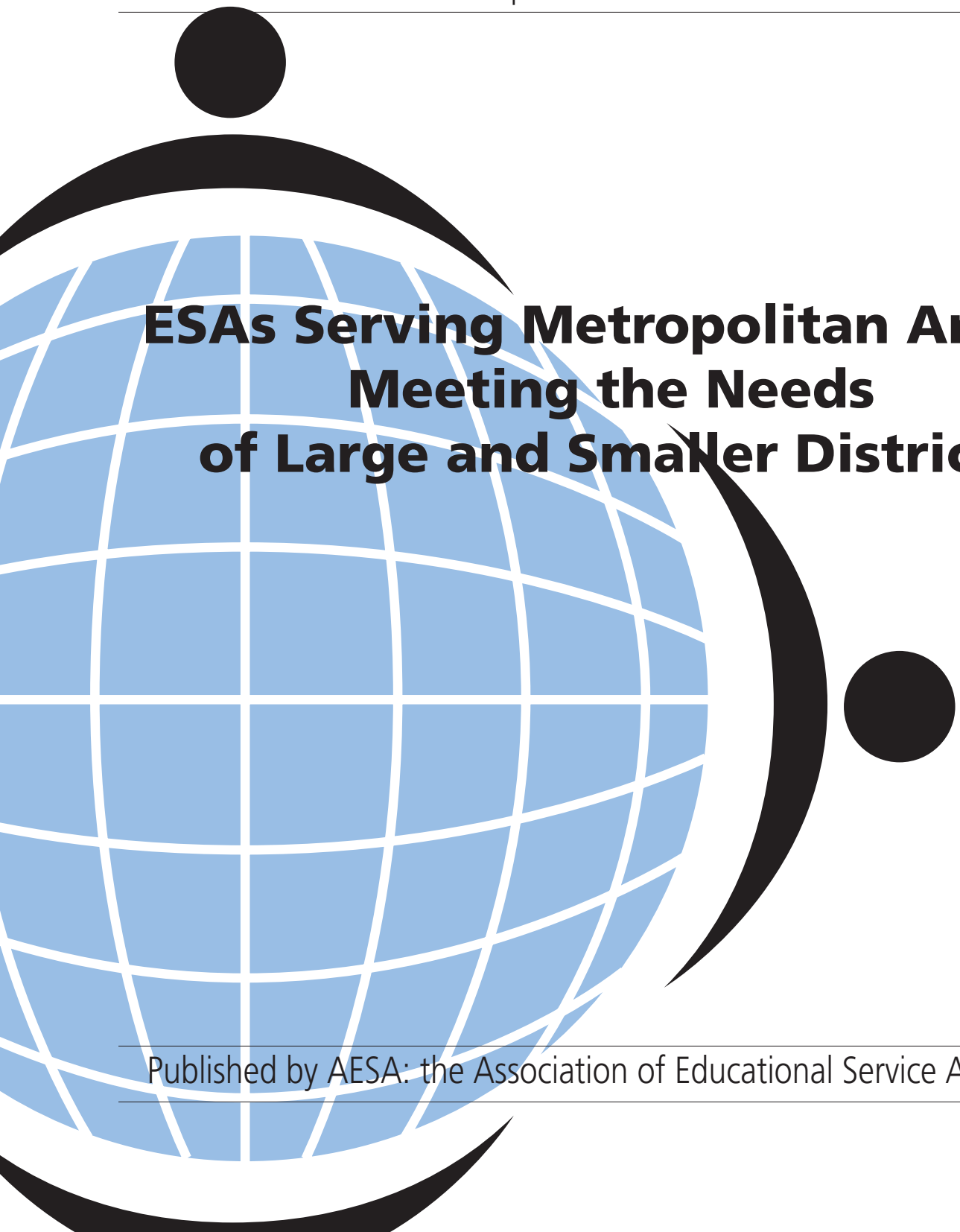
Volume 8, September 2002

Perspectives

A Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies



ESAs Serving Metropolitan Areas: Meeting the Needs of Large and Smaller Districts

Published by AESA: the Association of Educational Service Agencies

Perspectives Credits

Editorial Board

Table of Contents

PERSPECTIVES

Order Form

Additional copies of this or previous editions of *Perspectives* may be purchased for $5 each plus $3.50 for postage and handling for each order. AAESA accepts *prepaid orders only*, by check or money order. Include number desired of each issue, name of recipient and shipping address. Send your request to:

AAESA
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209
(703) 875-0739 Phone
(703) 807-1849 Fax
btalbott@aasa.org

INVITATION TO AUTHORS

Perspectives welcomes manuscripts from all those interested in the work of service agencies in America. The journal publishes articles of research as well as opinion. Interviews with public officials (legislators, chief state school officials, business leaders, etc.) regarding their positive views of the work of service agencies are also welcome since they can be helpful to colleagues in other states where the environment might not be so friendly.

For further information about how to prepare a manuscript, please contact the editor by email at Keanewg@aol.com or by phone at 248-370-4204. Deadline for submissions is April 1 of each year. Any necessary editorial assistance will be provided.

Preface: ESA Opportunities

by
Brian Talbott

Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) have never been in a better position to lead than we are today. This journal is a reflection of the leadership role that ESAs offer everyday throughout the United States. Whether one is looking for examples of successful teacher training programs, models for parental involvement, methods for improving instruction in the classroom, opportunities for online learning or other best practices in urban, suburban or rural districts, this journal reflects the commitment and success ESAs are having in improving education.

This year AESA and its member ESAs have developed a new relationship with the United States Department of Education. Jointly we are committed to improving education through the "No Child Left Behind Act." To insure a strong working relationship Secretary of Education Rod Paige has named Dr. Susan Sclafani, Counselor to the Secretary, as the liaison to AESA. With this assignment comes both responsibility and opportunity for our association.

As Kay E. Graber states in her report (available on the AESA webpage), nearly everyone of the programs required by the No Child Left Behind Act has already been initiated or supported by an ESA somewhere in this country. For ESAs, the challenge is to assist the United States Department of Education (USDOE), state departments of education and local school districts to increase the performance achievement of all students. There is an expectation that all students can and will learn and that student growth must be measured and accounted for at the building and classroom level. The Act also calls for parental participation, flexibility and choice; professional development for teachers, principals and support staff; and the dissemination of best practices. No level of the K-12 educational system is better positioned than ESAs to help local school districts meet these new requirements. Additionally, ESAs are also gearing up across this country to assist with and/or conduct quality research so that local districts and schools will know that the educational programs being implemented are effective. In support of this effort AESA is establishing a Research Committee to assist member agencies in conducting high quality research. Reports of research efforts will appear in future issues of this journal.

ESAs have a tremendous opportunity and a responsibility to continue to assist in achieving the success envisioned by the No Child Left Behind Act. In order to meet this new challenge it is critical that ESAs across the country share successful programs and the results of their research initiatives. As your Executive Director, I want to thank those of you who contributed to this and past issues of "Perspectives." For those who have not contributed, please take the time to write about our successes so that AESA can continue to demonstrate why ESAs are the educational leaders of today and tomorrow. By doing so you will not only contribute to AESA, but be part of the team that will insure that No Child is Left Behind.

Brian Talbott, Ph.D., is executive director of the Association of Educational Service Agencies. He may be contacted by phone at 703-875-0739, by fax at 703-523-2146, and by email at btalbott@aasa.org

Introduction

Earlier editions of *Perspectives* have had a title on the cover to note the presence of several articles focusing on a common theme; for example, the efforts within several states to prove to various audiences the cost efficiency/effectiveness of ESAs (2001), and the continuing task of service agencies to create more flexible organizations to meet rapidly changing needs of constituent districts and other audiences (2000).

This issue is partially devoted to a theme that, for the first time, was established in advance: the special challenges facing educational service agencies that serve very large school districts and others of varying other sizes within the same constituency. We have labeled these entities as "metropolitan" ESAs.

As pointed out in the first article in this edition, this effort had its origins in a project started a few years ago by Bob Stephens to acquire a national perspective on the special challenges that face such service agencies. Four manuscripts emerged from that effort. They were not originally designed as journal articles but as narrative responses to questions that Bob had posed to the group. The quality and comprehensiveness of the documents made it essential that they reach a larger audience. All authors responded positively to the request that they rewrite the pieces as journal articles and revise the text to accommodate changes in law and circumstances that occurred since the first draft. Summarizing what these authors were asked to do is easy; doing it was a Herculean task, and members of AESA can be truly grateful for the efforts these authors made, even those no longer with the agency they wrote about several years ago.

In Michigan, where I once functioned as an ESA superintendent, many service agencies have a large school district within their boundaries. In my case it was the city of Pontiac. In the case of Wayne RESA, one of the four service agencies described within, it is a major American city, Detroit. As many ESA leaders know, the larger districts often have several grievances about the service agency:

- They feel that the service agency is unnecessary. They feel that they have all required support services in-house.
- They feel that money designated by the state for the ESA might better be spent supporting their in-house support system.
- They feel that they are denied fair opportunities for governance of the service agency, often because board electoral systems give each district one vote in the election of board members. Thus they are easily outvoted.

Readers of the articles will note that circumstances are changing. Larger districts are discovering the quality, value, and accessibility of service agency staff as their own resources continue to shrink. They are discovering the many values of working synergistically with smaller districts to invent creative solutions to old problems. As test scores for all schools in the state are featured in the newspapers, larger districts are recognizing that smaller districts may have techniques and practices that can be adopted or adapted by larger districts.

The matter of mutual understanding is not a one-way street. Smaller districts are getting to know colleagues from the larger districts and are focusing on the commonality of their problems and learning from the larger districts now that they are getting to know their staff.

Next year it is our plan to focus on the special problems of ESAs that serve a largely rural constituency. We hope that we will be able to identify a cadre of authors from these smaller agencies to help us tell that story. However, this year, as next, we offer articles that deal with other issues of interest to service agency personnel including two articles on systems change (Papandrea, Reidy, & Walkley; Dougherty & Wyckoff), one about a significant effort to measure the impact of service agencies on student achievement (Harmon, Riggs, Lewis, & Six), and another about the leadership role of one ESA in developing opportunities for virtual learning (Dubble & Swengel). We request that readers pass on a copy of *Perspectives* to other members of their ESA and leave a copy in a staff lounge where others might see it. Visibility helps us generate future articles. Thanks.

Bill Keane, Editor
Phone: 248-370-4204
Fax: 248-370-4605
Email: Keane@oakland.edu

The Significant Role of Metropolitan Area ESAs:
Framing an Agenda

by
E. Robert Stephens

Introduction

The first four articles in this issue focus on some of the activities of a special sub-category of educational service agencies (ESAs), those that by legislative decree or historical tradition include at lease one metropolitan area in their service region. The articles, each authored by the chief executive officer, or jointly by the leadership personnel of an agency, represent the first products of what was conceived several years ago as a multi-year, comprehensive effort to tell the largely untold story of service agencies that function in the complex environment typically found in metropolitan regions, which typically consist of a relatively large urban city school district surrounded by multiple suburban districts of various enrollment sizes, demographic characteristics, and wealth.

Presented here is a brief statement on the major objective of the initiative, hereafter referred to as the "Metropolitan ESA Project." This is followed by a description of the principal assumptions made in undertaking the project as well as a review of Phase I of the project, a focused group session involving a distinguished panel of administrators whose agencies embrace a metropolitan area. It should be noted that Phase I of the project did not, as is often the case in ventures of this type, begin with support by a foundation or government agency.

Major Objective of Project

The overriding objective of the project is to begin the process of documenting the critical role that can be played by an educational service agency in alleviating many of the long-standing inequalities that typically characterize education in metropolitan areas. An ESA, when granted the requisite mandate and resources, represents a preferred policy choice for addressing the deep-seated, seemingly intractable issues in metropolitan area education. This is so because an adequately structured ESA in most situations would likely enjoy greater legal, administrative, and political feasibility than other policy alternatives advanced over the years designed to solve the inequity issue.

Advancing this argument will, of course, not be easy, as the literature on agenda-building in local and especially state and federal policy circles would attest. The literature on agenda setting in education does not offer much insight on why some policy alternatives are able to gain prominence while others falter. What

does seem clear is that those alternatives that can be supported by well-developed, content-rich illustrations have a far better chance of gaining attention in the policy arenas.

As will be subsequently described, a very modest, but extremely important, initial first step has been taken to begin the process of building the strongest argument in support of the overriding objective of the project. This was accomplished with the staging of a panel presentation at the 1998 national convention of the Association of Educational Service Agencies.

The first four articles in this issue were developed based on the presentations of four of the panelists at the earlier session. The project is greatly indebted to the authors for their perseverance in staying with the project by providing their insights and putting to paper a report on some of their programming efforts.

The importance of having these reports on the activities of metropolitan area ESAs should not be minimized. Though we had hoped for a much larger group of semi-structured, mini-case studies, the four articles will be of great assistance in the achievement of the objective of the project. The policy claim that a greater role for an educational service agency is a viable choice for addressing many of the issues in metropolitan areas across the country clearly must be grounded in as many modes of policy arguments as possible. The articles do just this in that they, at a minimum, begin to address, in part, three of the common forms of policy argument:

- *The Classification Mode* – Information is carried to claim on the basis of the assumption that what is true of a class…included in the information is also true of…other members of the class described in the warrant.
- *The Explanatory Mode* – Information is carried to claim on the basis of assumptions about the presence of certain generative powers ("causes") and their results ("effects").
- *The Pragmatic Mode* – Claims are based on arguments from motivation, parallel case, or analogy. (Dunn, 1994, pp. 100-01)

Major Planning Assumptions

The principal planning assumptions made in launching the project are ***five*** in number. The first four relate to the context in which metropolitan area ESAs operate in recognition that the role and function of these service agencies, similar to their counterparts serving essentially nonmetropolitan areas, will always reflect factors and trends that impact education at both the local and state level. Moreover, it is important to stress that the themes briefly summarized here are to be viewed as important developments that characterize the general environment in which each ESA functions, irrespective of the state in which each is located.

1. The long-continuing transformation of this country from a largely rural-oriented society in the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century to a predominately metropolitan-oriented society will continue in the 21st century. The great majority of the population and economic activity of this nation are now concentrated in metropolitan areas, and if past patterns hold true, will be even more so in the future. Little confidence can be placed in the recent speculation that the events of 9/11 will result in the major "de-urbanization" of metropolitan America.

   In 2000, 80.2 percent of the population of the nation resided in a metropolitan area – the 273 MAs (metropolitan areas), the 245 MSAs (metropolitan statistical areas), the 17 CMSAs (consolidated metropolitan statistical areas), the 11 NECMAs (New England County metropolitan areas) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a & 2000b, p. 9). The 80.2 percent represents an increase from 69.9 percent residing in an urban area in 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999, p. 46).

2. Demonstrable inequities that generally prevail in elementary-secondary education will likely increase in the near future as a result, in large part, of the current popular political support for standards and assessment, the centerpiece of the accountability movement. The disparities in metropolitan area education have, of course, been present for some time (Conant, 1961; Kozol, 1991; Wise, 1968). Major discrepancies that frequently exist among metropolitan area school districts include:

   - differences in the depth and breadth of the instructional program for the general and special populations of students;
   - variations in the instructional enrichment support services;
   - differences in financial resources, contrasts in salaries for professional staff; and,
   - variations in the quality of physical facilities.

   Moreover, and importantly, it would be erroneous to assume that the types of issues cited tend only to characterize the central city school district in a metropolitan area and then lump together all neighboring suburban and rural school districts as though the latter are to be viewed as more alike than dissimilar. There are often significant differences in the quality of the educational programming available in especially first-tier suburban districts and those functioning in the more affluent outer-fringe ring(s) of larger metropolitan areas. Still more distant, essentially rural, districts in the ESA constituency often face economic difficulties similar to those of the central city and first-tier districts. A majority of the nation's public school population is now enrolled in metropolitan area school districts. Inadequate educational quality for even a fraction of these students is of no small consequence to this nation.

3. There is little support for most of the popular alternative governance proposals advanced over the years for addressing the issues in metropolitan area education. One strategy argued for in the 1960s and 1970s would have established a single school district to serve an entire metropolitan region. Though there are notable exceptions (e.g., Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky; Nashville-Davidson County, Tennessee), this option has not enjoyed much support in local and state policy circles. Other serious proposals put forth in this time period, but not implemented, would have affected a number of the nation's largest metropolitan areas (e.g., Detroit, St. Louis, Buffalo, Kansas City, San Francisco). For example, two of the leading scholars in school government in this era, Reller (1963) and Cunningham (1968) were strong advocates for the reform of the governance of education in metropolitan areas. Reller's proposals (1963) were perhaps the most ambitious when he advanced two interrelated strategies for addressing the inequalities of education in the San Francisco metropolitan region: the reorganization of the then-existing 264 school districts in the Bay Area to approximately 30 to 40, and the establishment of a regional or metropolitan education district that would be governed initially by a board chosen by the reduced number of local district boards. The new metropolitan board would have limited powers to levy a uniform tax, provide technical assistance to schools, establish a metropolitan library system, and coordinate planning with other human services providers.

   Nor has there been any significant movement to adopt more modest proposals that would support the creation of a metropolitan area structure for the provision of single-purpose programs. For example, the once influential, but now disbanded, Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations in 1971 recommended that both vocational-technical education and special education programming in metropolitan area schools be assumed by a new governance structure that would serve all metropolitan students.

4. Most of the legal strategies, particularly the long list of desegregation suits, used over the past four decades, too numerous to cite here, have had, and will continue to have, only limited impact on the inequalities in metropolitan area education. Certainly the numerous court cases challenging the equity, and more recently the adequacy, of state school finance formulas have resulted in some financial relief for fiscally-poor metropolitan districts, as has the practice of special legislative appropriations and set-asides for large central city districts. Moreover, contrary to what some observers claim, most ESAs represent a form of "regional governance," not the more objectionable "regional government," a concept that enjoys less political feasibility.

5. It is assumed that there already exists a highly viable, but currently underutilized, model in place in many states for addressing many of the pervasive, deep-seated education issues in metropolitan areas: an adequately designed, well-functioning educational service agency. A significant majority of the approximately 800 operating ESAs were established in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of these are part of a statewide network of service agencies created through passage of mandatory or permissive legislation. The legislative language seldom singled out a class of school districts – urban, suburban, or rural – that was to be the object of the work of the state network. It is reasonable to assume, however, that many policy makers likely viewed service agencies as the preferred option to the continued push for the reorganization of rural schools.

   Moreover, and importantly, in establishing the geographic boundaries of the state networks, all school districts in the state were made eligible to participate in the programming of the units. The only exceptions to this prevailing pattern were in four states. New York excluded the five most populated districts when initiating the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in 1948. Ohio excludes city and village school districts. The states of Nebraska and Pennsylvania designated the two largest local districts in their states as both a service agency and a local district (Omaha and Lincoln, and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, respectively). So, sometimes by foresight, occasionally by fortuitousness, one of the seemingly strongest obstacles for addressing metropolitan area issues – the creation of a structure to do so – is avoided in those states having a statewide network of service agencies where all school districts are included in the catchment area of one of the units. Thus, there is not even the need to craft new legislative language, always a hazardous undertaking, to embark on a broad-based strategy to involve these units in a more significant way in addressing metropolitan area issues.

   Also, some of the recent legislative changes concerning the state system of ESAs in several cases (e.g., the Georgia Regional Educational Service Agencies, the Texas Educational Service Centers) also contain specific provisions that any school district in the state can secure services offered by any of the agencies in the state, not just their home agency. This pattern reflects a commitment to the new widespread emphasis on injecting market forces in the workings of the public sector and is likely to become the norm.

   But there is much more to be said in defense of the ESA as a tool for addressing educational inequity in metropolitan regions beyond the benefit of its greater political feasibility. The enabling legislation creating educational service agencies almost without exception established a number of common expectations for the agencies. These include language that stressed the promotion of equity, efficiency, and quality in the entire state system of elementary and secondary education, all three long-term objectives of state education policy.

   Also, and equally significant, most ESAs across the country, by the very nature of their work, serve as a platform for the planning, coordinating, and networking among educational interests and between educational interests and other human services providers in their catchment area. In many cases they represent the only potential state-sanctioned governmental subdivision in place to perform this clearly increasingly critical role.

The Metropolitan ESA Project: First Modest Steps

The first modest steps in the Metropolitan ESA Project were taken at the 1998 national convention of the Association of Educational Service Agencies. Planning for this session was done by Joe Lagana, at the time the Executive Director, Allegheny Intermediate Unit (PA), Brian Talbott, Executive Director, Association of Educational Service Agencies, and Bill Keane, Oakland University, the editor of this journal. Dr. Keane is to be especially thanked for his persistence in staying with the project and editing the four articles that follow this introductory statement.

The format selected for the initial phase of the project was the use of a focus group. Panelists were to be administrators of service agencies serving metropolitan areas of different sizes located in various geographic regions, but where all school districts, and especially the largest central city school district, are at least legally not excluded from participation in the programming of the agency.

Panelists who participated in the focus group, and the metropolitan areas their agencies serve, were:

David Cotterell, Franklin County ESC, Columbus, Ohio
Ronald Fielder, Grant Wood AEA, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Michael Flanagan, Wayne County RESA, Detroit, Michigan
Edward Frye, Capital Area IU, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
Tim Gavigan, CESA, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Terry Lindquist, Puget Sound ESD, Seattle, Washington
Edward Schmitt, Multnomah ESD, Portland, Oregon
Gary Wright, Cooperative School District of Greater St. Louis

The objective of the focus group session was to begin the task of identifying the nature of the special problems and issues faced by ESAs serving in a variety of different metro settings. Toward this end, three questions were posed for the panelists:

- What are the two or three greatest success stories your ESA has achieved during your stewardship as CEO in providing programs and services to metro area districts?
- What would you identify as the two or three greatest disappointments your ESA has experienced during your stewardship as CEO in attempting to provide programs and services to metro area districts?
- What are the two or three greatest challenges confronting your agency at the present time in attempting to provide programs and services to metro area districts?

The focus group session was taped and the results were used to inform a follow-up request that the panelists write a 20 to 30 page chapter/article. Each chapter/article was to be organized around the following common set of six questions, with the authors having the discretion to add other lines of inquiry if they so desired:

1. What programs and services currently offered by your agency do you believe make the greatest contributions to school improvement (as this construct is conventionally defined) in metro area school systems, with special attention given the central city school district?

2. What, in your judgment, is an appropriate ESA role for your agency in addressing a number of the most persistent public policy issues (e.g., equity, adequacy, quality) as these are played out in the metropolitan area your agency serves?

3. In your agency's efforts to provide programs and services, what kinds of problems, issues and challenges are presented by the differing enrollment size, wealth, and demographic characteristics of the districts in your metro area?

4. In what ways, if any, does the current legal framework under which your ESA functions either facilitate or inhibit the ability of your agency to provide programs and services to all metro area districts in an efficient, effective, equitable way?

5. What do you foresee as the two or three greatest challenges that your agency will need to address in the next three to five years?

6. Why is an ESA role in a metropolitan area necessary?

Concluding Comments

The four stories of metropolitan area educational service agencies in this edition of *Perspectives* yield important insights about the potential contributions of ESAs to addressing the vexing problems in metropolitan education. However, a limited number of stories, no matter how richly described, cannot capture the full potential of the concept of an educational service agency as it is now being implemented in metropolitan ESAs all across the country.

The task now is to continually perfect the lines of inquiry and then seek external funding in order to build on the four case studies. Though off to a slow start, every effort will be made to move the "Metropolitan ESA Project" to the top of state and federal policy and research agendas. Earlier this year an important next step was taken toward the goal of designing and conducting a comprehensive research and development agenda on the role of metropolitan area ESAs. The hope is that the project, off to a shaky start, will soon be on a fast track.

This new call for a broad-based, systematic assessment of the potential of metropolitan area ESAs follows previous urgings that have been made over the years, largely in vain (Benson, 1968; Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand & Usdan, 1990; Levis, 1983; Stephens, 1969). However, a renewed advocacy that is based on solid evidence will finally now convert many in local, state, and federal policy circles. That old adage that – there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come – should prove to be especially true here.

References

Campbell, R. F., Cunningham, L. L., Nystrand, R. O., & Usdan, M. D. (1990). *The organization and control of American schools* (6th ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Company.

Conant, J. B. (1961). *Slums and suburbs.* New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Cunningham, L. L. (1968). Organization of education in metropolitan areas. In R. J. Havighurst (Ed.), *Metropolitanism: Its challenge to education. The sixty-seventh yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part 1.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dunn, W. N. (1994). *Public policy analysis: An introduction.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools.* New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Levis, R. M. (1983). *The education service agency – where next?* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Reller, T. L. (1963). *Problems of public education in the San Francisco Bay area.* Berkeley: University of California, Institute of Government Studies.

Stephens, E. R. (1968, February). *An exploratory investigation of existing cooperative programs between selected central city and other metropolitan area school districts.* (Special Report No. 66). Iowa City: the University of Iowa, The Iowa Center for Research in School Administration.

U.S. Census Bureau. (1999). *Statistical abstract of the United States.* Washington: U. S. Department of Commerce.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000a). *State and metropolitan area data book – 1997-98.* Washington: U. S. Department of Commerce.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000b). *Statistical abstract of the United States.* Washington: U. S. Department of Commerce.

Wise, A. E. (1968). *Rich schools, poor schools.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

E. Robert Stephens, Ph.D., is director of the Institute for Regional Studies in Education. He may be reached by phone at 405-341-1147, by fax at 405-341-3366, and by email at erstephens@aol.com.

