



# Wyoming Shared Services Model Recommendations Report

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Colyott, J., Patel, V., Rasmussen, J., & Tate, V. (2021). *Wyoming shared services model recommendations report*. Denver, CO. Region 11 Comprehensive Center / McREL International.

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## Introduction

In 2017, the Wyoming State Legislature established the Wyoming Government Spending and Efficiency Commission to identify opportunities to increase efficiencies in Wyoming’s government and public services.<sup>1</sup> The commission’s final report included a recommendation to increase the fiscal and operational efficiencies of Wyoming’s Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and Boards of Cooperative Higher Educational Services (BOCHES) programs through implementation of a revised shared services model.

In response to the recommendation, the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) partnered with the Region 11 Comprehensive Center (R11CC), a technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, on a 2-year project to explore the current fiscal and operational practices of BOCES/BOCHES, identify key challenges, and develop recommendations to increase efficiencies that might be piloted by one or more of the state’s BOCES/BOCHES programs.

In 2019–20 (Year 1), WDE and R11CC completed two main activities to support the development of the shared services model recommendations: a stakeholder needs sensing survey and a scan of shared services models in other states. In addition, WDE and R11CC convened a planning team comprised of stakeholders, including staff from WDE, a legislative representative, the Wyoming Association of School Administrators, BOCES/BOCHES leaders, and staff from the Western Educational Equity Assistance Center. The planning team provided input on the project plan, guidance on the activities, and feedback on the two outputs—the survey findings and the national scan. Based on the findings from the 2019–20 needs assessment survey and the national scan, R11CC, together with the project team, identified priority topics to explore further in 2020–21.

In 2020–21, R11CC completed two additional activities to further support the development of the shared services model recommendations: (1) focus groups with district and BOCES/BOCHES leaders and (2) interviews with the program directors of shared service programs in Alaska, Colorado, Montana, and North Dakota. The focus groups centered on the priority topics identified by the project team in Year 1. For the program director interviews, the project team selected Alaska, Colorado, Montana, and North Dakota because of similar geographical characteristics to Wyoming.

This report provides a summary of key learnings from the focus groups and state interviews before outlining six overall recommendations for consideration by WDE to improve the efficiency of the current shared services model in Wyoming.

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<sup>1</sup> Wyoming Government Spending and Efficiency Commission. (2017). *2017 final report on activities*. Retrieved from <https://www.wyoleg.gov/InterimCommittee/2017/SGERPT1130.pdf>

## Key Learnings That Inform Recommendations

The district and BOCES/BOCHES focus groups and the program director interviews provided R11CC an opportunity to collect additional information. The focus groups provided additional insights about current structures and operational models of Wyoming BOCES/BOCHES, challenges impacting the efficiency of the current shared services model, and potential strategies to address them. The program director interviews provided insights related to the structures and operational models of other state shared service models and the strategies used to address challenges.

### Focus Groups With District Leaders and BOCES/BOCHES Leaders

In spring 2021, 22 district leaders and 17 BOCES/BOCHES leaders participated in a series of virtual focus groups to share their experiences and perspectives related to key operational areas (i.e., program structure and staffing, needs assessments and service design and delivery, communication and collaboration, and monitoring and evaluation) and content-focused areas such as special education, dual enrollment, and career and technical education. The focus groups identified strengths and challenges of the current shared services model which were summarized in the *BOCES/BOCHES and District Focus Groups: Overview Report*.

Key learnings about challenges identified by the focus groups with district leaders and BOCES/BOCHES leaders that inform the recommendations in this report include the following<sup>2</sup>:

- » BOCES/BOCHES leaders are **uncertain of some legislative requirements**, which hinders their ability to maximize the utilization of shared services and purchasing agreements with other BOCES/BOCHES, districts, and community colleges.
- » BOCES/BOCHES have **little formal communication and knowledge sharing** between one another outside the biannual Association of Cooperative Service (ACES) meetings, and mechanisms for districts to share feedback regarding received services are not formally established.
- » BOCES/BOCHES generally **use informal needs assessments** through engaging in discussions with district staff and garnering feedback from the community. Some BOCES/BOCHES typically provide specific services that have been in place for many years and therefore often conduct brief needs assessments. Districts and BOCES/BOCHES often communicate through board representation. Each district assigns one representative to their BOCES/BOCHES board; usually, the communications regarding services, reports, financials, and other relevant information flow through this channel.
- » **Limited funding** continues to be a significant challenge that hinders the ability to attract and retain appropriately certified staff (e.g., occupational therapists, physical therapists, concurrent teachers), maintain competitive salaries, and provide more diverse services.
- » There are **few systemic processes for onboarding** new BOCES/BOCHES staff or district staff

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<sup>2</sup> Additional focus group learnings are provided in Appendix A.

working with BOCES/BOCHES. While there are variations among all the BOCES/BOCHES, some newer staff indicated there is a large learning curve.

- » BOCES/BOCHES **vary on their processes for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services** to inform continuous improvement efforts. Outside of a few quantitative data points (e.g., participation numbers, credits earned, course evaluations), BOCES/BOCHES heavily rely on stakeholder feedback to assess their services.

