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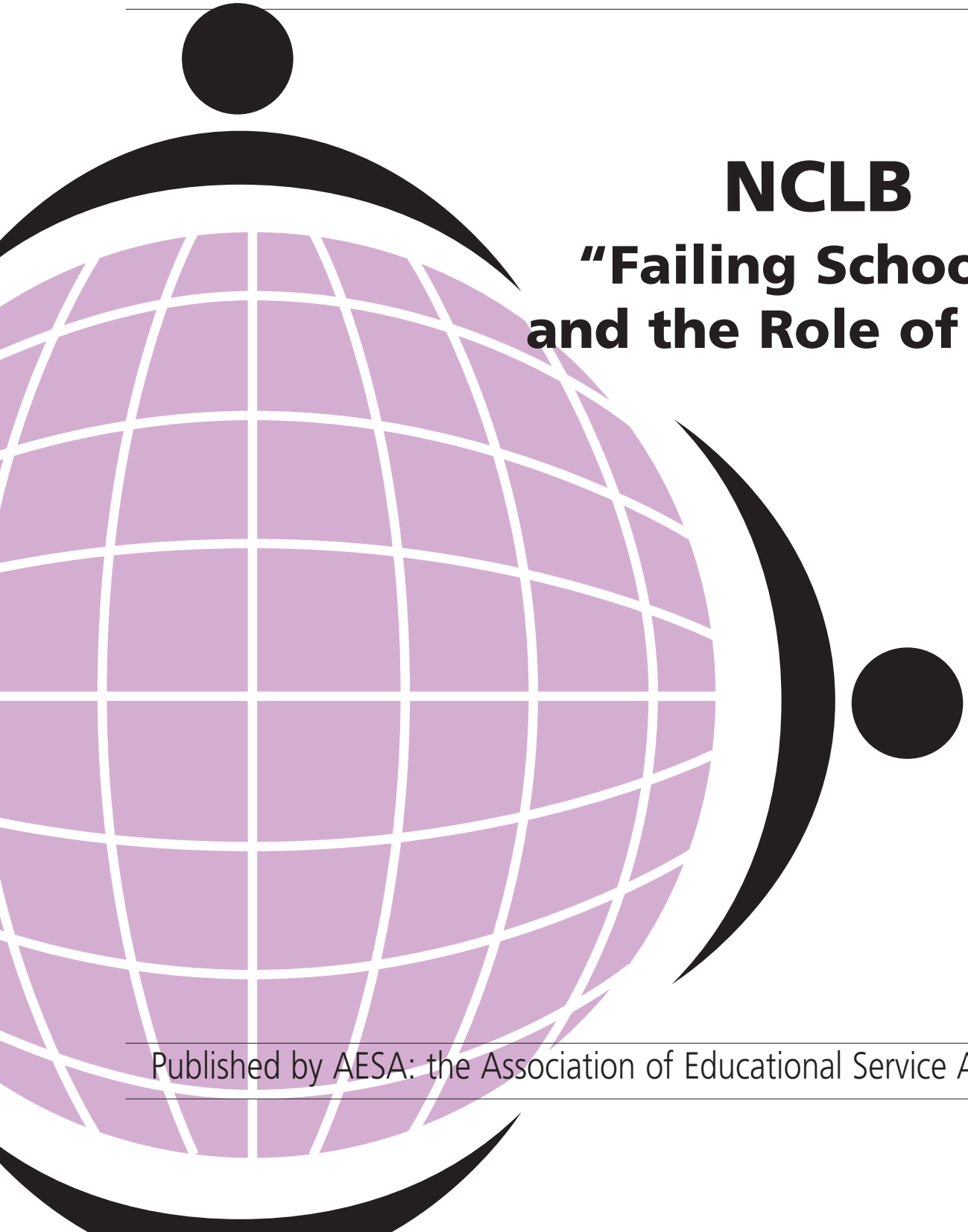
Perspectives

A Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies



NCLB
"Failing Schools" and the Role of ESAs

Published by AESA: the Association of Educational Service Agencies

A letter from Frank Deebach, former Superintendent, Olympic ESD 114, Bremerton, Washington.

Dear Colleague:

As the national ESA consultant for Canter & Associates, I've collaborated with a variety of ESAs to successfully provide professional development to their client districts over the last year. And as I continue in this leadership role, I want to reaffirm to you Canter's proven commitment to deliver both quality programs as well as a high-level of customer service to ESAs nationwide.

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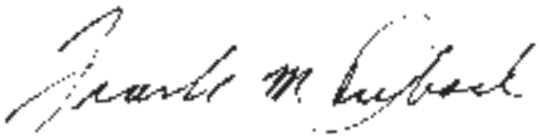
To discover how you can partner with Canter, please contact me at 360-479-4852 or 360-981-2364. You can also e-mail me at fdeebach@comcast.net.

I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Frank Deebach
Senior Educational Consultant
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AESA extends special thanks to the staff of the Oakland Schools Intermediate School District in Waterford, Michigan, for their invaluable assistance in producing this ninth issue of *Perspectives!*

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Preface

Reading through the outstanding contributions that each writer/researcher has given to this edition of *Perspectives* gave me the opportunity to reflect upon the outstanding contributions that ESA board members, superintendents/CEOs and staff contribute every day to the education of children across this great country. It also reminded me of the confidence that local, state and federal officials have in the benefits of ESAs.

