

Phase III Evaluation of the New England Secondary School Consortium

September 1, 2011 - September 30, 2012

Introduction to NESSC Evaluation

Since March 2009, the UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI) has served as evaluator for the five-state Consortium. The evaluation, which is funded by NMEF, documents the Consortium's key activities and provides the NESSC and its funders with formative and summative feedback, informed by the analysis of data arising from multiple sources.

Phase III Evaluation Objectives

Consistent with the long-term vision for the evaluation, the following reflect evaluation objectives for the first year of Phase III of the Consortium.

- Continue to document the Consortium's development and functioning as it transitions into Phase III.
- Track and assess Consortium and state-level activities and progress achieved with regard to each of the three key Consortium strategies.
- Report on progress toward the initiative's 2016 desired student outcomes.
- Develop and propose a long-term evaluation design that encompasses future years of the initiative.

Major Evaluation Research Questions

Following are key research questions, the exploration of which will guide the evaluation and address its overarching objectives during this grant period.

- What processes were used to carry the work of the Consortium forward across the region and within each state? Which practices/strategies appear to have been particularly effective, or not effective, in this regard?
- To what extent do contextual factors support or hinder the work of the Consortium?
- In what ways does working in a multi-state context appear to help or hinder progress with regard to secondary school reform in states? What was the value of pursuing reform in a multi-state context?
- What changes in the three NESSC policy priority areas occur in states, and what evidence is there to suggest that these changes were at least partially attributable to NESSC?
- How does the Consortium, and individual states, administer and support the LIS, and what challenges are encountered?
- What are the characteristics of schools participating in the LIS, and to what extent do participants perceive League activities and resources to be relevant, useful, and high-quality?
- In what ways do NESSC activities align with, support, and influence the implementation of the Common Core State Standards that have been adopted in participating states?
- To what extent is there evidence that NESSC messaging materials and strategies are effectively promoting the NESSC agenda related to secondary learning?
- To what extent does NESSC extend its reach to others to broaden the circle of champions of the NESSC secondary school reform agenda? What is the result of this outreach?
- In what ways, if any, do participating state education agencies change their operations, structures, practices, and/or resource allocation in ways supportive of, or consistent with, NESSC objectives?
- What degree of annual progress was accomplished toward reaching the NESSC's 2016 performance objectives?

Data Collection Activities and Methods

The evaluation will use a mixed-methods approach that combines interviews, surveys, and document review to address the evaluation questions and gather timely and ongoing feedback regarding Consortium progress.

Attendance and Participation at NESSC Meetings

UMDI will regularly attend and participate in key NESSC meetings which will provide evaluators with opportunities to observe the planning, development, and implementation process first-hand, as well as remain apprised of key changes in the Consortium's organization and approach.

In-State Interviews

UMDI will conduct two full-day site visits in each of the five participating states. On-site interviews will allow evaluators to: document implementation of NESSC activities; gather evidence regarding the extent to which states have been able to make changes with regard to policy, practice, and public/political will; and probe more deeply into educator's and state policy-makers' perspectives of the Consortium and its contributions to their reform efforts.

Interviews with GSP and NESSC Council Members

UMDI will conduct at least one set of formal full-day interviews with key staff from GSP, as well as separate interviews, with a sample of NESSC Council members.

Periodic Engagement with State Liaisons

The evaluation will include an increasing level of engagement with state liaisons to include monthly telephone conversations and review of liaison summary reports.

Review and Analysis of Relevant Documents and Tools

UMDI will compile and analyze documentation of Consortium- and state-level activities, goals, and outcomes. The goal of this activity is to ensure that evaluators remain apprised of and can adequately document Consortium work, such that it can fully report on NESSC progress toward 2016 goals and other objectives.

Surveys

UMDI will develop and administer two surveys. The first will be appropriate to a wide range of stakeholders within each state and will pose questions regarding stakeholders' perspectives of the Consortium, commitment to the Consortium's objectives and strategies, perceptions of the value-added of the Consortium, and more. A second survey will be administered to educators at the spring 2011 High School Redesign in Action conference.

Analysis of Secondary Data Regarding League of Innovative Schools

The evaluation will compile and report descriptive information pertaining to LIS school characteristics, including enrollment, demographics, prior student performance on state achievement tests, and more.

Collection and Analysis of Data regarding Consortium Messaging

UMDI will collaborate with the GSP Director of Communication to collect and report data regarding the reach and effectiveness of NESSC messaging.

Collection, Validation, and Reporting of NESSC Performance Objective Data

UMDI will compile, organize, and report NESSC performance goals data (2016 indicators) from the 2010-11 school year in order to measure progress toward the initiative's desired long-term goals. These metrics will be compared to those collected since the start of the evaluation.

Development of a Long-Term Evaluation Plan

In addition to the data collection activities described above, UMDI will develop a long-term evaluation design that moves beyond primarily qualitative description of the work and generalized impacts of the three strategies to encompass an increasing number of quantitative outcomes and indicators highlighting Consortium progress.

Reporting and Deliverables

The evaluation is intended to provide relevant and timely formative and summative feedback to NESSC participants. As such, data collected will result in a variety of deliverables, including the following:

- In-Person briefings at NESSC meetings
- Periodic written evaluation briefings (*January and June, 2012*)
- Technical reports of survey findings (*April and May, 2012*)
- Key indicators technical report (*July 2012*)
- Presentation to NMEF (*July 2012*)
- Phase III long-term evaluation plan (Summer 2012)
- Year-end evaluation report (September 2012)

For more information on the NESSC evaluation please contact Lonnie Kaufman at the UMass Donahue Institute at (413) 587-2419 or lkaufman@donahue.umassp.edu.