
Wisconsin Legislative Council

MINUTES



STUDY COMMITTEE ON SHARED SCHOOL DISTRICT SERVICES

Room 412 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI
July 20, 2022
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Brooks called the meeting to order and determined that a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Rep. Robert Brooks, Chair; Sen. Daniel Feyen, Vice Chair; Rep. Dave Considine; Sen. Janet Bewley; and Public Members Lance Bagstad, Jeffrey Dellutri, Bobbie Guyette, Ted Neitzke, Ben Niehaus, and Tara Villalobos.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Anne Sappenfield, Director; Rachel Letzing, Deputy Director; and Emily Hicks and Raine Black, Staff Attorneys.

APPEARANCES: Mike Beighley, Superintendent, Whitehall School District; Nathaniel Burklund, District Administrator, Niagara School District; Traci Davis, Superintendent, Juda School District; Jeff Eide, Executive Director, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance; Allen Betry, Agency Administrator, CESA 9; David Honish, Agency Administrator, CESA 8; and Mike Koltas, Director of Business Services, CESA 5.

OPENING REMARKS

Anne Sappenfield, Director of the Legislative Council staff, welcomed committee members and thanked them for their service. She then presented a brief video featuring remarks from Wisconsin legislators, including the Joint Legislative Council Co-Chairs, regarding the work of the interim committees. Ms. Sappenfield then noted certain housekeeping items and procedures followed throughout the study committee process.

INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair Brooks introduced himself and welcomed the committee members. At the invitation of the chair, committee members introduced themselves and provided brief explanations of their backgrounds.

PRESENTATION OF STAFF BRIEF BY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL COMMITTEE STAFF

Emily Hicks and Raine Black, Staff Attorneys, provided an overview of information included in Legislative Council Staff Brief 2022-03, [Study Committee on Shared School District Services](#) (July 13, 2022). A copy of their PowerPoint presentation is available on the committee's [website](#).

Ms. Hicks described the Legislative Council committee staff's role in assisting the committee's work, the committee's scope, and the method of distributing materials for committee meetings. Next, she

summarized possible reasons school districts share services, and school funding pieces most relevant to the committee's scope. Ms. Black then described current law regarding school district authority to contract for services, whole grade sharing agreements, the structure of Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs), and their role in providing services to school districts. Finally, she highlighted recent legislative efforts regarding shared services and whole grade sharing agreements.

PRESENTATIONS BY SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS

The committee heard presentations from school district administrators about how their districts share services and interact with their CESA.

Traci Davis, Superintendent, Juda School District, explained that the district currently shares teachers, library/media specialists, and a special education director. Additionally, the district is part of a three district cooperative. Under this cooperative agreement, districts share a district assessment coordinator, professional development, dual enrollment classes, and curriculum costs and training. She said her district uses CESA 2 for its resource library of curriculum and assessments, to find coaches and professional support, and to find specialized special education services. Benefits of sharing services include increasing opportunities for classes, activities, and dual enrollment credits; allowing students to remain in their "home" schools; decreased costs; and staff networking. Challenges to sharing services include staff difficulties traveling among districts, keeping track of different passwords, and learning different data systems. Ms. Davis said that incentives to sharing services could include the funding formula used in Iowa, having one student data system, increasing the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) systems' ease of use to enter information about multiple districts at one time, and providing traveling staff space and equipment in each district.

Jeff Eide, Executive Director, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, said he recently served as Superintendent in the Blair-Taylor School District, one of four schools in the Trempealeau Valley Cooperative 2.0. Benefits of the cooperative structure include creating more opportunities for career technical education classes, higher level classes, dual credits, and college credits. Mr. Eide noted staff from schools in the cooperative developed professional learning communities and received professional development at one time. Difficulties of the cooperative structure include finding certified teachers, creating a common vision, having human resources capacity, and compensating travel costs. He noted the need for strong leadership, and to clarify the goal of the cooperative agreement for students and staff. Among barriers to creating a cooperative structure, he noted concern over losing local control and identity, connecting course offerings, and having multiple student information systems. He said that incentives for sharing services should be flexible because districts have different needs.

Nathaniel Burklund, District Administrator, Niagara School District, explained that many professional staff in his district serve in multiple roles. He said the district has shared a food service coordinator with the Florence School District since 2014, and the two will continue sharing an occupational therapist in the upcoming school year. Mr. Burklund said his district is also part of a cooperative with three school districts, which share certain sports teams. The district also works with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, University of Wisconsin Green Bay, and the Iron Mountain, MI ISE to increase class offerings for students, including dual credits. He said the district has purchased services, including visually impaired, and orientation and mobility services, from CESA 8, as well as staff professional development. An example of a shared service that was unsuccessful was sharing a financial services manager, due to staff burnout caused by long days and heavy workloads. Mr. Burklund noted the district is considering whether to share physical therapy and human resources services in the future.

Mike Beighley, Superintendent, Whitehall School District, explained that his district is part of the Trempealeau Valley Cooperative 2.0., established in 2017, a reboot of a cooperative that existed from 1969-1998. He noted that leaders did not rebuild the cooperative in order to save money, but rather, to do better with the same money by avoiding duplication of services and sharing leadership positions. Challenges to creating the cooperative included the time commitment, retaining and attracting staff, achieving consensus on a leadership structure, competition among communities to retain residents, and different community values. Among the benefits of the cooperative structure, it enables students to take multiple shared courses, including dual credit and skills certification courses.