Looking back just six years I am reminded that we had 29 states with 471 members in 1998. Today we have 42 states with ESAs and 633 members of AESA. In addition, several other states are considering the addition of ESAs to their state educational systems as a way to improve education and leverage resources - another testimony to the rising importance of ESAs.

It is evident from every article in this journal that ESAs are best positioned to lead. In fact in the lead article "Who Will Turn Around Failing Schools: A Framework for Institutional Choice," the authors have, through their research, found that ESAs are best positioned to provide the leadership to turn around "failing schools." In subsequent articles the authors demonstrate through both research and practice why ESAs are so effective. ESAs are definitely best situated and have the expertise to assist local school districts as they strive to meet state standards of accountability and the federal requirement of implementing the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

The importance of ESAs is also stressed by Ted Stilwill, Director of the Iowa Department of Education and President of the Chief State School Officers, by the title of his article, "Educational Service Agencies are Essential to Improve Student Achievement."

Yes, ESAs are a success story, but this success will only be sustained if we continue to reach out to strengthen our relationships with the districts we serve, State Departments of Education, and the U.S. Department of Education. We must also work hard to build capacity and at the same time build cultures of high performance as Hobart Harmon describes in his "Creating a Culture of High Performance in ESAs: Focus on the Three Rs."

ESAs are now embedded in the educational fabric of our country thanks to the commitment within each ESA. Chief State School Officers, both past and present, have acquired a growing knowledge about what a system of ESAs can do for local school districts, and the U.S. Department of Education that has encouraged ESAs to leverage resources and provide leadership to improve the quality of education.

A special thanks goes to our editor, Bill Keane, and his Editorial Board for another outstanding issue of *Perspectives*. 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 your successes and the research your agency has undertaken. Our circulation of over 7,000 copies reaches not only all of our ESAs, but every State Department of Education, numerous universities, other educational associations, and our business members and partners. This journal provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate why ESAs are growing in prominence as leaders of educational improvement throughout the nation.

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Introduction

Welcome to the tenth anniversary edition of *Perspectives*, the only journal in America devoted to increasing the knowledge base about educational service agencies. We are proud that we have managed to survive for a decade, and we have managed that feat primarily because of our readers and writers – essentially staff members from ESAs across the country. Articles by chief state school officers, legislators, and other interested parties have also been important to enhancing our mission.

We began this issue with a plan to highlight articles about the work of ESAs across the country in fostering the goals of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Two things became evident as manuscripts began to be received. Though ESAs have enhanced their efforts to work with local school districts to improve measurable results as required by NCLB, it is probably too soon to capture significant hard data about the effects of ESA efforts, always a tough task in the best of times. Achieving the purposes of NCLB requires a multi faceted approach to school improvement, whether by strengthening and improving local district internal capacity by assisting school leaders to promote and use technology in instruction ("Leading through Technology: Leave No Administrator Behind," by J. Miller; "CESA 7's Online Charter School Approach," by C. Conway-Gerhardt), or in supporting parents in their efforts to send their children to school ready to learn ("Working Collaboratively with Parents and Community to Develop Literacy in the Early Childhood Years," by L. Gratz and L. Kempfert). As readers will remember, one of the National Educational Goals, initially developed during the presidency of George H.W. Bush and expanded under President Bill Clinton, stated the intention to have all children enter school ready to learn.

Some ESAs did describe their targeted efforts to help districts raise achievement levels as required by NCLB ("Meeting the New Requirements of No Child Left Behind," by C. B. Wilcox and P. Sexton; "Nebraska ESUs Have Their Heads in the Stars: Supporting NCLB," by P. Geary and G. Kettlehut; "The Role of Connecticut's RESCs in School Improvement: A Case Study in Mathematics," by C. McNally and M. Abdella).

This year's edition begins with two articles that provide a foundation for understanding the important role of ESAs in this time of local school district accountability for results. The first provides a research base for the hypothesis that ESAs may be the best policy alternative for society to help schools with low achievement ("Who Will Turn Around Failing Schools? A Framework for Institutional Choice," by D. Arsen, C. Bell, and D. N. Plank). The second is an essay by the chief state school officer of Iowa articulating the key role of service agencies in that state in school improvement ("Educational Agencies Are Essential to Improve Student Achievement," by T. Stilwell). This might be an appropriate time to ask readers in other states how their chief state school officer feels about the importance of ESAs in the task of improving all schools and rescuing "failing" schools. If any other person holding this office wants to make a positive written statement, we'll be happy to publish it in next year's *Perspectives*.

The Arsen/Bell/Plank article is a carefully researched essay by two professors and a doctoral student from Michigan State University that comes to the conclusion that educational service agencies are the most promising policy vehicle for providing substantive support for "failing" American schools. Based on their analysis of three factors – capacity, scale, and trust – the researchers found service agencies likely to be more successful in this task than other policy options intended to help schools succeed, including mayoral takeovers, university involvement, education management organizations, and school districts themselves. This study was not done at the request of AESA or any of its members. It was independently initiated by three scholars seeking to learn how to help failing schools succeed. We hope readers will view its rich research base as a virtue. This editor has found multiple opportunities to reference this research when speaking to groups. We call it to the particular attention of all readers.