Wayne RESA Challenges the Future in Southeastern Michigan

by
Frederica Frost, Sally Vaughn, and Michael P. Flanagan

Introduction

ESAs in metropolitan areas simultaneously fulfill a variety of roles that enhance the effectiveness and sometimes even assure the survival of schools, particularly during periods of turmoil in the economy and/or the political environment, or during major demographic shifts.

Through staff development, computer services, consultant services and purchasing agreements, RESA's services benefit taxpayers with substantial savings by enabling districts to concentrate more time, money and energy on the direct instruction of students.

Guided by its mission of "Leading...Learning for All," Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) focuses on the success of all students. As the county service agency, RESA takes very seriously its co-responsibility, with constituent districts, for the failures and successes of student learning. To reach its mission, RESA leverages its services to achieve the greatest impact on learning by the greatest number of students. RESA constantly seeks to ensure that new and improved approaches to teaching, technology and collaboration reach every corner of its service area.

Wayne County, located in southeastern Michigan and including the Detroit Public Schools with its 175,000 students, encompasses a geographic area the size of the seventeenth largest state and constitutes a microcosm of U.S. society. Constituent districts together represent great diversity in socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, religion, and language. The largest of Michigan's 57 ESAs, RESA coordinates programs in 34 districts with a total of 580 public school buildings, 61 public school academies, and 199 private schools, which together serve nearly 500,000 children. As a measure of poverty, students receiving free and reduced lunches range from less than one percent to 81 percent across districts, with an average of 47 percent. Enrollment in Wayne County districts ranges from about 1,000 students to nearly 175,000 students. At RESA, a professional staff of 52 consultants provides services to schools and educational organizations in Wayne County, as well as other parts of Michigan and the nation through collaboration with universities, community institutions and other regional agencies.

Understanding Wayne RESA

What Are RESA's Major Goals?

RESA's three major goals focus directly on helping local districts meet the needs of all students:

- All school buildings in Wayne County will make substantial yearly progress in raising student achievement levels.
- Wayne County schools and their communities will receive support services that enable them to focus on learning for all.
- Public policy will be initiated and influenced to support equitable, quality education for all Wayne County students and families.

Goal development began with RESA's mission, "Leading....Learning for All." Goals were designed by RESA's School Improvement Team, a committee representing local districts, the community and RESA staff.

How Does Wayne RESA Assist Local School Districts?

RESA is committed both to working with districts to improve student learning and to helping teachers and administrators do their jobs better, more efficiently, and more cost-effectively. Services to local districts focus on five major categories:

- Student achievement
- Leadership
- Technology
- Partnerships
- Public school academies

How is RESA Governed?

Wayne RESA is governed by a Board of Education composed of five members, each elected for a six-year term. Board members are elected by one vote from each of the 34 constituent local district boards of education (Mich. Compiled Laws 380.611). Representation is at-large and not based on school district enrollment, although not more than two members from a single district may serve concurrently.

Michigan's Legal Framework: Issues of Service and Oversight

Relevant Law

Although there is a broad range of statutes and regulations which bears on Michigan ESAs, the overall legal framework allows individual ESAs to develop policies and programs which are responsive to their regions, consistent with their financial capacity (Mich. Compiled Laws 380.627).

Accordingly, ESAs have considerable flexibility in determining how best to use their available resources. They can focus on a select number of initiatives to further their individual educational mission and eliminate practices that are not as highly valued. Whether or not a particular program is equally valued by all constituents is often a subject of some debate, but that debate is typically a regional educational issue, rather than a legal one.

Conflict Between Service and Oversight Requirements

State law establishes specific fiduciary and oversight duties that Michigan ESAs are required to perform. The potential exists for occasions when the "watchdog" responsibilities can impair the primary service functions between the ESA and a particular constituent school district. However, this rarely occurs. For example, RESA assists its constituent districts in carrying out pupil accounting functions, including offering interpretation and advice about particular situations and dissemination of information about frequent rule changes. Districts are particularly dependent upon RESA to assist them with their student counts because the rules can be difficult to understand and apply (Mich. Compiled Laws 380.1571).

Pupil accounting represents a sensitive issue to local school districts because the amount of state funds received by each district is closely related to the number of students counted. The counts must be audited before final acceptance for state funding purposes, and RESA has historically carried out the audit function for local districts. When a RESA audit results in a reduction to the total count, the local district experiences a reduction in state funding.

To a local district, this outcome can unfortunately feel punitive, as if RESA were the cause of a loss in state funding. This can result in tension between the two organizations unless there is a directed effort to clarify the circumstances that caused the outcome. RESA staff take care to provide ample information prior to the audit, insuring that local personnel understand the guidelines. As a result, out of the thousands of state aid membership audits conducted by RESA over the past 20 years, only a handful have been appealed to the Michigan Department of Education. In all but one case, the Department upheld RESA's findings. An appeal occurred only once when a local district enrolled students living outside its attendance zone without obtaining the requisite release from the students' district of residence. The district lost its appeal to the Michigan State Supreme Court (Mich. Compiled Laws 380.951).

The second major example of possible conflict between ESAs and their local constituent districts is related to Special Education requirements. RESA does not directly operate programs. It does, however, provide extensive technical assistance, which is coordinated with its legally mandated monitoring responsibilities. These can result in rulings that a local district may consider unwelcome (Mich. Compiled Laws 380.17811), but this occurs infrequently. Most rulings involve procedural errors in the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) process, with the common resolution being the reconvening of IEP Team meetings or instructing the involved personnel on the procedural requirements. There are occasions, however, where RESA may have to require a school district to hire additional staff so that special education teacher/pupil ratios do not exceed state mandates.

Recent regulatory changes at the federal level, i.e., IDEA 97, may increase the possibility of "special education" conflicts between ESAs and their constituent districts. These changes emphasize the need for monitoring agencies to consider awarding compensatory education in instances where formal complaint investigations have substantiated noncompliance with special education regulations.

Contributions To School Improvement

One of RESA's primary roles is to lead the next educational revolution since current practices, although they served the 19th century well, are no longer sustainable.

The Next Generation of School Improvement.

RESA's school improvement policies and practices encompass a view of school improvement that includes both continuous improvement and the more radical approach of structural reform. Also known as

total process reengineering and comprehensive school reform (Ross et al., 2000), structural reform is defined as the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of educational processes to achieve dramatic improvements in student achievement. Simply stated, it means starting over. School improvement alone is insufficient to bring about the kind of reform that educational institutions require immediately. In comparison to relying on a single change strategy, leveraging institutional reform and incremental school improvement has a higher probability of resulting in rapid, dramatic leaps in schools' capacities to effectively reach all students.

The nature of reform that results from school improvement and the type that results from structural reform differ in their magnitude and impact. School improvement is based on a Deming-like approach that builds on the existing organizational structure. This results in incremental change, but not dramatic reform, and amounts to tinkering around the edges of the existing system.

School Improvement in Wayne County Schools.

RESA's school improvement efforts focus on the use of data to monitor and promote continuous progress through concentrated interventions in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These efforts include:

- Technical assistance for lower performing schools,
- Professional development targeted to local needs,
- Relationship building with local personnel.

Technical assistance to lower performing schools. Technical assistance to lower performing schools includes targeted consultant services in the areas of measurement and analysis, curriculum alignment and individualized services based upon a school's particular needs.

Professional development targeted to local needs. Professional development related to school improvement goals is focused on long-term, sustained training.

Relationship building with local personnel. RESA administration meets regularly with local district counterparts at the superintendent, associate superintendent and director levels. District level participation in intervention initiatives helps to guarantee success, creating partnerships focusing on the needs of the individual school.

Central City: The Detroit Public Schools

The Detroit Public Schools (DPS) serves almost 175,000 students in 245 schools. RESA supports reform initiatives in DPS, and school improvement services for Detroit do not differ substantially from those for other Wayne County districts. The size of DPS, however, makes change more difficult. For example, working with ten buildings in Detroit represents less than five percent of the total number of schools, while ten buildings in another area may encompass the entire district. Further, the size of Detroit makes the establishment of an ongoing relationship with the central office absolutely critical for the coordination of planning and service. Coordinating initiatives and communication continue to be challenges for both RESA and DPS.

RESA's Role in Addressing Persistent Policy Issues in Education

Within its broad legal framework, RESA plays a dual role in developing and influencing public policy. The focus changes constantly as yesterday's issues give way to new priorities. Currently, two primary issues within Wayne County and across the state contain substantive policy concerns: accountability and choice. Other issues include teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and availability of substitutes.

School and District Accountability

School and district accountability in Michigan was originally established by PA 25 (1990), which contained two major provisions:

- A school will be accredited based on results from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP).
- Schools and districts will publish an annual report to their communities.

Over the years, state accreditation guidelines have been revised in an attempt to reflect continuous improvement. Recently, under tremendous pressure from the educational community, the new state superintendent completely discarded the existing system. The Department of Education has designed a new system, Education YES!, which sets high standards and assesses each child's progress toward those standards. The standards include the following provisions:

- All elementary and middle school children will read independently and use math to solve problems at grade level.
- All students will experience a year of growth for a year of instruction.
- All high school students, in addition to demonstrating high academic achievement, will have an education plan leading them to preparation for success.

The proposed system will use multiple measures and will include achievement factors including the MEAP, continuous improvement, professional development, and parent participation.

Choice

As a public policy issue, choice is here to stay. Parents increasingly demand a voice in determining where their children attend school. Thirty-four states now have charter school laws and 1,100 schools operate in 26 states. The United States Supreme Court has declared vouchers constitutional. Other vehicles for choice are available or under discussion: magnet schools within a district or consortium of districts, cross-district choice, dual enrollment, online courses, and tuition tax credits and vouchers.

Michigan was one of the first states to approve public school academies (PSAs), commonly called charter schools. Under Michigan legislation (Part 6A of the Mich. Compiled Laws 380), charter schools are public schools with public oversight of public funds. RESA played a leadership role in supporting PSAs as a way to:

- create alternatives within the existing system so as to meet the needs of all students,
- address the legitimate desires of parents and students for options, while preserving what works in the existing public system.

RESA has authorized nine PSAs in Wayne County. One is the Henry Ford Academy at Henry Ford Museum/Greenfield Village, while another is the Ben Carson Academy at the county juvenile jail. RESA has

also encouraged local districts to form consortia to charter their own PSAs to meet the needs of all their students and to demonstrate their recognition of the need for change and choice.

Other public policies related to choice, such as cross-district choice, dual enrollment, and on-line courses appear to represent legitimate tools to open the system and provide parents with meaningful alternatives. For example, Michigan allows students to attend schools outside their local district boundaries if the receiving district has declared itself to be a "district of choice." While cross-district choice provides parents with options that do not mandate their child's school of attendance based on real estate and residency, preliminary data suggests an unintended result: increased racial and ethnic segregation among districts.

If equitable choice is to be achieved, RESA must monitor and examine the impact of this public policy not only on student learning, but also on schools and their communities. This issue has potential impact on RESA's mission, "Leading...Learning for ALL," as it represents a current policy issue impacting the ability of all students to achieve success in a public school setting.

In the same way, the impact of vouchers as a means to provide choice must be carefully examined. If poorly designed, vouchers can make a mockery of parental choice. Vouchers that use public dollars to support schools with strict admissions criteria do not provide parental choice, but institutional choice. If a school can reject a student, the choice belongs to the school, not to parents or children. As an extension, vouchers could lead to a "balkanization" of the public system, with schools open only to students from one racial group or one religious group.

Because democracy was founded on an educational system that brings people together from all backgrounds and experiences, it cannot be sustained by a system that separates and divides. RESA's role is to lead a public dialogue about ways to provide choice, while preserving our democratic system.

In summary, RESA's role in developing and influencing policy is complex. As the county educational leader, RESA actively seeks opportunities at the local, regional, state, and national levels to advocate for policies that support learning for all.

Challenges Facing Wayne RESA

Regardless of other considerations, RESA's priorities focus on improving the educational performance of all students regardless of their circumstances. This represents RESA's central mission, and the most important role of ESAs nationwide. They must challenge all districts to do what is best for all students, even populations beyond the boundaries of a particular district. With this perspective, RESA faces the following major challenges:

- improving student achievement within schools,
- addressing equity issues stemming from disparities among districts in Wayne County,
- recruiting and retaining competent teachers for local districts,
- addressing the changing role of technology in schools and society.

Improving Student Achievement within Public Schools

For RESA, a major challenge is the failure of the public education system to meet the needs of as many as 150,000 of the 500,000 children in Wayne County. Most of these children live in poverty, and the relationship between socioeconomic status and levels of achievement in school is clear: students living in poverty achieve at significantly lower levels than students from more affluent homes.

As an educational entity, RESA alone cannot solve the societal issue of poverty. However, RESA has made an organization-wide commitment to exploring whatever it takes to improve learning for all students—and especially for those living in poverty. Working with educators, parents, community and business groups, RESA advocates that all parties interested in improving education keep an open mind to any strategy that will significantly improve learning. The following strategies are particularly encouraged:

- Benchmark success.
- Use data to drive innovation.
- Advocate for a re-conceptualization of how schools define success.
- Focus on reaching all students.
- Energize the entire community around the belief that all children can learn.

Another critical challenge lies in assisting districts to work successfully with an increasingly diverse population of students and families so that learning opportunities are extended to all. This means that achievement gaps must be closed, including gaps between ethnic groups, between socioeconomic strata, by disability and by gender. Therefore, the issues reach beyond curricular or instructional effectiveness to the more difficult problem of equity.

In leading efforts toward new ways of teaching, RESA strongly emphasizes the importance of reaching all and a "whatever it takes" attitude to break down systemic barriers. Until recently, for example, professional development was always done one way, the workshop way. No one is to blame; for decades this approach represented the best that was known. Now in a different world, one of the biggest challenges facing a service agency is to lead, both those in local districts and at RESA, in a new direction, one that focuses on the application of effective instructional strategies to all classrooms.

The danger of not addressing these problems effectively will result in a continuing erosion of confidence in public education. Unless all students experience success in school, evidence of poor performance will continue to provide data to those who would undermine the current system.

Addressing Equity Issues Stemming From Disparities Among Districts in Wayne County

Wayne County districts vary on many dimensions relevant to educational effectiveness. Disparities in funding and socioeconomic levels result in different degrees of access to a variety of educational opportunities, as well as dramatic discrepancies in the condition of school facilities.

Differences in district size create varying levels of service requirements, particularly when size interacts with economics. As a result, some districts need direct service with high levels of involvement, while others need only occasional, shorter-term assistance. Examples include grant writing, which can range from pointing local staff to possible sources of funds to helping to write the proposal, and policy development which can range from providing parameters to actually drafting a policy. The capacity to use technology represents another area dramatically affected by differences between districts; for example, narrow bandwidth and outdated computers can limit access to online training and other Internet-related opportunities.

Recruiting Competent Teachers

Education faces a serious teacher shortage and how RESA and other educational agencies actively support districts in locating qualified young people can impact the future of public education. Improving schools require a dedicated, competent teaching staff. RESA's initiatives to address this challenge include:

- implementation of an internet-based teacher recruitment and application process, which complements and expands recruitment efforts by districts,
- substitute teacher training,
- college scholarships for highly qualified high school students.

Another major problem facing local districts is the shortage of substitute teachers, particularly in the Detroit Public Schools. In response, RESA provides training for potential substitute teachers, typically workers with large amounts of time available from their regular full-time jobs, such as firefighters or airline personnel. To be eligible for substitute training, applicants must have at least 90 college/university credit hours and a desire to have a positive impact on children's lives.

The initiative focuses on both recruiting candidates for this position and providing basic skills training such as classroom management. This highly successful effort has resulted in cadres of substitutes available for Detroit and other local districts.

One major factor in Detroit's teacher shortage has been an inadequate supply of new teachers entering the profession. Accordingly, the Future Teachers Scholarship Fund attempted to alleviate this problem by encouraging highly qualified high school students to choose teaching as a career. During its first year, full four-year scholarships of $10,000 were awarded to 34 promising high school seniors, at least one student from each of RESA's constituent districts and partial scholarships of $2,500 were awarded to four adult career changers.

Addressing the Changing Role of Technology in Schools and Society

As an increasing number of technology-based programs become available to districts and as the Internet continues to grow, how RESA supports its constituent districts and insures that they have equitable access to the newest equipment and communications networks represents a critical issue.

Professional development pertains directly to technology equity. While RESA provides professional development about how to integrate technology into instruction, training really needs to begin at the pre-service level. At this time, current teachers are learning the technology basics rather than upgrading the foundation skills they needed to learn as part of their pre-service training. RESA is working with universities and pre-service teacher education programs to incorporate technology training into teacher education programs.

Why RESA's Role is Vital for Metropolitan Area School Systems

RESA can provide two major benefits to its constituents: leadership and opportunities for collaboration and cooperation. The latter goal can be achieved by forging a variety of partnerships to provide multiple perspectives and concentrated effort in accomplishing a wide range of educational initiatives.

Leading Effective Practices and Structural Reform

RESA's leadership role focuses on students and sharing responsibility for their learning. With this perspective, some RESA policy positions are unpopular with local school personnel, such as support for public school academies. Maintaining relationships while pushing for change demands careful management of a gentle tension that both supports and challenges.

With that consideration, RESA takes on a variety of leadership roles at all levels of the educational community. For example, RESA acts as an objective outsider giving a perspective to local district problems and opportunities and linking LEAs to best practices within the county, state and beyond.

RESA leads the way toward data-based instructional practices by promoting effective programs and approaches. Emphasizing the necessity for substantive evaluation of pilot programs can assist districts in asking the questions necessary to screen the substantive innovation from the latest fad.

RESA can provide a model for change in local districts. At RESA, a clear focus on student achievement for all students and persistence in discovering new uses for technology has created a proactive organization that constantly nudges its constituents to follow its lead.

RESA attempts to model effective practices in professional development. Training programs are not evaluated as successful merely by assuring that participants walk away with happy faces. Professional development must be followed by continued and sustained intervention that examines skill development, behavior change and, ultimately, improved student achievement.

Collaboration

To facilitate collaboration, RESA organizes consortia of local districts throughout the county, and serves as a liaison between local districts and other agencies, both public and private, thereby seeking economies of scale.

RESA has established consortia in a variety of areas; for example,

- The Achievement Group, a consortium of five Michigan ESAs, is focused on increasing the achievement level of students in 718 low performing schools,
- The Galileo Project, funded through the Kellogg Foundation, provides leadership training for teachers in seven local districts, two community colleges and two ESAs,
- Computer services are provided for 60 local districts throughout the Southeast Michigan region.
- Cooperative purchasing agreements save local districts nearly $2 million dollars a year.
- A consortium of six Michigan ESAs have trained early elementary teachers in the use of the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile, designed to monitor student reading progress.

The consortium approach bridges the gap among urban, suburban and rural school districts by providing opportunities to work cooperatively in exploring ways to eliminate artificial barriers between districts and by encouraging development of a regional identity.

Students should receive comparable services regardless of where they reside. RESA assists districts in raising their standards to a level of that reaches toward equity. Since RESA is often expected to see the larger picture, it can help to match up districts based on their individual strengths and weaknesses as well as adopt effective local practices for implementation throughout the county. With a vigilant eye on equity for all students and the benefits of diversity, RESA is becoming an organization that reaches out to all members of the community, emphasizing the strengths inherent in every culture and the improvements that come from collaboration and cooperation.

Liaison

RESA acts as a catalyst and focal point for communication and resource centralization involving a wide variety of governmental, philanthropic and private agencies. RESA forms natural alliances with higher education institutions, business and corporate partners, and community-based organizations other than public schools to enhance learning opportunities that meet the needs of large groups of teachers and students.

To have the greatest impact on the greatest number of children, RESA has forged a wide variety of collaboratives with other organizations and agencies to impact learning. For example, RESA's Cultural Collaborative for Learning brought together the 15 key cultural organizations in the region and the 34 local districts in Wayne County to integrate the arts with curriculum. As a result of this initiative, students participate in live, interactive teleconferences that bring the cultural institutions to their classrooms. Ultimately, the Collaborative created an interactive "Cultural Channel" and an Internet-based Learning System for learning core curriculum through the study of arts events and exhibits.

RESA also acts as a liaison between education and business. This occurs in a variety of formats such as chartering the Henry Ford Academy, an exemplary public school academy with a national reputation. RESA provides leadership in career preparation initiatives including the Educator in Business Internship Program, which takes teachers to business to observe first hand the link between academics and the world of work. Another example is RESA's participation on the Workforce Development Board, charged with coordinating career preparation throughout Wayne County.

As the foregoing examples suggest, the role of RESA in establishing extensive relationships within community agencies, private business and government representatives has the power to leverage essential services for local districts in a manner that most individual districts working independently could not achieve.

In summary, RESA plays a complex and vital role as leader and collaborator, reaching outside county borders to other districts, the state, and federal agencies to insure that the multiple influences on public education interact to result in higher performance for all children.

Concluding Comments

Wayne RESA is committed to its responsibility, shared with constituent districts, for student learning. With a strong belief in education's fundamental role in preserving America's democracy, RESA is dedicated to dramatically changing education for the better, and for advocating change and innovation so that learning truly reaches all. As Winston Churchill once said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." RESA welcomes the opportunity to "Lead...Learning for All."

Bibliography

Andrews, D.C. and Stalick, S.K. (1994). *Business reengineering: The survival guide*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Fuller, B., and Elmore, R.F. (1996). *Who chooses? Who loses? Culture, institutions and the unequal effects of school choice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hunter, B. (1996). The politics of educational service agencies: 1996-2000. *Perspectives*, Vol. 2, 1-6.

Kirkpatrick, D. (1994). *Evaluating training programs: The four levels*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Ross, S., Alberg, M., Smith, L., Anderson, L., Bol, L., Dietrich, A., Lowther, D., and Phillipsen, L. (2000). Using whole-school restructuring designs to improve educational outcomes: The Memphis story at year 3. *Teaching and Change*, Vol. 7 (2), 111-126.

Worthen, B. and Sanders, J. (1991). The changing face of educational evaluation. *Theory into Practice*. 30 (1), 3-12.

Fredrica Frost, Ph.D., MBA, is Research and Evaluation Consultant at Wayne Regional Educational Services Agency in Wayne, Michigan. She may be reached by phone at 734-334-1300 and by email at frostf@resa.net.

Sally Vaughn, Ph.D., former Associate Superintendent at the Wayne Regional Educational Services Agency, now serves as Superintendent, Livingston Educational Service Agency in Howell, Michigan. She may be reached by phone at 517-546-5550, by fax at 517-546-7047 and by email at vaughn@scnc.lesa.k12.mi.us.

Michael P. Flanagan, former superintendent of the Wayne Regional Educational Services Agency, now serves as executive director of the Michigan Association of School Administrators. He may be reached by phone at 517-327-9262 and by email at m@gomasa.org.

Readers should note that the origins of this article date back to a previous administration of Wayne RESA. The current focus of the organization may differ in some instances.

The Oregon Trail:

Ensuring Success for Every Student Through Regional Services, or, Compared to This, Lewis and Clark Didn't Have It so Bad

by
Edward L. Schmitt

In 1803 President Thomas Jefferson charged Meriwether Lewis and William Clark with finding "the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent for the purpose of commerce." These brave explorers found their way to the Oregon territory in 554 days, traveling 4,132 miles from Wood River, Missouri, to the mouth of the Columbia River where it meets the Pacific Ocean.

The journey was a remarkable success. In addition to discovering the navigable branches of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers, the explorers made extensive notes and drawings of the plants, animals and native nations they encountered along the way. Their blend of adventure, discovery and learning has left a strong imprint on the character of Oregonians ever since.

A prominent role for public education has been assigned to a regional agency since Oregon achieved statehood in 1859. During the past 163 years, this agency has had different titles: county education office, intermediate education district, and finally, education service district (ESD). However, their purpose has remained remarkably consistent and reflects the expansive thinking of those early policy makers. Above all, the role of ESDs is to insure that consistent quality educational opportunities is afforded to students in every corner of the state – to students rich or poor, isolated or living in communities. Legislation was enacted over the years to reflect the evolving role of regional service agencies. The issues have changed, as have the standards and the means to achieve them. But the goal remains the same, a high quality public education for all.

In 2001 the Oregon Legislature redefined the mission of education service districts: "The mission of education service districts is to assist school districts and the Department of Education in achieving Oregon's education goals by providing equitable, high quality, cost-effective and locally responsive educational services at a regional level." The statute also documents the "important role" of ESDs in achieving "interorganizational cooperation and coordination" with school districts and other "child- and youth-serving organizations." Also, ESDs "must respect the differences in needs of school districts by using varied and flexible service delivery modes and by giving school districts the opportunity to participate in decisions about what services will be offered." Careful planning with the component school districts provides an appropriate balance of services to meet specific needs of various districts. Thus, the statutory basis for ESDs is broad, comprehensive and only moderately prescriptive.