## Interviews With State Program Directors of Shared Services

In spring 2021, R11CC staff conducted 90-minute interviews with shared service program directors from Alaska, Colorado, Montana, and North Dakota. The project team selected these states because they share similar geographical characteristics with Wyoming, such as a large number of rural communities separated by great distances. Program directors were asked to share their experiences and effective strategies related to the composition and work of their governing board/coordinating body, evaluation, service delivery, funding mechanisms, and services to tribal communities. The interviews revealed that these four states have a number of shared services challenges that are similar to Wyoming's and identified a number of effective strategies for addressing them, which were summarized in the report, *Summary of Shared Educational Services in Four States: Interviews With Program Directors*.

Key learnings about effective strategies identified by state program directors that inform the recommendations in this report include the following:<sup>3</sup>

- » **Strengthening communication with the state education agency (SEA).** Program directors found that having SEA representation at board or executive director meetings fostered greater communication and collaboration between the SEA and shared service programs.
- » **Establishing formal communication channels.** Program directors leveraged online platforms to support communication and collaboration among shared service directors and to provide a consistent mechanism for them to share questions and best practices.
- » **Eliciting feedback from districts.** To gather more feedback from districts regarding shared services, some program directors administered brief standardized surveys to districts to ensure a greater response rate.
- » **Funding for shared services.** Program directors shared that promoting and supporting collaborative grant writing between shared service programs and the districts they serve helped programs explore options for additional funding.
- » **Overcoming geographical hurdles.** Program directors discussed leveraging local partners to help provide services to hard-to-reach communities.
- » **Retaining teachers and staff.** Program directors highlighted that to offset teacher shortages some shared service programs operate their own alternative teacher licensure programs.

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<sup>3</sup> Additional interview learnings are provided in Appendix B.

- » **Providing culturally relevant services.** Program directors mentioned maintaining open communication with tribal leaders and developing training materials for shared service staff specific to culturally responsive practices.

## Recommendations to Improve Efficiency of Shared Services

R11CC and the planning team used the learnings from focus groups with district leaders and BOCES/BOCHES leaders, and interviews with state program directors of shared services, to inform the development of six overall recommendations to improve the fiscal and operational efficiency of Wyoming's current BOCES/BOCHES system structure. For each recommendation, specific action steps are provided for consideration to support WDE to operationalize each recommendation. Action steps were informed by suggestions provided by focus group participants and planning team members as well as effective strategies identified in the program director interviews.

Recommendations are interconnected, so adoption or implementation of one will likely support implementation or progress on others. Recommendations include the following:

1. Review Wyoming statutes to **identify legislative barriers and systemic disincentives** for greater BOCES/BOCHES collaboration.
2. Establish processes and structures to support **increased communication and coordination** between BOCES/BOCHES, districts, and WDE.
3. **Develop a robust knowledge management system** within and across BOCES/BOCHES and districts to support high-quality implementation and create operational efficiencies.
4. Support BOCES/BOCHES in **identifying and securing appropriate funding** for services.
5. Build equitable processes and systems to **share available services, address service needs, and identify challenges** in service delivery.
6. Use a multipronged approach to **address educator shortage and staffing challenges** for BOCES/BOCHES.

### Recommendation 1: Review Wyoming statutes to identify legislative barriers and systemic disincentives for greater BOCES/BOCHES collaboration.

Recommendation 1 addresses key challenges identified by the focus groups related to state statutes and rules and regulations governing BOCES/BOCHES operations. BOCES/BOCHES leaders indicated they are uncertain of the legislative requirements regarding the utilization of funds outside their identified geographic boundaries. When considering shared services with other agencies, institutions of higher education, districts, or other BOCES/BOCHES, the uncertainty regarding where each BOCES/BOCHES may spend their funds may hinder their ability to provide services.

BOCES/BOCHES leaders also indicated that cooperative purchasing agreements could be more beneficial to the governing boards; however, financial limits may be restrictive. Some BOCES/BOCHES leaders believed this limit was \$25,000, but others understood the limit to have recently increased to \$50,000. This uncertainty hinders their ability to engage in purchasing agreements.

The various state legislative requirements impacting how BOCES/BOCHES share staff among one



another makes sharing staff unnecessarily challenging. Geographic and financial challenges make sharing staff between entities essential for some BOCES/BOCHES to be able to offer certain services.

### Suggested Actions Aligned to Recommendation #1

The following suggested actions may increase awareness and collaboration between legislators and BOCES/BOCHES leaders.

