

Promising Practices for District Consolidated Planning A Companion Document for the MACC Info Brief: Consolidated Planning for School Districts

This document provides a summary of promising practices for district consolidated planning, drawing on information gathered from states studied by the MACC from 2006 to 2009: Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

Build Support

The first step toward consolidated planning is to build support within the agency. An in-depth discussion between the state commissioner of education and staff from the district/school improvement division provides an opportunity for state leaders to discuss why consolidated planning is being pursued. Once the chief state school officer has made the commitment to transition to consolidated planning, broader commitment may be secured by forming a state agency committee comprised of leaders and staff from key divisions such as leadership and instructional support, district and school assistance, special education, vocational education, federal programs, assessment and accountability, curriculum, and technology.

Identify Staff

Individuals and offices within the SEA must be identified to facilitate the work. Without a supportive “owner” of the work, it may be difficult to create momentum for the work. In most states, staff members were hired or designated to devote a significant portion of their time (50% to 100%) to coordinating development of the consolidated planning process.

Develop a Common Vision

The state planning committee must develop a common vision for consolidated planning. Regular meetings of the planning committee (e.g., weekly meetings for an eight-month period) provide time for the committee to develop a shared vision to guide their work, and serve as a foundation for later discussions with districts. A guiding question can help focus the work, such as: How can the resources and requirements of your programs support student learning goals?

Identify Programs

States must identify the programs to include in consolidated planning initially and in the long term. The chief state school officer must establish the expectation that *all* programs that concern student learning will eventually participate. Requiring full participation initially, however, may be counterproductive if there is resistance. A prudent approach is to begin with at least five formula grant programs whose administrators wish to participate, adding other programs each year—which provides time to develop support within the agency.

Craft Planning Process

States must craft a planning process to guide district committees. The state may want to build on existing planning processes—provided those processes are based on principles of effective strategic planning. Essential components of the process should include assessing the district’s current needs, developing a vision for the future, determining goals and strategies for achieving the vision, and crafting a plan to monitor implementation and evaluate results.

Create Tools

States should create tools to help districts efficiently generate consolidated plans. With a process in place, the state agency should make the creation of consolidated plans as efficient as possible. Web-based tools can make the process accessible and efficient, such as online guidebooks, templates for each section of the plan,

and databanks pre-populated with each district's most current data. Online tools can also assist districts in gathering local data, such as perceptual surveys that may be administered to various stakeholders. Assurances for all programs may be integrated into the plan and compiled into a single document that is submitted along with the plan. The state agency should consider whether to have districts submit their plan electronically or simply post the plans to district websites for state review.

Assist Districts

The state agency may want to assist districts in using data effectively to craft a plan for meeting goals. Providing the data is an essential step, but some districts may need help using the data. For instance, the Ohio Department of Education created a “decision framework” that provides essential questions to assist district leadership teams in identifying and analyzing critical components for improving the academic performance of all students. The essential questions are organized around four levels: student proficiency, instructional management in the main content areas (including curriculum, assessment, professional development, etc.), expectations and conditions (i.e., questions about leadership, climate, and parent involvement); and resource management (i.e., time, personnel, and resources). At the completion of the decision framework process, the needs assessment is automatically loaded into the needs assessment component of the online consolidated plan.

Separate Planning

States may want to consider separating planning from budgeting. Districts can get bogged down in a “how do we spend the money” mentality. Kentucky, which has a uniform financial management system in place in every district, overcame this obstacle by separating the budget from the plan. Districts enter budgetary data for various programs separately from the planning process. This enables districts to focus on needs, priorities, and goals as the first order of business—rather than thinking in terms of how to spend the money.

Use Existing Structures and Networks

The state agency should make use of existing structures and networks to help districts transition to consolidated planning. The state will certainly want to use its website to provide guidance and planning tools. Training on consolidated planning may also be incorporated into existing professional development institutes or workshops for administrators and teachers. The state education agency may also be able to work through regional educational cooperatives and key professional associations to provide training opportunities.

Evaluate Effectiveness

States should develop a system for evaluating the effectiveness of consolidated planning. The state agency should consider how to evaluate the effectiveness of the planning process and the final plan. Rubrics may be created that can be used by both the state agency to evaluate plans and give feedback, as well as by local districts for self-evaluation. In addition, the state agency should consider gathering information on successes and obstacles by creating feedback systems, such as convening annual meetings with representatives from all or selected districts. Information gathered at these meetings may be used to continually refine the process.

Network

Network with other states and external partners. To stay abreast of current practices and to share information with other states, the state agency should draw on the expertise of other states, organizations, or individuals that have expertise with consolidated planning. States may want to join the NCLB/IDEA Collaboration Community of Practice, sponsored by the Council Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). The main objective of this network is to “enable state teams to update one another, share successes, discuss challenges, and consider how collaboration between compensatory and special education could be achieved.”