Multnomah Education Service District: Serving Oregon's Most Diverse Students through a Decade of Taxpayer Revolts

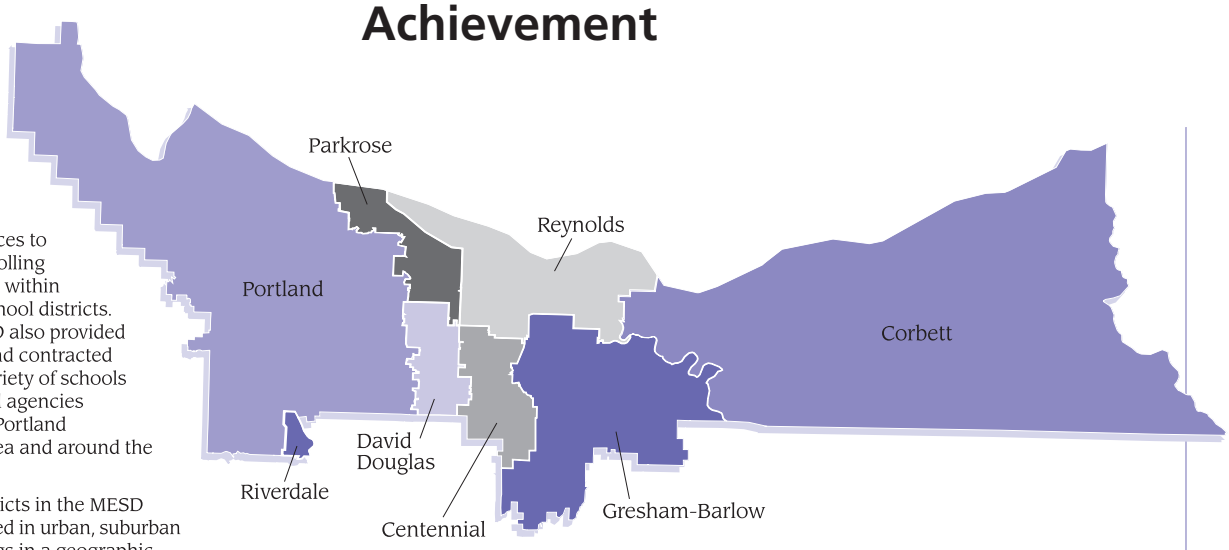
Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) differs in many ways from the other 20 education service districts in Oregon. MESD's primary service region is Multnomah County, Oregon's most populous county. MESD serves the Portland Public Schools and seven other local districts of varying size and demographic character. [Chart 1 illustrates characteristics of the component districts served by MESD.] Portland Public Schools ranks 70 in the largest 100 districts in the U.S. and is the only truly urban district in Oregon, educating 54,000 students, 56% of the county total. Thirty-four percent of these are ethnic minorities. The remaining 44% of the county's students reside in districts with enrollments as large as 13,000 and as small as 450. These can be characterized as ex-urban, suburban and rural. This unique demographic mix creates special challenges for MESD.

Chart 1

Component Districts: Multnomah ESD's Partners in Shared Achievement

In 2000-01, Multnomah ESD provided resolution services to 160 schools enrolling 92,896 students within eight diverse school districts. Multnomah ESD also provided grant-funded and contracted services to a variety of schools and educational agencies throughout the Portland metropolitan area and around the State of Oregon.

The school districts in the MESD region are located in urban, suburban and rural settings in a geographic area which stretches from Portland's west hills to the foothills of the Cascades, and from the Columbia River on the north to the Clackamas County line in the south. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that people 660,486 live in the Multnomah ESD district.



Profile of Component Districts

	Size (sq. miles)	Schools Elem	MS	HS	■Other	Total	2000-01 Enrollment	Students rec'd special education
Centennial	21	6	1	1	1	9	6,057	11.5%
Corbett	96	1	1	1		3	576	9.5%
David Douglas	12	8	2	2		12	8,173	11.1%
Gresham-Barlow	54	10	5	2	1	18	11,385	10.4%
Parkrose	15	4	1	1		6	3,507	11.0%
Portland	146	65	19	13		97	53,174	10.6%
Reynolds	27	10	3	1		14	9,571	11.5%
Riverdale	2	1	0	1		▲2	453	10.7%
All combined:	**373**	**105**	**33**	**22**		**163**	**92,896**	
Total population:		**660,486**						

■ *Some school districts operated alternative schools which may enroll middle school and high school students*

▲ *Riverdale School District's elementary school is K-8*

In 1990, Oregon experienced a taxpayer revolt as did other western states. Voters chose to cap property tax rates and make up the loss of revenue to schools by using state income taxes. Since Oregon does not have a sales tax, this move made the Oregon Legislature, rather than local property owners, the major funder of public schools. A consequence of the property tax limitation was a significant loss of local control on the part of individual school districts. Prior to the tax limitation measure, there was strong local community control in Oregon's schools, with 70% of the public education costs born by local taxpayers. Because voters could decide the tax bases and budgets of their communities' schools, a wide variation in tax dollar support for school districts existed across the state. This meant schools offered different levels of program offerings, facilities, co-curricular activities and other facets of public schools. When the district budgets failed to keep pace with the costs of programs or enrollment increases, the school board could authorize an election to establish a higher tax base that then became the new floor for future annual increases.

The disparity of wealth among communities across the state (the timber industry was waning while high tech industries and international trade experienced growth), enabled some school districts to enjoy adequate tax bases to support and enhance excellent educational programs. Others had to close their doors before the end of the school year due to lack of funds. With new found control of school revenue and funding, the Oregon State Legislature also involved itself in what had traditionally been the business of school boards: setting policy, establishing curriculum and determining accountability measures. The Legislature attached conditions, requirements and consequences to its financial authority.

Statewide Equity Funding: Some Up but Most Down

Portland Public Schools, the state's largest district by far, had a tax base approved by its voters in 1982 and enjoyed a reputation as a well-funded, high performing urban district. In the name of statewide equity, however, the Legislature reacted to the tax limitation referendum by phasing in a new funding formula, compressing higher and lower spending school districts toward a mean over a period of seven years. Under this policy, Portland schools became a case study in how a great urban district, without local support and control, can be damaged beyond recognition.

In the 1980s, Portland flourished as a dynamic educational laboratory for creative and innovative curriculum and instruction models. It boasted a curriculum department of over 30 staff and a testing department of 25. By the end of the statewide funding compression effort, the research department had been reduced to a testing office of 5 and the curriculum department had been eliminated. Other well-funded districts within the county experienced similar reductions, but their cuts were more to specific programs in individual schools and increases in class size.

On the positive side, a few other districts that had been on the lower side of the spending equation prior to the referendum were able to add some of the programs their neighboring districts had enjoyed in the days of local control but were now faced with reducing.

This approach to creating equitable tax resources for all public school districts produced another significant consequence besides the shift of control from local boards to the state capitol. It either created or unearthed adversarial relationships between neighboring districts. As those on the losing end fought to resist the reductions, others that were gaining resources criticized their neighbors for their political efforts to retain programs which poorer districts had not enjoyed in the past.

Repeating the Equalization Process with ESDs

After six years of this divisive statewide squabble over education funding, the Legislature turned its attention to the 21 education service districts. They presented an even greater financial disparity than that found in the local districts, due to a variety of historical, geographic and political reasons. One ESD received state resources of over $2,000 per student; another got only $54 per student. The statewide average was $230 per student.

The ESD funding disparity presented a complex dilemma for the state's lawmakers. Voters of some local districts with high tax bases had approved lower tax bases for ESDs. Those districts used their own general funds to contract with their ESD for services. Other districts had approved higher ESD tax expecting services would be provided to enhance the local districts' efforts without tapping district funds. In addition to voter approval, ESD boards of directors determined whether or not to levy the full authority of their approved tax base each year.

The Legislature's initial thought was to treat the ESD issue in the same manner as it had treated local districts – phase in a compression equalization model, but over a shorter time period. If enacted, those ESDs funded significantly above the state average would face layoffs, program eliminations and facility closures. These actions not only would have been highly disruptive to the ESD itself, but also to the districts relying on its programs with budgets in place anticipating the ESD resources.

Ironically those ESDs significantly below the mean were faced with the prospect of a different type of problem. Quadrupling the funding of an ESD in a relatively remote section of the state could have been seen as throwing money at a social/political issue; i.e., equalization, without recognition of the implications. Such ESDs could not gear up their operations to utilize the newly found resources effectively.

A Missed Connection between K-12 and ESDs

The Oregon Association of Education Service Districts (OAESD), through its legislative committee, developed a platform to address these predicted problems. The legislative platform proposed freezing the higher funded ESDs at their current dollar level and diverting all growth in statewide revenues to the ESDs below the average. In reality, due to contractual obligations and inflationary increases, this translated into a significant reduction over the two years. For Multnomah ESD, for instance, the budget reduction necessary for the first year was $730,000 and in the second year it exceeded $1 million.

Balancing the budget required making substantive reductions in programs offered to districts. So, while the legislative platform urged lawmakers to view ESD equity as an extension of K-12 equalization, in fact there was no connection made. Local districts in Multnomah County that had been flat funded for years because they exceeded statewide averages were faced with losing additional resources via their ESD's reductions.

The legislative committee avoided a permanent formula adjustment beyond the coming biennium. Lawmakers accepted the proposal of an interim study committee to reanalyze the mission, goals and function of ESDs across the state and to base future funding allocations on more rational bases than a simple average dollars per student formula.

For instance, due to the availability of social services and affordable healthcare, metropolitan area ESDs serve a higher proportion of low income, minority and disabled students than do suburban or rural areas. They also experience a higher cost labor market due primarily to employer competition and higher housing costs. Remote areas, on the other hand, have less efficient staffing patterns available as specialists must travel many miles to serve fewer students. Specialized staff are much harder to recruit, hire, and retain without financial incentives in these areas. So all ESDs made their case for unique circumstances that require special consideration.

The 1999 Legislature attempted to deal with this issue, and it assigned a special task force to develop recommendations for the 2001 Legislative assembly. The task force included legislators, local and ESD board members and local and ESD superintendents. The debate was rancorous, both inside the OAESD group and in the legislative committees dealing with finance and education. After many hours of meetings and conversations, all 21 ESD Superintendents agreed on a funding formula. It addressed some of the needs of all members, although, in the absence of adequate funding, it did not make everyone whole. For the five very small agencies, the plan provided for their state funding to be increased during the succeeding five years so that they would each receive $1 million to operate. For the five highest funded agencies, the plan phased in a five-year reduction formula with the stipulation that no single year's reduction could exceed 5% of the total amount it received from the state. For the remaining 11 ESDs, the plan applied all remaining new dollars to increasing their funding on an equal per pupil basis over the five years.

This funding plan, which was adopted, was written to sunset at the end of the biennium. While it did not bind the next legislature to continue the plan, it provided a reasoned approach that was generally well-supported. State officials observed that the next session would probably want to avoid reopening this potentially volatile issue.

Oregon ESDs: Prime Contributors to School Improvement

Oregon is among the states at the forefront of educational reform and school improvement. The Oregon Legislature in 1991 announced a series of educational goals to make the state's students the best educated in the nation by 2000 and the best educated in the world by 2010. It established aggressive standards that students needed to meet to earn the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and the Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM). It also established the Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS) aligning high school curricula with the state's system of higher education.

The Oregon Department of Education issued standards for local districts to meet as they developed their own programs. The timeline for implementation, unfortunately, coincided with the resource reductions discussed earlier, as well as cuts in the staffing budget for the Oregon Department of Education itself.

These resource reductions, coupled with local boards' and superintendents' skepticism about the legislative will to enforce the new standards, stalled coordinated efforts by districts to develop programs leading to the new certificates on the adopted timeline. Efforts that were undertaken lacked a systematic approach and often resulted in duplicative, haphazard and incomplete results.

When it became evident that the heightened expectations were real, even though some of the early deadlines were delayed a few years, the state's ESDs found themselves in a good position to coordinate staff training and curriculum development necessary to meet the new standards.

Forging New Relationships Among All School Districts

In MESD's region, the smaller districts had worked most closely with ESD school improvement staff over time. For them to meet new requirements, it was a matter of adjusting some of the specific activities and outcomes and sharing each other's expertise under the coordinating and leadership efforts of MESD staff.

The large urban school district, Portland, was accustomed to addressing state initiatives by itself. Now it was without the resources for meeting this challenge. New relationships were required for Portland to join the collaboration that existed among the neighboring districts. Today a much more collaborative arrangement exists among the districts, including Portland Public Schools, and MESD in working together to meet the new state standards.

In addition to curriculum and staff development, MESD also led the development of a Internet-based student record keeping system that could track academic progress by district, school, class and individual student. This program, called "ScoreBook," was the result of input from districts under the direction of MESD staff to achieve a balance between uniformity and customization for individual district needs. Again, Portland was late in joining this effort as it had relied heavily on its own testing department for student achievement reports.

A third related area of school improvement was the development of an off-grade assessment instrument. The state tests at grades 3, 5, 8 and 10 to determine students' advancement toward reaching the benchmark goals that would culminate in the CIM at grade 10. MESD, in partnership with two neighboring ESDs and CTB McGraw-Hill, developed off-grade assessment instruments to be administered at grades 4, 6, 7 and 9 to provide predictive data on students' likelihood of meeting the on-grade benchmarks (Campbell, 2001). Portland was again slow in joining this effort because of its long, independent assessment tradition. It should be noted that Portland has now become a strong proponent of these MESD products and services.

A fourth area of MESD leadership in school improvement was one-to-one and small group consultation by staff development specialists. These individuals had been well-regarded by metro area districts that had not employed such specialists themselves. Portland, having lost most of its excellent staff development specialists through budget cuts, had not previously participated in this service. Staff development is the key to preparing teachers to provide instruction that will enable students to meet the stringent state standards. Delivered properly, it is a very expensive proposition. ESDs are providing more of this training on a regional basis without adequate resources for the heightened level of expectations.

Technology and Special Education: Logical Areas of ESD Leadership

Technology is being hailed as possibly the single most critical educational component of the next generation of instructional improvement. ESDs are the logical providers of regional linkages and they have done a superior job over the past several years through the Oregon Public Education Network (OPEN). However, linking every classroom in every school building in the state will be expensive, and neither local districts nor ESDs will have the funding necessary to accomplish this goal by themselves.

Special education costs continue to soar as more high-needs students enter our schools. Regional agencies are in the best position to deliver programs to meet the unique needs of youngsters with severe disabilities, but these are the most expensive children to educate and the funding continues to be inadequate.

Other areas of high need and inadequate resources are education for incarcerated youth, second language learners, and pregnant and parenting teens. Schools also need to expand school health services, alternative learning environments, programs for the gifted and talented, and school-to-work programs.

The numbers of all these groups of students have been increasing and they continue to gravitate to urban centers where local districts are already cash-strapped and unable to keep up with the demands. Deteriorating buildings, bus fleet maintenance, safety and security measures, legal fees due to increasingly litigious parents and advocates place additional demands on districts and divert general fund dollars from the primary mission of teaching and learning. The regional service agency can be one of the most effective resources available to these districts. Since it is able to forge partnerships, develop collaborative arrangements and pull together parties to seek grants and other resources outside normal funding sources, the ESD is a crucial resource to improving urban education.

Success with newly hired staff development specialists shows the need to expand assistance to teachers working in a time of greater expectations. Acceptance of the value of such service is slow when undertaken by a large district that has not felt the need for it in the past. MESD's task was to acknowledge the changed circumstances and present ourselves as a resource to help the district achieve its goals rather that presenting ourselves as the solution for a district in trouble.

Portland's participation in MESD services has expanded under the scrutiny of seven smaller districts intent on not losing the personalized services they have enjoyed for years. This reinforces the role of MESD leadership in fostering a positive interpersonal relationship among the eight superintendents and being able to help explain the unique needs of one district to the others. Collaboration and partnership become empty abstractions if not grounded in strong, supportive relationships based on understanding of one another's individual circumstances. Collaboration among MESD's eight districts has been critically tested recently as the achievement levels of each of the 158 buildings in the eight districts have been reported in the media. The publication of report cards for all schools the past few years has heightened the public's perception of educational quality and added another layer of accountability to a system undergoing major changes.

Financial Equity or Adequacy: The Impact on Quality?

While school improvement and student achievement are the overriding goals that drive our efforts, education is now, more than ever, viewed in the context of public policy. In Oregon, the policy issues are those of financial adequacy and equity and their impact on the overall quality of public education.

Educational discussions have been dominated by the 1990 tax limitation measure ever since that critical event. While the policy and standards involvement from the legislature was felt almost immediately, the fiscal impact was phased in over the decade of the 1990s. The result has been a compression of per-pupil expenditures that has not kept pace with the rate of inflation during that time. Therefore, the equity districts (those below the mean) have increased their funding levels while the districts above that rate have lost not only their projected rate of growth but also the compounded effect of cost-of-living increases over that period. The result is that, today, all districts in the state have been equalized, but the total expenditures for all districts is more than 20% below what it would have been if allowed to grow at just the normal rate of inflation.

So while this has resulted in equalization, it has not addressed the policy issue of adequacy. The adequacy issue is the easiest one to see, as each year local boards are faced with difficult decisions about cutting programs, staff, materials or facilities in order to stay within restricted budgetary limits. High profile

examples of layoffs and school closures serve as counterpoint to legislative debates about increased standards, achievement and teachers' salaries. After years of this wrangling, the mood is shifting back to the allowance for local option taxes to augment the state average allocation and allow local taxpayers to tax themselves somewhat higher, within clearly established limits, to provide for the kinds of educational programs they want for their communities.

This local option is based on the state's concept of adequacy in state funding, which provides another key area of disagreement. Fiscal conservatives see adequacy as a minimal standard the state is obligated to provide while school funding advocates see adequacy as the amount necessary to provide a quality education that is able to provide students with the skills they will need to succeed in the 21st century. In order to quantify this level, the governor appointed a special task force with strong business representation to determine what it should cost to provide the level of education expected by the state in its establishment of standards for the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and the Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM). This committee's work culminated in the "Quality Education Model" report released in 2000. The report developed theoretical school models with corresponding costs associated with implementing them.

Healthy Collaboration vs. Unhealthy Competition

Educational attainment on a world-class level, touted as our nation's top priority, invariably brings in unhealthy competition rather than healthy collaboration. The phenomenon of many organizations chasing too few resources results in lost opportunities and, ironically, in inefficient spending and duplication of services. This situation allows for politics and perception to replace logical decision-making. Oregon has 196 school districts and 21 ESDs. The Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) and Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) represent both groups, but with inadequate state financial resources for all, it is clear that their emphasis lies with their larger constituencies. It is too easy for those who lack a good understanding of ESDs to view them as unnecessary, redundant, or duplicative. This misunderstanding is particularly evident in metropolitan areas where rural educators and lawmakers hold the mistaken notion that large urban and suburban districts are able to provide all the services themselves and do not need ESDs as do more remote areas of the state.

Unfortunately this type of misunderstanding also permeates the thinking of some local superintendents in metropolitan areas. Because large urban districts are able to run certain programs without the services of a regional agency, some ESD funds are passed through to them (called "transits"). This has led to some suburban superintendents asking for the money to operate programs rather than using the existing ESD service. If this attitude is allowed to establish itself among local boards and the legislature, changes could be in store for the urban districts and their ESDs. Maintaining positive, collaborative relationships with all the superintendents becomes an ongoing challenge of the ESD superintendent.

One of the few positive outcomes of reduced funding is that urban districts have had to rely on more services from the ESD and have actually reduced their level of direct transits. Another is the role ESDs play in community or countywide partnerships aimed at helping schools. In an attempt to ease the budget constraints in education, the City of Portland and Multnomah County governments have allocated significant dollars from their budgets to schools since passage of the property tax initiative of 1990. Initially, these were earmarked for Portland Public Schools because that was where the largest and best-publicized staff and program cuts were happening and these were well-publicized. This decision rankled their suburban colleagues, who felt penalized for what they viewed as their more responsible budgeting. These perceptions contributed further toward resentment of Portland's approach.

The presence of ESD leadership on many city and county committees, task forces and commissions helped pave the way for politicians to distribute funds on a more proportional basis across the county and the city, which actually includes five districts. While MESD was historically viewed as an "east county" agency representing districts other than Portland, it is now increasingly understood as a countywide partner and representative of all eight local districts.

But this challenge is far from being met. Portland Public Schools enroll 56% of the students in the county, and "The Oregonian" newspaper and four local television stations have the majority of their audiences within the city limits. High visibility can bring positive results to the urban district, but is can also cause resentment from the surrounding districts. Multnomah ESD experiences a similar attitude from many of the ESDs in the more rural parts of the state. The answer in both cases appears to be what we have been espousing all along: mutual understanding, respect and trust. It is sometimes much easier to articulate this proposition than to live it.

MESD's Role: Vital to Public Perception of Education

The effectiveness of Multnomah ESD is vital for the urban and metro area school districts for much the same reasons as the success of these districts is vital for the prosperity of the state. The reputation of a state's large urban district has a strong influence on the perceived quality and viability of public education within the state. If families are satisfied with the quality of the schools their children attend and the support services they receive, they will remain in the city's public school system and become active supporters of their schools. The stability of the urban school population is linked to the characteristics of a healthy city - good jobs, strong neighborhoods and a sound economy. The absence of this perceived quality results in families choosing to home school, place their children in private schools, or flee to suburban or rural areas of the state, or even leave the state for destinations with better schools.

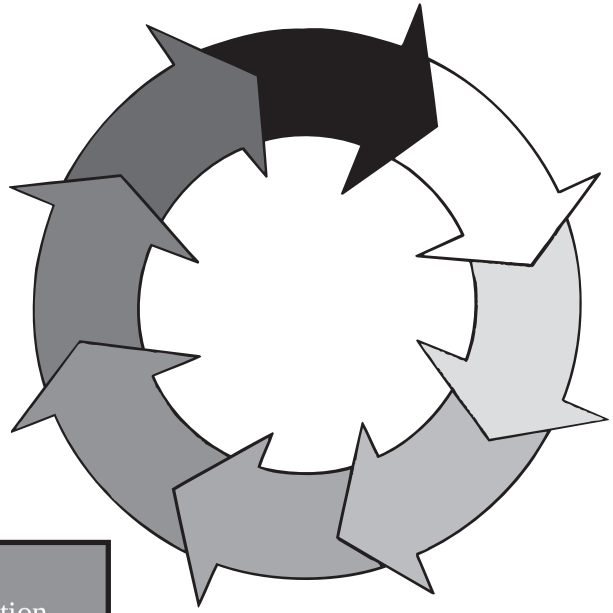
Any of those outcomes places obstacles on a weakened public school system to continue to be the socialization core of a changing society, a place where all children from all backgrounds come together and learn how to live together and how to make their society even stronger in their lifetime. ESDs help to keep schools connected to each other as well as other non-school partners. Urban districts cut loose from ESDs might find themselves struggling alone against formidable challenges from neighboring districts that work together effectively and efficiently. The neediest families would remain in the urban district, placing an even greater burden on strained budgets. The downward spiral, once begun, would be most difficult to reverse.

Results from the statewide standards testing are now reported for all schools. Those not utilizing the resources of their neighboring districts, whether large or small, through their ESD and the State Department of Education may suffer from the lack effective collaboration. With limited financial and human capital, the ESD structure makes the most sense as the link between the State Department and the local school building. Is it reasonable to expect that individual districts should have to compete for a limited number of talented staff against regional organizations that can pool resources? How many "experts" are there in educational technology, instruction, assessment, and the different learning needs of students with disabilities?

This is a high stakes discussion, not only for the large urban districts, but for public education itself. Urban education faces the greatest challenges for success and presents the most pervasive problems. Quite simply, it needs all the help it can get. This help can come from the state and surrounding districts only if there is an intermediary structure with commitments to all parties. And the most effective intermediary is already in place - the metro area ESD.

Chart 2

Multnomah ESD Resolution Programs and Services Approval Process



On-Going
MESD Resolution Advisory Committees meet to determne recommendations for programs and services priorities for the following school year.

August
MESD Board sets budget and planning parameters

November
MESD Advisory Committees' programs/services recommendations reviewed by Superintendents Council.

November
Draft service plan distributed to component district superintendents.

November-December
New resolution services determined.

December
Programs and services resolution proposals submitted to MESD Superintendent. Document prepared for printing.

January
Programs and services resolution document distributed to componenet districts

January-February
Component District Boards act to adopt MESD programs and services resolutions.

March 1
Final service plan determinations by component districts.
Legal deadline for component district approval of programs and services resolutions.

** All resolution programs and services require local district and MESD Board approval. The programs and services offered through the "resolution" process must be approved by 2/3 of local School Board and must represent a majority of the enrolled students in the service area. Although resolutions may be adopted by districts, the districts are not required to select the programs and services.*

The years ahead will present new challenges to the education community, which will need to respond in new ways. The power of combining resources across a strong metropolitan region, rich in technology, health care resources and business activity stands the best chance of helping schools keep up with these sweeping changes. The absence of a united, organized effort leaves open the possibility of lost opportunity and improvement. Future generations of families, without knowing any of the history or background, will be indebted to regional agency staff who report to work each day and grapple with perplexing issues of finding ever better ways of serving society's children who are our greatest hope and resource.

Reference

Campbell, D. (2001). Proving the worth of ESAs: A cost efficiency study for an ESD in Oregon. *Perspectives,* 7, 25-28.

Edward L. Schmitt, Ph.D., is superintendent of the Multnomah Education Service District in Portland, Oregon. He may be reached by phone at 503-257-1504, by fax at 503-257-1525, and by email at edward_schmitt@mesd.k12.or.us.

The Challenge of Building and Maintaining Relationships with Metropolitan School Districts

by
Ronald S. Fielder

History, Purpose and Characteristics of Iowa's AEAs

Grant Wood Area Education Agency is one of 15 area education agencies (AEAs) in the state of Iowa. The AEA system has been in existence since 1975, when the Iowa Legislature passed HF 1163, setting out in specific detail the organization, governance, programs and services, funding, and boundaries of Iowa's system of education service agencies. The purpose of the AEAs was to ensure that every child in Iowa had equal access to educational opportunities.