- » **1.1. Clarify the legislative statutes regarding BOCES/BOCHES funding authorities and regional boundaries to build a common understanding among BOCES/BOCHES and district leaders.** If state legislative and procedural requirements are clearly summarized for ease of understanding by district and BOCES/BOCHES leaders, funds may be better utilized, staff may be more efficiently shared, and services may be expanded to a larger regional audience.
- » **1.2. Create a subcommittee within ACES tasked with enhancing collaboration and problem solving across BOCES/BOCHES and making recommendations to the state legislature.** By providing more structured opportunities for BOCES/BOCHES collaboration on local and state issues, BOCES/BOCHES leaders may be able to solve common problems together, and collectively capture recommendations to provide to the state legislature through a larger, unified voice.
- » **1.3. Expand existing ACES legislative and professional development sessions to include state legislators and district leaders.** Providing expanded professional learning opportunities to more legislators, BOCES/BOCHES leaders, district leaders, and governing board members may increase all educational leaders' understanding of the legislature.

#### Recommendation 1: State Example

- » Colorado BOCES periodically establish subcommittees in which different BOCES can connect to discuss shared interests.

### Recommendation 2: Establish processes and structures to support increased communication and coordination between BOCES/BOCHES, districts, and WDE.

Recommendation 2 addresses key challenges identified by the focus groups related to communication and coordination across BOCES/BOCHES. Little formal communication occurs among BOCES/BOCHES outside the biannual ACES meetings. Though the biannual ACES meetings provide an opportunity for BOCES/BOCHES leaders to network and brainstorm, no mechanism exists for them to collaborate in a consistent and ongoing way as challenges arise. Furthermore, a lack of formal communication processes may present challenges for new BOCES/BOCHES directors who do not have established relationships with other directors or district leaders. A lack of formal communication processes also applies to new district leaders who may not know whom to contact when questions arise regarding

BOCES/BOCHES operations and services. District leaders in the focus groups expressed that more formal communication processes between districts and BOCES/BOCHES are needed, noting that communication between districts and BOCES/BOCHES usually only occurs through a BOCES/BOCHES board member. The BOCES/BOCHES also have no formal process in place to communicate with WDE, resulting in missed opportunities to engage collaboratively on shared challenges and goals.

District leaders also noted that they were not always satisfied with existing ways to provide feedback and receive BOCES/BOCHES service updates. For example, at times, districts were dissatisfied with the quality of instructors provided by the BOCES/BOCHES and had no clear way to provide feedback. A few districts also shared having to rush to cover BOCES/BOCHES services that were discontinued without timely notice.

### Suggested Actions Aligned to Recommendation #2

The following suggested actions may help to establish processes that increase communication and coordination between BOCES/BOCHES, districts, and WDE.

- » **2.1. Utilize a virtual platform that allows for a quick, easy, and cost-effective ways to connect and collaborate.** A virtual platform to support communication also may help new BOCES/BOCHES directors establish relationships with other directors and access shared resources as well as help district leaders connect with their local BOCES/BOCHES.<sup>4</sup>
- » **2.2. Identify a BOCES/BOCHES liaison at WDE to help increase communication between the BOCES/BOCHES and SEA.** A designated liaison would allow WDE and the BOCES/BOCHES to discuss common needs and challenges and to identify high-priority topics on which to collaboratively engage.
- » **2.3. Administer short surveys to district leaders and staff each spring to solicit feedback regarding BOCES/BOCHES services.** Keeping the surveys brief helps ensure a greater response rate. In addition, administering the surveys in early spring provides ample time to adjust services for the upcoming school year.

#### Recommendation 2: State Examples

- » The Colorado BOCES directors have had success using the Basecamp program as an online forum to share questions and practices.
- » Alaska, Colorado, and North Dakota all have SEA representation at their board or executive director meetings, which has resulted in strong collaborative partnerships.
- » Both North Dakota and Montana use standardized surveys that ask their schools/districts for feedback about services. The brevity of these surveys has resulted in high response rates.

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<sup>4</sup> Recommendation 3.3 also addresses issues relating to new district leaders and formal communication with BOCES/BOCHES.

### **Recommendation 3: Develop a robust knowledge management system within and across BOCES/BOCHES and districts to support high-quality implementation and create operational efficiencies.**

Recommendation 3 addresses key challenges identified by the focus groups related to BOCES/BOCHES knowledge management. BOCES/BOCHES and district leaders shared that there is no process to onboard directors, staff, or BOCES/BOCHES board members to their respective roles. Therefore, they have a steep learning curve in areas including business tasks and information, relationship building, finances, and operations. More specifically, some district leaders noted a lack of formal, clear processes for developing agreements between districts, BOCES/BOCHES, and/or colleges. Another specific area of interest in building knowledge is how BOCES/BOCHES can use funds compliantly across districts.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, some BOCES/BOCHES leaders who have long-standing relationships with districts relied on informal processes for communication, needs assessment, and evaluation.<sup>6</sup> Without clear guidance and a lack of formally established processes and shared knowledge about these processes, BOCES/BOCHES leadership and staff, especially new leaders, spend more time finding accurate information about operations and regulations, which strains staff capacity.

BOCES/BOCHES and district leaders highlighted the strong role that sharing best practices can play in improving current work, increasing efficiencies, or expanding services. While some BOCES/BOCHES participate in the biannual convenings through ACES, there are few opportunities outside this avenue for deep collaboration and problem solving.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Suggested Actions Aligned to Recommendation #3**

The following suggested actions may help to develop a robust knowledge management system within and across BOCES/BOCHES and districts and create operational efficiencies.

