of Title I students.

[9:17:18 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA responded that they do not have that data because when two districts decide to share a class, the students do not become BOCES students. Face-to-face students are reported from their schools and BOCE has no role in reporting.

[9:18:39 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL thanked the presenter. He said Alaska is trying to figure out how to use distance education. He asked how the BOCES do an annual student count.

[9:19:18 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA explained that it is complicated. Within the BOCES he is affiliated with, he keeps track of who the teaching and receiving sites are and pursues school districts for their enrollment numbers. However, each BOCES counts enrollment differently.

[9:20:16 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked about the cost per course and how it compares to a brick-and-mortar course.

[9:20:48 AM](#)

MR. BAYBA said he knows only how much his teachers cost - about \$75,000 to \$80,000. He provided a hypothetical example.

CHAIR HUGHES commented on the 95 percent of teacher retention. She asked for the brick-and-mortar school teacher retention rate.

MR. BAYBA thought it was comparable, but varied by location.

[9:23:52 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Mr. Bayba.

She noted that Commissioner Johnson was present in the room.

9:24:16 AM

CHAIR HUGHES announced next week's schedule.

9:24:35 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:24 a.m.