In 1965, the state provided legislation to allow county superintendents of schools to merge their efforts through "joint county school systems," which was accomplished in at least six areas of the state. However, these mergers were not taking place in areas where the population was sparse. Thus, there were still 79 county superintendencies among the 99 counties in the state.

Also, at this early stage of AEA development, Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, had just been passed. Iowa schools, as well as those in other states, were faced with educating a group of students without the staff and expertise required to meet the needs of these children. Many children with disabilities were either unserved or underserved at home or in institutions.

In addition, federal funding for library materials increased significantly for rural public schools, channeled through the state to county superintendents' offices. Nearly a third of the school districts in the state had no elementary school libraries. Educational leaders soon determined that the "economy of scale" achieved from purchasing and distributing these materials on a regional basis was far more efficient than allocating small amounts of funding to each rural county.

Given all these factors, the impetus for establishing the AEA system was strong and led to an organizational structure that emphasized statewide access to special education and media services through a regional delivery system.

The legal "charter" makes our role very clear. Both the enabling legislation in 1974 and the School Improvement and Accreditation legislation in 1997 established the AEAs with specific responsibilities for special education and media services and, more recently, assigned responsibility to lead school improvement efforts within the state. Thus, it can be asserted that our work is built on the foundation of the three E's: equity, efficiency, and excellence.

Districts do not have the option of withdrawing from AEA services. Even if they chose not to allow our staff on their premises, the funding "collected" by their district and designated for the AEA would continue, and our role in special education compliance would as well. (See below for a more complete discussion of how Iowa's system of funding AEAs is carried out.) There is no incentive for them to refuse services; indeed, it is to their advantage to use us as much as they can.

When drafting the AEA bill, the legislature made a number of decisions that greatly influenced the ability of the AEA system to survive the past 26 years. From the beginning, though autonomous in their policies and procedures, the AEAs were directly linked to the local schools in their regions in two very distinct ways-funding and governance.

Funding

AEAs were given no taxing authority. Their budgets were approved by the State Board of Public Instruction, with the funding for those budgets collected by the respective local school districts in their area through a process called "flow-through" funding. AEA funding became an integral part of the state's school foundation formula, based upon a basic cost per pupil times the state's annual allowable growth (a percentage approved by the legislature for school districts and AEAs) times the number of pupils in the area. Specific per-pupil figures for AEA services in special education, media service, and "other services" were calculated and added onto each local school's budget for the year. The local school district became a "tax collector" for the AEA operating budget.

This "flow-through" process has had both a negative and positive impact on the acceptance of the AEAs. Local school boards are very aware of the impact of AEA services on their school district's property tax levy; they see the figures every year on their budget forms. As new superintendents and new school board members join a district, we face the continuous process of educating them on what those funds are for and why the district can't use them for other than AEA purposes. When a need arises to purchase property or major equipment, or repair and maintain buildings, it is necessary to lease-purchase these items and improvements out of the general operating budget. Overall, this funding process has provided a stable funding source for the AEAs and has spared them from the extensive public information campaigns to influence public referenda that are typical for institutions with taxing authority.

As we pursue new initiatives and develop whole new areas of expertise, there are those who point to the law and question where we get the authority or "mandate" to use funding for such services. So the specificity of the enabling legislation is both a protector and an inhibitor for services. We indeed realize that we are fortunate to be subsidized in the funding formula for most of our services. We are careful not to take that fact for granted. We know full well that subsidized organizations can sometimes become complacent. We make a deliberate effort to treat each educator, parent, and board member as if they were the "paying customer" for everything we provide.

Governance

The local school board members of the school districts they represent elect AEA board members. This process provides local school districts with a direct, representative voice on AEA policies and decisions. Often they come from the ranks of current or retired local school board members or retired school administrators, which increases their credibility with local boards. It also assures the AEAs a more

knowledgeable, politically astute and child-focused board of directors. Currently the Grant Wood AEA Board is comprised of nine individuals; each elected from one of nine "director districts" in the seven county region. The "director districts" are apportioned based on the total population of the area, and each board director is elected through a weighted vote. Six of the nine have served as local district school board members. One is a retired assistant superintendent from the Cedar Rapids School district. Because of the predominant population base of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City, five of the nine GWAEA board members represent these districts.

Grant Wood AEA

Demographics

Grant Wood AEA is located in east central Iowa, serving seven counties in a 4,900 square-mile area with a total population of nearly 403,000 based on the last census. However, it is certain that the general population has increased significantly since then.

The major population center in the area is Cedar Rapids, which is also geographically linked to the communities of Marion and Hiawatha. Four public school districts and an extensive Metropolitan Catholic School System exist in this metropolitan area. In addition, Interstate 380 and I-80 link the Cedar Rapids metro area with Iowa City and the University of Iowa, forming what is now being called the "corridor," a fast growing region with upscale housing developments and industrial parks quickly engulfing the small communities between the two major centers of commerce.

The largest school district in the AEA area, also known as Area 10, is the Cedar Rapids Community School District with 17,745 students. The four "metro" schools in the Cedar Rapids/Marion area comprise 28,134 students. The Iowa City Community School District has 10,535 students. The smallest district being served has a total student population of 217 students. Other districts range in size from approximately 500 to 1800 students. Total student population in the GWAEA region is 63,905.

In all, Grant Wood AEA serves 33 public school districts and 22 approved private schools. Under Iowa Code, approved/accredited nonpublic schools are eligible to receive AEA services. GWAEA is the second largest AEA in the state in terms of student population and budget.

The agency has 517 staff members but 455 full-time equated positions. The agency's budget is $34,000,000, which includes a number of state accounts for which the agency is the fiscal agent. Funding for specific Grant Wood AEA programs totals approximately $28,000,000.

Programs and Services

For most of its organizational life, GWAEA provided programs and services in three broad categories, or "divisions" as they were called. The three divisions were special education, media services, and educational services (curriculum, instruction, management services, etc.)

In 1997, the Iowa Legislature established an accreditation system for Iowa's AEAs and expanded its mission to lead school improvement in the state. All AEAs were to provide services in six core service areas. The programs and services of GWAEA today can best be described by the following core services:

a. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment – offering school educators technical assistance and professional development for the improvement of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices – based on research and "best practice."

b. Instructional Media Services – providing print and non-print instructional materials for classrooms and school media centers, assisting teachers with developing their own materials, and consulting on media center management.

c. Professional Development Services – coordinating workshops, courses, materials and providing on-going consultation for the professional development of school administrators, teachers, counselors, media specialists, and support staff.

d. School-Community Planning – providing support to public and nonpublic schools to strengthen their strategic planning, problem solving, communication, & school improvement processes and practices.

e. School Technology – providing assistance with technology planning and training, cooperative purchasing of equipment and software, networking, integration with curriculum and instruction, duplication services, distance learning, administrative data processing and technology funding.

f. Diverse Learning Needs of all Children and Youth – providing specialized services for children and students with diverse learning needs, including identification, diagnosis, planning, and treatment/ therapy/education for those with disabilities.

In 1999, three additional core services were added as part of the statewide AEA responsibility:

g. Inclusive Schools – providing services to assist schools and districts to provide a learning environment free from discriminatory acts and practices and to assist with instructional strategies related to responsibilities, rights and respect for diversity.

h. Leadership – assist with recruitment, induction, retention and professional development of education leaders.

i. Management Services – if requested, deliver management services in conformance with the provisions of Iowa Code section 273.7A. Such services might include data processing, printing, financial management, human resources management, and cooperative purchasing.

Organizing for Success

For nearly the first 20 years of the agency's existence, the organizational structure remained traditional, following the "three division" funding mechanism.

Seven years ago, GWAEA took a major step forward in reorganizing services and staff. After months of listening to various customer groups, the agency's leaders determined they could no longer organize staff by disciplines and coordinate agency services through the divisions of special education, media, and educational services without jeopardizing continuity and flexibility. It was necessary to break down barriers. Our metropolitan districts, in particular, were telling us that we must ask them what their priorities and goals are and then illustrate where our services could fit in - how we could be of value to them. Then, in partnership with them, we could help build their capacity and ours to reach those goals.

A year later, we reorganized by establishing nine regions within our service area, creating cross-disciplinary teams within regions, and hiring a "regional facilitator" to manage each one. The three largest school districts within our area became regions unto themselves, each one with two regional facilitators.

The role of the regional facilitators is to be the "one stop shop" link with the administrative team of the school districts for all AEA services, to organize the delivery of those services to schools, and to locate other resources that might be useful. They are also responsible for collaboratively developing written "district service plans" for each of the districts in their regions. In addition, they are responsible for the supervision and evaluation of GWAEA staff assigned to their regions.

At the agency, the regional facilitators have become advocates for their districts and are instrumental in communicating needs for new or customized services or procedures. They are expected to be familiar with the district's school improvement plans and assist with the implementation of those plans, particularly in terms of AEA services. In many of the districts served by GWAEA, the regional facilitator is welcomed as a member of the district executive management team. Such has been the case in Cedar Rapids for many years.

In addition, as part of the agency reorganization, programs and services were organized into two units: Learning Development, which included direct services to children, professional and curriculum development, and assessment; and Learning Support, which includes media and technology, business management services, human resources and public relations. In summary, these reorganization efforts occurred around functions that meet customer needs rather than agency job titles and funding streams. The agency is currently in the process of developing its newest "strategic plan," which will drive even more organizational changes and improvements.

Evolving With Our Largest Districts

The context for the establishment of the AEAs, namely the need for special education and media services, fulfilled a major need for the rural school districts in Iowa. Larger metropolitan school districts, however, were ambivalent about such a need.

The Cedar Rapids School District, for example, had its own staff of speech/language pathologists, school psychologists, school social workers and special education teachers at all levels of its K-12 system. When the AEAs were formed, it was decided that the local districts would employ the direct instructional staff; i.e., special education teachers, while the AEAs would employ support staff such as school psychologists, speech clinicians, and school social workers. When Grant Wood AEA was formed, the Cedar Rapids School District special education support (not instructional) staff were involuntarily merged into the agency staff. This forced the agency to try to convince both the school district and the special education staff that the AEA could more efficiently and equitably serve students.

For several years, those original Cedar Rapids support staff remained the backbone of the AEA employees' union to assure they would not lose ground in negotiating salaries and benefits as a result of the shift in employer. However, for years the district maintained that "its dollars" were subsidizing the other school districts in the area, despite the fact that dollars were supposed to be pooled and redistributed. That's the way the system is designed to work.

Though the employment situation with some of the special education staff was difficult, the fact that they were originally employed by the Cedar Rapids School District enhanced their credibility as they continued to work with Cedar Rapids students as well as with students throughout the area.

In addition, the situation faced by Grant Wood AEA was complicated because the largest school district in the state, Des Moines, was allowed to retain employment of its special education support staff, primarily because the Des Moines school system had its own retirement system. To this day, the AEA in that area simply passes through their wages to the Des Moines School District, which creates the potential for other districts to suggest that they too can "pull out of the AEA."

In one of our three largest districts, the AEA special education staff was initially relegated to the central office. The operating management philosophy was clear: "You can send them here, but we won't let them in our buildings." It took several years and much trust-building before the AEA staff was welcomed in the district and its buildings. The situation now has rather dramatically reversed. Our metropolitan districts continually ask for more special education staff time from the agency, and we hear predominantly positive reports on the value and expertise of AEA staff.

How did this turnaround happen? Not overnight, by any means! The passage of time and changes in local district personnel and leadership certainly were factors. The AEA staff themselves proved to be skilled, professional, and tremendously patient. They became highly accomplished with tactful behaviors and serving numerous "masters," while still complying with special education law and IEP requirements.

In turn, because of the numbers of staff in various disciplines, the AEA was able to provide high-quality professional development. The AEA could more easily reassign staff from district to district or building to building, because it was the single employer. Particularly in situations with low incidence disabilities, the flexibility in assignments was a valuable asset.

Our AEA gave careful attention to recruitment and hiring, and developed particular expertise in knowing how to find the best people from the best training institutions. By the time the agency reached "full service" for special education in the early to mid-eighties, the GWAEA staff was considered by many as among the best in the country.

Media and technology services had its own history with the metropolitan school districts. When the Joint County School System in the area was formed, just prior to the establishment of the AEAs, new federal funding for media materials was used to purchase the film collection from the Cedar Rapids School Districts (CRSD) and then circulate it among the other counties. Thus, the CRSD from the very beginning had ownership in the AEA media center.

Technology had a similar history. As the AEA was seeking to establish its own administrative data-processing center and taking the all-important step of purchasing a large mainframe computer and major software systems, it first entered into a sharing agreement with the CRSD, jointly purchased the equipment, and shared the staff to operate it. It has been only within the last few years that the AEA has taken over the administrative data-processing functions, both for the constituent school districts and for itself. It now also provides a full array of internet-based data processing services to school districts throughout Iowa.

Success Through Building Relationships

Though difficult to document, the attention paid to the development of positive relationships among district leaders and the AEA leadership team cannot be overlooked. Upon taking this job in 1987, I was told that one of my major challenges would be to rebuild the relationship between the agency and our two largest districts. Attacking this problem required action on many fronts.

A series of superintendents have been hired by our larger districts who have come from other states. With little or no experience with educational service agencies, they were surprised to learn that there were so many staff working in their buildings who were not under their district supervision. In addition, as mentioned before, AEA funding appears on the local school budget forms as if a significant part of the school budget was arbitrarily going to the AEA, which adds to their misunderstanding.

Through the years we have discovered what might be seen as a universal truth among education service agencies – that large district middle managers seem to be less than positive about their AEA. Perhaps it is because the existence of the AEA could, in fact, be seen as threatening to the job and function of local district middle managers. Thus, building a trusting and productive relationship with the middle management team appeared essential to us. It has been our intent to help these central office middle managers see the AEA as an asset to their job, not as a threat.

When I came to the AEA, I considered it a part of the role of the AEA administrator to welcome new superintendents through personal visits, linking them with other superintendents of districts within the area, and involving them in organized social events to assist them in the transition to a new job and region. Because of rapidly increasing numbers of new superintendents in the region, I recently began hosting a picnic for all superintendents and spouses at the beginning of the school year as well as a mid-year reception in Des Moines that coincides with a yearly trip to the Legislature. I find it very important to find out as much about the superintendent as a "person" as well as the "professional."

In addition, I frequently make myself available on evenings and weekends to facilitate planning, boardsmanship, or problem solving retreats and meetings at the request of district superintendents and boards. Such activity seems to enhance the mutual respect and understanding between our agency and the local district leadership team.

On one occasion I collaborated with a prominent superintendent on an opinion piece in the local newspaper. When it came time for that district to undergo an audit by a citizen's group called the Report Card Commission, the superintendent spoke publicly at a meeting about the value of the AEA to the district, saying "the AEA makes sense…. It is an effort to build collaboration and cooperation and minimize duplication of effort."

I certainly am not suggesting that friendships should be sought and manipulated for professional and administrative gain. But I do suggest that welcoming gestures and sincere, ongoing communication between those in administrative positions in member districts and the education service agency leaders can pave the way for positive relationships and acceptance of services throughout the district. While familiarity does not guarantee trust, it helps to nurture it.

Partnering for Flexibility

One of the most difficult things to accomplish in an era of change as rapid as we are now experiencing, is the flexibility needed in staff expertise. Because of our history with special education, we found ourselves with 70 percent of our staff with degrees in special education. Other consultant staff were heavily aligned with academic subject areas. As we wanted to move into leadership with some nontraditional services, we had little room to maneuver in terms of hiring new staff.

The reorganization away from disciplines into regional teams allowed us to train and use staff in some different ways within the districts they serve. In an effort to improve the agency's overall quality and

effectiveness, all our staff, including those with a special education background, were trained in the Garmston-Wellman facilitation, consultation, and presentation techniques. This was one of our first efforts to standardize our processes and practices.

One of the most effective ways to gain flexibility, however, has been contracting for staff expertise and time from our largest districts. Such arrangements provide the agency with expertise to carry out special projects/initiatives as well as add to our overall school improvement consulting capacity.

For example, eight years ago, we determined through informal dialogue with school administrators, including those in our largest district, that few teachers had the opportunity to hear many of the outstanding national speakers in education and to get outside the "box" of their individual classrooms to gain a global perspective. We sketched the parameters of a world-class conference to be held in Cedar Rapids for all 4,500 educators in the area, bringing in key educational thinkers with topics that would match the staff development needs of our districts. Each district would pay a per-teacher registration fee to fund the conference. Revenue to cover initial costs of the conference would come from commitments from districts that would guarantee to bring all their staff. We hired one of the administrators of the CRSD to be the conference director.

That action created an invaluable link for us with our largest district. Not only did we gain an excellent manager who directed four successful biennial "Kaleidoscope" conferences for us, but also his own credibility within his district assured us the committed participation of that district and its staff. The district, in turn, could be assured that the focus of the conference would meet its needs, because one of the director's other "hats" was that of staff development coordinator for the district.

The New Charter for AEAs: School Improvement

In 1997, the Iowa Legislature established a new mission for AEAs in Iowa, to lead school improvement in the state's public and approved private schools.

Not only was this charge written into law, but the director of the Iowa Department of Education also embraced the concept. He speaks publicly about this AEA role and the importance in building capacity within the state for increasing student achievement and school performance. He has proclaimed their leadership role and established a train-the-trainer process that begins with AEA staff and uses the AEA as the conduit for information, consultation and training to schools. All reports and plans are to come to the respective AEA as well as to the Department of Education. Yet the AEAs are currently spared from having a regulatory role, except with special education compliance.

This positioning of the AEAs as the premier distributor of information and training in school improvement efforts has had a significant impact on local schools' acceptance and reliance upon AEA services, particularly from the larger districts. Following the designation as a key player in school improvement, GWAEA held a year-long seminar series, often attended by 200 or more local school administrators and teachers representing nearly all our districts. Participants were systematically trained in the legal requirements of school improvement as well as current research and best practice. Whenever possible, we included persons from the Department of Education as presenters, to preserve the statewide, unified link.

We have little doubt that school districts would not have so easily accepted our leadership role without the support of the state director of education. We would not have had his support if we had not worked for

years building a relationship, including him in our deliberations, welcoming him to special events, and offering him our full support for his vision for Iowa education. Most importantly, there is a close and very candid personal relationship between the DE director and myself as chief administrator with frequent, spontaneous phone calls and visits.

Our services to the metropolitan districts reflect our nine basic core service areas for all schools, but the delivery of services takes on different characteristics. For example, in the smaller districts our staff is often asked to lead the school improvement process, which may include planning and conducting community planning forums, coordinating the writing of standards and benchmarks, and drafting reports on behalf of the district. In essence, the staff serves in almost a quasi-management role for districts that are badly in need of administrative support. In our metropolitan districts, AEA staff members are valued for their links with state and national policies and processes. They are used to facilitate internal and external focus groups and problem-solving activities and to link the schools with training and resources. They take a more behind-the-scenes role, but nevertheless serve as that "critical friend" or "objective third party" when it is to the advantage of the district to do so. Facilitation of group process is a service highly valued by our larger districts.

Our agency works closely with the central administrative staff of metropolitan districts, sometimes providing funding for their efforts but even more often coordinating meetings, planning sessions and suggesting procedural changes so the entire community will experience a sense of continuity and communication among educators.

Superintendents of the larger districts meet at the AEA, prior to the monthly area-wide superintendent meetings. As administrator I initiated this meeting and continue with agency support in planning agendas, locating information and resources, and implementing the targeted multi-district initiatives. The AEA board president and I also meet with the superintendents and board presidents of the large districts on a monthly basis.

These collaborative efforts have resulted in agreements ranging all the way from common decisions on closing schools for impending storms to more global actions such as unified policies and practices to prevent school violence. Recent collaborative initiatives among the metro schools and GWAEA include professional development, technology, and cooperative purchasing. Our metro area schools see us as a facilitator for higher levels of partnership and collaboration.

Often, through AEA leadership, the metropolitan school leaders have been encouraged to bring in city officials, the police department, or other agencies involved in the health and well-being of children. The traditional approach of AEAs to work in partnership and to work regionally, is slowly being infused into the metro school districts' way of doing business, rather than each district going on its own.

This phenomenon of partnering and "thinking regionally" has an effect on the entire metropolitan community. Through our agency's visibility as effective conveners, facilitators, and community problem-solvers, we find ourselves at the forefront of community and county coalitions. One example illustrates this point. Nearly six years ago, Linn County held a countywide visioning process to determine the future direction of the county. Several task groups resulted from that effort, including those devoted to health care, economic development, and education. The education task force named itself the Learning Alliance, and I became a part of the three-person leadership team along with the president of Pioneer Office Products, and the president of Cornell College.

Through the ensuing years, the Learning Alliance studied what it would mean for the metropolitan area to become a "learning community" and, among other things, has established The Workplace Learning Connection to coordinate student and teacher job-shadowing, internships, and mentoring on a regional basis.

The organization of such a program accomplishes many things. It equalizes the opportunities for students from districts of various sizes and in rural areas to have access to learning in metropolitan businesses and industry. It gives major employers a single contact to work with rather than being bombarded by schedulers from each district. It has also elevated interest among school districts and teachers in learning more about employers' needs and the qualities sought in the hiring process.

The leadership role of the AEA in such community-wide endeavors is crucial for several reasons. When an entity such as the Chamber of Commerce or county government does not know who to invite among the multiple superintendents and districts within its area, the AEA often becomes symbolic of the involvement of the total education community. They only need to make one call, and education is represented!

As with such initiatives as The Workplace Learning Connection, the AEA can also be a constant prod to the conscience of the larger districts that there are rural schools in the county as well, and those students need similar opportunities and programs that can only be delivered through extraordinary collaboration. In this way all students become winners.

Equity, Quality, Efficiency in Programs & Services

Of course, we cannot speak about services to any districts, metropolitan or rural, without including the direct services to children with disabilities, their teachers and their families.

Grant Wood AEA provides more than 100 staff for the Cedar Rapids School District, either full or part-time. All the special education support staff—the speech/language pathologists, school psychologists, school social workers, hearing and vision testing and itinerant teaching staff, occupational and physical therapists, adaptive physical education consultants, assistive technology consultants, and work experience staff are hired by the AEA and assigned to Cedar Rapids schools.

As was mentioned earlier, the large number of these staff, along with their colleagues serving the rural areas, make it economically feasible to provide state-of-the art training. Districts are aware that these staff groups are well-trained and the districts do not have the responsibility for that training.

In addition, adult and family services (welfare, social services, etc.) provided in this county appear more generous and comprehensive than those in other counties, which tends to bring families with many needs to this area. The populations of the metropolitan school districts are growing, and a part of that growth includes low-income, more diverse families, many with children with disabilities. The mobility of this segment of the population stretches the capacity to adapt on the part of individual buildings and districts, but because the AEA can more easily reassign staff to accommodate changes, any negative impact on area schools is diminished.

The city districts, because of the numbers of their students with low incidence or severe disabilities, may be able to provide a more appropriate instructional setting, with better facilities and equipment than are available or ever could be available in surrounding rural areas. The coordination and partnering capacity of the AEA make it easier to transport and tuition those children into city districts, if a self-contained program is the most appropriate and least restrictive to meet their needs.

Though great effort is put into collaborative decision-making between the city school districts and the AEA, the AEA staff is still in a regulatory role when it is time for special education compliance reviews and the "sign off" on individual student education plans (IEPs). The AEA system of checks and balances is

preserved, which provides a "bottom line" of equity and quality for all students, no matter where they are attending school.

Though the public does not often recognize it, one of the most valuable services a system of educational service agencies can provide is the freeing up of dollars for instruction by creating greater efficiencies in local school administration.

Grant Wood AEA has had a cooperative purchasing program since its inception, with approximately a 40% savings on such items as audio-visual equipment, janitorial supplies, paper, and athletic supplies. Within our service area alone, the volume of purchases was not enough to create a significant savings for our city school districts. They could do as well on their own.

However, within the past few years, the cooperative purchasing programs operated by various AEAs have been coordinated into a statewide AEA cooperative purchasing program. The AEA Educational Media Coop has provided savings of anywhere from 40% - 80% on computer hardware, software, and audio-visual equipment.

After extensive research two years ago, the AEAs launched a statewide food cooperative and bid out a number of bulk food items. Fifty-three schools took the leap of faith to be charter members in January 1999. We now have 165 participating school districts and we expect to have 200 later this year. In the 2000-2001 budget year, the coop purchased $6 million in food items, including 5,000 cases of cereal, 9,000 cases of pizza, and 16,000 cases of chicken. Through this contract and the numbers of districts participating, we have provided significant savings in food purchase expenditures. All cooperative purchasing programs operated by the AEA system are operated on a "site delivery" specification, thus eliminating the need for warehousing.

Though such a program benefits both urban and rural school districts, it has a proportionately greater impact on city school districts and on their ability to stay in the black with their hot lunch program supplies purchase.

Challenges of Size and Wealth

Iowa's formula for funding K-12 education, based on an "allowable growth" figure, a per-pupil cost, and funded through a combination of property and income taxes, has held up through the years as an equitable means of supporting public school districts. Though fluctuations in the tax base in rural and metropolitan areas may adversely affect the taxpayers, the formula has provided a fair and equitable means of funding the schools.

Additional surtaxes based upon public referenda are available, and recently the Legislature has allowed counties to levy an additional local option sales tax for schools if residents of all the districts within the county pass it.