- » **3.1. Build a mentorship program through ACES to support onboarding of new BOCES/BOCHES leaders and governing board members.** Experienced BOCES/BOCHES leaders can provide insight into successes, challenges, and processes that support fiscal and operational efficiencies. Pairing leaders from similar types of BOCES/BOCHES (e.g., by size, services, locale) could provide valuable mentorship, which may lead to operational efficiencies.
- » **3.2. Establish a virtual community of practice (CoP) among BOCES/BOCHES.** A CoP will provide a mechanism for BOCES/BOCHES to share best practices related to services (e.g., preschool and early childhood development), identify effective operational processes (e.g.,

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<sup>5</sup> Recommendation 1.1 addresses, in part, issues concerning clarification in funding stipulations. This challenge expands on the communication of those clarifications.

<sup>6</sup> Recommendation 2.3 addresses, in part, issues concerning communication and evaluation between BOCES/BOCHES and districts.

<sup>7</sup> Recommendation 2.1 addresses, in part, issues concerning communication and collaboration among BOCES/BOCHES, generally. This challenge expands on specific topics of interest shared across multiple BOCES/BOCHES and codifying learnings.



needs assessment), and discuss solutions to common implementation challenges (e.g., reduced funding, educator shortage, staffing needs).

- » **3.3. Create common training sessions and onboarding materials for BOCES/BOCHES and district leaders, staff, and governing board members on existing rules, operations, regulations, and key implementation challenges to ensure effectiveness in delivering services.** BOCES/BOCHES and district leaders expressed shared points of interest to stay compliant and improve practices, such as using funding across BOCES/BOCHES and understanding the impact of state legislation and the role that governing board members play in communication and collaboration between BOCES/BOCHES and districts.
- » **3.4. Design common tools (e.g., needs assessment, evaluation) and templates that can be customized for the context of each BOCES/BOCHES and that can be used by new leaders.** Because staff capacity is limited, common tools would provide BOCES/BOCHES a standardized template to start with and then customize based on local needs.
- » **3.5. Investigate integrating key operational systems (e.g., technology, payroll, accounting, human resources).** Information systems that integrate with each other could help BOCES/BOCHES leaders and staff manage knowledge internally and make data more accessible to support such functions as needs assessment, budgeting, and evaluation.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Recommendation 3: State Example**

- » North Dakota has multiple template surveys ready to use that can be modified and are easy to complete, including a survey that rates program services, a needs analysis every 3 years, and 1-minute surveys sent to school administrators asking about satisfaction and whether they want to be contacted.

### **Recommendation 4: Support BOCES/BOCHES in identifying and securing appropriate funding for services.**

Recommendation 4 addresses key challenges identified by the focus groups related to BOCES/BOCHES funding. Budget cycles, funding reductions, and limited BOCES/BOCES staff capacity to explore other funding opportunities are key challenges in providing necessary services for their students and communities. BOCES/BOCHES leaders shared that the continual reduction of funding and the inconsistent revenue from mill levies makes planning for services from year to year incredibly challenging. BOCES/BOCHES leaders and district leaders are required to adopt their annual operating budgets prior to knowing the actual revenue for the year due to the annual timeline for the state budget adoption. Although acquiring additional federal and state grant funds is seen as essential to continue to offer existing or new services, BOCES/BOCHES do not have the staff capacity to find grant opportunities or write grants.

Due to the reduction in annual revenue and the difficulty in identifying and securing appropriate new funding for services, BOCES/BOCHES have had to eliminate or reduce services, discontinue new

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<sup>8</sup> In order to support integration, resources would need to be allocated to BOCES/BOCHES to set up and maintain these systems.



services, and limit professional development for staff. BOCES/BOCHES also feel they are unable to provide competitive salaries for employees and contracted staff, which leads to staff turnover and inability to find staff. Furthermore, district leaders noted that having a better understanding of the standardized cost of services might help their decision making about whether to seek support through the BOCES/BOCHES or hire their own staff, if possible.

#### Suggested Actions Aligned to Recommendation #4

The following suggested actions may help support BOCES/BOCHES in identifying and securing appropriate funding for services.