Though most practitioners serving at ESAs see one of their main tasks to be the development of the internal capacity of local school districts, two of our authors caution that ESAs must themselves develop policies and processes that assure the development of internal capacity and a results-oriented focus ("Creating a Culture of High Performance in ESAs: Focus on the Three Rs," by H. Harmon and "The Professional Within Educational Service Agencies: Are We Neglecting Our Most Valuable Resource" by R. Gorter). It is always a pleasure when *Perspectives* has an opportunity to publish a piece by one of our international colleagues, this time from the Netherlands. Probably the most complicated issue facing ESAs in this age of accountability is finding ways to document their specific effects on school improvement. The appendix to Dr. Harmon's article lists all the articles that have appeared in recent years in *Perspectives* grappling with this topic.

We trust that you will enjoy this issue of our journal and will encourage all staff and board members to read it, either in its printed or online format. Equally important, we hope that readers will become contributors in the near future. Next year's edition of *Perspectives* will feature the role of ESAs in developing leadership talent in the education environment. We seek articles about the role of ESAs in developing leadership capacity among aspiring administrators, practicing administrators, teacher leaders, school board members, parents and any others who contribute to better education for children and young people.

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Who Will Turn Around Failing Schools? A Framework for Institutional Choice

by
David Arsen
Courtney Bell
David N. Plank

Introduction

In the past decade, country have developed accountability policies. of these policies has been schools where student of acceptable standards. urgent new problem for because the public identification of "failing" schools imposes an obligation to turn these schools around.[1]

ESAs appear to have significant potential but largely untested advantages...for the task of turning around "failing" schools.

states across the strict new
One key consequence the identification of performance falls short This has created an state governments

The passage of the federal "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) legislation in 2001 has increased the urgency of the states' policy problem. The new law requires that all schools and students meet state standards of "proficiency" by 2014, and further requires that all schools make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward this goal in the intervening years, not only in the aggregate but for identified sub-populations (poor children, racial minorities, students with special needs) as well. Under the guidelines established by NCLB, the number of "failing" schools is set to increase dramatically.

States have addressed the task of turning around "failing" schools in a variety of ways, typically on a case-by-case, ad hoc basis. Some, including California, New Jersey, and West Virginia, have taken over schools or school districts. Others, including Illinois, Michigan, and New York, in some instances, have assigned control to municipal governments. States, including Kentucky and North Carolina, have sent teams of experts into "failing" schools to provide assistance, or encouraged districts to award control over "failing" schools to private companies. Some states have tried more than one approach, typically on an ad hoc basis.

[1] There is a great deal of disagreement about how to characterize schools where performance consistently falls short of acceptable standards. These schools are variously identified as low-performing, under-performing, in need of improvement, and so on. In this paper we have chosen to identify them as "failing," to acknowledge the lack of a generally agreed-upon terminology.

Under NCLB, schools that fail to make AYP will be subject to a series of increasingly intrusive interventions, which culminate with dramatic changes in school governance. The required governance changes may include a takeover by state or municipal officials, the transfer of administrative control to a private-sector education management organization (EMO), or the re-opening of a persistently "failing" school as a charter school. Sadly, however, there is little evidence to buttress the hope that the strategies required by NCLB will prove successful in turning around "failing" schools. Each of these strategies has been implemented in several states, but none has worked consistently to improve student achievement (Brady, 2003). There is little reason to hope that these strategies will achieve better or more consistent results when they are implemented on short timelines under the threat of federal sanctions in thousands of schools across the country.

Turning schools around is harder work than the NCLB policy mandates acknowledge. We have known for three decades that some schools are unusually effective in raising the achievement of otherwise disadvantaged children. We have also learned a great deal about what makes these schools effective (Edmonds, 1979; Jerald, 2001). Summarizing 30 years of research on the characteristics of highly effective schools, Taylor (2002) concludes that effective schools have the following characteristics:

- a clearly stated and focused mission
- a safe and orderly climate
- high expectations for students, teachers, and administrators
- opportunities to learn and high levels of student time-on-task
- instructional leadership by all administrators
- frequent monitoring of student progress
- a positive home/school relationship.

Despite more than a generation of robust findings on the attributes of effective schools, however, the process through which previously ineffective schools become effective remains mysterious. The wide range of attributes that characterize unusually effective schools suggests that turning a "failing" school into an effective one is a complicated task even under the best of circumstances.

We cannot simply rely on "failing" schools to turn themselves around. Though many schools have actively and skillfully engaged in whole school reform through models such as Accelerated Schools, Comer, and America's Choice, there is no reason to believe that most "failing" schools have the knowledge or capacity to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, even when faced with state sanctions (US Department of Education, 2001). As Elmore and Burney (1997a) have noted, "If schools knew what to do, they would be doing it."

At the same time, the distance between the agencies of state government and individual schools creates serious impediments for direct state intervention (Wong & Shen, 2001). School improvement is a local and idiosyncratic process, requiring the active engagement of local educators if it is to succeed. Standardized strategies must be adapted to the unique circumstances of individual schools. Unless state departments dramatically change, states are unlikely to be able to acquire the context-sensitive information they would need to monitor and support educational change in hundreds of schools that are likely to be designated for intervention under NCLB.

Successful strategies for improving teaching and learning in "failing" schools will therefore require the involvement of intermediary institutions to bridge the distance between state and school. Recent work has emphasized the role that school districts may play in supporting instructional improvement (Elmore &

Burney, 1997a; 1997b; Hightower, 2002; Spillane, 2001). The district is not the only candidate for this role, however, and under many circumstances it may not be the best candidate. Other possibilities include regional educational service agencies (ESAs), for-profit education management organizations (EMOs), universities, and local governments.