Probably the most challenging phenomenon for school districts in the state is the uneven growth pattern. Communities in the eastern part of the state, and particularly within or near metropolitan areas, are growing rapidly. For example, our AEA serves more than 63,000 students K-12. One of the other AEAs, covering a larger geographic area, actually serves only 14,000 students, less than our largest district.

Each year when setting the "allowable growth" for the state's educational system, the legislature wrestles with the phenomenon that many districts never get the full percentage of new revenue because it is offset by

declining enrollments. So legislators struggle with mandating school reorganizations or providing a funding cushion for those districts in a declining mode. So far the "cushion" has prevailed but is scheduled to expire within the next few years.

In turn, there are city and suburban districts that are growing at the rate of several hundred students per year, and the school funding formula is always a year behind. So they are faced with providing classrooms and teachers for a growing student population that will not be fully counted until the following year. These districts advocate for "on-time" funding, but so far the legislature has provided only partial relief and the opportunity to go before a School Budget Review Committee for additional funds.

The AEAs are also finding themselves in "have/have not" positions, with some located in economically depressed parts of the state and others in areas with a booming economy. Because of this phenomenon, the AEAs recently stepped forward and offered to consider voluntary reorganization. Currently there are two AEA merger initiatives underway in Iowa that will, if successful, reduce five AEAs to two, resulting in a statewide total of 12 rather than 15.

Besides growth in the student population and funding that doesn't keep up, our largest school district is facing another demographic issue common to city districts throughout the country—landlocked boundaries. The new upscale housing developments are in the suburbs with the districts surrounding the Cedar Rapids School District benefiting from families that are traditionally supportive of schools and involved in their children's education. The Cedar Rapids district was growing until very recently, and so is its number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch programs. Some buildings have more than 40% of their student body on free and reduced lunch payment programs. It is well-documented that poor children and poor families often need more services.

The surrounding suburban school districts have passed several bond issues and expanded both their facilities and technology. The Cedar Rapids School District is facing a tough and well organized taxpayer group that is questioning its use of funds, its upkeep of buildings, and its ability to manage the district. The very nature of taxpayer arguments against alleged "elitist" leadership of the school board, and against such programs as daycare and preschools within the school district, indicate they represent a more conservative, non-progressive view of education; characteristic of older, more established neighborhoods.

The increasing numbers of at-risk students, diverse learners, and children with disabilities is certainly beginning to affect our agency and its services. We began as an agency with just over 4,500 students identified for special education services; now we are close to 10,000. Yet the total school enrollments, and the funding those numbers generate, have not kept up with the increase in identified student needs.

Thus far, federal funds have allowed us to cope with the growth, but we are also spending a great deal of energy and time with increased staff training and cross-training, partnering with other community agencies, and brokering other resources whenever we can.

Challenges of the Future

There are a number of future challenges that face AEAs, and specifically GWAEA, and they will in many cases involve our services to the large districts.

More than a third of the school administrators in the state are expected to retire within the next five years, and there currently are fewer persons preparing to take their places. This could have a major effect on the

large school districts, and an influx of new people in those positions could affect our ability to partner with the district. Leaders in our agency have for many years been committed to the challenge of increasing the number and improving the quality of educational leaders for our schools.

Our agency has taken a variety of steps to meet this challenge. Five years ago, Grant Wood AEA organized a "Contemporary School Leadership" (CSL) program to introduce aspiring and practicing school leaders to contemporary leadership content and experiences that they were unlikely to get in traditional preparation programs. Content includes systems thinking, strategic planning, systems design, data based decision-making, instructional leadership, communication, team building, accountability, quality tools, etc. The program is entirely self-supporting with tuition paid by the participants and their districts, though the agency did "sweeten the pot" with $250 scholarships for each participant. Through a one-year series of once-a-month seminars, aspiring leaders are exposed to national and local presenters and new ways of thinking about leading in times of "high accountability."

The first year started with 20 participants, but now our area hosts two classes totaling between 50-60 participants per year. The CSL program has been adopted as a statewide project for the AEAs, stimulating two additional sites/classes in other parts of Iowa. Further expansion is planned.

More importantly, a vast majority of the participants have gone on to seek degrees in educational administration, posts in school administration, or are in an elevated position of leadership in their buildings as "teacher leaders." Their testimonials at the end of each year's program attest to their newfound enthusiasm and belief in the value of being an educational leader. They are much better equipped to provide 21st century leadership in their current or future positions. In addition, we hope that their image of the AEA as an agency in the forefront of educational thinking and a support for school administrators should be greatly enhanced as they move into new leadership roles.

At the request of area superintendents, we are now in the process of developing a CSL program for practicing superintendents focused on "Leading in an Age of Accountability." We are also engaged with public and private universities in partnerships to offer on-site weekend and evening graduate and endorsement programs for educators wanting principal or superintendent endorsements.

A second challenge facing our agency and all the AEAs is the continual scrutiny of the AEA system by the Iowa legislature as they search for dollars to reallocate for public schools and increase teacher salaries. The fact that we are not commonly understood by lawmakers because we have few visible links with direct instruction of students makes us vulnerable to funding cuts or, at worst, extinction. It seems that all it takes is for one or two disgruntled superintendents or school board members to say to a legislator, "We're not getting the services we need from the AEA" and the entire system is studied once again. We annually spend considerable staff time and emotional energy to explain to an ever-changing body of policy makers that our mission and services add to Iowa's education system. As a result of this scrutiny, the state system of AEAs has been subject to two major studies in the last five years. The results of both showed high satisfaction with AEAs by the various stakeholders they serve. In fact, the studies showed that the eight "urban" school systems in Iowa were more satisfied with AEA services than were their suburban counterparts.

Not only must we advocate for the existence of the AEAs, but we also struggle to be included in the funding for new initiatives. For example, two years ago, the legislature appropriated a three-year, $15 million funding program for school technology in the state. Unfortunately, even though the AEAs were designated to assist schools with development of required technology plans in order to receive funds; the AEAs received little funding for this new assignment.

The Iowa Department of Education relies more and more heavily on AEAs to serve as its program and service providers and as its leaders of school improvement in the state. It seems obvious that we may

eventually be required to monitor the progress of local districts. As AEAs, we feel our success with school districts, and particularly with the large metropolitan districts, has been our ability to work with them in a partnership and support mode rather than a regulatory role. We will be careful to maintain this support and service role to the highest degree possible.

An emerging challenge is that posed by the proliferation of private sector companies offering programs and services similar to those provided by AEAs. In many cases, these companies have access to many more dollars and resources for research and development, marketing, and sales. Often, these companies target our largest school districts as part of their initial sales strategy. I have recently suggested to my colleagues in Iowa that the "enemy" is not each other but rather the threat posed by the private sector. To address this challenge successfully, we must not see these companies as enemies, but rather as potential partners in meeting the needs of our member schools. I predict a new era for private/public sector collaboration among ESAs and the private sector education companies.

Educational Service Agencies: An Asset for All Schools

Often one will hear citizens say they can see the need for educational service agencies such as Iowa's AEAs for rural and small-town school districts, but the largest schools surely have the resources and economy of scale to provide the services needed for their staff and students. We would maintain, however, that large metropolitan districts have as much of a need for AEAs as the rural districts do; though those needs may be different.

First, both large and small districts are facing increasing expectations from the Department of Education, from legislators, and from the public for increased student achievement.

Iowa as a state still has a negative population growth compared to ten years ago, but its minority population is growing. Some buildings in the metropolitan areas have entire classes with only one or two Caucasian students. In the Iowa City schools, more than 30 languages are represented.

The county's comprehensive welfare and adult human services are enticing citizens from urban areas like Chicago to move here, and most of these new citizens will likely live in the landlocked Cedar Rapids School District.

This growing diversity in the student population and accompanying family issues will stretch the city school districts' resources to the limit. It is only through the combined efforts of the school and the AEA, and the partnerships with communities and other agencies, that the larger school districts can build their capacity to overcome these emerging challenges.

School districts, whether large or small, also need the economy of scale that can be provided through statewide cooperative purchasing and staff development that is delivered across district boundaries. Even the largest school districts could seldom achieve the efficiencies of such programs as statewide food service and equipment cooperative purchasing, easily transferred and highly trained professionals for special education, shared software for administrative data-processing, or a professional development program bringing in ten or more national speakers.

Last, the very presence of an educational service agency focused on quality instruction and equal opportunities for all children serves as a catalyst for efficient and effective collaborative solutions. By constantly asserting the regional perspective, by reminding others that "the village" is larger than just the

confines of a single town or city, the barriers and turf sometimes found among local districts can slowly be diminished. As school districts cooperate with each other—as schools and communities create coalitions—the capacity to meet the needs of children and families is increased. The education service agency can help make this happen, and the children will be the winners.

Ronald S. Fielder, Ph.D., is chief administrator of the Grant Wood Area Education Agency in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He may be reached by phone at 319-399-6711, by fax at 319-399-6457, and by email at rfielder@aea10.k12.ia.us.

Mobilizing Metropolitan Regional Resources To Meet Highly Diverse Needs

by
Timothy C. Gavigan

In southeastern Wisconsin's metropolitan area diversity is a way of life. In this area CESA #1 serves 45 school districts with student enrollments ranging from 100,000 to 92. These districts are organized into a variety of K-12, K-8, and 9-12 systems. Non-public school governance structures range from traditional parochial and private schools, to charter schools, virtual schools, and choice (voucher) schools. Moreover, schools in the metro area operate in an environment strongly influenced by national and state political "inventiveness." Consequently, the pace of change and the needs for regional educational services can be both challenging and energizing.

The Agency

Cooperative Educational Service Agency #1 (CESA #1) is one of 12 regional agencies created by the Wisconsin Legislature to

> …serve educational needs in all areas of Wisconsin by serving as a link between school districts and between school districts and the state. Cooperative Educational Service Agencies may facilitate communication and cooperation among all public and private schools, agencies, and organizations that provide services to pupils. (Wisconsin State Statutes, Chapter 116, 1983)

However, unlike the other 11 CESAs, CESA #1 is a voluntary organization in that school districts may adopt a resolution to withdraw from the Agency itself.

The five fundamental functions of CESA #1 are to:

- Equalize educational opportunity by providing quality services to meet diverse school district needs.
- Enhance and promote quality education.
- Provide technical services.
- Promote cost-effectiveness by providing linkages to state, regional and national resources.
- Provide a network to take advantage of regional diversity.

CESA #1 services are provided through 41 programs organized into three departments: Student Services, Professional Development Services, and Technology Services. These departments provide instructional classes for remedial, at-risk, and special needs students; staff development; itinerant special education staff; and computer / technology support.

Unique Challenges and Unique District Needs

Because CESA #1 is directly connected to the challenges faced by its member districts, their challenges represent the primary service needs for the Agency. The current major challenges facing these districts are fluctuating enrollments, inadequate funding, and recruitment of competent staff.

Fluctuating Student Enrollment

The first major challenge is the multi-dimensional impact of the fluctuating student enrollment. In 2000, when compared with the previous year's enrollment, 31% of the public school districts in the area experienced decreasing enrollment; 50% experienced increasing enrollments; and only 19% experienced stable enrollment (Center for Education Statistics, 2000). In addition, southeastern Wisconsin has by far the largest proportion of minority students in the State (*Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area, 2000*). However, of the 45 school districts in CESA #1, the largest number of minority students is concentrated in only three districts, Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Racine. Moreover, the effectiveness of the Inter-District Transfer Program has leveled off, and the exchange of students to establish racial balance has not expanded beyond the 1990 level (*Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area*, 2000). Also, only 81% of the K-12 students in CESA #1 attend public schools, as compared to 86% across the rest of the State (Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

Limited Fiscal Resources

Limited fiscal resources are the second significant problem faced by the districts. In 1999-2000, per-pupil spending in the area ranged from $10,684 to $8,313 as compared to the state average of $9,368 (*Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area*, 2000, pp. 34-35). Overall, the area receives about the state average of 52% for state aid (*Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area* 2000, p. 30-31). However, the disparity of state aid received by the districts range from 62% to 32% (*Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area, 2000,* pp. 30-31). The most recent Critical Issues Survey of the area superintendents indicated that inadequate financing was the most significant district issue overall (Survey of CESA #1 District Administrators, 2002).

Staffing Issues

The third challenge for these districts is staffing. In the metropolitan area, some unique staffing patterns are evident. For instance, the professional staff in the CESA #1 area averages more years of experience and training than the State of Wisconsin overall (*Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area*, 2000, p.46). Also, 17% of the area school employees are from racial minorities while 59.1% of the students represent racial minorities (*Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area*, 2000, p.18, 45). Moreover, on the most recent Critical Issues Survey, area superintendents identified "recruiting and training quality leadership and instructional staff" as the most significant regional issue (Survey of CESA #1 District Administrators, 2002), especially in light of the increasing retirements and districts' continuing commitment to reduce class sizes.

Other Issues

Complicating all of these challenges is the increasingly politicized environment in the metropolitan area. A great deal of political "inventiveness" has impacted the schools as a result of initiatives at the national and state levels. At the national level, many changes, such as the recent ESEA legislation, the charter school movement, initiatives for national testing, and comprehensive changes in special education through IDEA have taken place. At the state level, new initiatives including the implementation of high-stakes testing, state standards of academic performance, and the restructuring of school financing have entered the scene. If the interaction of all these initiatives did not give enough complexity to the system, state legislation establishing

Open Enrollment, Parental School Choice, and Charter School programs has increased competition for limited resources.

Implications of this Complex Environment

The extensiveness and nature of these, as well as local educational changes occurring within the metropolitan area, are multidimensional. They have affected every aspect of the educational enterprise including overall school governance and organization. They have shaped the training, licensure, and pool of personnel providing educational services. They have also modified the definition of educational content by defining district standards and levels of acceptable pupil performance. Moreover, they have impacted the very heart of education, namely instruction for children.

Another dimension of this "change environment" is that it is multi-directional. On one hand recent political efforts have resulted in the recentralization of educational services at the state level. This has been achieved through the implementation of such initiatives as state assessment, state standards, state-determined limits for collective bargaining, and revenue caps for local school budgets. On the other hand, recent legislation has also decentralized education. These initiatives have changed the governance structure of schools through the creation of charter schools, public/private school choice, vouchers, and open enrollment, which permits students to attend schools outside of their residence area. Inasmuch as these opposing directions for change are occurring simultaneously, the result is destabilizing to the public school systems in the area.

Unique Opportunities

While there is a strong tradition of self-sufficiency among the districts in CESA #1, the intensity of these changes has resulted in a heightened awareness of their common needs. Therefore, there is a growing sense of the importance of regional planning and action among the districts. This creates an "opportunity-rich" service environment for the Agency. Moreover, because the statutory parameters for CESA #1 enable it to avoid the onus of being a bureaucratic office of the State, the willingness of school districts to participate in collaborative efforts is enhanced.

Building On Strengths

To develop effective, proactive services to meet the unique challenges and opportunities presented in southeastern Wisconsin, CESA #1 decided in 1998 to "reinvent" itself. This process began by recognizing that such a change process should begin by building on strengths. The major strength of the organization was an experienced and skilled staff with a keen understanding of the need to be highly adaptable. Another fundamental strength of the Agency was the Board of Control's vision and commitment to a regional mission built on proactive, client-based services.

With these two foundation points, the Agency quickly moved to demonstrate the capacity to successfully develop and implement consortia programs. These consortia programs included the design and implementation of a special education program serving severely emotionally disabled elementary children from seven school districts. Another example of these successes was the development of chartered at-risk programs for middle school and high school students. In both of these programs, not only did the initial participating districts continue as members of the consortia, but each of the consortia expanded by at least 20%. This record of success resulted in the realization that CESA #1 could offer still more energized and value-added services that are based on client needs.

Implementation Tools

To put the needed changes for CESA #1 into operation, a strategy using several basic "tools" or processes was implemented. The first process was the design and implementation of a business plan. This replaced the traditional strategic plan and focused on implementing data-driven decision-making based on the organization's purpose and operation within a competitive market condition. Using this approach gave the Agency an opportunity to define and manage each of its organizational components. These components include the following:

Capacity: Ability to meet service demand. Measured by productivity indicators of resource (fiscal, human) compared to risks/liabilities.

Stability: Sustained growth over time. Measured by comparing performance indicator trends for capacity, customer satisfaction, and quality of product/service.

Productivity: Cost/benefit analysis of efficiency. Measured by comparing process costing with customer satisfaction performance indicators.

Quality of Service: Value added by business process. Measured by workflow function analysis.

Customer Satisfaction: Ability of the customer to meet needs using the Agency's service. Measured by data regarding customer use of service and satisfaction.

Implementing the Plan

The planning model outlined above was based on the following Total Quality Management and Business Process Redesign concepts:

Total Quality Management Principles

- Improvement must be on-going and knowledge-based.
- Leadership empowers others to meet/exceed the expectations of clients.
- Effective systems are organized to create a human synergy of the parts.
- Knowledge is an on-going cycle of information-gathering for data-driven decision-making and problem-solving.
- Work teams with data tools are the most efficient and effective use of human resources.
- Effective change requires a fundamental change in process first.

Business Process Redesign Model Principles

- Organizations vary in architecture, a difference which impacts decision-making, communication, and planning.
- The processes by which work is done and the results achieved are the key determiners for organizational success.
- Information technology is a key enabler of change.
- Organization around outcomes, not tasks, is required.

- Organizational effectiveness requires information to be captured at once and at the source.
- Organizational effectiveness requires the decision point to be where the work is performed and control built into the process rather than placed into artificial hierarchies.
- To effect quality change the organization must understand and measure key processes.
- Effective data management establishes a common view of an organization's success and maintains alignment.
- The answers to the planning questions of "How?" "When?" and "Where?" are equally as important as "What?" and "Why?"

The Agency also implemented another key process, the regional environmental scan. This scan was conducted annually and included an updated comparison of regional demographics, school performance data, as well as current research results and "best practice" trends. Based on this environmental scan, the Agency annually conducted a regional Critical Issues Forum. This Forum was a focused workshop attended by the superintendents of the member districts. At the Forum, the environmental scan data was reviewed, critical issues were prioritized, and regional initiatives were established for the upcoming year. For the past three years these initiatives have included:

- Addressing severe restrictions on public school funding.
- Program development in response to a rapidly changing, more diverse student population with more severe educational needs.
- Recruiting and training quality leadership and instructional staff.

These initiatives became the base for the development of expanded or reconstituted CESA #1 services. Consequently, to meet the first initiative, the Agency focused on developing partnerships and grant-supported services to increase the level of resources supporting school districts through consortia programs.

To meet the challenges of a changing student population, regional instructional programs were developed and staffed by CESA #1 for students with severe emotional disabilities. Other programs for high school at-risk students were designed so that students could achieve a high school diploma using proficiency-based criteria. Moreover, the Agency developed a program to provide regional access for students interested in on-line learning. This program served not only at-risk and gifted and talented students but also those with schedule conflicts or attendance at a high school lacking certain curriculum offerings.

The third initiative resulted in CESA #1 developing an alternative licensure program and participating in a Transition to Training grant project to support non-traditional teacher candidates to help fill over 1200 vacancies in the area. This effort was also targeted to increase the number of minority staff members.

In addition to the implementation of a business plan and the use of the environmental scan/critical issues initiatives, the Agency restructured itself. This involved combining and focusing Agency programs around the business plan. This diminished the "silo effect" whereby programs and projects, especially those funded by grants, previously operated in isolation of other programs. In addition, to reinforce the focus on client-based service, the position of District Services Director was established. This position was designed not only to ensure that programs and staff were focused on the comprehensive needs of each district, but also to be responsible for the assessment of the effectiveness of the services in meeting client needs.

As a part of the reorganization effort, the Agency provided targeted in-service and cross-training for staff so that they could more easily facilitate shifts in services and programs needed to meet the rapidly changing needs of the districts. This was particularly effective in the Professional Development Center where professional development consultants were previously assigned to individual projects such as Early Childhood programs, Youth Service Learning, and Student Assessment. Under the new structure, these

consultants were organized into a team focusing on school improvement. As a result, the Agency was better able to tailor services to the school districts so that those school districts received those services in a "seamless fashion." Consequently, previous efforts such as student data retreats, which focused on the interpretation and implications of student data on curriculum and instruction, were transformed into school improvement services. Staff were able to use student assessment information to assist districts in developing comprehensive plans of action that also met district initiatives for curriculum alignment and professional development.

To reinforce the staff's restructuring efforts, the Board of Control adopted a Staff Recognition Program whereby stipends could be awarded based on reaching specific departmental, team, as well as individual benchmarks of success. This served to reinforce and reward the staff for their contribution not only to their programs but also to the Agency itself.

As a result of using a business plan, using regional initiatives, and reorganization, the Agency was better able to provide "just in time," client-based services while more effectively managing the critical risks resulting from this approach. It is also because of these efforts that it has been seeing an increase in local service contracts of at least 4% per year.

The Impact of the ESA on Metropolitan Area School Systems

In response to the intense and highly diverse needs facing children and the schools serving them, a metropolitan regional service agency such as CESA #1 must "step up to the plate." This means being able to meet the increasing requirements for school districts to share resources, to ensure that there is equity of educational opportunity despite the heightened environment of competitiveness, and to reinforce the efforts for school improvement. Nevertheless, the ultimate result of the metro regional service agency, like any other agency, must be to enable improved student achievement. This is both the responsibility and promise that regional service agencies of all types bring to education.

References

Cooperative Educational Service Agency. (2002). *Survey of CESA #1 District Administrators*.

The Public Policy Forum. (2000). *Public Schooling in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area.*

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Center for Education Statistics. (2001). *Enrollment Report by CESA.*

Wisconsin State Statutes. (1983). Chapter 116, *Cooperative Educational Service Agencies*.

Measuring ESA Performance in Improving Student Achievement

by
Hobart Harmon, Stan Riggs, Tom Lewis and Sharla Six

Since passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990, Kentucky's public schools have been on a journey to enable all students to reach higher levels of academic achievement. One of nine "cooperatives" in the state, the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC), like most educational service agencies in the U.S., strives to provide services that support schools and educators in member districts as they attempt to reach higher levels of effectiveness and accountability for student performance.

Established as a nonprofit organization in 1965, KEDC is the oldest and largest "cooperative" in Kentucky. Over 500 public schools and almost 200,000 students are represented in the 66 school districts that voluntarily choose to be a member of KEDC. A statewide service area enables nearly 40 percent of the public school districts and almost 12,000 teachers to be served by KEDC. The divisions of Instructional Support, Management Support, and Technology Support make up the organizational structure. This recent restructuring appears consistent with the growing demands to support an aggressive agenda of expectations by member districts and state policymakers.

The Charge to the KEDC

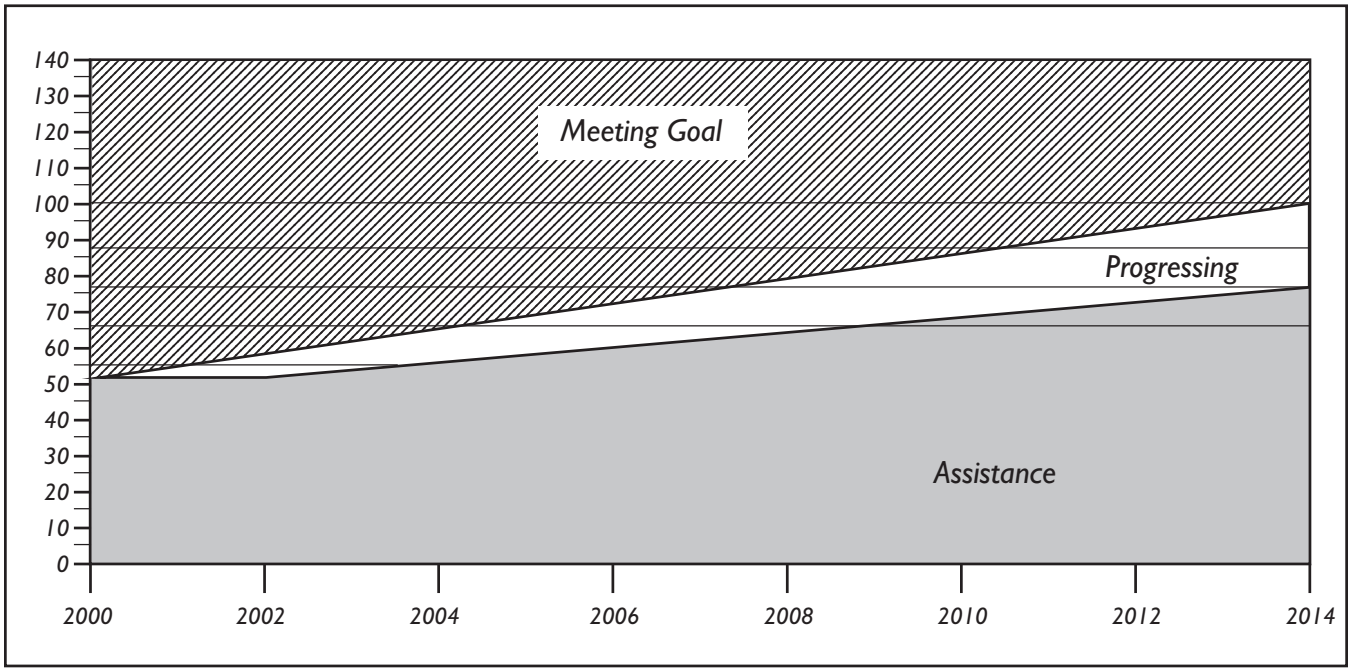
Speaking before the KEDC board of directors, — a board comprised of the superintendent of each member school district — Kentucky Commissioner of Education Gene Wilhoit emphasized that school districts had a new "compass" in the journey to proficiency and beyond. On June 5, 2002, the Kentucky Board of Education accepted a new set of student performance standards. More than 1,600 Kentucky teachers developed these standards specifically for the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). These standards provide the unifying direction for reaching the journey's destination: *for every school to reach proficiency by the year 2014, meaning a score of 100 or better on a 140-point scale.*

Commissioner Wilhoit indicated that now the task is to support schools in applying the new standards for success. The Kentucky Department of Education provides each school with a customized growth chart showing its current academic performance index (see Figure 1). This information serves as the school's baseline and projects a year-by-year path to reaching proficiency by the target date. The Department of Education also is producing additional materials and training on ways to use the new standards and related examples of student work to analyze individual student performance.