- » **4.1. Conduct a standardized cost analysis of each BOCES/BOCHES that is shared with member districts to provide transparency regarding the actual costs of provided services.** By providing clear costs of services to their member districts annually, district leaders will better understand the true cost of the provided services. This information will help districts determine the cost effectiveness of the services and may influence their desire to continue certain services or opt for new services.
- » **4.2. Develop and strengthen relationships with national and state organizations to help identify grant opportunities to mitigate reduced funding.** Some BOCES/BOCHES have limited staff to support grant writing. Developing and strengthening relationships with partners may allow BOCES/BOCHES to learn about and access funding opportunities and grant writing support.
- » **4.3. Develop a grant opportunity database and provide grant writing technical assistance to support BOCES/BOCHES in securing additional funding to support programming.** Creating an online platform<sup>9</sup> to share grant opportunities with BOCES/BOCHES could assist BOCES/BOCHES staff in identifying and pursuing additional funding. Pursuing and procuring supplemental funding could maintain existing services or provide new services for students and communities.
- » **4.4 Explore opportunities to incentivize collaborative grant writing and share grant writing processes among BOCES/BOCHES.** Although each BOCES/BOCHES is considerably different in region, staff size, and the services it provides, they have a shared purpose to utilize available funding to assist districts in providing services for students and local communities. BOCES/BOCHES leaders could collaborate with one another and share their grant writing strategies and processes to help one another find additional funding.
- » **4.5. Establish a workgroup to analyze the current BOCES/BOCHES funding structure to consider recommendations for improvement.** A workgroup to analyze the timing of the annual budget cycle and the current funding structure for BOCES/BOCHES may provide valuable insight into the equity of the funding model and possible remedies that can be considered. This workgroup could consist of state representatives, BOCES/BOCHES staff, and

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<sup>9</sup> Recommendation 2.1 addresses the development of an online platform which could be leveraged to host this database.



district representatives to provide varying perspectives.

#### **Recommendation 4: State Examples**

- » Alaska and North Dakota conduct a cost analysis to share with their member districts, which district leaders deemed valuable.
- » Alaska, Colorado, Montana, and North Dakota work collaboratively with their districts to explore grant funding opportunities. Colorado developed a special program to assist rural BOCES in the grant writing process, and North Dakota's seven shared service agencies often assist each other when applying for grants.

### **Recommendation 5: Build equitable processes and systems to share available services, address service needs, and identify challenges in service delivery.**

Recommendation 5 addresses key challenges identified by the focus groups related to BOCES/BOCHES service design and delivery. BOCES/BOCHES face several challenges in efficiently meeting districts' service needs.<sup>10</sup> BOCES/BOCHES have difficulty recruiting and retaining the appropriately certified personnel to provide services. Frequent turnover in staff impacts the ability of BOCES/BOCHES to provide consistent services, especially in smaller and more rural communities.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there are necessary services that BOCES/BOCHES are challenged to provide due to various factors such as funding and distance. For example, districts share a need for more day school programs to avoid having to send students who need supports outside the district. Districts also need additional counselors and social workers to support students and to build programs that create behavior plans for students. District leaders reported a need for social-emotional learning training so that teachers can provide more support to students, especially as it has become harder to find residential placement and because of the social-emotional effects of the pandemic.

BOCES/BOCHES and district leaders also shared a specific desire to better support tribal communities in Wyoming. In particular, there is a need for curricular materials that are appropriate for the diverse range of students they support and to provide culturally responsive services, teaching, and practices for Native communities.

Some BOCES/BOCHES have little to no data or technology supports to support the development and implementation of structured monitoring and continuous improvement processes outside of discrete course feedback. Due to limited capacity at the BOCES/BOCHES, staff play multiple roles and there are rarely dedicated data or evaluation staff whose role is to collect and evaluate data for program improvement.

Providing services during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for many BOCES/BOCHES. Some services were provided virtually while others, such as special services (e.g., occupational therapy,

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<sup>10</sup> Recommendation 4 addresses, in part, issues concerning funding revenues that could alleviate shortages.

<sup>11</sup> Recommendation 6 provides specific actions related to educator shortages, but this challenge is mentioned here as well due to its connection to the ability of BOCES/BOCHES to meet district service needs.



physical therapy), were significantly reduced or even eliminated during the pandemic. Technology became a high priority to continue the services that BOCES/BOCHES provided to districts and communities.

### Suggested Actions Aligned to Recommendation #5

The following suggested actions may support the ability of BOCES/BOCHES to build equitable processes and systems to share available services, and to serve needs and identify challenges in service delivery.

- » **5.1. Publicize BOCES/BOCHES trainings and professional development that teachers, school staff, and administrators from any region can attend.** Sharing trainings and professional development statewide may minimize the duplication of offerings, broaden the potential audience, and create fiscal efficiency.<sup>12</sup>
- » **5.2. Provide professional development and technical assistance to improve the effectiveness of online/virtual service delivery.** Although BOCES/BOCHES were able to shift many in-person services to a virtual platform during the pandemic, they were forced to reduce or eliminate some services for which online delivery methods were not appropriate or not yet developed. In addition, the distances between districts can increase costs for BOCES/BOCHES to provide shared services across districts. Providing additional support to BOCES/BOCHES on how to make these services virtual can help alleviate costs for many in-person services and, if effective, could allow for more experts to participate if they can provide services virtually.
- » **5.3. Provide professional development and technical assistance on continuous improvement and self-monitoring.** Supports may include identifying common data points that BOCES/BOCHES can collect to have consistent data about service needs and service offerings, training staff on how to use data to identify the needs of students (especially in special education), and sharing ways to collect and respond to stakeholder feedback that many BOCES/BOCHES currently use to improve services.
- » **5.4. Build local and federal partnerships to support BOCES/BOCHES services.** Local partners can be critical in delivering services to schools in sparsely populated geographical regions. In addition, federal service providers—including Regional Educational Laboratories, Comprehensive Centers, Equity Assistance Centers, and centers funded through the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services—may support needs in unmet areas and increase staffing capacity.<sup>13</sup>
- » **5.5. Ensure that services are culturally relevant to tribal communities and are provided by staff trained in cultural competence.** Developing and providing culturally relevant services will strengthen partnerships with tribal communities and may increase the likelihood that tribal partners will find the services meaningful.

