

Singular Statewide Needs Assessment Series Transcript

Part 2: Planning the Singular Statewide Needs Assessment

Cary Cuiccio: Hello; this is Cary Cuiccio from the State Support Network, welcoming you back to our podcast series on creating a singular statewide needs assessment. Last week, we learned from the Arizona and Georgia Departments of Education about why and how they decided to create a single comprehensive needs assessment process to be rolled out statewide. Today, we'll be talking with the Georgia and Arizona teams about their needs assessment development process: how they went about structuring the development team and organizing the flow of activities within the agency in order to produce the needs assessments that are the focus of our series. We'll begin the conversation with Craig Geers and John Wight from the Georgia Department of Education.

Craig Geers: This is Craig Geers speaking, and I'm currently the Associate Superintendent for Federal Programs at the department.

John Wight: Yes, and this is John Wight. I'm the Director of Federal Programs here at the department.

Cary Cuiccio So, when you launched the development process, who led that? Who led the work at the agency?

Craig Geers: So, it was essentially the federal programs folks because we were already working together as a federal programs unit. So, we really took the ownership of pulling our program managers together from the Title programs and having the discussion with them. Once they got in the room, however, and started talking about data points that we would want to look at, it quickly became a part of the discussion that, well heck, we need to be pulling in all these other people. Because if we're doing this in a single fashion, we've got to have everybody on board. So, it started with federal programs, but branched out pretty quickly when the managers started talking to each other.

John Wight: Right, and that branch out is still happening. I mean this is a couple of years down the road, we're still realizing, you know what, we need to pull in this other group because, they're, as all state agencies, very complex.

And as you dig into what you're doing, you realize “Oh, this is a complete connection to school safety,” for example, and that's a whole different team. They may not be federally funded, but we're going to pull them in here because they, they...

Craig Geers: They've got data.

John Wight: Correct. They have the data and they sit in the whole, our whole improvement process. So, while we have most of the people on board, I mean, I wouldn't be surprised if we'll find another one, another group that needs to join in the work.

Craig Geers: But as far as the continuing process, federal programs are still considered the lead for this work, and rightly so. I mean, it's all about implementing ESSA [Every Student Succeeds Act], and the requirements of ESSA, so it's kind of a natural, a natural setup.

John Wight: On the timing of it, we used the ESSA plan. That became the glue, really, as it should be, because we're able to put out our systems framework that we have been talking about. So, as we started to communicate that, that message started to be communicated from the superintendent and from the senior leadership here, so that it wasn't just coming out of the left field of federal programs. While we took main responsibility, the message started to become the message of the department.

Cary Cuiccio: Tell us about your timeline. From the time you pulled together the federal programs folks and said, “We're going to sit down and make this happen” until you were ready to share some materials with your districts. How long did that take?

Craig Geers: Oh wow, good question. This is thinking back a-ways. The initial pulling together of our program managers who felt they were ready to commit to a single needs assessment process, that happened pretty quickly because we were already working together. A specialist who was helping with the data really led the managers through the data analysis in figuring out, okay, what are all the data points we want to pull into this? That didn't take more than probably, what, four or five months?

John Wight: Yeah, about four or five months.

Craig Geers: And I mentioned earlier that we needed to pause because we didn't want to move forward with reauthorization pending. So, that's basically where we landed. And that work got put on hold for probably a good six months. And it was in the spring of...

John Wight: Like spring/summer 2016.

Craig Geers: 2016, right. That we realized that, okay, ESSA's rollin'.

John Wight: Right, and we were getting the template from U.S. ED [U.S. Department of Education] on the ESSA plan, so we knew that we were there, that this work was embedded, and that's when we picked up again.

Craig Geers: Yup, we pulled it back in, we pulled up those spreadsheets again, and really got into the discussion in a more significant context under ESSA for how this was going to work.

John Wight: And that's when we went into hyper mode.

Craig Geers: Yeah.

John Wight: Because we started to move extremely quickly. We rolled out and shared information in January of 2017 to our LEAs [local education agencies], information including everything from the systems framework to how we were going to ask districts to coordinate together to do their one single comprehensive needs assessment. So, it was at that point it started to move very quickly.

