

Initial Needs Sensing Summary



Introduction

The purpose of this discussion draft is to publish back to the field a summary of needs elevated during the initial phase of needs sensing, collect feedback to refine the summary and identify initial services and programs, and inform the development of the Education Service Center's (Center) operational plan.

There are two sections to this report. The first section synthesizes findings from a comprehensive need sensing tour across Nevada's school districts, Nevada Department of Education (Department) and State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA). Each meeting was attended by the superintendent or executive director and the vast majority included senior members of the district team and one or more members of their district board. The second section presents initial ideas on how the Center may organize the services and programs that result from the needs sensing.

Ongoing Needs Sensing

Determining the needs of the field, state, and other local governments is an ongoing affair and should be a formal and routine effort by the Center. During the formation of the Center, it is anticipated that there will be two phases of formal needs sensing. The first phase seeks to understand the needs of districts, SPCSA, and NDE. This is a reasonable starting point given Senate Bill 460, Sec. 56.5 clarifies that the Center is to provide services and programs to local education agencies and as necessary, to other local governments.

The second phase of the needs sensing should follow the initial launch of the Center and include charter schools that are their own local education agency and other local governments such as those that sponsor charter schools – City of Henderson and North Las Vegas.

Needs Sensing Summary

When Senate Bill 460 established the Education Service Center (Center), Nevada joined most states in having a formal intermediate organization to support school and district improvement. To fulfil this mandate and to ensure the initial launch of the Center is aligned with field and state needs, the Center engaged in needs sensing conversations with the Nevada Department of Education (Department), districts and the State Public Charter School Authority. The following is a synthesis of common needs elevated across conversations during this initial phase of needs sensing.

Operational Efficiency and Reporting

- Reporting Burden: The most urgent and universally expressed need is to alleviate the administrative burden felt by district staff by the myriad reports or

requirements. Districts seek a central "quarterback" to support a statewide effort to create an efficient reporting system.

- Note: Superintendent Wakefield asked the Center to spearhead this project with a partner, the project launched in February.
- Collaborative Contracting: Districts seek a “co-op” model to leverage economies of scale by coordinating volume discounts for purchases like curriculum, assessments, supplies, and maintenance services like fire extinguisher testing.
- Grants Management: Support is needed to streamline grant writing, ensure timely reimbursements, and provide regional coordination for programs.
 - Grant Writing: Related, support to leverage specialized staff to apply for federal and state grants on behalf of a consortium of districts.
- Medicaid: The complexity of expanding Medicaid billing programs is not lost on district leaders and the pilot currently underway in a number of districts is important to learn how the Center may support this statewide effort.

Specialized Expertise and Shared Staffing

Educational leaders expressed a need for support in developing the capacity of specialized positions, for succession planning and for professionals new to positions. A related need, particularly in rural settings, is their access to specific service providers in support of students with individualized education plans.

- Fiscal/CFO Support: There is a high demand to support the development of sitting and newly hired chief financial officers (CFO) and other staff that may be eligible for promotion into the CFO role. There are a few CFOs near retirement, and their superintendents expressed a level of urgency for this support.
 - There is an extension of this request for experienced CFOs to have opportunities for expanded, collegial, learning opportunities like those afforded through local professional associations in other states to address such issues as long term planning given demographic/enrollment shifts.
- Special Education (SPED): This topic was raised in each of the need sensing conversations and organized thematically below, in service to expanding opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities.
 - Related Services: There is a need for reliable and cost-effective access to Related Services personnel (e.g., school psychologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists).
 - IEP Compliance/Quality: The litigious environment was highlighted by many superintendents and a renewed effort to ensure IEPs are compliant and high quality.

Leadership and Governance Support

Superintendents and board members expressed that they often operate in "firefighting mode," leaving little time to attend to long-term planning. Additionally, board members and superintendents highlighted support from NASB and NASS as extremely valuable and would benefit from additional support toward action within the context and nuance of their district.

- Superintendent Support: Support for new superintendents to navigate the legal and operational landscape of Nevada's education system.
- Board Support and Training: Specialized training for trustees on their roles and aligning board priorities with their strategic plan.
- Policy Clearinghouse: A central hub providing model policies (governance and operational) that are updated and available for districts to adapt and adopt.
- Strategic Planning/Systems: There is a clear intention from the field to revisit or develop a new strategic plan; however, available time was often mentioned as a limited factor. Supporting systems to be more efficient would provide a foundation upon which support could be provided to attend to strategic planning or other leadership activities.

Data Management and Utilization

Elevated needs around data fell into two general areas, the first relates to efficient processes and the second on utilization or moving from data to informed action.

- Data Processes: There are a considerable amount of data and a complex data system associated with state requirements. Limited capacity, primarily a matter of time, often translates to pulling staff from one area to address these data requirements. Support or centralization of routine processes would likely save time and increase the accuracy of data, especially in high-stakes metrics.
- Capacity Building: Training for staff on how to use formative data (like MAP or iReady) to inform classroom instruction within the district's particular model like PLC or MTSS frameworks.