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<sup>12</sup> The feasibility of this recommendation depends on whether BOCES/BOCHES are authorized to provide services outside their geographic boundaries to other interested communities and districts.

<sup>13</sup> Recommendation 6 also addresses issues concerning staffing capacity by building better pipelines to decrease shortages.



### Recommendation 5: State Examples

- » North Dakota’s seven shared service agencies partner with local collaborators to help provide services. Local partners are critical in helping shared service agencies in North Dakota serve schools in sparsely populated geographical regions.
- » Both Alaska and North Dakota strive to create services that are culturally relevant for the tribal communities they serve by collaboratively engaging tribal partners to deepen staff understanding and grow meaningful programming. North Dakota specifically requires new staff to watch instructional videos that address culturally responsive practices.

### Recommendation 6: Use a multi-pronged approach to address educator shortage and staffing challenges for BOCES/BOCHES.

Recommendation 6 addresses key challenges identified by the focus groups related to BOCES/BOCHES staffing. BOCES/BOCHES have found it challenging to recruit educators in specialized positions such as early childhood educators, substitute instructors, educators with special education or English learner credentials, and afterschool instructors. BOCES/BOCHES are also often unable to recruit staff due to an inability to offer competitive salaries or retain certified personnel to provide services and oversee high-profile programs. District leaders also stated a need for more support in recruiting educators, especially math teachers. In addition, districts have difficulty finding adaptive physical education teachers and physical, occupational, and speech therapists to meet students’ needs. These positions are usually contracted out by the BOCES/BOCHES and the districts have limited or no role in the interview process and performance evaluations.<sup>14</sup>

District leaders also shared challenges with recent changes to qualifications for teaching concurrent courses, which now require teachers to have a master’s degree in the content area or a master’s degree with at least 18 graduate-level courses in the content area.<sup>15</sup> This change has made it more difficult for districts—especially smaller districts—to find qualified personnel.

### Suggested Actions Aligned to Recommendation #6

The following suggested actions may help to address educator shortages and retention challenges.

- » **6.1. Explore ways to ease requirements that make it difficult to share staff across BOCES/BOCHES and districts and/or for educators to meet licensure requirements.** For licensure requirements for concurrent courses, this may require examining the roles that both the state and the institution of higher education have in setting these requirements.
- » **6.2. Explore the feasibility for BOCES/BOCHES to operate alternative teacher licensure programs.** Developing alternative licensure programs (i.e., “grow your own” certification programs) may be an effective way to address educator shortages in rural areas.

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<sup>14</sup> Recommendation 2.3 partially addresses challenges related to districts having no role in how physical education teachers, and physical, occupational, and speech therapists provided by the BOCES/BOCHES, are evaluated.

<sup>15</sup> Qualifications for teaching concurrent courses in WY can be found here: <https://2ky701279qlou23p6256zftv-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DE-CE-Manual-of-Procedures-Revision-3-1-31-1.pdf>





- » **6.3. Explore the feasibility of using micro credentialing to help educators develop competencies and mastery in particular academic areas.** Micro credentialing may help address educator gaps by developing existing staff's proficiencies in areas that need more staffing.

#### **Recommendation 6: State Example**

- » Many BOCES in Colorado operate alternative licensure programs to address educator shortage issues in rural areas.

## **Conclusion**

There are many strengths of the current shared services model in Wyoming; however, there are opportunities to address challenges and create greater efficiencies within the current structure. The six overall recommendations are interconnected and aim to address key leverage points identified by stakeholders and informed by successful strategies in states with similar contexts.

These recommendations, and their associated action steps, focus on building greater efficiencies within the current shared systems structure. Considerations or recommendations related to a revised operational model are not included and would need additional stakeholder feedback.



## Appendix A. Summary of Learnings From Focus Groups of District Leaders and BOCES/BOCHES Leaders

In spring 2021, 22 district leaders and 17 BOCES/BOCHES leaders participated in a series of virtual focus groups to share their experiences and perspectives related to key operational areas (i.e., program structure and staffing; needs assessments and service design and delivery; communication and collaboration; monitoring and evaluation) and content-focused areas such as special education, dual enrollment, and career and technical education. Learnings from the focus groups were summarized in the *BOCES/BOCHES and District Focus Groups: Overview Report*. Learnings from focus groups of Wyoming’s BOCES, BOCHES, and district leaders reveal the unique nature and services of the 21 BOCES/BOCHES across the state. While some BOCES/BOCHES have a small two-person staff and offer one or two services to member districts, others have their own facilities with several full-time and part-time staff to fulfill district and community needs. However, the tailored structure and service approaches of BOCES/BOCHES allow them to serve the needs of their districts and community within their available budget and capacity.

