

Co-Creating a Menu of More Rigorous Interventions to Drive Nevada School Improvement

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The Region 15 Comprehensive Center (R15CC) supported the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) in developing an evidence-based menu of more rigorous interventions (MRI) for the state's Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), schools identified as CSI, including the bottom 5 percent of Title I schools, must meet specific state-determined criteria to exit turnaround status. If a CSI school does not meet these criteria, state educational agencies must provide districts with "more rigorous interventions" to support schools in addressing the root causes of persistent low or stagnant academic performance and growth.

To help NDE build this MRI menu, the R15CC team synthesized relevant research, facilitated a collaborative workgroup, and provided content expertise. The MRI menu offers guidance and resources supporting local educational agencies (LEAs) in partnering with CSI schools to select and implement interventions that best address a school's needs. The menu also enables LEAs and schools to identify the level of support they want from the NDE to help them implement the chosen interventions.¹

A Collaborative Process Centered on Deep Participant Engagement

NDE leadership expressed the importance of using an evidence-based collaborative process involving interest holders from across the state to co-develop the MRI menu. Based on this request, the R15CC team designed and facilitated a highly collaborative six-session workgroup. The group led NDE in using evidence and research to make collaborative decisions about the content of the MRI menu and a related guidance document that describes how schools are designated for CSI and the process for exiting that designation. Engaging in this complex collaborative work

¹ This impact story is based on information gathered by R15CC from participants of the Nevada Department of Education More Rigorous Interventions Working Group and on data collected as part of the evaluation of the R15CC technical assistance and capacity-building services conducted by the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) at the University of Utah. The UEPC is conducting a 5-year evaluation study of R15CC support to SEAs focused on the implementation of services and the resulting impact on SEA capacity over time.

helped NDE build its staff capacity related to (a) understanding the root causes of low school performance and the best practices for improving performance, (b) leading complex statewide initiatives, (c) designing resources and tools to disseminate and implement the MRI menu, (d) ensuring that NDE can support schools in implementing the chosen interventions, and (e) documenting essential processes and outputs. To create an inquiry-driven problem-solving cycle that guided the workgroup sessions, the R15CC team adapted the Collaborative Solution Discovery,² “a problem-solving framework for finding sustainable solutions to local complex problems.” The R15CC team also worked to foster greater commitment by inviting education leaders from across NDE and LEAs throughout the state to join the group to explore ESSA’s MRI requirements and brainstorm creative ways Nevada schools could meet them.

Cultivating Trusting and Authentic Relationships

An important aspect of the workgroup involved the R15CC’s deliberate attention to facilitating spaces that cultivated meaningful and trusting relationships among participants—an essential foundation for authentically sharing opinions and experiences. This focus on building trust was critical given the diversity of participants’ roles and backgrounds. The R15CC team built relationships through purposefully assigning participants to small-group breakout sessions, strategically using icebreakers, and using outside facilitators to mitigate positional power. Participants had meaningful opportunities to share opinions and challenge each other’s ideas about effective approaches for school improvement. They were encouraged to “ask hard questions,” which included examining the NDE’s past and current practices and digging into the research and emerging practices. One NDE representative commented on the impact of this work, “Props to R15CC for cultivating that kind of environment where folks were comfortable being open and vulnerable and sharing things.”

R15CC Provided Synthesized and “Customized” Evidence Tailored to the Nevada Context

R15CC ensured that participants’ learning and decision-making about the MRI menu was grounded in research and evidence. R15CC provided a literature review of

² Laskasky, K., Clemmer, K., & Clemmer, D. (2020, April). *Collaborative Solution Discovery: A participatory improvement process* [Conference presentation]. American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA.

related research and scans that synthesized information about other states' approaches to ESSA's requirements. They also helped participants understand the strength of the research base, customized to the workgroup's needs. R15CC facilitated reviews of NDE CSI school improvement data to ensure participants understood the state's education landscape and Nevada's most pressing school improvement needs. Finally, they facilitated activities to examine and draw meaning from research to inform decisions to select more rigorous interventions. This grounding in research supported the workgroup's confidence that the MRI menu focused on research-based, high-impact areas for improvement that are responsive to the state's education needs. One NDE Representative commented, "I would not count this successful if NDE teammates did not see themselves as having a shared responsibility for transforming the education landscape in Nevada."

A Continuous Improvement Process for Dissemination

R15CC supported NDE with an iterative process of creating implementation guidance for the MRI menu and site visit protocol that provides background on the interventions and directions on choosing and implementing them. Approximately 20 schools will pilot the MRI menu and provide feedback on their experiences to help NDE revise and refine the guidance document before distributing it more widely and expanding the site visits to additional schools.

By modeling continuous improvement within the MRI work, NDE sets the stage for schools and districts to embrace continuous improvement mindsets and implement research-based strategies. Integrating the input and voices of practitioners also supports their efforts to build strong, positive, supportive relationships between the NDE, LEAs, and schools, which serves as the foundation for long-term sustainable growth and improvement for Nevada's students.

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