

**Qwest Foundation Grant Proposal**

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**Wyoming School-University Partnership**

1000 East University Avenue, Department 3374

Laramie, WY 82071

(307)766-3658

(307)766-3792 (fax)

[dakota@uwyo.edu](mailto:dakota@uwyo.edu)

[www.uwyo.edu/wsups](http://www.uwyo.edu/wsups)

**Please provide a brief description of the organization.**

The Partnership is a statewide consortium of 21 school districts, all of Wyoming higher education (seven community colleges and the University of Wyoming), the Wyoming Department of Education, and the Wyoming Education Association. Members pay annual dues.

As the 2010-2011 school year resumes, 74% of Wyoming pk-12 students are served via the Partnership as are 44% of the school districts.

In existence since 1986, The Partnership has long served a critical function of bringing together all levels of public education in Wyoming, pk-12, community college, and university. In this role, the Partnership both leads and leverages, especially around issues that involve multiple stakeholders. During its nearly 25-year history, those issues have included teacher education, instructional technology, and principal preparation. The foundation for all of the Partnership's work is a commitment to the role of schooling in a democracy. Ours is, at heart, an Agenda for Education in a Democracy. Our projects and initiatives are bottom up rather than top down, downplaying status and power, and prizing discussion and the inclusion of all voices.

**Project Title**

Lost in Transition II

**Amount requested:**

\$ 10,000.00

**What is the total budget for the program/project?**

\$17,500.00

**Please briefly describe the program for which you are seeking support:**

Lost in Transition II: Improving the High School to Higher Education Transition for Students

In this work, we are focusing on Wyoming's Hathaway Scholarship Program and Success Curriculum, enacted into law by the 2007 Wyoming Legislature. The success curriculum includes English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and world languages. When students complete the success curriculum in high school, they poise themselves to be successful in postsecondary study and to earn a Hathaway scholarship at any of the state's seven community colleges or single four-year university. The scholarship program has generated enormous enthusiasm and energy, with enrollments at Wyoming's community colleges and university increasing. Wyoming's community colleges are, in fact, at record capacity. However, while the scholarship program can be credited for increasing enrollment at the University of Wyoming, approximately 25%

of incoming freshmen are on academic probation after the first semester. Roughly 30% lose their Hathaway scholarships due to low academic performance.

The Wyoming high school to higher education snapshot is not atypical. As documented widely throughout the U.S. and also in Wyoming, far too many students must complete remedial work to meet the prerequisites of an academic major. While the personal toll on students and families is significant, the institutional toll of far too many remedial courses is similarly dramatic, resulting in costly instructional resources for remedial courses and ever-increasing demands for individual and small group tutoring. Though helpful to students, remedial coursework and tutoring programs fail to address the mismatch of secondary and postsecondary expectations. This mismatch is what the Wyoming School-University Partnership has labeled Lost in Transition and aims to better align.

The Partnership has created a strategy that convenes high school faculty and community college and university faculty on the topic of academic transition in specific content areas. In the life sciences, the Partnership has sponsored five statewide summits, three multi-district summits, and piloted a site swap, all around the issue of better preparing high school students for the next level of academic work by examining student work samples. In English/language arts, the Partnership has sponsored three statewide writing institutes, co-sponsored several statewide meetings, and supported a small-grants follow up. In world languages, an April 2010 statewide summit resulted in a cross-level work group centered on drafting common 1010 course outlines for French, German, and Spanish (a concurrent and dual enrollment course currently taught with great variability by high school, community college, and university faculty). This fall, the work group also will recommend a statewide placement process which is long overdue. Secondary and postsecondary mathematics faculty have convened over four years, examining ACT test findings at their most recent meeting. We anticipate convening social sciences faculty in the coming academic year (e.g., U.S. government, history, and psychology).

The Lost in Transition initiative has been successful in two important ways. First, the initiative demonstrates a democratic and respectful strategy that creates social capital among faculty at different levels. Then, at an institutional level, the initiative validates how different parts of a complex, disconnected system can and must work together.

**What is the anticipated duration of your project?**

18 months

**Project start date:**

01/01/2011

**Project end date:**

06/30/2012

**Please list the organization's three major core programs or activities:**

1. Agenda for Education in a Democracy. The Partnership believes that American students have the right and obligation to blossom into well-prepared and socially-engaged citizens in a democracy. School is the best and most complex setting for students to learn the skills of critical thinking and civil discourse.

Through meetings, dialog, and work groups, the Partnership facilitates conversations with Wyoming educators around fostering student decision-making, use of voice and choice, collaboration, debate, and leadership. This work helps ground teachers and administrators in the idea that while much of schooling is now about standards and tests, children are young presidents, program managers, plumbers, and community members, able to contribute to society.

The Partnership's statewide In Praise of Education conferences center on the Agenda for Education in a Democracy. For example, the November 2010 In Praise of Education conference will feature a

principals' working dinner with an award-winning Pennsylvanian principal, Donnan Stoicovy, focused on how to make democracy work at a school-building level. Additional plenary and breakout sessions speak to the role of schooling in children's personal, academic, and democratic development, and how to enable students to use their voice and choice.