Given the variability in BOCES/BOCHES, the systems, structures, and processes that each one uses for key areas (e.g., monitoring, needs assessment) differ across the state. However, most BOCES/BOCHES value stakeholder engagement from their communities and district leaders, and BOCES/BOCHES board representatives serve as channels for communication with district staff regarding service needs, challenges, and strengths. In addition, the Association of Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) provides a structure with tangible advantages (e.g., benefits for BOCES/BOCHES staff) and a way for BOCES/BOCHES leaders to communicate and collaborate.

Focus group data indicate districts have found great value in working with BOCES/BOCHES on several services, especially residential programs, dual enrollment and career and technical education (CTE) courses, and special education services. However, shrinking budgets and strained staff are consistent challenges BOCES/BOCHES encounter while fulfilling the needs of their districts and communities.

Table 1 provides a summary of the main strengths and challenges of the functional areas synthesized from the focus groups.



**Table 1. Summary of Focus Group Learnings**

Strengths	Challenges
<b>Program Structure and Staffing</b>	
Board representation	Shared staff <sup>5</sup>
Flexibility	Staff recruitment and retention
Shared staff <sup>16</sup>	Educator shortages
Efficient resource use	Staff compensation
Partnerships	Funding
<b>Needs Assessment and Service Design and Delivery</b>	
Flexibility	Geographic boundary restrictions
Responsiveness	COVID-19-related pivots
District collaboration	Limited partnership opportunities
Postsecondary collaboration	Educator shortage
Community partnerships	Educator recruitment and retention
Program efficiencies	Budget timeline
Service delivery methods	Budgeting process
Multiple locations	
Service quality	
<b>Communication and Collaboration</b>	
ACES Connector	Spending stipulations
Legislation	Distance
Program-specific collaboration	Onboarding
Deeper relationships	Feedback and communication on services
COVID-19 response	Lack of procedures
	Inconsistent MOU processes
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	
Development of programs	Limited capacity
Continuous improvement	Lack of systemic continuous improvement
Customization	Funding declines
Aligned metrics	Communication opportunities
Community knowledge	

<sup>16</sup> “Shared staff” was discussed as both a strength and a challenge by the BOCES/BOCHES focus groups.

## Appendix B. Summary of Highlights From Interviews With State Program Directors of Shared Services

In spring 2021, R11CC staff conducted 90-minute interviews with shared service program directors from Alaska, Colorado, Montana, and North Dakota. The project team selected these states because they share similar geographical characteristics with Wyoming, such as a large number of rural communities separated by great distances. Program directors were asked to share their experiences and effective strategies related to the composition and work of their governing board/coordinating body, evaluation, service delivery, funding mechanisms, and services to tribal communities. Learnings from the program director interviews were summarized in the report, *Summary of Shared Educational Services in Four States: Interviews With Program Directors*.

### Alaska

Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC) was created by statute in 1976 and is the only shared services program in Alaska. Even though SERRC now serves the entire state, the name remains, but “Alaska’s Educational Resource Center” has been added to help make clear who it serves.

SERRC Highlights	
Governance	Services Offered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» SERRC has a centralized governance structure.</li> <li>» Its board is composed of 21 members, including the superintendents from SERRC member districts.</li> <li>» Board members approve budget and policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Pre-K</li> <li>» Professional development</li> <li>» Out-of-school time programs</li> <li>» E-Rate</li> <li>» Business and technology support</li> <li>» School facilities capital improvement projects and maintenance management</li> <li>» Special education</li> <li>» Itinerant services and secondary transition services to students with disabilities and their families</li> <li>» School improvement</li> <li>» Federal programs management</li> <li>» Adult education and workforce development programs</li> </ul>
Delivery Approaches	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» In person</li> <li>» Virtual</li> <li>» Remote strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Evaluation reports are developed to help board members review services.</li> <li>» Surveys are sent to member districts to help inform evaluation reports.</li> <li>» Frequent informal conversations with districts regarding needs</li> <li>» A recurring 5-year external evaluation of SERRC services</li> </ul>



Funding	Communication and Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Grants</li> <li>» Student program fees</li> <li>» Donations</li> <li>» Contracts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Biannual meetings with board members</li> <li>» Annual report highlighting program successes and the overall impact of services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Clusters trips to offset travel costs that result from being in a large and sparsely populated state.</li> <li>» Empowers itinerant staff to make their own decisions since communication with supervisors is infrequent.</li> <li>» Conducts a cost analysis study every few years that is shared with districts to address concerns regarding costs.</li> <li>» Ensures services are culturally meaningful when working with tribal communities.</li> </ul>	

## Colorado

Colorado’s 21 Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) are primarily an extension of the local member school districts. Each BOCES provides only programs approved by its members. Colorado’s BOCES were established by the Boards of Cooperative Services Act of 1965.