In this paper we assess the comparative advantage of various intermediary institutions in addressing the challenge of turning around "failing" schools. Our analysis frames the question as one of institutional choice (Clune, 1987); that is, which intermediary institutions are best suited to support improvement in teaching and learning in "failing" schools? In our analysis we highlight *capacity*, *scale*, and *trust* as the key determinants of the relative efficiency of different intermediary institutions. We establish an evaluation framework based on these elements, and then illustrate its application by drawing on previous research to assess the relative merits of different intermediary institutions that might be called upon to turn around "failing" schools.

Theoretical Framework

The adoption of NCLB was motivated in large part by the persistent failure of many schools to produce satisfactory learning outcomes for all of their students, despite decades of federal support. As in previous versions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the key objective of NCLB is to enhance equity by improving educational opportunities and educational achievement for poor children.[2] Previous versions of ESEA focused primarily on providing additional resources for schools enrolling low-income children; in contrast, NCLB relies heavily on strategies that aim to make these schools more efficient. In the analysis that follows, we therefore propose efficiency as the primary normative criterion to govern the choice of institutions to turn around "failing" schools.

Efficiency is measured by the ratio of useful output to total input in a production system. In schools, for example, efficiency can be defined in terms of the quantity of desired educational outcomes (mathematics achievement, high school graduates) produced for a given outlay of resources. The relative efficiency of different policies and practices turns on their ability to bring about improvements in these outcomes while reducing (or at least not increasing) costs.

Despite nearly 40 years of research, economists remain far from the goal of specifying the most efficient production process for schooling (Coleman, 1965; Burtless, 1996; Hanushek, 2002). If the educational production function were known, the selection of intermediary institutions to assist "failing" schools would be less problematic. Policy-makers would simply choose those institutions most likely to implement the practices that were known to be most efficient. In the absence of detailed knowledge about the educational production function, however, policy-makers must adopt a different approach. We argue that their choice of intermediary institutions to improve performance in "failing" schools should turn on the relative ability of different institutions to strengthen key organizational attributes that have been established in the economics literature as efficiency enhancing.

This approach draws on Harvey Leibenstein's (1966) seminal theory of X-efficiency. Leibenstein argued that employee effort, information flows, and other organizational features of firms have far greater significance for efficiency than the allocation of inputs at the margin. Employee and employer behavior is governed by conventions, habits, and moral imperatives that generally place firms within rather than on production frontiers. X-efficiency is attained through organizational changes that increase the intensity and

[2] Equity turns on the extent to which improvements in educational outcomes are greatest for low-income families. Since poor children are disproportionately enrolled in poorly-performing schools, any reform that improves the efficiency of these schools is also likely to enhance equity.

coordination of employee effort, rather than changes in the capital-labor ratio or plant design. Leibenstein's insights have been reinforced by extensive theoretical and empirical work by economists employing principal-agent, information, and institutional economics to analyze firm efficiency (e.g., Alchian and Demsetz, 1972; Williamson, 1985; Coase, 1998). Henry Levin (1997) argues that the concept of X-efficiency is especially relevant for strategies to improve the provision of public school services.

The economics literature highlights four characteristics of X-efficient firms. They have: (1) clear, measurable goals, (2) a collective commitment to attaining organizational goals, (3) ready access to information on their performance, and (4) the capacity to evaluate this information and implement changes as necessary.[3] As in other productive organizations, the establishment or enhancement of these attributes in "failing" schools is likely to improve efficiency. The question for policy-makers, then, is how do alternative intermediary institutions rate in their ability to foster these attributes? The answer depends both on the characteristics of the intermediary institutions and on their relationships with the schools themselves. Our analysis models the ability of these institutions to enhance efficiency in "failing" schools as a function of three primary factors: capacity, scale, and trust.

Capacity

The relative ability of different intermediary institutions to improve the performance of "failing" schools depends first of all on their capacity to guide and support change. The capacity of different intermediary institutions can be assessed along two key dimensions, which we characterize as technical expertise and local knowledge. On the one hand, intermediary institutions must have expert knowledge and successful experience working with practitioners to diagnose, reflect on, and remedy problems of teaching and learning. On the other hand, intermediary institutions must have a firm understanding of local contexts and the flexibility to adapt their responses to a school's distinctive circumstances.

Technical expertise in the core areas of teaching and learning is a necessary condition for the success of any intermediary institution's efforts to improve "failing" schools. The task of turning these schools around requires improved performance in what Elmore (1996) calls the "instructional core." Successful intermediary institution must have the capacity to change the way teachers and students interact around subject matter (Stein and D'Amico, 2002). Change in the instructional core requires teachers and principals to learn something new, and to change their professional practice as a result. Intermediary institutions must have expert knowledge to guide and support this change.[4]

Technical expertise is translated into effective capacity only when it can be adapted to a school's local conditions. The capacity of successful intermediary institutions will therefore include local knowledge of a school's students and personnel, its history of curricular and instructional reforms, and relevant social and political forces within the district and community. Standardized approaches to school reform will not work unless they can be adapted to respond to the specific circumstances and needs of each individual school.

Both forms of capacity–technical expertise and local knowledge–reside in the specialized knowledge of professional staff. The acquisition of this knowledge is costly. If other factors are equal, intermediary institutions that employ staff who already possess relevant expertise and knowledge will have an advantage over those that do not.

[3] The attributes of X-efficient firms and unusually effective schools (see above) are, not surprisingly, parallel.