All of these tools – combined with local analysis of academic strengths and weaknesses through "Scholastic Audits," the Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment, and the Kentucky Program of Studies – will help each school chart its own course to proficiency and beyond, according to the commissioner. Wilhoit

invited organizations like KEDC to gear up to assist the Department of Education in this significant school improvement effort. Essentially, the standards and new tools will help schools meet the new assessment and accountability system and the goal to reach proficiency by 2014.

Figure 1. Anytown School Sample Growth Chart



Redefining KEDC's Mission and Objectives

Fortunately, a new strategic plan advanced by KEDC leadership and approved by the board of directors in Spring 2001 enabled the cooperative to voluntarily position itself to address this urgent need of member school districts. One specific, measurable objective now guides efforts for the organization in accomplishing a mission consistent with its beliefs: *All districts will succeed as demonstrated by continuous improvement toward a goal of 100 in the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System*. Appendix A shows the new strategic plan for KEDC. Additional information about KEDC is found at website address www.kedc.org.

This change in priority, to hold the organization accountable for impacting student achievement in member school districts, also resulted in the creation of a new Division of Instructional Support. The job description of the division director, a new position, clearly reflects the new emphasis of the organization as called for in the strategic plan, as well as the desire to become a strategic partner with the state Department of Education in helping school districts reach the new state standards. A former school principal and reading specialist in the Kentucky Department of Education was hired to fill the position.

Developing intensive instructional support services designed to have an impact on student achievement was a necessary first step. Under the new strategic plan, the organization's effectiveness is primarily tied to the cooperative's ability to support school improvement efforts of the member districts. Moreover, as one of the seven key strategies resulting from the strategic planning process, the board approved developing a self-assessment process for evaluation of progress towards the mission (see Appendix A).

Performance Measurement System Design

KEDC contracted with a consultant, Dr. Hobart Harmon, to assist in designing and facilitating an organizational process for creating a performance measurement system (PMS). Key steps for the organization to follow included: (1) establishing a KEDC team to guide PMS design, (2) identifying and conducting a telephone conference call with directors of ESAs across the country who are in the process of creating or who have created a PMS, (3) visiting selected ESAs to learn how they are addressing the need to measure performance of the organization in improving student achievement, (4) organizing a session and meeting at the 2001 AESA conference, and (5) selecting an instructional support service for piloting a performance measurement strategy.

Step 1: Establishing the PMS Team and Process

The KEDC director appointed selected persons from the staff, two superintendents from the Board of Directors, and the Dean of the College of Education at Morehead State University to serve as the team for designing the performance measurement system. Based on a review of the literature and personal contacts with persons engaged in performance measurement, the consultant lead a meeting of the PMS team to explain and consider specific steps necessary to follow in developing an effective PMS. An eleven-step process was reviewed:

1. Clarify purpose and system parameters.

2. Identify outcomes and other performance criteria.

3. Define, evaluate, and select indicators.

4. Develop data collection procedures.

5. Provide for quality assurance.

6. Specify system design.

    - Identify reporting frequencies.

    - Determine analytical and reporting formats.

7. Develop software applications.

8. Assign responsibilities for maintaining the system.

9. Conduct a pilot and revise if necessary.

10. Implement full-scale system.

11. Use, evaluate and modify as appropriate.

KEDC's executive director also provided the PMS team with an overview of the strategic planning results that lead to the team's creation and charge. This information also accomplished step 1 in the process.

The consultant also led a discussion of issues associated with the most common problems cited in the literature for creating a performance measurement system. These include:

1. Too many measures are introduced in too little time. The measures tend to be overly complex.

2. Time, effort, and costs are underestimated.

3. Stakeholders are not involved in developing the measures and have not bought into the system.

4. Measures are not aligned with policy, strategy, goals, and objectives of the organization.

Step 2: Conferencing with ESA Directors

In consultation with Dr. Brian Talbott, Executive Director of the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA), and Dr. E. Robert Stephens, the leading expert and researcher on ESAs, KEDC's consultant identified directors of ESAs in 10 states to participate in a telephone conference. The purpose of the one-hour conference call was to discuss development and implementation of a performance measurement system. The KEDC consultant and PMS team developed questions based on the 11 steps previously noted to guide the discussion during the conference call.

KEDC's consultant served as the facilitator during the conference call. Available PMS team members, Brian Talbott, and the director of an ESA in the following states participated in the conference call: California, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The discussion was recorded and a written summary was prepared by the KEDC consultant for the PMS Team's future deliberations. In addition, the consultant worked with Dr. Talbott to post an announcement in the AESA Newsletter and on the AESA listserve to solicit performance measurement information from ESAs around the country.

Step 3: Visiting ESA Sites

Based on information gleaned from the conference call, the KEDC consultant arranged for selected members of the PMS team to visit six ESAs. The team visited three Iowa area education agencies, two Texas education service centers, and one service center in Ohio. The PMS team prepared a list of tentative questions based on the 11 steps identified for creating a desirable PMS. Each ESA also was asked to provide information that would highlight or showcase how it was providing instructional support services, including applications of technology, to member school districts that were aimed specifically at improving student academic achievement.

The performance measurement and instructional support questions were provided to the executive director of each site to aid in preparing for the KEDC visit. (See Appendix B). Each site prepared an agenda that best enabled the ESA to respond to the questions. All sites provided a tour of their facilities and generously allowed site visitors to interact with staff, a commitment of time for which KEDC leadership and the PMS team are very grateful.

The executive director at each site worked diligently with ESA staff to provide additional information by mail, as a way to arrange for us to "take back" the enormous amount of information shared at each site. Comments by the ESA executive directors revealed that hosting such a visit at the ESA was a rewarding experience for staff. Planning and hosting such a visit, especially on the topic of measuring performance for impact on student performance, forced the organization to take a critical look at itself.

KEDC's consultant worked with other site visitors to prepare a list of lessons learned from each visit. This exercise proved valuable for KEDC to offer a session at the annual AESA conference on creating a performance measurement system.

Step 4: Hosting AESA Session and Teleconference Follow-up Meeting

KEDC offered a session at the 2001 AESA conference to share its approach to developing a performance measurement system. Joining the KEDC executive director on a panel was the executive director of an Area Education Agency in Iowa and a regional Best Practice Center in Virginia. A large audience attended the session entitled *Measuring ESA Performance for Improving Student Achievement in Member Districts.* Members of the audience shared how their ESAs were approaching the issue of measuring performance for student achievement. Lessons learned shared by the panel and audience members became a part of the database for the KEDC PMS team. The session proved to be a great learning opportunity for KEDC leadership and team members.

During the teleconference call hosted by KEDC with the executive directors of ESAs in 10 states, participants agreed that a follow-up meeting should be arranged at the AESA conference to continue the discussion. Continuing this networking opportunity for the ESA directors was strongly supported by AESA Executive Director Brian Talbott. Dr. Talbott hosted and attended the meeting. This opportunity enabled participants to clarify points not possible during the conference call, as well as put a face with the voice.

At the meeting the group concluded it should continue to network ideas and experiences, as the topic of measuring ESA performance in the context of student achievement was highly significant to the future success of ESAs across the nation. KEDC's executive director agreed to share results of the effort to create a PMS and facilitate additional networking opportunities for the group.

Step 5: Piloting the PMS Strategy

Selecting a new instructional support service for the pilot to test the PMS was a critical decision for KEDC leadership. While targeting an existing service included in the new Instructional Support Division was possible, the team believed that a new service offered the greatest potential and flexibility in identifying and correcting inadequacies in the PMS. Moreover, existing services were not created with the goal to impact student achievement as called for in the organization's new goal. The team selected a new instructional support service called a "Guided Self-Study Plan."

In efforts to identify and improve low-performing schools, the Kentucky Department of Education conducts "Scholastic Audits" in school districts as part of the state's accountability process for public schools. Many school districts needed a process (service) that would help them perform such an audit for continuous improvement purposes, but one that was more of a self-assessment and perceived as less threatening than the state audit. Having a team of school practitioners trained by KEDC as outside observers added objectivity to the process. As important, it also provided the opportunity for practitioners to network and become significant contributors to building regional capacity for school improvement.

The Guided Self-Study Plan process and assistance also contained elements that could be argued as contributing directly to improving student achievement. This was necessary if the PMS team was to prepare a program logic model that contained outcome measures for which the cooperative might reasonably be expected to impact student achievement. Figure 2 shows the components of the performance-based outcome logic model, a model that adds outcomes to the traditional service delivery model. Demands for demonstrating the impact of services provided by the cooperative makes the traditional service-oriented model inadequate. A program logic model is an effective method for charting progress toward interim and long-term outcomes. Because KEDC seldom provides direct services to students, raising student test scores would be considered a long-term outcome in measuring ESA performance.

The Challenge of Measuring Impact

Measuring impact through the use of a program logic model requires linking both short-term and long-term outcomes with the program's activities (services) and outputs (products). Inputs (resources) invested in the program are aligned with the expected outcomes. Constraints on the program are also considered, such as laws, regulations, and other requirements. A program logic model provides a road map of the program, highlighting how it is expected to work, what activities need to come before others, and how desired outcomes are achieved. By using a logic model that makes the connections between short-term (initial), intermediate, and long-term outcomes, staff are better able to evaluate progress and program successes, including gaps and weaknesses in program operations.

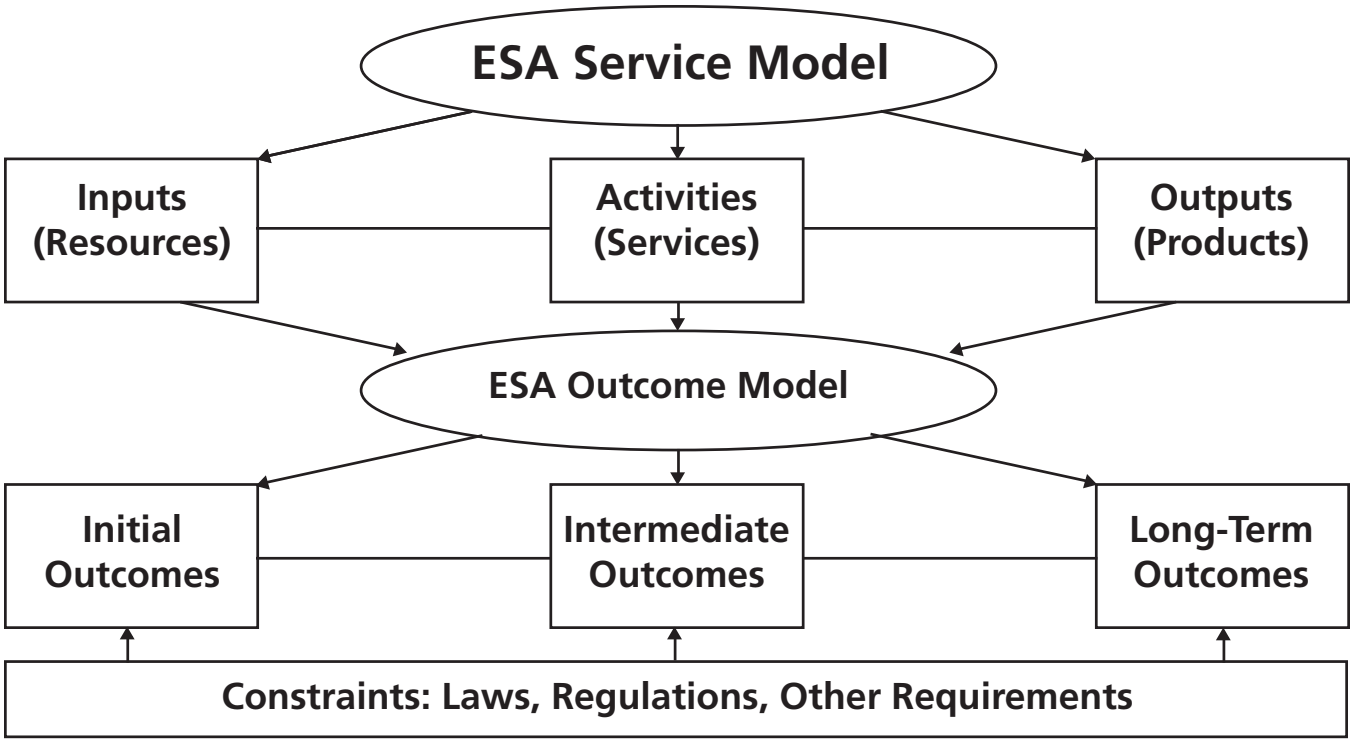
Benefits of a program logic model include:

1. A program logic model enables staff to stay focused better on outcomes, connect interim outcomes to long-term outcomes, link activities and processes to desired outcomes, and keep underlying program assumptions at the forefront of their minds. It clarifies how the program was originally intended to work and what adaptations may be needed once the program is operational.

2. A program logic model provides a powerful base from which to conduct ongoing evaluation of the program. It makes clear how the program produces the desired results, what works and what doesn't, and where the program may not be performing as originally planned.

3. A program logic model is an effective approach for evaluating complex initiatives with intangible outcomes or long-term outcomes that will not be achieved for several years. Tracking intermediate outcomes and the more measurable outcomes is possible on the way to measuring long-term and intangible outcomes. Consequently, progress can be charted and continuous improvements made based on the new information.

Figure 2. Program Outcome Logic Model



(1) A program logic model process is an interactive one that requires stakeholders to work together to clarify the rationale for the program and the conditions under which the program is likely to be most successful. Decisions about gaps in activities or services, expected outcomes, and program assumptions can be identified and changes made based on a logical process, rather than on personalities, politics, and ideology. Moreover, the process of creating the logic model creates a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

At this writing, the PMS team is in the process of creating the logic model for the Guided Self-Study program. Performance measures and indicators for each outcome at the three levels will be established. Procedures for collecting and reporting data on the indicators will reflect the lessons learned from visits to other ESA. Initial school districts receiving this new instructional support service will serve as the pilot sites for the performance measurement system.

In addition to institutionalizing the logic model process in planning and continuously improving programs offered by the cooperative, a web-based customer satisfaction survey is being designed to complement measuring the outcomes prescribed in the logic model. Strategic focus group data collection efforts are planned where additional, in-depth information is needed from the "customer" to make decisions about the program's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

Together, the logic model process, the customer satisfaction survey, and the strategic focus group constitute the self-assessment process that will enable the organization's leadership and staff to determine if the programs offered are answering the question that went unanswered by the traditional service model. The question is, "Are participants or target groups better off after receiving the service than they were before?" "Better off" for instructional support services means achieving results in accomplishing the new objective: All districts will succeed as demonstrated by continuous improvement toward a goal of 100 in the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System. Linking services of the cooperative with student performance on state tests will be more necessary than ever. Tracking what impact the services have at the classroom level will also be essential.

Lessons Learned

What have we learned in our journey to create a performance measurement system at KEDC? Certainly, we are in the very early stages of creating the most effective performance measurement system at KEDC. The review of literature, visits to selected ESAs, networking with progressive ESA directors, and experiences gained thus far provide a foundation of "lessons learned." We offer 10 conclusions that appear critical to our future success in developing an effective performance measurement, self-assessment process.

1. Beyond doubt, we have learned that ESAs are responding to the increased public school accountability environment. ESAs are becoming very sensitive to the pressure on public schools to show results in improving the performance of students on core academic subjects. While accepting a sense of "shared responsibility" for their customers' (public schools) success (or failure), most ESAs are wrestling with how to provide services and be accountable when most of their services are not directed to students. Improving test scores is caused by what teachers, administrators and others who directly serve the students do with skills learned in ESA professional development and other services.

   A performance measurement system must bridge this gap in a reasonable way for most ESA leadership to report accomplishments or failures with integrity. The opportunity to voluntarily address this issue may be closing as legislators and state departments of education consider or enact

laws and regulations that make ESAs more accountable for school improvement. Reporting instructional support services provided to schools (customers) without results on key outcome performance measures such as student achievement is becoming less welcome by both local and state policymakers. Implications and opportunities for ESAs in the federal 2002 Leave No Child Behind Act heightens the need to measure and report meaningful outcomes for ESA programs.

2. ESAs are developing elaborate systems for tracking services provided to school districts. Some ESAs present superintendents and staff of member school districts with detailed information about the number of services provided to them by the ESA. While the information may be available to the member district on the ESA's website, some ESA directors make a personal visit annually to present and explain the services provided to the district. How the ESA is saving the school district money is carefully explained during the visit, as well as information that can be linked to improving student achievement. Whether the ESA is linked to or governed by the state department of education may greatly influence data collection and reporting of ESA performance. Moreover, ESA staff may perceive the time needed to document and track services provided school districts to be a major imposition on their time unless the information is linked to strategic decisions that include the staff.

3. ESAs with computer-enhanced tracking systems are in transition to a web-based approach using the Internet that enables staff to easily enter and retrieve data. In organizations where continuous improvement is a hallmark of meeting customer needs, teams of appropriate staff or a supporting office in the ESA can be instrumental in revealing services that need to be improved to meet planned objectives. Some ESAs assign a staff member to be the customer relations contact for a member district. This person serves as the conduit for transmitting customer satisfaction and needs to appropriate ESA staff. Where necessary, a cross-functional team in the ESA formulates a solution to the customer's (school district's) expressed needs.

4. Tracking systems that significantly link ESA services to student achievement are in their infancy. Systems usually fall short of being able to connect ESA performance with increases (or declines) in student achievement (i.e., test scores). New state requirements on some ESAs we visited or contacted are expecting the network of ESAs to demonstrate how services tie more closely to improving student achievement in the core subjects. Incentives and sanctions for the ESA are being debated or on the horizon in several states. One ESA explained how it periodically conducted studies that explored as much as possible the cause and effect relationship between services and benefits to the school district. Customer satisfaction surveys appear to be a necessary and minimal step in gauging performance of the ESA. In some instances, such a survey is mandated by the state education agency.

5. ESAs are using the Baldrige criteria and other improvement systems to focus strategically on changes that might yield greater impact of ESA services. A culture of continuous improvement on core instructional support services that will get results is the goal of progressive ESAs. New hires in the ESAs are expected to fit into this culture. Expertise of existing staff is being updated to meet customer needs. Outside consultants are being employed to extend the capacity of the ESA for meeting selected school improvement needs of school districts (customers).

6. ESAs are creating partnerships that leverage expertise of universities, state department of education personnel, and other credible technical assistance providers. Expertise in member school districts is being tapped to increase the capacity of the ESA to provide essential instructional support services. The performance measure system must be able to reveal how this partnership arrangement adds value to achieving intended outcomes. For example, the partner must be willing to participate in the ESA's tracking system.

7. Some ESAs are planning to renovate or in the process of renovating their facilities to better accommodate the electronic collection and presentation of data. Again, web-based technology is being considered and accommodated in facilities being designed for in-house or broadcast (or other distance learning) technologies. Tracking professional development services provided to teachers in member districts is a high priority. ESAs also are accommodating beginning teachers programs of their own design and operation or those conducted by regional colleges and universities. Student teachers typically visit the ESA facility and learn of the instructional support and related school improvement services available.

8. Directors of ESAs visited by the KEDC performance measurement team expressed the positive experience, yet challenge, of reflecting on the organization's services in preparation for the site visit. In some regards, searching for "evidence" that could be described as revealing impact on improving student achievement was a "lesson learned" for the ESA's staff. Asking staff to critically review services that might be showcased to outside visitors provided a non-threatening and unique learning opportunity for staff. Questions and the ensuing discussions during the site visit provided information that usually stimulated the ESA staff to reexamine beliefs and practices that could foster greater commitment and change for measuring progress consistent with a philosophy of continuous improvement.

9. Progress in creating KEDC's performance measurement system reinforces how change must necessarily be a slow an incremental process. Locating external grant funds for starting new instructional support programs, one that could serve as the pilot for testing the PMS, takes considerable time. Time needed to perform traditional services, those that school districts have come to expect in accomplishing cost-savings functions, for example, must remain a priority. Tracking the instructional support services of the ESA also will require the school districts receiving the services to value providing data reflective of classroom practice. For example, a classroom teacher or school administrator who failed to implement the "best practices" provided for school district personnel may not be a welcome discovery. An effective PMS at the cooperative will function best for member districts that also have a high commitment to continuous improvement. The PMS system alone should not be seen as a quick fix to "low performing" schools.

10. KEDC's effort to learn from other ESAs stimulated the request from directors participating in the telephone conference call and site visits that the networking opportunity started by the initiative be continued. As ESA directors seek to build high-performance organizations, they express that staying on the "cutting edge" of innovation and change requires networking with those who are trying to change their organizations by credibly measuring their performance. A customer-driven, risk-taking orientation to change is desirable. Becoming a more entrepreneurial nonprofit organization also appears necessary.

Conclusion

Providing high quality services for school districts is not a new endeavor at KEDC. What is new and challenging is performing services that can be described as making a difference in schools striving to reach acceptable levels of proficiency on state-mandated measures of student achievement. A futuristic strategic plan for KEDC was a first step. Taking advantage of opportunities to voluntarily create a performance measurement system consistent with the climate of accountability being experienced by the cooperative's customers (school districts) requires persistent leadership. Clearly, we are in the early stages of creating a highly credible performance measurement system and self-assessment process. It will take time and a commitment to change that is guided by the organization's new strategic plan.

KEDC is fortunate that its board of directors and colleagues at ESAs around the country, including leadership at AESA, have committed to facilitating change in ways that encourage innovation and experimentation. Each ESA will likely need to develop the kind of performance measurement system that best addresses its current circumstances and future needs. For some ESAs it is almost too late, as legislatures define services that will be provided and measured for improving student performance.

KEDC leadership greatly appreciates the tremendous effort and enthusiasm shown by ESA directors and staff in making the site visits possible. Comments by participants in the telephone conference call and at the AESA session were informing, encouraging, and rewarding. Continuing to network is an excellent way for us to create the kind of performance measurement systems that enable ESAs to survive and thrive in an era of high-stakes accountability for public schools—and, increasingly, for ESAs in most states. Based on our experiences at this stage of our journey at KEDC, we expect to achieve our goal in a true "cooperative" spirit with colleagues at local, state and national levels.

Suggested Readings

The following references provided background information for this paper, and are offered as suggested readings for those interested in creating a performance measurement system for an individual ESA or state network of ESAs.

Berman, E.M. and West, J.P. (1998). Productivity enhancement efforts in public and nonprofit organizations. *Public Productivity & Management Review*, 22 (2), 207-219.

Bouckaert, G. (1993). Measurement and meaningful management. *Public Productivity & Management Review*, 17 (1), 31-44.

Brown, R.E. & Pyers, J.B. (1988). Putting the teeth into the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. *Public Administration Review*, 48 (3), 735-743.

Bruder, K.A. (1994). Public sector benchmarking: A practical approach. *Public Management*, 76 (9), S9-S14.

Bryson, J.M. (1995). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Burford, C.E. (2001, September). Ohio's ESC network: Best practice expectations. *Perspectives: Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies*, 7, 20-24.

Center for Accountability and Performance. (1998). *Performance measurement: Concepts and techniques*. Washington, D.C.: American Society for Public Administration.

Halachmi, A., & Bouckaert, G. (1996). *Organizational performance and measurement in the public sector: Toward service, effort, and accomplishments reporting*. Westport, Connecticut: Quorum Books.

Harkreader, S.A., & Henry, G.T. (2000). Using performance measurement systems for assessing the merit and worth of reforms. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 21 (2) 151-170.

Hatry, H.P. (1999). *Performance measurement: Getting results*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

Hatry, H.P., Marcotte, J.E., Van Houten, T., & Weiss, C. H. (1998). *Customer surveys for agency managers*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

Hayes, B.E. (1998). *Measuring customer satisfaction: Survey design, use, and statistical analysis methods*. Milwaukee, WI.: ASQ Quality Press, 1998.

Harmon, H. L., & Stephens, E. R. (1999, December). *Focusing ESAs on school improvement: State laws, regulations and policies*. Presentation at 1999 American Association of Educational Service Agencies Conference, Marco Island, FL.

Harmon, H. L., & Talbott, B. (1999, December). *Sharing best practices of ESAs for improving student achievement*. Presentation at 1999 American Association of Educational Service Agencies Conference, Marco Island, FL.

Henry, G.T., & McMillan, J.H. (1993). Performance data: Three comparison methods. *Evaluation Review*, 17 (6) 643-652.

Kopczynski, P., & Lombardo, M. (1999). Comparative performance measurement: Insights and lessons learned from a consortium effort. *Public Administration Review*, 59 (2) 124-134.

Kravchuck, R.S., & Schack, R.W. (1996). Designing effective performance-measurement systems under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. *Public Administration Review*, 56 (4), 348-358.

