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Regents Creates Electronic Learning Task Force

BATON ROUGE, La. – Electronic learning across the nation is seeing tremendous growth and interest, however according to a national expert on distance education, capacity for online learning has lacked in Louisiana. To establish e-learning as a priority and respond to this preferred method of learning for many students, the Board of Regents voted to create The Electronic Learning Strategic Planning Task Force today.

The task force will identify strategic objectives, elements, innovative approaches, and best practices that provide the momentum for Louisiana to truly embrace e-learning as a way to increase access to colleges and universities for both traditional students and adults. By doing so, higher education officials believe e-learning can achieve the following things:

- Expand access and success for students,
- Eliminate unnecessary duplication of programs,
- Deliver programs at a lower cost and
- Respond to students' preferred method of learning.

National statistics show that 25% of all U.S. college students took one or more online course in the Fall of 2008. In Louisiana, Northwestern State University leads the state in the number of online programs with 37 of its 108 degree programs offered through distance education. Delgado Community College comes in second with 20 online degree programs.

Due to Northwestern's success in building a comprehensive e-learning initiative, Darlene Williams, Vice President for Technology, Research and Economic Development at Northwestern, was tapped by the Board of Regents to lead the efforts of the Electronic Learning Strategic Planning Task Force.

"Northwestern State University saw the opportunity to re-engineer itself as a leader in e-learning many years ago," noted Commissioner of Higher Education Sally Clausen. "We must move this distance education agenda forward faster. This is a lesson to all of us that it can be done successfully."

Dr. Bruce Chaloux, with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), presented a report on the Distance Education Initiative's SELECT Grant program which awarded more than \$6 million of funding to campuses across Louisiana over the past 10 years. His assessment included a series of recommendations intended to further build Louisiana's e-learning capacity.

"This report will be a valuable resource for the task force formed today. You have several institutions that have done a great job and have taken distance education in a very positive direction," Chaloux said. "These campuses have a great track record and can assist in expanding Louisiana's e-learning offerings."