[4] Lack of capacity is the main reason why schools cannot generally reform themselves. Their available expertise is fully deployed and insufficient to the tasks at hand: "If schools knew what to do, they would be doing it."

Scale

The relative ability of different intermediary institutions to improve the performance of "failing" schools depends on the size of the institution and the number of schools and students it serves, and also on the geographical dispersion, or proximity of the schools.

Two distinct sources of scale economies are associated with the size of an organization's operations. First, intermediary institutions that serve many schools can lower average costs by spreading fixed start-up costs, primarily those associated with acquiring capacity (knowledge), over more client schools. Second, as Adam Smith noted long ago, a primary determinant of a firm's productivity is its division of labor, which is limited in turn by the extent of its market. An intermediary institution that serves many schools can enhance its overall organizational productivity by hiring experts to perform specialized tasks in concert (e.g., data analysis, instructional training, leadership preparation, parent-school liaisons). Small organizations, including schools and most school districts, cannot employ specialists in these and other essential areas because the local demand for their services is too small to justify the additional expense.

Previous research on scale economies in education indicates that average pupil costs tend to be minimized at a district enrollment size of about 6,000 students (Andrews, Duncombe, & Yinger, 2002). Nearly 90 percent of U.S. school districts enroll fewer than 6,000 students, which suggests that for most districts there is considerable potential for scale economies, especially in the areas of administrative and instructional support services.[5] These are the services that intermediary institutions could provide to "failing" schools.

Beyond reasonable boundaries scale economies will almost certainly begin to decline, and ultimately turn negative. If there were no diseconomies of scale, the optimal approach to the problem would require that state or even federal agencies respond directly to the needs of all "failing" schools. In fact, however, increasing size leads almost invariably to the standardization of services, which precludes adaptation to the specific circumstances of individual schools.

Scale interacts with geography. Proximity matters. Operating in a geographically bounded area allows institutions to minimize travel and communication costs and to accumulate knowledge about local circumstances. They can take advantage of local networks to share information and resources, to identify common problems, and to develop common strategies for addressing them. Agencies providing services to a geographically scattered set of clients will, in contrast, face higher opportunity costs associated with key personnel's travel time. They will also face difficulties in acquiring useful local knowledge and building trust among the schools and teachers with whom they seek to work.

Trust

There is growing recognition of the critical role trust plays in well functioning organizations (Coleman, 1990; Williamson, 1993). Nobel economist Kenneth Arrow (1974) describes trust as a "lubricant," greasing the way for efficient operations in organizations. Trust promotes effective communication, cooperation, and adaptability, which are the foundations for productive relationships in organizations. By facilitating an open exchange of information and teamwork, trust promotes the disclosure, diagnosis, and correction of problems before they are compounded.

[5] In contrast, there appears to be little scope for economies of scale in the provision of instructional services (primarily classroom instruction), beyond very small districts.

As trust declines, the cost of doing business increases. People must engage in self-protective actions and continually guard against the opportunistic behavior of others. Rules proliferate as an inferior and often counterproductive substitute for trust as a means to keep participants in line. The loss of trust may be especially damaging in organizations where efficient performance relies on employee discretion and judgment, including schools.

The literature on trust suggests several predictions about circumstances that are likely to influence the level of trust within or between organizations. First, trust is strengthened when parties have ongoing relationships in which their interactions demonstrate benevolence, support, and concern. Second, people have less incentive to act in a trustworthy manner when there is uncertainty about the durability of their relationship. Third, trust is easier to establish and maintain where the parties share congruent values (Sitkin and Roth, 1993). Once people have evidence that leads them to perceive incongruence in values, distrust is likely to emerge. Fourth, trust is easier to establish and sustain when a party has a good reputation, especially among peers. Reputational networks can initiate cycles in which trust is strengthened or undermined through stories that are told and retold. Fifth, trust is more difficult to establish when parties do not enter into a relationship freely, but rather under pressure or compulsion. Sixth, organizational trust is promoted when the behavior of those in authority positions is characterized by (a) consistency, (b) integrity, (c) concern, (d) open communication, and (e) a willingness to share control (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

There is growing evidence that trust is important not only for the smooth functioning of schools but also for increasing student achievement. Schools where administrators, teachers, and parents trust one another and rely on one another to achieve common purposes are likely to perform better than schools where these conditions are absent (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hoy, 1992; Tarter et al., 1995; Goddard, et al., 2001). In contrast, establishing or maintaining trust may be a serious challenge in schools that are (or have been designated as) "failing." When teachers and administrators feel threatened, or accountable for problems beyond their control, they may be reluctant to cooperate with one another or external partners to make necessary changes in employee work routines or personnel.

The importance of trust to the improvement of student achievement in "failing" schools can scarcely be overstated. Significant improvements in school performance will require changes in how the school is organized and in how teachers work. These changes may include cutting jobs for teachers and other staff; altering the way administrators share power with teachers and parents; adopting new materials and teaching practices; and figuring out creative ways to engage students and parents respectfully. If student achievement data are to be transformed into teaching knowledge, there must be a trusting learning environment for practitioners (Petrides & Guiney, 2002). In short, trust may help schools do the same work better, but new and more challenging work cannot be done in the absence of trust.

Applying the Criteria for Institutional Choice

In this section we evaluate five intermediary institutions on the criteria of scale, capacity, and trust as these pertain to assisting schools to improve teaching and learning. These institutions are school districts, state and local governments, universities, private sector education management organizations (EMOs), and education service agencies (ESAs). There are other candidates for the role of providing assistance to "failing" schools, including non-profit "whole school" reform programs (e.g., Success for All, Modern Red Schoolhouse), but for the purposes of this analysis we restrict our attention to these five.