Layman, R., & Harmon, H. L. (2001, December). *Role of regional best practice centers in "academic review" of low performing schools*. Presentation at the Association of Educational Service Agencies Conference, Marriott Marquis, Atlanta, GA.

Layman, R., & Harmon, H. L. (2000, November). *Superintendents' perceived needs for instructional support services from regional education centers in Virginia*. Presentation at 2000 Association of Educational Service Agencies Conference, Las Vegas, NV.

McKinney, B, and Gauntt, K. (2001, September). EscWorks. *Perspectives: Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies*, 7, 8-19.

Morley, E., Bryant, S.P. & Hatry, H.P. (2001). *Comparative performance measurement*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

Ogilive, D. A. (1999, September). Building a customer-focused culture: From vision to action. *Perspectives: Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies*, 5, 3-8.

Osborne, D. & Gaebler, T. (1992). *Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Patton, M.Q. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Plantz, M.C., Greenway, M.T., & Hendricks, M. (1997, Fall). Outcome measurement: Showing results in the nonprofit sector. *New Directions for Evaluation,* 75, 15-30.

Poister, T.H., & Streib, G. (1999). Performance measurement in municipal government: Assessing the state of the practice.*Public Administration Review*, 59 (4) 325-335.

Rossi, P.H., Freeman, H.E., & Lipsey, M.W. (1999). *Evaluation: A systematic approach (6th Edition)*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishers.

Stephens, E. R. (2001, November). *State-sponsored annual report cards on the work of state networks of ESAs*. Presentation at 2001 Association of Educational Service Agencies Conference, Marriott Marquis, Atlanta, GA.

Stephens, E. R., & Harmon, H. L. (1999, October). *New roles for ESAs in rural school improvement initiatives*. Presentation at the National Rural Education Association Convention, Colorado Springs, CO.

Stephens, E. R., & Harmon, H. L. (1998, September). Standards and performance measures on the horizon. *Perspectives: Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies*, 4, 3-26.

Stephens, G. M. (1999, September). The Baldrige quality assessment: A service to districts and a tool for service agency improvements. *Perspectives: Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies*, 5, 9-19.

United Way of America. (1996). *Measuring program outcomes: A practical approach*. Alexandria, Va.: United Way of America.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (1998). *W. K. Foundation evaluation handbook*. Battle Creek, MI: Author.

Hobart Harmon, Ph.D., is an education consultant in Timberville, VA. He can be reached by phone at 540-901-9932, or by e-mail at hharmon@shentel.net.

Stan Riggs is executive director of the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC) in Ashland, KY. He can be reached by phone at 606-928-0205.

Tom Lewis is Public Relations Director at the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC) in Ashland, KY. He can be reached by phone at 606-928-0205.

Sharla Six is Director of Instructional Support at the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC) in Ashland, KY. She can be reached by phone at 606-928-0205.

Appendix A

Kentucky Educational Development Cooperative (KEDC) Strategic Plan

Mission	Beliefs	Objective	Strategies	Parameters
To develop the capacity of schools, school districts, and other partners to transform their educational systems to produce students who can successfully compete in a global society.	*1. Children are our first priority.* *2. Every child deserves an equal educational opportunity.* *3. Each individual has worth.* *4. Education improves the quality of life.* *5. Learning is a lifelong process.* *6. Expectations shape reality.* *7.Leadership is vital to organizational productivity.* *8.A safe and nurturing environment promotes growth.* *9. Excellence is worth the investment.* *10.A positive vision is vital for a successful future.* *11. Global competitiveness demands a highly educated workforce.*	*All districts will succeed as demonstrated by continuous improvement toward a goal of 100 in the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System.*	*1.We will design programs to aid districts and schools with school improvement that are focused on student outcomes.* *2.We will provide comprehensive professional development for districts, schools, and other partners.* *3.We will provide management support services to assist districts and schools in being efficient and effective.* *4.We will restructure and develop the KEDC staff in a way that obtains the human and fiscal resources necessary to accomplish our mission.* *5.We will develop a public relations system that enables KEDC to obtain the objective.* *6.We will expand and develop the technology services available to districts.* *7.We will develop a self-assessment process for evaluation of progress towards our mission.*	*1.We will practice participatory management at every level of the organization.* *2.We will respond to external pressure without compromising our beliefs and mission.* *3.We will not allow geography to become a factor which detracts from our mission.* *4.We will not allow our desire to be competitive to diminish the quality of our services.* *5.We will always operate with a balanced budget.*

Appendix B
Questions for KEDC Site Visits to Other ESAs

Performance Measurement System Questions

1. What kind of system do you use to measure and/or track the amount of services that your service agency provides school districts, particularly services related to improving student achievement in member districts?

2. How does your system or approach help you determine if the services provided were effective or had an impact?

3. What are the specific indicators that you track?

4. Did you create a computer software program to track the indicators, buy a commercial program, or use some other approach?

5. How do you provide for quality control of your data in the system so you are assured the data are as accurate as possible?

6. How do you attempt to use and/or report results of your performance measurement system (for example, do you prepare a report for each member district of the ESA and also an annual report revealing overall performance of the ESA's)?

7. Who is responsible to manage and maintain your performance measurement system and database?

8. What have you learned in creating your system to track services provided member school districts that is most critical to its success (performance measurement/tracking system)?

9. How have you used the tracking system to conduct a self-assessment process that helps you improve services to school districts?

10. How has your Board of Directors or governing agency been involved in and/or reacted to your performance measurement system that tracks services of the agency?

11. How long has it taken your organization to develop and implement your performance measurement system?

12. Do you have any other points of wisdom to share with us relevant to creating and using a performance measurement system for your ESA, particularly for focusing the ESA on services related to improving student academic achievement?

Instructional Support Questions

1. What instructional support services do you offer your school districts? Below is a list that you might find useful as possibilities for brainstorming purposes.

   a. Media and technology assistance
   b. Program accountability/evaluation
   c. Clearinghouse for curriculum materials
   d. Assist with curriculum development process
   e. Explore models of best practice for teaching and learning
   f. School improvement planning
   g. Student testing and assessment
   h. Classroom management
   i. Direct instruction for special student populations
   j. Assistance in providing for exceptional children
   k. Educational audits
   l. Evaluation of hardware and software
   m. Program for at-risk students
   n. Help in creating alternative assessments for student learning
   o. Enhance instruction with content-specific techniques and/or materials (e.g., math)
   p. Support for implementation of content standards
   q. Interdisciplinary approaches
   r. Evaluation of instructional materials
   s. Clearinghouse for regional instructional materials and programs
   t. Educational applications of technology
   u. Evaluating instruction
   v. Support school-determined in-services and workshops
   w. Enhance professional skills (e.g., in-service, workshop, course)
   x. Support mentoring opportunities for superintendents and principals
   y. Support renewal of teacher/administrator professional licenses
   z. Staff development in instructional leadership

2. Of the instructional support services that your ESA offers, which services have you determined to be most effective in helping the school districts (and schools) improve test scores?

3. What approaches have your ESA taken to help teachers integrate technology into instruction that seem to be effective?

4. How has the ESA provided instructional support services in core academic areas such as math, science, English and language arts, and history?

5. How does the ESA evaluate individual instructional support services (activities) provided to school districts?

6. What barriers did your ESA have to overcome to offer needed instructional support services for schools and school districts?

7. What grant funds have you attracted or won that helped you offer key instructional support services to school districts?

8. If you had the resources, what new instructional support services would you offer school districts based on needs expressed by teachers, principals, superintendents, your board members (or stakeholders)?

7 SHARE: Turning a Promising Practice into Reality

by
Jean T. Papandrea, Robert J. Reidy, and Barbara A. Walkley

Imagine schools where every educator:

- can clearly articulate what students need to know and be able to do,
- has the skills to assess the gap between where students are and where they need to be,
- and where learning these skills is embedded within the classroom.

In this vision all educators view students as entering any new learning at a readiness level described in terms of prior knowledge and skill, rather than in terms of student deficit or giftedness. All educators have the skills to set rigorous yet attainable goals and to move students toward these goals, always keeping the learners within their instructional level. Instructional level is defined by Dr. Edward E. Gickling as the 'comfort zone' created at the intersection of the suitability of the material being taught, the student's ability to learn the material, and the skill of the teacher, creating the conditions for optimal learning. Instructionsal level is determined through curriculum-based assessment.

In this vision you would see educators networking professionally, giving their skills away as instructional supporters to each other, and the full staff would set measurable, continuous improvement goals for the systems within the school needed to support this vision.

These are the schools that have fully implemented 7 SHARE.

The Beginning

In the fall of 1998, the seven districts of the Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga (SCT) Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) embarked on a collaborative regional initiative called the 7 SHARE (Supporting and Helping to Affect Regional Education) Initiative. The seven school districts of the SCT BOCES have a history of working collaboratively toward developing regional improvement goals and programs to serve the common good of students in our schools. The 7 SHARE Initiative is a powerful example of a region-wide commitment to a unified direction of systems change for student success.

The 7 SHARE Initiative is a profound systems change that has challenged the traditional special education and staff development paradigms. Employing an instructional support model, the 7 SHARE Initiative is a research-based, data-driven delivery system that addresses three critical educational systems improvement questions:

1. What if we really organized schools around teaching and learning instead of sorting and selecting, classifying and placing students?

2. What if we focused on continuous improvement instead of deficit driven-processes?

3. What if we promoted a collaborative model that creates a strong professional network within each school, while moving educators out of isolated cells and passive staff development experiences?

The instructional support model is grounded in the Effective Schools research, the Curriculum-Based Assessment work of Dr. Edward E. Gickling (Gickling & Thompson, 2001; Tucker, 1985; Gickling & Thompson, 1985; Gickling & Armstrong, 1978), and the Pennsylvania Instructional Support Model led by Dr. James A. Tucker (Tucker, 2001; Kovaleski, Tucker & Stevens, 1996).

The purpose of the initiative is to raise student achievement and prevent student failure and inappropriate referrals to special education by intervening instructionally with students who are struggling, and by bringing job-embedded staff development to the classroom. The 7 SHARE Initiative is changing our traditional thinking about instruction, assessment, intervention and prevention of academic failure, and about staff development. Instead of sending struggling students to separate locations for services, and teachers out of their classrooms for training, the 7 SHARE Initiative brings support for teachers and students to the location where teaching and learning take place: the general education classroom.

Instructional support is a way of operating in schools that turns the nature of what we each do into that of *helping*: helping students and helping each other. The primary purpose of instructional support is to create the conditions within the school and each classroom for all students to succeed. Instructional support requires collaborative problem-solving around the issues of *teaching, learning, and assessment.* The essential foundations of instructional support are:

1. Curriculum-based assessment,

2. Collaborative problem-solving,

3. Research-proven instructional practices, and a

4. Guided practice approach to staff development through in-classroom modeling of practices and strategies.

The goal of instructional support is to quickly and effectively discover the root cause of a student or group of students' failure to achieve, and to develop and support the implementation of instructional interventions *within the classroom* that will turn struggle and failure into success. Instructional intervention becomes the role of every adult in the school.

The Catalyst

In May of 1995, Dr. James Tucker, then Professor of Educational Psychology at Andrews University, Michigan, was the featured speaker at the New York State Special Education and Training Resource Center (SETRC) Meeting in Albany, New York. Dr. Tucker's presentation (Tucker, 1993) was compelling in its comprehensive and accurate picture of the history of the special education in our nation, and its unintended negative consequences. The consequences included: escalating referrals, escalating cost, schools' over-

reliance on special education as the best-funded system to serve high-needs students, and its failure to produce academic achievement for the students it served. Dr. Tucker's presentation demonstrated the need for complete systems change away from special education's deficit model to a new vision such as the one described in this article's opening. During the 1996-97 school year we began the systems change by training teams of educators called Classroom Intervention Model (CIM) Teams.

In May of 1998, Dr. Tucker visited our schools to observe our instructional practices and to complete efficiency study on our region's special education system. His final report spoke to the research of Ellis and Fouts (1997). They identified mastery learning, direct instruction, cooperative learning and authentic (curriculum-based) assessment as the four best practices that have been proven effective over time in improving student learning. In our situation Dr. Tucker found evidence of all except authentic assessment, and he specifically recommended that we learn and implement curriculum-based assessment as developed by Dr. Edward E. Gickling.

Dr. Tucker also recommended that we add to our Classroom Intervention Model, full-time, highly trained Instructional Support Teachers (ISTs) at a ratio of 1/500 at the elementary level, and 1/1000 at the secondary level. The ISTs working in conjunction with trained CIM Teams in every school would have the primary goal of building capacity to raise achievement of large number of students. In addition, we needed to train our region in curriculum based assessment and create systems to share the aforementioned research-based, best practices across the region. And so began the collaborative school reform journey of the SCT BOCES and its seven component districts: Elmira, Elmira Heights, Horseheads, Odessa-Montour, Spencer-Van Etten, Watkins Glen, and Waverly.

Goals

Initiated in the fall of 1998, the original goals and benchmarks of the initiative were to:

1. Eliminate inappropriate referrals to special education (target referral rate: 1-2%).

2. Reduce the classification rate in our BOCES area (rate had increased by 13.20% over a five- year period).

3. Provide greater opportunity and access to the general educational environment for students with disabilities (50-60% of students with disabilities will spend 80% or more of the day in the regular education classroom).

In the pilot (1998-99) school year of the 7 SHARE Initiative, nine (9) schools were the first to launch instructional support:

- 7 elementary schools (one from each district), and
- 2 secondary schools (one middle, one high school).

During that first year, we trained and networked the new ISTs, trained new teams from schools across the region, developed a data collection system, and instituted a three-pronged approach to program evaluation.

Instructional Support Process

In this Instructional Support Model, extensively trained Instructional Support Teachers (ISTs) conduct Curriculum-Based Assessments (CBA), teach instructional strategies to the student, and model these

strategies for class-wide application in classrooms. ISTs are staff developers within their schools by providing guided practice for teachers and supporting CIM Teams as they learn new strategies and practices. ISTs build the regional capacity for improvement by meeting in monthly regional network meetings to share successful instructional practices from their work in individual schools.

Guided Practice Approach to Staff Development

Teachers, like all learners, need guided practice in order to master a new skill. When it comes to new instructional practices learned in teacher training, teachers need continued job-embedded support and follow-up (Guskey, 1991; Joyce & Showers, 1982). In the 7 SHARE Initiative we have located this guided practice within the classroom, with teachers' own students. ISTs, CIM teams, and teachers receive monthly guided practice within their schools, from national instructional support consultants Dr. Edward E. Gickling and Dr. John Dellegrotto, and from BOCES staff development specialists. The ISTs, in-turn, provide daily modeling and support for the implementation of the strategies they use, within the classrooms in their schools and with each other across district lines.

Program Evaluation Process

In 1998 the 7 SHARE Initiative established a comprehensive evaluation process, including both internal and external evaluators. Figure 1 illustrates the multiple data sources and research questions used to evaluate 7 SHARE.

Figure 1 7 SHARE Evaluation Questions and Data Sources

	Video Interviews with Participants (2001-2002)	Syracuse University Evaluation (1998-2000)	IST Student Intervention Data (1998-2001)	IST Activity Data (1998 - 2001)	Regional Demographic Data (1998-2001)
*What is the impact on **individual students?***	• *Teachers* • *Principals* • *Parents* • *Students*	• *Teachers' perceptions and practice*	• *Student intervention reports* • *Student assessments*	• *Student contacts* • *Parent contacts* • *Classroom delivery of strategies*	• *Referral rate* • *Classification rate* • *Placement data*
*What is the impact on **teachers?***	• *Teachers* • *Principals* • *Parents* • *Students*	• *Teachers' perceptions and practice*	• *Student intervention reports*	• *Staff contacts* • *Classroom delivery of strategies and support* • *Staff development* • *IST/team contactt*	• *Referral rate* • *Classification rate* • *Placement data*
*What is the impact on the **system?***	• *Teachers* • *Principals* • *Parents* • *Students*	• *Teachers' perceptions and practice*	• *Student intervention reports*	• *All of above*	• *Referral rate* • *Classification rate* • *Placement data* • *Cost analysis*

7 SHARE Initiative Third Year (2000-2001) Results

Systems Impact

Upon completion of the analysis of three years of data, we have discovered the following:

- Referrals – the percent of the total population that is referred for testing to receive classification for special services. Our goal is 2% across the region. Our referrals were reduced by 34% over two years and in the original nine schools by 41% over two years. The area referral rate was 2%, down from 2.7% in 1997-98.
- Classification efficiency – the percent of students referred that do become classified to receive special services. The ultimate efficiency goal would be to have a system that has 100% of those students referred be appropriately classified. Our efficiency improved from 51.2% in 1997-98 to 84.5% in 2000-2001, meaning 84.5% of students referred for special education qualified.
- Classification rate - the percent of the total population of students that are classified to receive special services. New York State has set a goal of 11% or less. The classification rate of the BOCES is 13.66% as of December 1, 2000, down from 14.3% in December of 1998, reversing the pattern of escalation in our region that saw a 13.20% increase from 1993 to 1998. In Spencer-Van Etten, a district with high implementation of the 7 SHARE Initiative, the number of classified students has been reduced by 28%.
- 55% of classified students and 95% of the student population had access to the general education setting 80% or more of the time, a 4% increase from one year ago.
- 5% of classified students were still outside of regular school settings as of December 1, 2000, an 8% decline from 1996. This is a lower percentage than the New York State average of 8.5%.

School/Teacher Impact

- In 2000-2001, 28 schools were served by 26 ISTs:
  - 19 elementary schools
  - 4 middle schools
  - 3 junior–senior high schools
  - 3 high schools (including the BOCES TEC Center)
- 63% of direct student intervention sessions occurred within the classroom, compared to 32% in 1999-2000.
- 2637 sessions of in-classroom strategy modeling were delivered, a 45% increase from the previous year.
- 3225 sessions of other in-class support were delivered, a 90% increase from the previous year.
- 3886 teachers participated in job-embedded staff development in their schools with specific guided practice follow-up in their classrooms, delivered by the IST.
- Teachers and principals indicate that the role of the IST is pivotal in improving collaboration, consistency, communication and continuous improvement in their schools.

Student Impact

Students, parents and teachers involved in instructional support reported positive impact on student achievement, referring to specific strategies used, and positive results of interventions on reading, organization and overall grades.

General Education Students

7 SHARE Initiative 2000-2001: Third Year Instructional Support Teacher Individual Student Intervention Reports 664 Students Received Intervention 598 (90%) for Academic Concerns		
Academic Areas of Measurement	Number and % of those referred for academic reasons (If more than one priority concern exists, only the top two priorities are reported.)	Number and % of those referred whose reports indicated improvement
Reading	328 (54.8)	207 (63.1)
Math	175 (29.2)	104 (59.4)
Study/Organizational Skillls	229 (38.2)	83 (36.2
Grades	149 (24.9)	96 (64.4)
Other	112 (18.7)	40 (35.7)

Special Education Students

- The percentage of special education students in the 7 SCT BOCES districts scoring at level 3 or 4 on the 4th grade NY State English Language Arts (ELA) Assessment was 11 percentage points higher in 2001 (28%) than in 1999 (17%).
- The percentage of special education students achieving at level 3 or 4 on the 4th grade NYS Math Assessment was 12 percentage points higher in 2000 (40%) than in 1999 (28%).
- The percentage of special education students achieving at level 3 or 4 on the 8th grade NYS ELA Assessment was 2 percentage points lower in 2000 (2%) than in 1999 (4%).
- The percentage of special education students achieving at level 3 or 4 on the 8th grade NYS Math Assessment was 5 percentage points higher in 2000 (6%) than in 1999 (1%).

Students, parents and teachers spoke in interviews about the positive impact on student achievement. Each referred directly to the strategies that helped the students to improve. The examples given below are representative of the comments received.

> It was hard. I just couldn't keep everything together. [IST] had me bring a binder. And she took the homework sheet and put it in the binder, she put a calendar in the binder and a desk organizational thing in the binder so I could see if my desk was ok. It's much easier than it was. The grades have gotten much higher.
>
> *Peter, the 6th grade student*

> He was very disorganized….His homework assignments were always very late. Half the time he never knew what his homework assignments were. And he hated school. [Now] he has his work organized…he's learned to do that. He knows what his assignments are and he follows through with them. At the end of the last year when he received his report card, he had failed math...and this last report card, I think, he got an 86 in math. So there's a good example of how it's really helped him. And the best thing about it is that he likes school now. He informed me that when he grows up that he wants to be a 6th grade teacher. That means a lot.
>
> *Mother of Peter, a 6th grade student*

"All of his grades have just skyrocketed. He's doing fabulous."

Peter's teacher

Conclusions

By aligning research-proven practices with our beliefs, we are seeing results in a number of areas.

- Our demographic data has been steadily improving; there has been no Hawthorne effect. We are achieving our original goals of lowering referrals and classification rates while increasing classification efficiency and the percentage of students with disabilities in general education settings 80% or more of the day.
- Increases in the activities of ISTs that address systems change contribute to moving us away from a deficit model. Data shows that
  - ISTs are working more within classrooms to model and support effective instruction.
  - More interventions with students occur within the classroom than out of the classroom.
  - Staff and parent contacts show substantial increases.
- Networking of those strategies proven to work is expanding beyond classroom and school walls.
- Struggling students served in instructional support are improving academically rather than being referred to special education.
- Students reported their own successes in measurable terms.
- Teachers and principals reported improved collaboration, consistency of instructional practices, and communication.
- Staff development is increasingly occurring within the classroom and within the school building.
- Teachers reported the positive impact of in-classroom intervention and instructional support in their own continuous improvement.
- Principals reported the positive impact on the continuous improvement of the school as a system.
- Teachers, parents, principals and students speak about specific instructional and assessment strategies that have worked.

Discussion

It takes a lot longer to create change than anybody thinks. People think change can occur in 3-5 years, yet it normally takes 10-20 years. We lose patience in the process and we move on to something else before we've seen the completion of one cycle.

Dr. James Tucker, 2001 Interview

The planners of the 7 SHARE Initiative designed a five year phase-in of the instructional support process, meaning that by the end of the 2002-2003 school year, teams and ISTs would be trained and in place in all of our schools. Having the pieces in place, however, is far from full implementation of the structure, processes and vision. We can see the truth in Dr. Tucker's statement, and our early results give us great confidence that if we stay the course we will realize our goals. We are committed to improving our results by making sound instructional decisions at the classroom level.

Measuring the impact on student achievement is different in an instructional support environment than in

the state as a whole. Outcomes in the 7 SHARE Initiative are measured by individual student curriculum-based assessments, by grades, and attendance, and the impact must be measured first in these terms, and analyzed student-by-student, grade-by-grade and school-by-school. Over time we anticipate that we will see large systems improvements in state assessments. State assessment data informs program decisions, but is not an appropriate assessment of individuals.

Finally, we need to remember what change experts tell us about the challenges we should expect. With every change effort there will be resistance, barriers, implementation dips, successes and disappointments. Change always takes longer than our patience tolerates. The greatest mistake would be to give in to the challenges and give up before working through them to see positive results. In a one-on-one interview, Tucker (2001) advised,

> *If you push through [the barriers] you will achieve the goal, the mission, the vision; and the data will be there to make you realize, 'Yes, we did it.' In my own experience in working with hundreds of school districts that have gone through this process over a period of about twenty years, those that stayed with it succeeded, those that gave up didn't.*

The responsibility for student learning belongs to each of us.

References

Center for Special Education Finance (CSEF). (1996). *Pre-referral intervention in Pennsylvania: Is it cost effective?* (1996). Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.

Ellis, A. & Fouts, J. (1997). Research on educational innovations. Larchmont: Eye on Education Press.

Gickling, E.E., & Thompson, V.E. (2001). Putting the learning needs of children first. In Sornson, B. (Ed.). *Preventing early learning failure*. Alexandria: ASCD.

Gickling, E.E., & Thompson, V.E. (1985). A personal view of curriculum-based assessment. *Exceptional Children 52* (3), 205-218.

Gickling, E.E., & Armstrong, D.L. (1978). Levels of instructional difficulty as related to on-task behavior, task completion, and comprehension. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 11*, 559-566.

Guskey, T.R. (1991). Enhancing the effectiveness of professional development programs. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation,* 2(3), 239-247.

Joyce, R.B., & Showers, B.(1982). The coaching of teaching. *Educational Leadership,* 40, 4-10.

Kovaleski, J.F., Tucker, J.A., & Stevens, L. (1996). Bridging special and regular education: The Pennsylvania initiative. *Educational Leadership,* Fall 1996.

Tucker, J.A. (1985). Curriculum-based assessment: An introduction. *Exceptional Children 52(3),* 199-204.

Tucker, J.A. (1993). Special education: Past, present, and future. Keynote address at the 14th National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities. Miami Beach, Florida.

Tucker, J. A. (2001). Instructional support teams: It's a group thing. In Sornson, B. (Ed.). *Preventing early learning failure*. Alexandria: ASCD.

Jean Papandrea is the Classroom Intervention and SETRC Coordinator for the SCT BOCES in Elmira, New York. She can be contacted by phone at (607) 739-3581 and by e-mail at jpapandr@mail.sctboces.org.

Dr. Robert Reidy is the District Superintendent of the SCT BOCES in Elmira, New York. He can be contacted by phone at (607) 739-3581 or by e-mail at rreidy@mail.sctboces.org.

Barb Walkley is the Administrator of Staff and Organizational Development at the SCT BOCES. She can be contacted by phone at (607) 739-3581 or by e-mail at bwalkley@mail.sctboces.org.

