

Singular Statewide Needs Assessment Series Transcript

Part 3: The Gathering and Presentation of Data

- Cary Cuiccio:** Hello, and welcome back to our podcast series on developing a singular statewide needs assessment. This is Cary Cuiccio from the State Support Network. Today, we'll be talking with the Georgia and Arizona teams about how they approached the gathering and presentation of data as part of their needs assessment development process. 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 [Georgia Department of Education].
- John Wight:** Yes, and this is John Wight. I'm the Director of Federal Programs here at the [Georgia Department of Education].
- Cary Cuiccio:** So, I want to talk to you now about data. I know that you've been talking about when you used the fillable PDF; you talked about how you started, very early, talking about data sources and how to pull them together. And I know for many states it's a question of: are we providing all the data for the needs assessment, or are we asking schools and districts to go and pull those data? Can you talk about how you made the decision to provide the data, and whether you would do it differently now?
- Craig Geers:** Yeah, so interesting. The program managers, when they got together, we had an incredible amount of data that we were potentially looking at. And we realized, you know, that's unrealistic. At that point, we looked at what did we consider the core essential pieces of data that would be needed. I don't know John, you want to add anything?
- John Wight:** I think that, what was interesting was we went for the standard, the assessment data, attendance data, maybe some perception data. Those were some of the standard things that we went for. But when it became huge like Craig's talking about, [that's] when we would start to peel back that onion and say, "Oh, there's this whole survey data that goes out to LEAs [local education agencies] on school safety." We don't normally look at that, but it fits completely in the cycle. So, before we got to the pause, we were collecting all that information and we were getting bigger and bigger and

bigger. It just became to the point where it got so large, and that just happened to be at the same time we paused.

Craig Geers: Yeah.

John Wight: So, when we came back, we had to streamline what we wanted.

Craig Geers: Which we did, but it was still a lengthy amount of data that we did send down to the districts. And I will mention, I think one important thing that we did is we didn't want them focusing on assessment data.

Cary Cuiccio: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Craig Geers: Because that traditionally has been what we've seen as a primary go-to. So, we purposefully put the assessment data at the very end. Because we really wanted them to think beyond that. ESSA was an opportunity here to implement supports and services through federal programs that didn't necessarily always just focus on English language arts and math.

John Wight: The first part that we wanted them to go through was to do their own perception data on our systems framework and our standards for school quality. So, they were doing some ratings of themselves as a district. That became their first data piece and, then, as Craig said, they looked at their assessment performance, whatever data. But it was purposeful, and it made perfect sense to us, and some of our districts got it and some of our districts still just turned the pages and went straight to that [assessment performance] because that's how their head works.

Cary Cuiccio: Right.

John Wight: They like to see the assessment data first, and then they can do the self-assessment piece as well. But that was our thinking with that because we didn't just want people to just look at their data and make decisions. You had to look at the whole school and not just how little subgroups are doing first.

Cary Cuiccio: Right, right. So, I know that data that are collected particularly for other purposes are not always useful for a needs assessment the way that they're collected. You have to reorganize the data or make them useful or readable for the actual folks at the district level who will be involved in interpreting these data to draw some conclusions. So, how did you handle that challenge?

Craig Geers: Yeah; we were really limited. I mean the PDF templates that we used were “swanky,” for a lack of a better word.

John Wight: Right, right.

Craig Geers: The data presentation was pretty standard. It was tables.

John Wight: Right. The mass raw data file that we use for our accountability purposes, that's the file that we use to populate a lot of those fields. And some of the ways that we're presenting the data were different than how it was in our accountability system. So, we did realize that there were some instances where we might have done an average a certain way, whereas on a website somewhere we had posted an average a different way. So, there was a little bit of conflicting data. I remember a conversation with Craig and Debbie Gale where we said this is exactly why we need to not provide them the data, and we need to go to a single source of data, which is kind of [what we] went to our next phase with.

Cary Cuiccio: Right. So, you initially decided to provide the data in these pre-populated PDFs and later you moved to an online platform. So, why did you choose the PDF to begin with, and then how did it change?

Craig Geers: Well, we chose the PDF because, as John said, the data were housed there, so we wanted to provide them back to the districts and that was just an easy way for us to deliver the data back in a usable way, through the systems framework, the way we wanted them to analyze their data, and it just seemed logical.

