



# River Trails

## SCHOOL DISTRICT 26

To: The Board of Education  
From: Dr. Jodi Megerle  
Date: May 6, 2025  
Subject: Superintendent's Perspective on NSSEO

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### Introduction

First and foremost, I want to emphasize that being part of the NSSEO cooperative is an extraordinary opportunity. One that provides invaluable benefits to our students and staff. The services, expertise, and support offered through this partnership are simply not replicable within District 26 alone. It is a relationship we deeply value, and it has a direct, positive impact on the lives of our school district community.

It is precisely because of this deep appreciation that I feel compelled to share my perspective on the recent conversations and proposed changes taking place at NSSEO. The purpose of this memo is twofold: first, to clearly communicate my position regarding the current discussions around governance and strategic direction at NSSEO; and second, to ensure that all District 26 Board members receive consistent and comprehensive information. I recognize that many of you have engaged in different conversations or attended separate meetings, resulting in varied levels of context and understanding. As a full board, there have been individual questions and discussion, but not engaged in a whole group discussion on this matter, nor have many questions surfaced thus far. This memo aims to provide clarity, align understanding, and support informed dialogue moving forward.

### Background

- In December 2024, I participated in two full days of strategic planning at NSSEO. It was an energizing and purposeful experience, bringing together NSSEO leadership, member district teams, parents, and board members to collaboratively envision the future of the organization. The cooperation was strong, and as we concluded, there was a shared sense of pride and optimism. The work felt aligned with the true essence of a cooperative, and we left confident that the priorities we had identified were critical to NSSEO's long-term success.
- At our January 2025 board meeting, the NSSEO committee report reviewed the newly refined mission, vision, and the following four strategic priority areas:
  1. **Facilities** – Develop and implement a fiscally responsible long-range facilities plan that ensures a safe and supportive environment for all students and staff.
  2. **Instruction and Programs** – Design and utilize a continuous improvement process for instruction and program development that responds to the evolving needs of all students.
  3. **Governance** – Implement a clearly defined advisory and governance structure that promotes collaborative decision-making and meaningful engagement from all member districts and NSSEO.
  4. **Staffing** – Recruit and retain high-quality staff through effective hiring practices and a positive work culture rooted in support, recognition, and professional growth.
- Between January and April, the strategic planning conversation has appeared to have shifted, particularly around **Priority #3 Governance**. While initial discussions were focused on strengthening collaborative decision-making structures, the recent emphasis seems to have narrowed to simply increasing communication with member superintendents. After watching several NSSEO meetings and engaging in follow-up conversations, it has become concerning that the original "why" behind this governance direction of cohesive, shared decision-making has been overshadowed or lost in translation. As a result, the focus has drifted away from seeking a sustainable, long term governance redesign toward more surface-level communication solutions.

## Analysis

- Over time, NSSEO appears to have gradually shifted from functioning as a true cooperative to operating more as an independent district. **This shift is not the fault of any one individual, but rather the result of a growing and evolving system that outpaced a governance structure not designed to sustain rapid change.**
- As a result, the foundational spirit of collaboration and shared ownership among member districts has diminished. NSSEO now functions with greater autonomy, often making decisions without full engagement from the member district, which is contrary to the original cooperative model. This is not how the structure was intended to operate.
- The proposed changes to the governance structure are not about control, they are about restoring the collaborative framework that ensures all member districts have a meaningful voice. Specifically, these changes aim to:
  - Reinforce **shared decision-making**, with each member district's board representative empowered to reflect and represent the will of their district in all major decisions.
  - Shift the dynamic from districts **passively receiving** decisions to **actively contributing** to them, ensuring decisions are informed by the collective needs and interests of all parties involved.

## Financial Impact

As we all know, member district contributions form the foundation of NSSEO's budget. While District 26 contributes on the lower end of the funding spectrum, every financial decision made by the cooperative ultimately impacts our district's overall budget. For this reason, it is essential that all member districts have the opportunity to provide input on decisions with significant financial implications. A few examples help illustrate this need for greater transparency and collaboration:

- The absence of prior communication about NSSEO's HVAC project, which was initially proposed at \$9.5 million dollars. This demonstrates a significant gap in awareness and lack of input across member districts, despite the project's scale and financial impact.
- Staffing levels in tuition-based programs have grown from **244** budgeted positions in 2021–2022 to **280** in 2025–2026—an increase of 36 positions over five years. An additional **12** staff have been added in other programs and services.
- The **proposed budget for this year includes funding for an additional EL teacher and a 0.5 instructional coach**, which, in my view, may not be essential at this time.
- Over the past five years, **District 26's contribution to NSSEO has increased by 87%**, while **NSSEO's total budget has grown by \$13 million.**

These trends underscore the importance of ensuring that financial decisions are made with transparency, input, and alignment to member district priorities.

## Timeline and Next Steps

- The NSSEO Governing Board is currently working through key questions related to the proposed governance structure. In parallel, administrative teams are developing a calendar of meetings and agenda topics to ensure a more timely and transparent flow of information to member districts and boards.
- While no formal vote has been scheduled yet, it is likely that any proposed changes to the Articles of Agreement will eventually require board action. That process will take time, and it is critical that we remain actively engaged throughout.
- That said, if meaningful structural changes are not implemented, I have serious concerns about the long-term sustainability of NSSEO. For a district of our size, the implications could be significant.