School Districts

School districts are the most likely candidates to do the work of turning around "failing" schools. These schools fall under the direct authority of district administrators, who are consequently in a strong position to amend rules, change procedures, and redistribute resources in order to turn them around. Many large districts employ specialized professional staff with the expertise and local knowledge to provide effective assistance.[6] The available evidence nevertheless suggests that relying on school districts to bring about improvement in the performance of their own "failing" schools is unlikely to bear much fruit.

Recent scholarship has documented the ways some districts have helped to turn around "failing" schools through instructional improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1997a, 1997b; Hightower et al., 2002; Spillane, 2001). Scholars highlight the cases of Community District #2 in New York City and San Diego as evidence that districts can act as "agents of instructional change" (Elmore & Burney, 1997a; Hightower, 2002). In these two districts the central office was downsized and reorganized and money was reallocated, with the goal of building capacity to support improved instruction. Principals were retrained, and teachers were assigned to work with peer coaches. The San Diego reforms are still young, but the changes in Community District 2 have produced improvements in student achievement (Elmore & Burney, 1997b). In addition to these large urban districts, Wechsler (2001) and Snyder (1998) have described successful efforts in two smaller districts to create communities of learners and to build support structures that enable those communities to improve teaching and learning.

This small handful of success stories stands in contrast to a large body of research that argues that districts are generally ill-prepared to support improvement in "failing" schools (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Spillane, 2000). The available evidence suggests that few districts have the capacity to implement the kinds of deep reforms that led to improved performance in Community District #2 (Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, & Yoon, 2002).[7] Most lack the technical expertise needed to bring about lasting improvements in teaching and learning, either because they are too small to hire specialists or because they do not know how to assemble appropriate expertise. In addition, according to Massell and Goertz (1999), "only a few [districts demonstrate] a deep commitment to professional learning," which is a prerequisite for improved instruction (Cohen, 1990; Cohen & Hill, 2001).

Struggling schools are often in struggling districts, which are characterized by a long history of failure (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In these districts, it is extremely difficult to build the trust that would be necessary to improve instruction. Educators in schools perceive district administrators as adversaries instead of reliable partners who are prepared to engage in shared decision-making. District administrators in turn are reluctant to decentralize authority to schools (Resnick and Glennan, 2001), a stance which prevents local educators from making the kinds of systemic changes that might improve teaching and learning.

Rich (1996) and Hess (1999) argue that local politics creates incentives for districts to engage in behavior that is antithetical to improving teaching and learning. Hess notes the pressure on school districts "to initiate a great deal of activity," whether productive or not, as evidence of energetic and committed leadership in the face of intractable problems. "Policy churn" takes the place of improved performance. One key outcome of "policy churn" is the erosion of trust and commitment among teachers and other system professionals, who cease to believe that new policy initiatives will persist long enough to make a difference for students and

[6] Most districts, however, are too small to provide this type of support.

[7] The success of the reforms in Community District #2 hinged on the ability of the superintendent to gather outside experts to train teachers within the district, and also on the opportunity to reassign teachers and administrators to other schools and districts in the New York City system. Most school districts can only envy the conditions that supported these reforms.

schools. Rich argues that "school cartels" made up of administrators, activists, and union officials resist efforts to change "governance, institutional structures, and personnel." Instead, they steer policies in directions that are unlikely to disrupt established routines and equally unlikely to improve teaching and learning.

In summary, school districts are the most obvious candidates to assume responsibility for turning around "failing" schools. The strategies that school districts could adopt to accomplish this goal are increasingly well-known, but their track record in improving performance in these schools is poor, for several reasons. Most districts are too small to offer effective assistance, and few are able to marshal the breadth and depth of technical expertise that is needed to bring about lasting improvements in teaching and learning. In other cases, the best efforts of district administrators are undermined by political turbulence, or by long histories of "policy churn," broken promises, and a consequently deep distrust on the part of local educators.

State and Local Government

Lacking confidence in school districts' efforts to turn around "failing" schools, several state governments have sought to shift administrative control of local education systems from school boards to other agencies. On the one hand, some states have taken over school districts themselves. The first state takeover occurred in 1989 in Jersey City, New Jersey. In the years since, states have taken over other school districts, including Compton, California; Hartford, Connecticut; Lawrence, Massachusetts; and Newark and Paterson in New Jersey. On the other hand, states have assigned administrative control over the education system to mayors in cities including New York, Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Baltimore, Detroit, and Oakland. Efforts to improve the performance of "failing" schools by shifting administrative control have achieved only limited success, for a number of reasons.

State Takeovers

In some important respects, the agencies of state government are strong candidates for turning around "failing" schools. They have the authority to demand change and the power to reallocate resources to support (or punish) specific schools and school districts. They have demonstrated success in establishing political and fiscal stability and integrity in troubled districts (Wong & Shen, 2001). In addition, many state education agencies can marshal an impressive stock of technical expertise on issues ranging from curriculum design to professional development (Massell, 1998). They operate on a scale that allows them to employ specialists, and to spread the costs of technical assistance over large numbers of clients.

