

On April 21, 2016, the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE), on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education (ED)/Office of Safe and Healthy Students, hosted an online learning event on the topic of “Planning for Sustainability”. The online learning event, facilitated by Tim Duffey (Training Specialist, Vision Training Associates) explored strategies for planning sustainability efforts. During the session, the presenters (Sandra Williamson, AIR, NCSSLE Director; Scott Lindstrom, Student Support Coordinator for Chico Unified School District, Chico, CA; and Shelly Duke, Director of Coordinated School Health Services for the Cheatham County Schools, Ashland City, TN) received several questions from participants. The Center has prepared the following Q&A Summary with responses to each question that was asked during the event. For additional information, please email or call the Center (ncssle@air.org; 1-800-258-8413).

# Questions to Presenters

*Please note the content of this summary was prepared under a contract from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students to the American Institutes for Research (AIR). This Q/A summary does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does it imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education.*

**Q1:** Which of the sustainability factors do people have the most difficulty to master or do well with?

**Sandy Williamson:** Securing the diverse financial opportunities. This is one of the first times I have seen people not asking where to find more grants. Grants are for people to bring in a program that is evidence based, try them in the school, look at your data and see if they make a difference and have a positive impact. If it does, then the district now knows where to spend their money wisely. It is not just about a grant, it is looking at how to diversify. We will get into a planning worksheet and you will see the questions and how to break down the activities you are doing to identify key functions and how those might be met through another funding source.

**Q2:** Which of the factors had generated the best return for investment?

**Shelly Duke:** Building a leadership team. It has been very helpful to our development and to secure diverse financial opportunities like student insurance (where we bill insurance for the services we are providing) has been beneficial and allowed us to hire more positions than the grant funding is providing.

**Scott Lindstrom:** I would say number 7 (Create Strategic Partnerships) first but I would add relationships as well. I tell teachers all the time the way we influence kids is through your relationships. We need to be constantly looking at the relationships we are building and seeking out the key people we know are going to be influential to build relationships. But also, you never know when you are talking to the right person, so always be focusing on discussing your work and build the relationships with everyone you are around. That enhances the likelihood they are going to support the work.

**Q3:** Who are the most common partners willing to invest in school counseling programs?

**Shelly Duke:** Our contracted provider is a local mental health agency. They have been instrumental to us in their willingness to invest their time, efforts, training, and therapists to support our efforts. They go above and beyond the grant in the school counseling programs.

**Scott Lindstrom:** For us we are looking at district funds. Our partnership with the local county mental health agency is probably going to grow through our ACES coalition, even though we have some different priorities from them. Also our site level funding supports this work; principals have some control with funding and at the district level there is additional funding to support it. One of the things we are responding to is LCAP- (Local Control Accountability Program)- which has built in some key goals that we address directly through counseling work, so that is an important resource for us. We are building our work into the LCAP to access that funding stream. The other piece is just to continue building those key relationships with stakeholders and be there with people so you know of potential places of linkage and support.

**Q4:** Any tips about data sharing between district, local, and state mental health agencies to support sustainability?

**Sandy Williamson:** For both of these topics there are addressed in a series of webinars and other resources. We will send out the links to the resources to everyone who has registered for today’s event. There are good examples of what types of data is being shared and what kind of data people are collecting.

Follow-up note: The resources Sandy was referring to are as follows:

* NCSSLE webinar: [***School-based Mental Health Services Programs***](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/project-prevent-webinar-school-based-mental-health-services-programs)
* School Mental Health Sustainability: Funding Strategies to Build Sustainable School Mental Health Programs, Series 1, [***Why School Mental Health? What Is the Connection to Systems of Care?***](http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/SMHSeries_1.pdf)
* School Mental Health Sustainability: Funding Strategies to Build Sustainable School Mental Health Programs, Series 2, [***What Are the Challenges to School and Mental Health Agency Partnerships?***](http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/SMHSeries_2.pdf)
* School Mental Health Sustainability: Funding Strategies to Build Sustainable School Mental Health Programs, Series 3, [***How Do System of Care Leaders Work with Community Agencies/Organizations to Overcome Challenges to Develop a Sustainable School Mental Health Program?***](http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/SMHSeries_3.pdf)
* School Mental Health Sustainability: Funding Strategies to Build Sustainable School Mental Health Programs, Series 4, [***What Are Some Strategies to Sustain School Mental Health Programs?***](http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/SMHSeries_4.pdf)
* [***Using Medicaid to Finance Services for Young Children***](http://www.healthysafechildren.org/resource/using-medicaid-finance-services-young-children)
* [***Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Community Success***](http://www.healthysafechildren.org/resource/financing-community-schools-leveraging-resources-support-community-success-1)
* Details on [***Information Sharing***](http://informationsharing.promoteprevent.org/content/about-information-sharing)
* Additional information on [***data sharing***](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/ssd-webinar-resources)

**Tim Duffey:** There is also an upcoming OLE that speaks about data sharing as well. That event details are:

Title: Information Sharing Among Schools and Community Agencies

Date: Thursday, June 2, 2016 | 2:00-3:30 p.m. EST

**Q5:** (Regarding Step 2 – *What you can take off the table?*) I will direct this question to Shelly or Scott: Do you have any ways you have found effective to let go of a project?

**Scott Lindstrom:** When we talk about sustainability there is a big picture here which is “What are we doing everywhere in the district, that maybe it is time to let go of to make room for this?” So not just with our own programs, but really asking if there are other things going on in the district that we are spending money on that maybe it is time to let go and then that brings us back to the data that says here is a reason to keep this program because our data says we are very effective with this amount of money. It comes down to “Can you show me the spending impact on that money and program?”

**Shelly Duke:** I would agree with Scott. We sit down with our district leadership team, discuss this project and we also discuss other various projects in our school budget annually to look at what can be taken away and what is really beneficial for all of our students and the entire school community.

**Sandy Williamson:** We had an opportunity over the last 5-6 years to work with another grant program for the U.S. Department of Education and we were quite frequently with school teams within districts looking at evidence-based programs, and exactly this – looking at the data - and having to come face-to-face with some of these hard decisions about what do you let go of. One thing that is critical is to shift the conversation ***from*** the people (staff) that are implementing the program ***to*** the functions of the program, the intended impact the program is supposed to have, and then the data to show you having that impact. It is one thing to have discussions about data and make hard decisions; it is another to have that discussion about a particular staff person and to say you no longer need that person, because s/he is a really nice person and we know them well, perhaps even interacting with them in the community on a personal basis. I would encourage folks to really drill down to the program components, the functions, the intended impact, and the data. And have the discussion from that perspective.

**Q6: And HOW do you let go?**

**Tim** **Duffey:** I think Sandy may have answered this question. So one step is to depersonalize the process. I also heard Sandy, Scott, and Shelly referencing the use of data points so it is less personal and is driven by effectiveness.

**Scott Lindstrom:** It is that mix. Here is a story. As the first grant we received was coming to an end--and this is 30 years ago--we had a visit from the state about the grant and program. The teachers at that school asked – “How do we keep Debbie?” (The staff member supporting the grant’s work.) We looked at it and asked – What is it that Debbie is doing that is going to be sustainable at other sites? So, at that point it became very clear to us that that person’s relationship and integration into the staff was equally as important as the data we were getting. The data was awesome too, it was a good pairing. But you have to have both.