2. Lost in Transition Initiative. The transition from high school to higher education can be a significant challenge for many students, particularly when high school and college-level coursework are not congruent. This frequent lack of cohesion between secondary and postsecondary learning expectations is an issue the Partnership is working to tackle within the Hathaway Success Curriculum areas, including English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and world languages. Methods for addressing this issue (further described in the Program Description section) include statewide content-area focused meetings, small work groups, mini-grant recipients, and site swap events.

Educators' demand for the Partnership's continuation of the Lost in Transition initiative is apparent through high event participation numbers, successful event evaluation forms including high scores and indications of returning for future meetings, school district interest in site swap programs, and general inquiries about work and progress. The Partnership seeks to continue and expand the Lost in Transition initiative to better meet Wyoming's needs in this area.

3. Wyoming Educator Professional Development Opportunities. The Partnership is a frequent and active co-sponsor for many University of Wyoming and statewide events centered on providing educators meaningful professional development opportunities. All of the events which the Partnership co-sponsors align with the core belief that schools are democratic forums for education. In 2010, the Partnership co-sponsored the following events:

- a. 14th Annual Shepard Symposium for Social Justice (University of Wyoming, Laramie). The Partnership financially supported the "Teachers' Tea" and encouraged conversation on ways to engage all students, regardless of class, gender, race, or creed, in the classroom setting.
- b. Rocky Mountain/Plains Chapter, League of Democratic Schools Conference (Casper). The Partnership provided financial, logistical, and technical support to the League of Democratic School's state coordinator, Jennifer Grooms, and co-sponsor, Woods Learning Center, Casper. The conference focused on the Agenda for Education in a Democracy in Wyoming schools.
- c. 2010 Literacy Education Conference (University of Wyoming, Laramie). The Partnership provided logistical and technical support to the conference coordinators. The conference attracted 202 registrants from Wyoming and Colorado, including approximately 150 K-12 educators, 45 postsecondary educators, and five representatives from other organizations.
- d. e-Volution Technology Forum: Innovation in Learning Environments (University of Wyoming, Laramie, and online, anywhere). The Partnership provided logistical support to conference coordinators, and conducted significant outreach to the K-12 community to encourage participation. Three K-12 educators who are regular participants of the Partnerships' Lost in Transition meetings are presenting at the conference with the support of the Partnership.

### **How does this effort address a community need?**

Despite many calls for a seamless preschool- 16 education system focused on improved achievement, a well-established culture of schooling fails to support that goal. Curricular non-alignment, non-compatible academic calendars, and differences in professional status make it virtually impossible for faculty across levels to meet face-to-face as a normal and necessary part of the job. While the ultimate benefactors of the Partnership's Lost in Transition initiative are the Wyoming secondary students transitioning into postsecondary settings, the target audience for Lost in Transition includes Wyoming's high school, college, and university teaching force. Within this force, all faculty face

challenges varying from technological and social media needs in the classroom to time constraints due to increased testing and accountability. Lost in Transition meetings provide opportunities to seek common ground and face challenges together.

Over the past year, since receiving the initial Qwest Foundation grant (May, 2009), the Partnership has registered 205 participants for Lost in Transition events centered on English/language arts, mathematics, science, and world languages. Registration for the 2010 English/language arts meeting that focused on social media in the classroom filled almost immediately, with a waiting list formed. Multiple educators have contacted the Partnership office requesting or inquiring about a Lost in Transition meeting in their geographic or content area. The high ratings on event evaluation forms suggest the Partnership indeed is helping faculty across levels communicate, network, discuss, and collaborate in efforts to improve students' academic success.

The Partnership seeks to continue meeting faculty needs for cross-level and cross-discipline collaboration and communication, and expand to include faculty not previously reached by Lost in Transition events.

**Please explain how you have measured or will measure the success of the program/project:**

In all of its work, the Partnership combines a quantitative and qualitative assessment process including numeric ratings of event components (break-out sessions, quality of content, helpfulness in classroom) and a short-answer feedback form of what event components resonated well and how to improve the meetings. The Partnership staff and event leaders examine these assessments thoroughly for application to future events. Compiled evaluation results are shared with participants to relay a high level of transparency and assurance of usefulness. Additionally, evaluation summaries are provided to the Partnership's Governing Board for discussion and planning next steps.

Additional measures of success include monitoring event participant numbers for each content area and location, by tracking the number of "opens" and email "click-throughs" in email campaigns about Lost in Transition upcoming events.

During the 2010-2011 school year, the Partnership will continue to assess success of communications and event participation through these measures. In addition, the Partnership is building a section of the website dedicated to Lost in Transition work, broken down by content area, which will allow for tracking of website traffic and clicks.

**If awarded, select which of the following will be part of your communications plan to help publicize this grant?**

- Recognition on Website
- Recognition on Program Materials
- Press Release on Your Letterhead