At the same time, however, direct interventions by state agencies to improve performance in "failing" schools face a number of critical obstacles. First, state education agencies typically serve hundreds of districts and thousands of schools, most of which are geographically distant from the capital. They consequently have little local knowledge of schools and communities. Under these circumstances, political and bureaucratic exigencies make it difficult for them to tailor their interventions to the specific local needs of individual schools and districts. Second, state interventions in local school districts are almost invariably triggered by crisis, so school districts rarely enter into a relationship with the state freely or as a partner. The consequent lack of trust may require state officials to overcome deep local resistance in order to establish the legitimacy necessary to assist "failing" schools.

Even if these obstacles can be overcome, the capacity of state education agencies to provide assistance is declining because of a decrease in manpower and an increase in policy demands. Research in eight large states found that three departments of education had experienced 25-50 percent cuts in personnel over the

last decade, and that none of the eight states had added staff in order to cope with new accountability and assessment requirements (Massell, 1998). Given severe budget shortfalls and the new burdens imposed by NCLB, few states are likely to have sufficient capacity to provide effective direct assistance to "failing" schools.

Mayoral Control

An alternative candidate for assisting "failing" schools is the mayor. In contrast to state education agencies, mayors are geographically close to the schools. City boundaries are often coterminous with school district boundaries. Mayors have deep local knowledge, and their familiarity with local actors and their understanding of local politics can be useful in building trust among local educators. Many urban school districts are large enough to support the employment of specialists in key areas of need.

The most obvious barrier facing mayors, however, is their lack of knowledge about schools, teaching, and learning. Staffed by non-educators, mayors' offices do not possess the expertise that is essential for improving student performance (Kirst, 2002). Mayors control a variety of city resources, including such things as parks and recreation resources and housing and health programs. They can marshal these resources in ways that support schools and enhance administrative efficiency, but the kinds of resources that would be needed to significantly improve academic achievement are not in the mayor's office. To bring about deep changes in the way schools operate, mayors must either build this technical capacity from scratch or else rely on other agencies–including current school district personnel–to provide expert knowledge.

An additional problem with mayoral takeovers is that most mayors–like most school boards–are deeply embedded in a turbulent political environment. The political turmoil that is often associated with a mayoral takeover of local schools can present serious obstacles to accomplishing the academic improvement that would justify the takeover (Kirst, 2002; Wong & Shen, 2001). In cities including Detroit, Compton, and Lawrence mayoral takeovers of the local school system generated a great deal of political opposition. Partly as a result, seven years elapsed in Compton before student achievement scores improved at all. In the four years following the mayoral takeover in Detroit, test scores continued to decline. Many mayors serve less than seven years, and it may consequently be difficult for them to sustain the political and technical support needed to bring about lasting improvements while bearing the burden of continued "failure" in local schools.

Universities

Universities are another intermediary institution that might be nominated to provide assistance to "failing" schools. Universities often have a rich stock of highly specialized technical expertise embodied in their faculty and staff, which could be deployed to assist relatively large numbers of schools. Many universities have a history of working with districts to train pre-service teachers, and many local educators are alumni. These prior interactions should help to establish a reservoir of trust between universities and public school educators.

There are a number of serious problems that universities must overcome if they are to assist "failing" schools, however. First, the reservoir of trust between colleges of education and public schools is often very shallow. Distrust often arises from disagreements about technical expertise (Lanier & Little, 1986). University faculty may be tempted to portray themselves as more knowledgeable than educators in the schools, and to regard classroom teachers as needlessly committed to low expectations and routinized instruction. For their part, K-12 teachers and staff often characterize university faculty as prisoners of the ivory tower, lacking the knowledge and skill to teach effectively in the increasingly complex world of public education. Two decades of experience with professional development schools make it clear that universities have a difficult time supporting improvement in teaching and learning (Valli, Cooper, Frankes, 1996).

Universities also have less useful capacity than may at first appear. The expertise that resides in universities is often different from the expertise necessary to carry out the work of improving "failing" schools. Only a small part of the research conducted by university faculty is directly relevant to immediate problems of teaching and learning. Relatively few faculty members have recent experience teaching in K-12 schools, and even fewer have participated in the arduous process of turning around a "failing" school (Lanier & Little, 1986). Moreover, there are few institutional incentives that would encourage university faculty to choose sustained work with "failing" schools.

Education Management Organizations

EMOs are another potential intermediary institution to assist "failing" schools. NCLB designates EMO management as one of the possible governance changes required for schools that fail to meet their AYP targets for five consecutive years. The EMO industry has grown in recent years. By fall 2003 there were roughly 50 companies managing over 400 schools in 28 states plus the District of Columbia (Molnar, Wilson, & Allen, 2004). The individual companies that comprise the for-profit school management industry are heterogeneous. Some offer a menu of specific services from which contracting schools can select (e.g., bookkeeping and payroll, operations and maintenance). Increasingly, however, companies offer whole school designs including curriculum, instruction, assessment and management practices that are implemented with little variation in all of a company's schools.

The K-12 for-profit education contracting market is composed of two distinct segments: charter schools and school district contracting. Charter schools are the largest segment, representing over three-quarters of all EMO-managed public schools. Most EMOs are very small firms operating exclusively in the charter sector. About two-thirds of all EMOs manage one to three charter schools. Entry into the district-contracting market segment has to this point proven to be much more difficult. Only four companies currently manage traditional public schools, and a single one–Edison Schools–operates over 80 percent of the district schools that are managed by for-profit firms.