Instructional Systems/Professional Development

Valuable instructional support is provided by the Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDPs); however, gaps remain in system-level implementation. Districts often receive professional development as part of the curriculum purchase and identified the need for further professional development once the purchased support is exhausted and/or more nuanced support specific to the needs of their educators.

- **Adoption Support:** Guidance through the expensive and complex research phase of curriculum adoption to ensure high-quality materials are selected.
- **Implementation Fidelity:** Support for long-term professional development to ensure new curricula are used as intended across all schools.

Additional Topics

Below are selected aspects of the needs sensing meetings that don't easily fit within one of the categories above but provide important feedback on priorities and how the Center may consider engaging with the field.

- **The Center as a Bridge:** There are several points made during the needs sensing meetings that consider the Center as a bridge between systems. Most obvious is the Center acting as a bridge between the Department and districts, one that supports both entities enhanced understanding of one-another and facilitate effective progress. It was also mentioned that the Center could act as a bridge with other state agencies (inter-agency coordination) that are active in the local education and health systems within our district's boundaries.
- **Clearinghouse:** The idea of the Center operating as a curator of information, templates, tools, etc. was expressed across several themes mentioned above.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** Although not as common as the themes noted above, many districts would benefit from support with further development and refinement of their educator pipeline.
- **Innovation:** There was a clear call from a few district leaders to ensure the Center is a space that holds innovation as part of the mission. Given how busy and focused system leaders are, they want to ensure new research and ideas (not mandates) are woven into the Center's work in support of schools.
- **Focus:** The Center is encouraged to begin its operations with a narrow focus, supporting a limited scope of engagement to ensure the field and the Center build trust and the value or benefit is returned.

Concerns

The agenda for each of the need sensing meetings included an item to discuss the field's concerns with the new Center. Although this may evolve as the Center begins operation, it is important to understand what, if any, concerns the field has as we enter the initial operational phase.

- **Large/Small:** A common concern was raised by large and small (rural/urban) districts: The concern is that the Center would focus a disproportioned amount of time and attention on the other. They requested a balanced approach,

understanding the needs of large and small districts are unique but each should be served.

- **Role Clarity:** There is significant variation in how districts view the Center relative to Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDPs). Some districts worry about overlap, while others see the Center working at the "system-level" support (superintendents/boards) while RPDPs focus on "instructional-level" support (teachers/principals).
 - Additionally, initial and ongoing conversations with NASS and NASB will support coordinated and clear areas where the Center may build on existing support provided by both entities.
- **Independence:** Several districts emphasized that the Center must remain independent from the Department of Education to be a "neutral and trusted" partner rather than perceived as a regulator. There is a recognition that the Center would support the implementation of state priorities.
- **Budget:** There is a common and general concern that funding for the Center would negatively impact funding available to local education agencies – a dollar to the Center is one less to them.

Services and Programs¹

This section transitions from sharing a summary of results from meetings with the field to the implications and emerging next steps for the Center. Once the initial set of services and programs are identified then the Center will develop an Operational Plan that will provide for the operations of the Center, within its available resources.

Service Lines

How the Center will organize itself to serve the field needs consideration and ongoing discussion. Regardless of which services and programs are prioritized, a framework for how the Center will engage in the work is necessary to ensure there is a clear understanding and aligned expectations. Below captures very preliminary thinking about how the Center might clarify its role as it rolls out services and programs as contemplated in Senate Bill 460.

What is a service line?

A service line is an organized scope of work, offered by the Center, that aligns with a specific need. A service line appears in the budget, supported by specific Center

¹ SB460, Sec. 56.5 "... provide services and programs to local educational agencies and, as necessary, to other local governments."

staff. A service line would qualify as a service or program as identified in Senate Bill 460.

The following service lines are organized into a tiered framework in order of increasing cost and capacity needed at the Center to successfully execute the service lines within each tier.

Tier I: Facilitation

- Example: Best Practices Network
- The Center facilitates a series of meetings for role-like peers across the state to discuss timely topics and share experiences, best practices, and tools. The Center's role in this service line is that of facilitators, it takes on the responsibility for organizing the calendar, developing the agenda, and facilitating the meeting.

Tier II: Capacity Building

- Example: CFO Academy
- The Center structures support to build the professional capacity of the field. The Center's role is that of expert and would need to staff with or contract for specific expertise, collaborate on the scope and sequence of the support delivered to local staff. The Center organizes this service line with the express purpose of building district capacity in a specific domain of knowledge.

Tier III: Direct Service

- Example: Data Facilitation
- The Center as a central office to the central office. Providing direct services means the Center would take on the responsibility for a given process and/or product but not the authority for approval or formal submission. Using the Data Facilitation example to illustrate how this might work. If several districts requested the Center to take on the responsibility for the statewide data validation processes, then the Center would collect and validate data sets, work with the district to finalize, and then the district would submit or approve the final validated data.

Next Steps

This discussion draft will be reviewed by members of the Center's Board and their feedback incorporated. The updated discussion draft will be circulated with the Department's Cabinet, the Nevada Associations of School Superintendents, and School Boards, with their feedback incorporated. It is anticipated that the Center's Board will

discuss and possibly act in April on the initial set of services and projects and the outline of the Operational Plan.

- Adopting Vision and Mission, focused on improved outcomes