John Wight: Right, and remember, I don't know if you've seen our PDFs, but those PDFs were, they were a needs assessment, but they were also designed to walk you through the process.

Cary Cuiccio: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yup.

John Wight: So, it makes sense for us to put the data in there so it's easier for the districts to walk through their process. And, for lack of a better way of doing it, we just went with a fillable PDF.

Craig Geers: We really didn't have other options.

John Wight: We didn't have anything else to do.

Craig Geers: Right.

John Wight: We had nothing built, [and] we didn't just want to give them separate files because that would have gotten away from the consistency and the coordination we wanted to have. So, we went with, I guess, the path of least resistance at that time.

Craig Geers: But we knew it wasn't going to be sustainable.

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: I know you chose to collect and report data out to districts as part of the CNA [comprehensive needs assessment] process, rather than requiring districts or schools to gather them all on their own. How did you set about determining what data sets you were going to utilize for this effort?

Devon Isherwood: We had kind of a combination of what we had available to them and what they needed to find themselves. We looked at the major leading and lagging indicators from the research, and we made those suggestions. We required benchmark data that are a requirement in our state as well as the summative statewide assessment. The leading indicators of the teacher attendance, discipline, you know the normal kinds of things. We also, in our guidance document, talked about the other kinds of things that they might use, but those were the major ones. Again, we had the discussion; we came to consensus in the group of what the minimum requirement for the quantitative data would be.

Cary Cuiccio: In many states it is a challenge just determining what data are easily available and then pulling those data from various systems in order to present them in a coherent way to districts. How did Arizona work through that challenge?

Devon Isherwood: We're still working through that challenge, to be honest. We collect quite a bit of data at our IT department; we're still working with them on the best way to actually pull data into the tool itself, and we're changing tool platforms. One [piece] of the data that we said we didn't have was transiency rates. We found that schools weren't keeping mobility rates. We weren't keeping mobility rates, which was kind of a surprise to me because my district had.

The others didn't have teacher attendance. We've identified things that are important, but that a lot of [what] our smaller districts are not keeping, we don't keep as an agency either. We're still working to figure out the best way to handle those things. For school improvement, which is my direct responsibility, we've been helping them with formulas, but, statewide, we're not there yet.

Cary Cuiccio: You talked about how often the data that are housed at the SEA [state education agency] reflect your lagging indicators. How did you encourage districts and schools to add local data to round out the picture? Did you provide supports or guidance?

Devon Isherwood: We have our guidance document that's pretty extensive. That was one of the reasons we put the Excel spreadsheets in our tool, so that they had a place to put them in and analyze them. We made it as easy as possible, but, again, it was dependent on the district. I came from a large district and we had a whole team that provided all of that for us. We have a lot of charters and we've found that they don't keep those kinds of data. We're just in the process, and it's a slow process, of helping them figure out how to gather them, where to house them, and how to use them.

Cary Cuiccio: I know upfront, you created the incredibly impressive, giant Excel workbook to house the data. You embedded formulas in there to assist local users. I heard you say a moment ago, I think, that you're transitioning to a portal. Is that true?

Devon Isherwood: We're transitioning into our grants management system. Not for this year. They've just finished their needs assessment to plan for next year right now, so they're still in that Excel spreadsheet. For the next school year, the CNA and the Integrated Action Plan are going to be housed in the same place that the grant applications are housed. It'll pre-populate much easier and we're very excited about it. I got to test [the] site yesterday, so I haven't really played with it yet, but they've mirrored the CNA that the field has used for the last two years exactly. We've been able to embed the root cause analysis better into the new tool, and the “fishbones” [i.e., root causes identified in an Ishikawa diagram] will be required as part of that. Right now, it's just uploaded [as] extra; not everyone does it and, as we know, that's the most critical part, or one of the most critical parts.

Eventually, the action steps that are requiring funding will pre-populate into the grant application, but that's phase 2. This is the beginning of housing it all [in] one, and truly having one needs assessment, one plan, and then the [applications] as appropriate.

Cary Cuiccio: Today's conversation about data collection for a needs assessment process is an important precursor to our next topic: data interpretation. Our next episode will focus on the data analysis and interpretation processes that Georgia and Arizona outlined for the schools and districts that would be working through the needs assessment. We always say that an effective needs assessment is a process, not a document, so tune in next time to learn how Georgia and Arizona brought their documents to life. In the meantime, 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 <https://statesupportnetwork.ed.gov/>. Thanks for joining us!