Virtual Learning: Success Through Collaboration

by
Janet Dubble and Kristen Swengel

Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 (IU 13), one of 29 intermediate units serving Pennsylvania, is a regional education agency whose mission is assist local districts to enhance educational opportunities by providing high quality, cost-effective services. IU 13 is a leader in recognizing the needs of schools and in implementing programs to meet those needs. Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit employs over 1,500 full- and part-time employees in its local and state initiative programs and serves the 22 school districts in Lancaster and Lebanon counties in Central Pennsylvania (student population of over 88,000), as well as students in non-public schools. IU 13 is organized into five departments: Business Services, Exceptional Children Services, Human Resources, Instructional Services, and Technology Services.

History of Online Learning at IU 13: The Collaboration Begins

Recognizing the emerging trend of online education in the higher education arena, IU 13 Technology Services staff began to develop online courses for teachers to earn Pennsylvania in-service credit in October of 1998. This initiative proved to be very successful. In early 1999, IU 13 partnered with a local school district to develop three online courses. Staff from IU 13's Technology Services and Instructional Services Department joined together to coordinate this initiative. IU 13 recognized the power of a collaborative effort between these two departments- bringing the expertise of technology, curriculum, assessment and instruction together in this virtual education project. This served as the foundation of IU 13's collaborative approach to virtual education.

The goal of this initial course development project was to provide students with an opportunity to complete both required and elective courses outside of the traditional school day. Although the development of courses proved to be a very costly and time-consuming process, grant funding and collaboration with local districts enabled the continuation of course development, with 13 courses being developed by Fall 2001.

During the time that online courses were being developed locally, the IU 13 virtual education team began researching the availability of commercial online content. Through this collaboration with local school districts, commercial online providers, as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Education, other regional service agencies, and other virtual education programs nationwide, IU 13 continues to expand and provide a successful online learning program to meet the needs of students and schools.

Virtual Learning: Success Through Collaboration

by
Janet Dubble and Kristen Swengel

Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 (IU 13), one of 29 intermediate units serving Pennsylvania, is a regional education agency whose mission is assist local districts to enhance educational opportunities by providing high quality, cost-effective services. IU 13 is a leader in recognizing the needs of schools and in implementing programs to meet those needs. Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit employs over 1,500 full- and part-time employees in its local and state initiative programs and serves the 22 school districts in Lancaster and Lebanon counties in Central Pennsylvania (student population of over 88,000), as well as students in non-public schools. IU 13 is organized into five departments: Business Services, Exceptional Children Services, Human Resources, Instructional Services, and Technology Services.

History of Online Learning at IU 13: The Collaboration Begins

Recognizing the emerging trend of online education in the higher education arena, IU 13 Technology Services staff began to develop online courses for teachers to earn Pennsylvania in-service credit in October of 1998. This initiative proved to be very successful. In early 1999, IU 13 partnered with a local school district to develop three online courses. Staff from IU 13's Technology Services and Instructional Services Department joined together to coordinate this initiative. IU 13 recognized the power of a collaborative effort between these two departments- bringing the expertise of technology, curriculum, assessment and instruction together in this virtual education project. This served as the foundation of IU 13's collaborative approach to virtual education.

The goal of this initial course development project was to provide students with an opportunity to complete both required and elective courses outside of the traditional school day. Although the development of courses proved to be a very costly and time-consuming process, grant funding and collaboration with local districts enabled the continuation of course development, with 13 courses being developed by Fall 2001.

During the time that online courses were being developed locally, the IU 13 virtual education team began researching the availability of commercial online content. Through this collaboration with local school districts, commercial online providers, as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Education, other regional service agencies, and other virtual education programs nationwide, IU 13 continues to expand and provide a successful online learning program to meet the needs of students and schools.

Collaboration With Nationwide Virtual Educators

An important beginning step in the development of a plan for the creating of a virtual education program is to research programs that already exist. Most coordinators of virtual programs throughout the country are more than willing to share their successes and failures. Staff from IU 13 visited the Florida Virtual School (http://www.fhs.net/) and also attended national virtual school events. These visits enabled IU 13 staff to connect with others in the field who had already experienced the growing pains of beginning a virtual education program. Becoming a part of a national network of virtual educators is an excellent way to exchange best practices and support each other through the planning and implementation process.

Continuing to be a valuable resource for IU 13's virtual education programs, an informal network of virtual education providers has evolved throughout the country. Local school districts, regional service agencies, and other virtual education programs nationwide are able to share information related to virtual education policies, quality course development indicators and the implementation of online learning with students, teachers and schools.

Collaboration with Pennsylvania Department of Education

IU 13 maintains ongoing communication with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) about its virtual education initiatives. During the spring of 2002, IU 13 was requested to assist the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Office of Educational Technology, in the implementation of a statewide AP Exam review course initiative funded by PDE. IU 13 saw this as an opportunity to have large numbers of students, teachers and schools experience online learning. IU 13's role in the implementation has included the co-development of materials for the website, statewide mailings for awareness of this program and handling technical assistance calls and emails from teachers and students who access the AP exam review courses.

IU 13 works collaboratively on a number of online course development projects for professional education for teachers and administrators. These development projects are with the Partnerships for Educational Excellence Network (PEEN), the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) and intermediate units across the state. This approach has maximized the resources at local service centers and allowed for varied levels of involvement based on staff size and a service center's commitment to virtual education. It has also strengthened the collective expertise in the field of online learning.

Collaboration With Local School Districts and Teachers

Including local school districts and teachers in the process of designing and developing an online education program is essential. There are many myths related to virtual education, and it is crucial that these myths be dispelled. Many teachers believe that online learning will replace the "traditional" school system and its teachers. In actuality, a well-designed virtual education program will augment the existing educational program, allow a school district to provide educational alternatives for students, and individualize the learning experience for students and teachers. In reality, a good online program that involves engaging the students in interactive projects will not decrease the necessity for teachers, but may increase that need.

Another common myth is that online courses are only for advanced or gifted students. Although online education is not an alternative for every student, many service agencies and school districts have had great success in providing online courses for ESL students, alternative education programs, and many other types of learners. A virtual education alternative can be limited only by the needs of the school district or agency.

IU 13 worked very closely with the administration and teaching staff of its local districts. Through a consortium of 11 local districts, coordinated by IU 13 staff, decisions were made as to how courses would be developed and distributed. Teachers were selected by local districts and trained and supported by IU 13 instructional and technology staff. Teachers were totally immersed in the course development process. They did not have any classroom responsibilities for an entire semester. This model is a costly one, both in money and time. The local development of courses involves intensive training in the use of technology, the development of curriculum, and alignment to standards. Issues of copyright, licensing and ownership of course content must be addressed, particularly if the courses will be shared outside of the developing school district or service agency.

The support of the regional agency does not end when the courses are completed. IU 13 provides continued training of and technical support for the teachers who are teaching the online courses. This support may take the form of the development of an online discussion board for virtual teachers, and even a virtual education "support group" for teachers. At the request of the online instructors, IU 13 has created the "Virtual Education Teacher Network" (VETN), a group of IU 13 technology and instruction staff and online teachers who get together on a monthly basis for the sharing of virtual learning experiences.

Collaboration with Commercial Online Providers

One way to expand the online educational opportunities for students without having to locally develop all courses is to partner with commercial online content providers. These providers offer proven course content. The courses are developed by teachers knowledgeable in the field, with the addition of multimedia teams to develop highly interactive lessons and activities. It is important that this content be reviewed closely prior to making any financial commitments. The regional service agency can conduct this research and make recommendations to the local districts. After much evaluation of existing content providers for course design and educational quality, effective delivery and teacher involvement, service and support of their products, and company stability, IU 13 has partnered with two online content providers and a company to provide course delivery infrastructure. Apex Learning, Inc. (http://www.apexlearning.com) provides online courses for advanced placement courses, online course tools for use in the face-to-face AP classroom, and online exam reviews for students preparing to take AP exams. Apex is also expanding their course offerings to include foreign language courses and other non-AP courses. The other content provider with which IU 13 has partnered is class.com (http://www.class.com), an online provider of a complete high school curriculum. With class.com, school districts and service agencies have the opportunity to train and employ their own teachers, thereby allowing for the sharing of teachers in those course areas where instructors are difficult to find. IU 13 has also partnered with Blackboard (http://www.blackboard.com) to provide a consistent infrastructure for the delivery of online content.

IU 13 worked with all three companies to negotiate volume discount pricing, not just for the 22 districts within its service area, but throughout the state of Pennsylvania. This large volume allows for the lowest possible purchase price for Pennsylvania educational institutions.

Collaboration With Other Regional Service Agencies

When IU 13 began working on virtual education in 1999, there were not many people working in this arena. Unlike many other areas of education, staff could not walk to down the hall and talk to people about their experiences with virtual education. This field was brand new to K-12. This necessitated the development of a national communication network.

One such relationship developed between IU 13 and a regional service center in Kansas, the Southeast Educational Service Center in Greenbush, Kansas (http://www.virtualgreenbush.org). IU 13 and Greenbush began collaborating via phone and email. This allowed a sharing of experiences with course development, experiences with commercial providers, pricing structures and implementation models. Staff from IU 13 even traveled to Greenbush, Kansas to meet with Virtual Greenbush staff. This connection has resulted in conversations about the points of short- and long-term collaboration between education services agencies regarding virtual education. This may include content sharing, policy sharing, and collaborative funding opportunities. IU 13 and Greenbush recognize that virtual education is changing daily and everyone does not need to be reinventing the wheel. There are many opportunities for collaboration between and among educational service agencies, some possibilities that may not have even be imagined yet, given the fact that technologies evolve and change so rapidly.

Components of Effective Online Courses

Whether the choice is to develop courses locally or purchase content from commercial online providers, there are several components of online courses that make them more educationally valuable than just electronic correspondence courses. When evaluating or developing courses, it is wise to look for the following components:

Access

- Students, parents and school administrators have password access to the course, as well as progress and achievement reports.

Structure

- Courses are web-based and delivered in a user-friendly format.
- Courses are structured into modules, units, or chapters based on lessons, activities, and assessments that are similar to the structure of a face-to-face course.
- Course includes supplemental materials such as CDs, lab materials, or textbooks.
- Online instructors are certified in the subject area of the courses they are teaching.
- A variety of instructional methods are utilized, including synchronous (live) and asynchronous (bulletin board discussions) activities.
- Courses contain multimedia components such as audio, video, and simulations to illustrate educational concepts.
- Students can move through the course at a pace best suited to their learning needs.

Communication

- Course contains extensive communication among students, between student and instructor, and, when appropriate, with “invited guests.”
- Participation in discussions is required and evaluated.
- Communication with instructor is frequent.

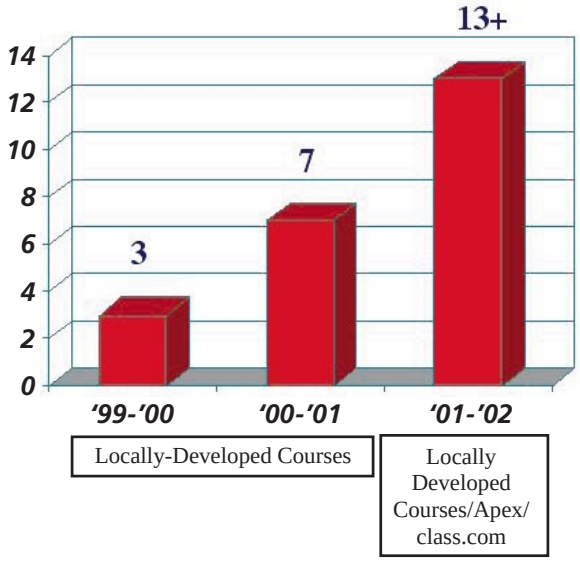
Accountability

- Assessment is conducted in a variety of ways, including traditional tests, performance assessments, and electronic portfolios.

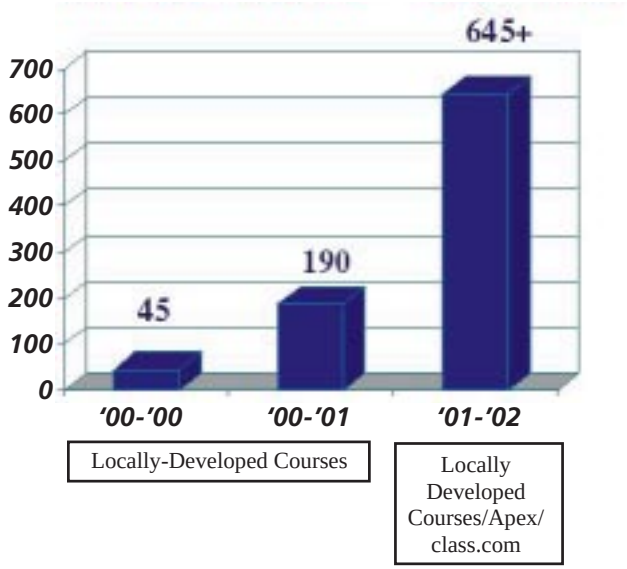
IU 13: PAVEing the Way!

Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 has developed an umbrella to encompass virtual education resources and services provided by the intermediate unit. This is PAVE, Partners to Access Virtual Education. The mission of PAVE is to be a resource network for schools, parents and students to obtain uniquely interactive, high quality and flexible web-based courses, resources and electronic communities for teaching and learning, as well as resources for local implementation in a cost-effective manner.

Growth of PAVE - Courses



Growth of PAVE - Students



PAVE provides services and resources across the continuum of virtual education. This includes K-12 online courses, web-enhanced courses, and tools for additional instructional opportunities and exam preparation. The IU 13 team administers and supports the development of online staff development courses as well as electronic learning communities for teachers and administrators. Consultation, training and technical assistance are services that are available to schools as well.

PAVE focuses on six major goals in the administration of this resource network:

1. Positively impact student achievement by elevating instructor skills to integrate and infuse technologies into current and emerging models of teaching and learning.

2. Establish strategic relationships with and among school districts, educational service agencies, state education agencies and commercial providers for the purpose of providing cost-effective K-12 web-based courses, resources and e-learning communities.

3. Develop and implement policies and procedures that define operational guidelines for the collaborative.

4. Provide information about and access to K-12 web-based courses, resources and communities for schools, families and students.

5. Conduct research and evaluate newly-developed online courses and classroom tools related to online teaching and learning.

6. Conduct ongoing evaluations of the operation effectiveness and efficiency of PAVE.

The Vision

PAVE's vision for its virtual education resource network provides opportunities for virtual learning for its collaborative partners, assures policies for the access and administration of these opportunities, and offers leadership, training, and consultation for its partners in the integration of virtual learning. PAVE will provide the infrastructure for its partners to locate, evaluate, register for, and participate in online courses, course tools, and staff development. PAVE will work together with commercial providers of online content and tools to provide access to virtual learning opportunities in a cost-effective manner. PAVE will work with statewide and nationwide providers of course content, whether commercially, locally, or regionally developed, to establish access for its partners.

Regionally Developed Courses

- **Health**
- **Family and Consumer Management**
- **Vietnam War and Its Societal Implications**
- **African American History**
- **Astronomy**
- **History and Technology**
- **Linking the World Through Global Perspectives**
- **English 12**
- **Algebra I**
- **Advanced Algebra II**
- **College Algebra**
- **Math-Internetics**
- **Fundamentals of Composition**
- **Exploring the Internet**
- **Supreme Court Landmark Cases**
- **Sowing the Seeds of Citizenship: American Government and Economics**

In this new and emerging field of online learning, there is much to learn and many areas for growth. Educational service centers need to be willing to take strategic risks in a field that is new to students, teachers and schools. The role of the education service agency is key in the implementation of online learning. Service agencies need to continue to serve in a collaborative role with commercial providers and assist them

in developing services and courses at the highest levels of quality. Educational service centers can maximize financial resources by collaborating with other service agencies in their own state, as well as nationally. Most importantly, educational services centers can collaborate with students, teachers and schools to learn from local experiences and influence the field of virtual education to continually meet the needs of all learners at the highest level of quality. With this as the focus, education service centers are critical to this new field of virtual education.

Janet Dubble, M.S., is the Instructional Technology Coordinator for the Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. She can be reached by phone at 717.560.4651, by fax at 717.560.6110 and by email at janet_dubble@iu13.org.

Kristen Swengel, M.S., is a Staff Development and Training Specialist for the Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit. She can be reached by phone at 717.560.4611, by fax at 717.560.6150, and by email at kristen_swengel@iu13.org.

A Crisis in Education: But What Crisis?

by
Milt Dougherty and Steve Wyckoff

Most would agree that today's environment forces educational leaders to deal with the increasingly difficult issues confronting them, their teachers, parents and students. Unfortunately, they focus on the "tyranny of the urgent," a situation that too often results in leaders abdicating their real leadership responsibilities in order to assume the functions of crisis managers. Progressive educational service agencies can help alleviate the problems created by sidetracked leaders by becoming think tanks for educational change and offering their members safe havens for creating the new mental models needed to deal with the crisis in education today.

The debate continues in America as to whether or not schools are in crisis. More and more educators are arguing that they are in crisis mode. What is missing is a consensus on what that crisis is. Many teachers and principals will argue that it is a crisis of the family, that kids are coming to them with so many problems that it is virtually impossible to teach them.

Many superintendents will insist that it is a crisis of finances, that while there are some legislators who care about kids, many do not. The result is inadequate resources for schools to educate kids appropriately.

Many legislators will claim that it is a crisis of "educrats," that the educational establishment is more concerned with protecting the system than educating kids and that too few resources are making it to the classroom. They insist that it is a crisis of accountability, that if schools were just held accountable, learning would increase.

Many in the business community bemoan the crisis in learning, that students leaving the educational system simply do not have the skills necessary to contribute in meaningful ways to today's economy.

Some parents see the problem as a crisis of caring, that schools don't care about them, their families or their children. Students, the older they get, will increasingly maintain that they are bored.

Each group believes that members of another groups are at fault for the dire conditions of today's schools and that the solution is to "fix" that group. Statements such as "give us different kids to teach," "give us different families raising the kids," "give us legislators who care," "give us administrators who do their job," "give us teachers who are competent," and "give us educators who care" all seem to be common (though perhaps not always publicly proclaimed) proposed solutions in today's discussions of how to fix schools.

It is time to quit playing the blame game and look for authentic answers to America's education dilemma. This will require different ways of thinking, but, as Albert Einstein stated years ago, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them."

Though typically not considered a contributor specifically to educational thought, W. Edwards Deming's research shows that 93% of all problems are systems problems (Deming, 1986). Perhaps it is time to look at the educational "system" and see if the answer is not in fixing the people, but the system?

It is abundantly clear that education will change. What is still in question is whether or not schools will. Unfortunately, the very people often charged with the responsibility of restructuring the educational system are those whose only experience is in this outdated system. It is so ubiquitous and pervasive that educators and the public alike, assume its current manifestation must be the only way schools can operate. Therefore, proposed solutions, while offering different looks, rarely focus on true systemic change. However, well-intentioned reformers must accept the fact that systems, not people within the system, control results, and that our current educational system is producing exactly what it was designed to produce. The problem is now that we need it to produce vastly different results. Statistical process control explains upper and lower control limits of a system, and the works of W. Edwards Deming and his contemporary, Walter Shewhart, go a long way toward showing how systems, not the people within the system, control results. Once those working to reform education understand this basic premise, their focus will be placed on high-leverage restructuring proposals, not merely tinkering with the current system.

In his work with paradigms, Joel Barker (1990) opines that paradigms (problem-solving models) have three distinct phases. The first phase occurs as the rules of the new paradigm are being established. During the second phase many problems are being solved by the new problem- solving model, but during the third phase it becomes evident that the operational model no longer is solving problems, as new problems are created which cannot be solved by that particular paradigm. Understanding the current educational paradigm, including how it came to be and what problems it was designed to solve, helps make the case for the need for a new model.

While every school's mission statement has somewhat different wording, nearly every one of them declares the intention to prepare students to be productive members of society. The common educational model was created nearly a century ago to do just that. The "problem" the system was created to solve was that students coming from an agricultural age weren't properly equipped to function in the new industrial era. Designers of the current educational system purposefully created a system that would remedy that problem. One of the important contributors to today's operational model was the Committee of Ten, who were presidents of Ivy League colleges. They decided that since the predominant structure of the industrial age was the factory, schools should not only look like these buildings, but function like them as well. The design principles of contemporary education were therefore the principles that guided the industrial age. Standardization, specialization, synchronization, concentration, "massification" and centralization are all characteristics of the industrial-age factory; they are also characteristics of how nearly all schools commonly operate. At the inception of this design, schools did a remarkable job of preparing students to be productive members of an industrial age society.

However, we are currently living through one of the greatest periods of societal change known to mankind as we move from the industrial age to the information age. The problem-solving model created in the early 1900s now has new problems to solve, and we are still attempting to utilize a system that, while its general purpose is the same (to prepare productive members of society), requires outcomes that have changed dramatically.

In the "old paradigm" of schooling, educating all students was not a significant goal; it was perfectly fine to focus on only part of the population since there was no need, or even room, for a totally educated society. Just a few decades ago, the term "drop-out" didn't exist in the educator's vocabulary since good jobs were plentiful for students who failed to complete high school, and these former students were able to be productive members of society. In today's high tech world that simply is no longer the case. Now, because of the changes in society and the workplace, educating ALL students is required of schools, and the current system simply was never designed to do that. The new system must.

Before we outline the principles information-age schools will likely operate from, it is important to stress that as education changes, it will not be either the old model or the new one, but both/and. The current system does work well for some students, and it makes no sense to change a system for those for whom it

works. Nevertheless, for those whose needs are not met by the system, new rules of operation must be created. Just as the old system had unwritten principles by which it operated, so will the new. We see the new system as being individualized and mass customized instead of standardized. This means that rather than every person getting the exact same education at the same time at a common place, each student will have an individually tailored educational plan. The new system will be generalized rather than specialized, meaning that rather than functioning through fixed areas like grade levels and teaching certification, teachers will be high-level generalists who facilitate the learning process. We frequently refer to this in education as integrating the curriculum. Additionally, the system will provide asynchronous as well as synchronous learning opportunities, often through the use of technology-based options. The electronic cottage (houses or central locations wired to outside educational facilities) will replace the need for concentrating all students in one location for working with all enrolled students at the same time. Students will work at their own pace, not as if they were parts on an assembly line. This focus on individual learner needs will replace the massification (assembly line) system from which education currently operates. Administration will rely on site-based, self-directed work teams rather than leading through centralization of the power structure. These characteristics of information age organizations are outlined further in Alvin Toffler's Creating a New Civilization (1995).

Though there has been some "restructuring" of schools for some time now, there has been little reformation of the very rules that drive how the system operates. Some public and private schools, as well as good home schools, operate by the principles described by Toffler (1995) but not nearly enough to assure that all students can be successful in the information age. Several examples of new-paradigm schools that we are aware of include Pleasantview Academy and Unified School District 444, Little River, both in central Kansas, and Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, located outside of Estes Park, Colorado. The Pleasantview Academy utilizes a completely flexible schedule with no set starting times or ending times each day, nor does it have starting or ending dates each year. Arbitrary age divisions are ignored. Achievement is fixed and time is variable, instead of the opposite as is practiced in today's schools. This reconceptualization of how schools should operate allows students to take advantage of learning opportunities at times that work best for them, not the administration of the school. At Pleasantview, students focus on meeting outcomes through project-based, constructivist learning opportunities.

At Little River Jr. -Sr. High School in Little River, Kansas, public school students are each issued a laptop computer to be utilized in a wireless environment. These teaching and learning tools are one way in which the walls of schools are being removed in an effort to move to anytime, anywhere learning opportunities. Additionally, the small high school has a virtual learning classroom where students have access to on-line courses not typically available to rural students. These classes can be taken anytime during the day, with achievement, not time spent, being the determining factor for student success. Utilization of technology allows learning, not teaching, to be emphasized. Though an average, rural Kansas community, Little River has made its entry into the Information Age because of its school board's commitment to the idea of individualized education.

Owned and operated by Honda Corporation, Eagle Rock is a year-round, residential school designed for students who have not been successful in traditional schools. The achievement-based emphasis, with a focus on sense of community, allows all stakeholders to feel responsible for each other's success. By emphasizing small groups, the engaging curriculum is built around how people learn, not how teachers teach.

While we have outlined several guiding principles, it is our belief that for any new system for educating kids to be successful, achievement must be fixed, and time the variable. No one model will meet the needs of all students, but any model must provide valuable, engaging learning opportunities for all students since the current information age requires no less. Educational service agencies have a superior track record of assisting educators meet the needs of schools and their students as currently designed. It is now time for service agencies to play a leading role in helping school leaders and their patrons move from what is to what needs to be.

References

Barker, J. (1990). *The business of paradigms*. Burnsville, MN: Charthouse International Learning Company (video).

Deming, W.E. (1986). *Out of the crisis.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Center for Advanced Engineering.

Toffler, A. (1995) *Creating a new civilization: The politics of the third wave*. Atlanta, GA: Turner Publishing.

Dr. Milt Dougherty, President, Milt Dougherty and Associates may be reached by phone at 620-242-4167, by fax at 620-897-6788, and by email at MDandA@lrmutual.com

Dr. Steve Wyckoff, Educational Futurist, Educational Services and Staff Development Association of Central Kansas can be reached by phone at 620-663-9566, by fax at 620-663-5734, and by email at swyckoff@essdack.org