

West Central Regional Service Center Symposium Executive Summary Mohave County

The Mohave County Education Service Agency hosted the first symposium on the Governor's Education Reform plan for the West Central Regional Service in Kingman, Arizona, on Thursday, September 15, 2011. More than 3,000 individuals and organizations were invited by the Mohave County Superintendent's office to participate in the symposium. Of the 54 invitees who responded that they would attend, 48 actually participated including 11 individuals who did not pre-register. These participants represented education (26), the business community (5), the government sector (3), media (1), community services (4), Native Americans (2), and unspecified affiliations (7).

The symposium began with a warm welcome from Mohave County Superintendent Mr. Michael File followed by an overview of the day and the regional center concept by Yavapai County Superintendent Mr. Tim Carter. The attendees then viewed the 8-minute video "When Children Learn, Nations Prosper" by WorldBank.

After presenting a welcome message video from Governor Jan Brewer, Ms. Deb Raeder-Gay, Associate Director of the Governor's Office of Education Innovation, presented the Governor's reform program "Arizona Ready" and information about its website. Participants then received a questionnaire from the Governor's office. A panel of three educators addressed the six legislative mandates and the opportunity provided by the optional Grand Canyon diploma supporting the state initiative "Move on When Ready."

Ms. Betsy Parker, superintendent of the Western Arizona Vocational Education (WAVE) Joint Technology Education District (JTED), revealed the Arizona's new workplace skills document to the participants. Arizona Department of Education's Dr. Marv Lamer presented ADE's support to the regional center development as well as other current projects in the department. The morning's program wrapped up with Ms. Beth Broome, from the Science Foundation Arizona, discussing their efforts towards promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). During the presentations, participants had opportunities to ask questions.

After a lunch break, the participants divided into four homogeneous groups, each comprised of a balance of the education and non-education communities. A facilitator/recorder guided the break-out tables in a discussion answering six essential questions presented to the educators and business community. These questions were:

1. If you could help design a regional service center, how would it be structured to ensure improved instruction?
2. How would you like the regional service center to function and provide service? Is it a place, a portal, a conduit?

3. How can the regional service center positively impact your school(s)? What would you like the outcomes to be?
4. Based on what you've heard today, how can the regional service center and local industries further economic development?
5. Working together through the regional service center, how can the information learned today be used to improve economic development?
6. Utilizing the 4 pillars of reform, and the upcoming state mandates, how do you envision your company or organization assisting with the accomplishment of the above?

Each table facilitator/recorder kept notes of the key discussion topics on a laptop. Using these notes, a spokesperson from each table reported back for the group to the general assembly.

The reviewers synthesized general answers to the essential questions based on the four break-out table responses.

- 1. Regional service center structure:** Comments on physical structure of the regional center included the use of the county ESAs (possibly have one dedicated person at each county) and/or multiple sites such as libraries to deliver the needed services. A business representative suggested the need for a “fiscal organization with a physical site and staff” and that work force organizations might help identify function and services needed. Strong support was voiced for electronic technology both for administration of the center and accessibility to resources. The table discussions also included needs and expectations in a regional center. Data gathering, analyzing and storing with easy access and published/shared successes. Providing resources for administrators and teachers, including master teachers on staff, grant writers, professional development opportunities, connections to local experts, continuing education, and educational materials for classroom use. There was a consensus that the regional center must be relevant to the users and evaluated for effectiveness. Additional support particularly for reservations and “non-traditional” schools was mentioned. The uncertainty of funding for the service center evoked much discussion. This topic brought out concerns from the educators that these dollars should be going into the classroom and paying teachers instead of creating another center.
- 2. Regional service center function:** Responses to the “place, portal, or conduit” segment were “a combination” or “all of the above.” One group emphasized that the center must be funded in a “meaningful, systematic, and on-going way.” Accessibility was a key requirement considering the geographic size of the area. Though multi-modal access was discussed, internet connections and delivery were primary, especially with “cloud computing,” distance learning, and so forth. The groups expressed a need for “experts” to conduct on-site training, support for first-time implementers of new programs, a central directory of personnel and their specialties, coordination of grant writing teams, help in recruiting/retaining highly qualified teachers, and facilitation of shared services (transportation, IT, food service, etc.). Some mentioned the need for a political arm to help examine

existing laws and funding mechanisms. There was some discussion about how the regional center would be governed (county superintendents would be board members maybe), but that this element of structure would need to be handled after the development of the center. Services from the regional center should be available to LEAs and community colleges as well as support for partnerships with other agencies.