Cary Cuiccio Yes, well, I was just going to pause there and say that in January of 2017, you communicated this out to the districts, but you didn't have all the materials ready to roll out. Didn't that take a couple more months?

John Wight: It sure did, yeah.

Craig Geers: Right, so we started to communicate out, and we were using fillable PDF, at that time, and those rolled out on March 1st.

Craig Geers: By that point, we had completed probably six or seven of our 10 webinar series.

John Wight: Right.

Craig Geers: That could provide the overview and the information, so the messaging was out there, and it was kind of like building that anticipation to get these PDF files.

John Wight: And February of 2017, we also had a key conference that happens annually. The main focus of that conference was the single needs assessment. So that was helpful, but, yes, we started it in January, didn't roll out until March 1st, but we did have, in the interim, a key event that helped to pull everybody together.

Cary Cuiccio: That was John Wight and Craig Geers of the Georgia Department of Education. Next, we'll hear from the Arizona Department of Education. Devon, can you introduce yourself please?

Devon Isherwood: This is Devon Isherwood, and I'm the Deputy Associate Superintendent for Support and Innovation, which is school improvement for the Arizona Department of Education.

Cary Cuiccio: So, describe the development process for us. You had this group that was going already, you said you met two hours every Wednesday for four or five meetings to decide how you were going to do this. Then, once you decided you were ready, from the time you said, "All right, this is what we're doing" until you were ready to share the process and materials with your districts, how long a period was that?

Devon Isherwood: About 10 months.

Cary Cuiccio: That's really good to hear. How did you structure your time there?

Devon Isherwood: Our goal was to have an initial draft to share with the field at our mega-conference in October. We took a principle a week and ended up with six principles. We looked at the definition, we did research on what the indicators might be, what the elements might be, and then we would gather that information and send it out to the team and then would come prepared to the meeting with the edits to the definition, or maybe even a different definition. We came to consensus on the definition, and then we came to consensus on the elements and indicators. There was a core group that showed up every single week, and then there were others that weren't going to be in the first rollout of the requirement for the CNA [comprehensive needs assessment] that came when appropriate. Early childhood was very present during climate and culture and parent involvement, not so much in some of the other things, but Title I, Title II, Title III, school improvement, and then our state were there every single week.

Cary Cuiccio: Was this a collective effort or did you have a primary project manager, someone who was sort of a team lead?

Devon Isherwood: We had a project manager, that was me. I coordinated the agendas and ran the meetings, facilitated the meetings, wrote up the minutes, [and] sent out what we agreed on each week to keep the group going.

Cary Cuiccio: Did you engage your districts at all during the development process, either by sharing some materials in advance or inviting them to meetings for conversations?

Devon
Isherwood: Yes, we had members on the team itself. We had representatives from small, medium, and large districts and charters, urban, suburban, and rural. They were here or on the phone meeting with us the whole way through. Then, like I said, we presented it at the mega-conference to get feedback [on] the initial draft; we also involved the Title I CoP [Community of Practice].

Cary Cuiccio: Excellent. Did you pilot the process before rolling it out statewide?

Devon
Isherwood: No, we did not. The superintendent and executive team felt very strongly that this was important, and we were going to pilot all the Title I, Title II, Title III, school improvement, and then move on with reading schools. In our state, [we have] about 2,100 LEAs, and about 1,800 of them are Title I.

Cary Cuiccio: Wow.

Devon
Isherwood: Yes.

Cary Cuiccio: Wow.

Cary Cuiccio: This conversation about the internal development process undertaken by the Georgia and Arizona Departments of Education has provided some key insights about the challenges and benefits of engaging in this work—including some important takeaways about timelines and engaging the right people on the team. The next episode will focus on data, including how Georgia and Arizona decided which data to use, how those data were collected and organized, and how data were shared with those at the local level who would be engaging in the needs assessment process. If you have any questions about this series or are interested in learning more, please contact the State Support Network directly on our website at statesupportnetwork.ed.gov. Thanks for joining us!