Committee members posed questions to the panelists regarding several topics, including: creating district “buy in” for a cooperative model without transferring money or losing community identity; the impact of the “double dipping” provision when filling teaching positions; the challenges of supporting staff who travel among districts; standardizing record keeping at DPI; whether barriers exist in state law to districts creating a cooperative agreement; the impact of districts competing for grants, the lack of grant writers, and the inability to reimburse grant writing services; consistency of school district technologies; and the impact of school district collaboration on businesses, communities, and students.

Chair Brooks asked the panelists to provide additional information to the committee, including: specific ways to increase buy-in and to create incentives for districts to share services; state laws that are barriers to sharing services; the impact of the “double dipping” provision on staffing; ways to assist with cross-training staff experiencing burnout; whether more uniformity and guidance from DPI is needed to report data from multiple districts; ways to assist staff who travel between districts; and incentives for businesses to partner with school districts.

PRESENTATIONS BY CESA STAFF

Following a lunch break, the committee heard presentations from CESA staff about services their CESA provides and how their CESA facilitates shared services between school districts.

David Honish, Agency Administrator, CESA 8, highlighted the special education and student services CESA 8 offers. He said they have many partnerships with higher education institutions in order to provide students with multiple credit options. With those partners, CESA 8 created the rural teacher talent development program for student teachers to get experience in rural districts. He noted that a working group is exploring using this model for deaf hard of hearing and vision specialists, but this would require more funding in order to be effective. The CESA 8 region has 27 member districts, and most staff provide direct special education services to schools and serve in multiple districts. In addition to providing services for its member districts, CESA 8 contracted services with close to 60 districts in cooperation with other CESAs. In his experience, sharing administrative positions among districts in the CESA 8 region has generally not been successful, as it is very demanding for one person to address multiple needs in different communities. Finally, he noted that increasing available funding for programs would be helpful.

Mike Koltes, Director of Business Services, CESA 5, summarized the business services CESA 5 offers. He said CESA 5 has 35 member districts but serves between 75 to 100 districts across the state. The business services offered include business manager, payroll, accounts payable, and state reporting on an ongoing and interim basis. He noted examples of CESA 5 full-time staff working as a business manager and in payroll services and splitting time between different districts. Mr. Koltes emphasized the value to districts of using the team of experts at a CESA, which can create efficiencies, increase collaboration, and create best practices. As an example, he noted that a CESA can prepare the standardized audit reports every district must submit to the state. He suggested the committee consider

helping districts share services by creating a categorical aid that would allow a district to keep a percentage of that reimbursement if it purchases services from a CESA or shares services between school districts.

Allen Betry, Agency Administrator, CESA 9, discussed the curriculum support services CESA 9 provides. He noted that CESA 9 has 22 member districts, in a wide variety of sizes, and emphasized that CESA 9 communicates consistently with its member districts in order to anticipate needs and provide quality services. For example, CESA 9 developed the Excellence in Teaching program after hearing district concerns about the lack of teachers. He said CESA 9 provides staff to be curriculum directors, brings districts together on common professional development days, and offers continuous improvement plan assistance. Mr. Betry noted that a CESA acts as a filter for information from the state and federal governments, and can therefore save districts time and money. Some of the challenges to sharing services include ensuring longevity in employment, cross-training staff and ensuring they have the correct licenses, staff travel costs between district, and providing quality staff to meet recent needs for school counselors and school psychologists.

Committee members posed questions to the panelists regarding several topics, including: how districts access CESA services; how best to offer centralized payroll services to districts; CESA funding sources; whether any state reporting requirements could be eliminated; barriers to CESA staff working in multiple districts with different systems; and defining “rural” for purposes of grant or program eligibility.

Chair Brooks asked the CESA staff to identify any overlap in the services provided by CESAs and DPI, and whether there are any services CESAs are better able to provide.

PRESENTATION BY MOLLY GOLD AND DAN THATCHER, NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

Ms. Gold provided a detailed overview of shared services models in other states (referred to as CESAs in Wisconsin); shared services laws in states similar to Wisconsin; different approaches to shared services in South Dakota and Pennsylvania; and recent legislation in selected states. Mr. Thatcher spoke about different states’ financing models for funding shared services. He noted that based on the available research, state funding methods varied across the country; for example, certain models include state funding, while others rely primarily on local funding. Hyperlinks to the highlighted state laws and legislation are embedded in their PowerPoint presentation, available on the committee’s [website](#).

DISCUSSION OF COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT

Chair Brooks asked whether state law prohibits CESAs from receiving philanthropic donations, and what services DPI provides that could be contracted for and provided through the CESAs. CESA staff said they are not aware of anything in state law that prevents receiving donations from non-education entities. In response to a question about whether CESAs have a set menu of services like some other states, CESA staff explained that CESAs have a standard set of services contracts based on required grants and also have add-on service contracts to customize support based on a district’s particular needs. CESA staff offered to provide information to the committee about which services they offer in both models.

PLANS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Chair Brooks explained that the committee's next meeting will focus on school district consolidation. In response to a question, he suggested that if committee members have colleagues who wish to submit written testimony regarding experiences with consolidation, they can be sent to Legislative Council staff and will be posted on the committee's website. In conclusion, Chair Brooks emphasized that his goal is for committee members to reach consensus on achievable legislative proposals.

ADJOURNMENT

The committee adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

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