Colorado BOCES Highlights	
Governance	Services Offered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Colorado BOCES are decentralized, locally driven, and operate independently of one another.</li> <li>» School board members from participating districts are appointed to the governing board of their local BOCES.</li> <li>» Most BOCES have an advisory council in which superintendents from participating districts help formulate budgets, recommendations, and policy issues.</li> </ul>	<p>BOCES services vary by local need, but some common services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» special education programs</li> <li>» technology services</li> <li>» alternative licensure for teachers and principals</li> </ul>
Delivery Approaches	Evaluation
<p>Delivery approaches vary by BOCES and local need.</p>	<p>Evaluation processes vary by local need, but many BOCES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» develop a strategic plan with goals and objectives that are used to evaluate staff</li> <li>» conduct needs assessments, which often involves working with districts to identify priorities</li> </ul>
Funding	Communication and Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Colorado Department of Education</li> <li>» Member district fees</li> <li>» Student program fees</li> <li>» Grants</li> <li>» Donations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Quarterly meetings with the Colorado Department of Education</li> <li>» Informal communication with member districts regarding need</li> <li>» Monthly legislative committee meeting open to the BOCES to attend</li> <li>» Subcommittees in which different BOCES connect to discuss specific issues</li> <li>» Basecamp: an online forum for BOCES executive directors to share questions and practices</li> </ul>
Challenges and Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Helped create the Rural Education Council to address educator shortages in rural communities.</li> <li>» Share special education staff to fill shortages.</li> <li>» Operate alternative teacher licensure programs to train teachers for the districts they serve.</li> <li>» Collectively applied for broadband services through the Colorado Education Broadband Coalition.</li> </ul>	



## Montana

School Services of Montana (SSoM) is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit education service agency that serves 58 member districts and more than 50,000 students. Any school district, private school, or other organization serving youth can become a member.

SSoM Highlights	
Governance	Services Offered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» SSoM has a decentralized governance structure.</li> <li>» Its board is composed of seven superintendents from SSoM districts.</li> <li>» Board members approve budget and explore ways to maximize profits on SSoM’s business services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Special education</li> <li>» Technology for distance learning</li> <li>» Services to tribal communities</li> <li>» Professional development</li> <li>» Curriculum and instruction</li> <li>» Services for school improvement</li> <li>» Services for data collection</li> <li>» Technology support</li> <li>» Collective purchasing</li> </ul>
Delivery Approaches	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» In person</li> <li>» Virtual</li> <li>» Contract services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» SSoM relies on survey data to get direct feedback on its services.</li> <li>» SSoM works directly with member schools to help improve their formal needs assessment processes, and then provides services to fill any gaps where possible.</li> </ul>
Funding	Communication and Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Member district fees</li> <li>» Grants</li> <li>» Student program fees</li> <li>» Donations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Informal communication with member districts regarding their needs</li> <li>» SSoM maintains a strong relationship with the SEA, which has improved its services.</li> </ul>
Challenges and Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Holds teleconferences to reduce travel time for individuals from different communities working together.</li> <li>» Creates opportunities for shared conversation to help foster collaboration between communities that take pride in local control.</li> <li>» Has diverse board members with different perspectives to help address the unique needs of different communities.</li> <li>» Recognizes where needs exist statewide to open the door for more collaboration and service opportunities.</li> </ul>	

## North Dakota

North Dakota’s seven regional education agencies (REAs) provide services to school districts serving more than 110,000 students. The REAs vary in size, with the smallest serving 12 districts and the largest, the Central Region Education Association (CREA), serving 37. The REAs were created in 2001 by North Dakota statute. CREA participated in the program director interview.

CREA Highlights	
Governance	Services Offered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» North Dakota has seven REAs created by statute.</li> <li>» Governing boards consist of at least one superintendent and elected school board members.</li> <li>» The governing boards primarily make policy decisions rather than operational decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Pre-K</li> <li>» Special education</li> <li>» Professional development</li> <li>» Curriculum and instruction</li> <li>» Services for school improvement</li> <li>» CTE coursework</li> <li>» Services to tribal communities</li> </ul>
Delivery Approaches	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» In person</li> <li>» Virtual</li> <li>» Contract services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Professional development surveys</li> <li>» Survey that rates program services</li> <li>» Business model survey</li> <li>» Needs analysis conducted on a three-year cycle</li> <li>» One-minute surveys sent to school administration officials</li> <li>» Five-year external evaluation by Cognia</li> <li>» Internal continuous quality improvement process that assesses current programs to ensure they still work</li> </ul>
Funding	Communication and Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» North Dakota Department of Public Instruction</li> <li>» Member district fees</li> <li>» Grants</li> <li>» State contracts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Monthly REA directors meeting</li> <li>» Strategic plan that focuses on priorities the REAS collaborate toward as a group</li> <li>» Annual regional educational leaders meeting</li> </ul>
Challenges and Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Shares staff to fill gaps where needed.</li> <li>» Collaborates with local partners and organizations to help provide services to hard-to-reach geographical regions.</li> <li>» Recognizes where needs exist statewide to open the door for more service opportunities.</li> <li>» Conducts reverse invoices for their schools to address concerns regarding perceived costs.</li> <li>» Educates staff on culturally responsive practices when providing services to tribal communities.</li> </ul>	