

Striving for Success: Insights from Succeed 2020 Partners

Third Report of the Succeed 2020 Documentation Project

Executive Summary

Since 2011, Succeed 2020 has helped North Dakota students transition from school into college and careers. Eight Regional Education Associations (REAs) have led this effort, working with each other and with their member schools and districts, local businesses and higher education institutions, a statewide steering committee, and FHI 360. The 2014–2015 school year was the first in which all eight REAs had entered the full implementation phase of the initiative.

This report is the third in a series of annual documentation reports and features stakeholders' perspectives on continuing progress and hurdles in Succeed 2020 during the 2014–2015 academic year. REAs have been able to offer more and, they believe, better professional development services to their member districts because of Succeed 2020 resources. They have recognized the need for collecting and analyzing data on these services to make decisions about their priorities. While they are negotiating these programmatic decisions, they are also working to strengthen their management acumen and become stronger organizations.

The information presented in this report derives from interviews with REA staff members, FHI 360 technical assistance providers, and steering committee members as well as surveys of school and district leaders from North Dakota's public schools. Data was collected from December, 2015 to March, 2016, meaning that respondents were reflecting on the previous school year.

Key findings from this report follow.

Organizational Capacity

- Increased staffing levels have enabled REAs to develop their capacities to deliver services to member districts.
- REAs were working to become more strategic and develop stronger planning skills to conceptualize their services as a cohesive body of work.
- Succeed 2020 has prompted many REAs to develop greater organizational complexity to meet the demands of the initiative.
- Succeed 2020 has invested significantly in helping REAs develop their capacities for human resources management.
- REAs were developing a stronger collective identity and ability to advocate for themselves.

Implementing Succeed 2020

- REAs have developed a strong grasp of the Succeed 2020 strategies. Their progress was evident in stronger professional development services for their members and more sophisticated requests for technical support.
- REAs continued to struggle with staffing issues.

- With experience, REAs were refining their understanding of the Succeed 2020 strategies and the activities in each. REAs also abandoned some activities or priorities they deemed unsuccessful.
- The specific types of technical assistance from FHI 360 that REAs requested and received varied.
- REAs addressed a variety of topics in their professional development. School and district staff members reported that professional development that focused on using data was both the most available and the most useful to them.

Relying on Data

- The collection and use of data has simultaneously been one of the greatest areas of progress for the REAs and the greatest area of need.
- FHI 360 has increasingly provided targeted support for developing REAs' data capabilities.
- REAs struggled to link their activities directly to student outcomes. They relied on several alternative sources of information to understand the effectiveness of their professional development.
- Succeed 2020 stakeholders recognized REAs' progress in relying on data but acknowledged that they have a long way to go.

Impact of Succeed 2020

- Succeed 2020 helped some REAs provide services to new audiences.
- School and district leaders reported that REAs effectively addressed their needs. Their satisfaction with REA services increased during the grant period.

Planning for Sustainability

- REAs were still in the beginning stages of planning for sustainability, but many were beginning to think about potential future funding sources. Almost all the REAs would like to receive technical assistance around grant writing and identifying additional funding sources in the final years of Succeed 2020.
- REA staff members hoped to maintain their growth in using data.
- REAs needed support in using data to help them determine which services to sustain.
- Professional development, events for students, and project staff emerged as the features of Succeed 2020 REAs most hoped to sustain.
- Collaboration among the REAs has increased dramatically because of Succeed 2020 and most REAs would like to sustain this stronger collaborative spirit.
- There was consensus among Succeed 2020 stakeholders on the different roles each should play in planning for sustainability.

Over the course of Succeed 2020, REAs have strengthened their own organizations and the services they offer member districts. They are responding to calls to enhance their data capabilities, both to plan their ongoing work and to prove its worth. School and district leaders have recognized the growing strength of their REAs. This report concludes with continuing challenges and questions, many centered on data and REAs' roles, that will need to be addressed as the initiative pivots to focusing on sustainability.