- 3. Regional service center impact/outcomes:** The responses from the break-out groups revealed that the needs are very different in each community and district and the regional center must be able to provide multiple services and support—a menu of services. An important outcome, especially with instructional coaching services, would be improved effectiveness of current teachers and an increase in the number of highly qualified STEM teachers. Increased awareness and shared activities in response to state mandates could be positively impacted, such as teacher/principal evaluations. Having the infrastructure to share good models of outcomes, increase collaborations and resources, and create an online learning community would be valuable. Data collection, analysis and warehousing would assist in meeting state requirements and making data-driven decisions. A regional center might impact finances positively by assisting with grant writing, resource sharing, and teacher recruitment.
- 4. Regional service center furthers economic development:** Education as a partner in economic development was discussed in each group. Having the populace and education community partner in determining what skills are needed from the future work force can be facilitated by the regional service center. The work force can be better and more appropriately trained to adapt to changes in work economic realities. With advisory boards, the center can be responsive to changes in local industry and share what skills are available in the upcoming workers. It was mentioned that the center could also assist with funding to help LEAs be responsive and capable of making quick adjustments to economic changes. A continued outreach to the business community is vital. Also, the business community can be ambassadors for education.
- 5. Information learned today improve economic development:** The take away from the symposium was presented as a means improve communication between education and industry and a vehicle and method to track it. The relationship between education, the business community, Chambers of Commerce, workforce development and the regional center is valuable to education and economic development. JTEDs and CTE programs can bring improved economic vitality to the communities and a regional center can assist in facilitating this connection. Groups felt that the center should be education focused—getting kids college- and career-ready; not driving economic development, but participating in it.
- 6. Assisting with the accomplishment of the four pillars of reform and state mandates:** The break-out groups emphasized the need for a regional center to have a cadre of resident experts and a credentialed staff with continuity so that changes in leadership do not impede progress. They stressed the need for adequate funding so that these experts could provide on-site outreach. Almost all discussion centered about preparing students for the future with good life and

work skills. Relevancy in the classroom and seat time appropriate for each student were expressed as being valuable consideration in meeting state mandates. The wellbeing of each child must be considered in the process of education reform. The need for and consideration of cultural literacy on the reservation must also be considered. Working with higher education and the business community would be valuable in accomplishing the pillars of reform. Colleges can offer professional development opportunities, especially for recertification. They can also communicate strengths and weaknesses observed in students from the school system. Data gathering, analyzing and storing in relation to workforce development, coordinated/provided by the regional center, would support education relevancy, and therefore education reform. Enhanced parental involvement and political action would also assist in moving forward with reform. Groups revealed that “everyone” must be involved in meeting these mandates—higher education, businesses and the health industry with internships/scholarships and field trip opportunities, and more. The identification and coordination of partnerships would be a role of the regional center.

At the conclusion of the symposium, each participant received a blank card on which to write comments and thoughts about the day’s experience. The following is a summary of those responses that were returned.

Comments Card:

The major feedback from comment cards after the Mohave County symposium was positive and complimentary:

- Overall a “great” day
- Good food
- Good information
- Nice opportunity to network
- Good break-out session
- Professional and well-organized
- Speakers knew their topics well

The “constructive criticism” comment cards addressed the following:

- Need handouts of power points
- Presenters need to know how to operate equipment
- Sound system difficult to hear
- Room temperature was uncomfortable—too warm
- More time for questions to Governor’s staff
- Power points too difficult to read
- Lack of Native American representation/discussion
- Need a higher representation from business community
- Information delivered somewhat vague
- Break-session tables too close—noisy, warm
- Re-order break-out session question since their answers build on each other

The symposium planners and county superintendent and staff met after the symposium for a de-briefing session. They generated a list of “lessons learned.”

Lesson Learned:

- All presentations need to be accompanied by handouts, particularly the power point presented by the panel
- Panel power point needs to be reworked to be briefer and have fonts of at least 36 pt. (wait until Monday to hear from Vince Yanez to see if we need to develop a better power point)
- Check sound system for clarity and volume; monitor room temperature
- Provide more time for questions after Governor Staff presentation
- Better outreach to Native American representatives (maybe hand deliver invitations)
- Break-out session tables need to be arranged so that participants can hear better and are more comfortable
- Invitations should be mailed to potential participants as well as sent electronically
- Participants appreciated the presentations for an variety of agencies without the typical alphabet groups such as ASBA

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Nancy Alexander
Ms. Rebecca O'Banion
Symposium Planners