

## Legislative Council Study Committee on Shared Services

### Request for Additional Information – Nate Burklund

1. Identify any barriers to the successful implementation of shared services by your school districts (*examples could include – statutory barriers, financial uncertainty, community relationships*)?
  - **Some barriers that we have faced with potential shared service positions is lack of applicants. We tried posting for a Physical Therapist and received zero applicants. As a group of four districts, we proposed the hiring of a shared HR Director, but with four districts and four school boards we did not get consensus from all districts to post for the position. This is a definite barrier when sharing services with multiple districts as you need buy-in from all districts.**
  - **As you will see in question #2, burnout is another barrier as our shared Financial Manager did not work well.**
  - **Our current shared service agreements have been working well. We share Food Service Director with the Florence County School District. This has been proven to be a good partnership that has financially worked well. We also share Occupational Therapy with the Florence County School District. Up until the 2022-2023 school year this position was shared with four total districts. Due to larger caseloads and higher special education needs, Niagara and Florence will share the full FTE between the two districts. This service has worked out well for both districts, but as case loads increase in special education this might not be a shared service in years to come.**
  - **Due to our location, we must be creative in offering services to stay competitive and give our students the same opportunities as every other school district in the state. A couple examples of this is sharing cross country, wrestling, and track with the Florence County School District. This has given our students many more opportunities and has allowed them to meet and team up with more students. On the flip to this we shared football with two other districts since 2005. After the 2021 season we all agreed to dissolve the program due to lack of participation, multiple districts and communities' input on game and practice location, different visions from each district on the direction of the program. This was an example of communities still wanting to keep their identity. The result of the program ending was each school starting back up their own 8-man football programs with their traditional mascot and at their own respected fields.**
  
2. In your experience, have you tried to share services that proved not to be beneficial, if so please explain?
  - **We shared a Finance Manager with the Florence County School District for 2.5 years. This was a very difficult agreement to sustain. The shared Finance Manager was at each district every two days which made it tough to focus on each district's vision and future needs. With the planning and preparing of budgets, referendums, grants, local and federal dollars, audits, short term borrowing, special education funding, etc., for two districts, there wasn't enough time in the day to be progressive and plan for a district's future needs.**
  - **This work only allowed the position to do necessary tasks rather than have the time to expand the district and be part of the day to day running operations, curriculum costs, staffing, etc.**
  - **The individual was working 6-7 days a week with most days being 10-hour days, attending 2-4 board meetings each month. Policy, insurance plans, WRS, and other financial offerings for our staff, are handled by our Financial Manager, in a larger district, many of the things I just mentioned would be handled by an HR department.**

- **We now have our own Financial Manager and speaking for Niagara, we are more efficient and only having to worry about one district has allowed our Financial Manager to focus more on district planning and forward thinking.**
3. Can you identify any solutions that could address barriers to or incentivize greater use of shared services?
    - **In the case of our Financial Manager, it was time. We need to look at funding for enough administrative positions to avoid burnout and multiple hats being worn so burnout doesn't occur. We need good people to educate and run our school systems. Providing budgets that will allow us to have positions, so we do not have to rely on current employees to pick up the slack due to a position not being filled. Such as the superintendent having to take on transportation or other roles, so these positions do not get pushed aside.**
    - **Incentivize districts for sharing positions as we all know that there is a teacher/support staff shortage. If we can share an FTE, and get applicants, there should be some sort of financial incentive for districts, perhaps a percentage of their salary and wages.**
  4. Provide examples of barriers that currently prevent school districts from moving forward with consolidation?
    - **A community's identity is rich in history and in many of the communities that we live in, the school district is the hub of that community, especially in rural communities. Consolidation potentially can cut jobs, which are usually jobs that community members hold. This then creates an economic struggle for families.**
    - **Special education numbers continue to increase in districts, and we are not seeing the dollars to support those needs as it is. If consolidation occurs, those numbers and dollars should be on the forefront of all discussions.**
  5. In what ways could the state incentivize school district consolidation:
    - **Not sure what type of incentive can be valuable enough to a community to consolidate with a neighboring district and lose its rich traditions and identity. I would have a hard time believing that taxpayers would support such a referendum to build a new district/school building to house students if a neutral site is desired.**
    - **Going back to special education populations, a significant increase in special education funding should be looked at if districts consolidate.**

Thank you for this opportunity. If you have further questions, feel free to contact me.

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