Some of the differences in contracting arrangements in charter versus traditional public schools are relevant in anticipating the prospects for EMOs to successfully turn around "failing" schools. In charter schools, firms typically enjoy greater autonomy to hire and fire teachers, set salaries, and implement their programs. District contracting, however, presents much more difficult administrative and political constraints. EMOs typically must work with elected school boards, existing school employees and their unions, and offer a full complement of educational services. These features restrict EMOs' flexibility and raise the cost of managing district as compared to charter schools. Thus far no EMO has been able to turn a profit operating traditional public schools. In addition, several EMOs (including Education Alternatives in Baltimore and Hartford and Edison Schools in Dallas and San Francisco) have been "fired" by local school districts because of their failure to accomplish promised gains in student achievement. The record suggests that in order for private management of traditional schools to be profitable, EMOs will either have to receive more generous funding than regular public schools, or they will need the authority to implement the sort of cost-cutting strategies feasible in charter schools.[8]

Regardless of whether private management of public schools becomes profitable, EMOs might still fulfill a more modest role of providing advice and assistance to "failing" schools. As with the case of mayoral and state takeovers, EMOs may hold promise for bringing about improvements in school financial management and administration.[9] It is at least unclear whether EMOs possess an advantage over school

[8] In Philadelphia, now the site of the nation's largest private contracting experiment, outside contractors receive higher per pupil funding than the rest of the city's public schools.

[9] There have been questions raised about improprieties in the financial disclosures of EMOs themselves. See, for example, Henriques & Steinberg (2002b).

districts in their knowledge of how to improve student learning. The available evidence remains limited, but it indicates that improvement in student achievement in EMO-managed schools is about the same as in comparable district schools (U.S. GAO, 2002; Miron & Applegate, 2000).

EMOs vary dramatically in their capacity to guide instruction. A handful of large EMOs have fairly substantial capacity. In most EMOs, however, this capacity is very thin. Among EMOs that operate more than a few charter schools, competition to attract clients centers on efforts to differentiate their programs from those of other schools and EMOs. Developing innovative instructional practices that generate superior student achievement would be one product differentiation strategy, but it is difficult and risky. Most EMOs, therefore, rationally elect to adopt existing instructional programs that are commercially available, and concentrate instead on marketing. This strategy requires firms to establish brand and product identity, which necessitates relatively uniform operations and services from school to school (Levin, 2001). Standardization limits their ability to respond to distinctive local conditions.

Whether EMOs can develop the capacity to turn around "failing" schools therefore remains an open question. If they can do so, however, they will likely be able to benefit from scale economies. Already there are at least 10 EMOs that manage 10 or more schools. Wide geographical dispersion of the schools managed by an EMO, however, could diminish the potential for efficiency gains.

The establishment of trust may pose the greatest challenge for EMOs in their efforts to turn around schools. EMOs enter contracting relationships with public schools as a business venture. They do not ordinarily enjoy longstanding relationships with a school's personnel that could serve as the basis for establishing trust. To the contrary, distrust could arise from educators' concern that EMOs' profit motive is not congruent with the values that guide their work. The spread of EMO-management successes stories could eventually help with the formation of trust, but thus far reputational networks among teacher union members and community groups seem mainly to be disseminating horror stories of contracting arrangements gone bad (Henriques & Steinberg, 2002a; Walsh, 2001). Uncertainty about the durability of the contracting relationship is also likely to hinder the development of trust. Finally, the difficulty of establishing trust will almost certainly increase significantly in those instances where state officials orchestrate contracting arrangements without the participation or consent of school employees.[10]

Education Service Agencies[11]

Educational service agencies (ESAs) represent another potential intermediary institution to provide assistance to "failing schools." They provide services to local schools that are too costly or specialized for individual districts to efficiently provide for themselves—services for which economies of scale are operative. By obtaining services through ESAs, districts can share overhead costs rather than fund duplicative programs. Given their scale of operation, ESAs also can often hire highly trained and experienced specialists in their service areas. In addition, ESAs are generally less constrained than local school districts by tradition and established practice and more flexible and entrepreneurial in defining their roles.

Provided they possess the necessary expertise, the greater size of most ESAs is likely to afford significant scale advantages over local districts in supplying specialized support services for "failing"

[10] This circumstance could arise, for instance, when a state takes over a school (or district) and turns it over to an EMO to manage. The Inkster School District in Michigan offers one prominent example where the district entered into an EMO contracting arrangement under strong compulsion from the state. In that case, the lack of trust and good will between the contracting parties produced debilitating struggles and a dramatic deterioration in student performance on state assessment tests. (See Hall, 2002).

[11] Information on ESAs in the U.S. was obtained from the database of the Association of Educational Service Agencies.

schools. In addition, since ESAs are defined geographically, they enjoy an advantage over states, universities, or EMOs by virtue of their proximity to all the schools they serve.

ESA interventions in support of "failing" schools are also likely to benefit from a relatively high degree of trust. Many local schools have longstanding and mutually beneficial relationships with their ESAs. These relationships encompass a wide range of services beyond those specifically related to assistance for "failing" schools. If school personnel have a favorable opinion of ESA services in areas such as special education or staff and curriculum development, they are more likely to give the ESA the benefit of the doubt and respect its competence to assist with their school's academic improvement. Given their ongoing role within the public education system, ESAs also are more likely than other intermediary institutions to subscribe to organizational values that are consonant with those of public schools. Finally, the ability of ESAs to maintain trust is facilitated by the fact that there is less uncertainty about the durability of their affiliation with a district or school. One way or another, the ESA and public schools will have to work together in the future, so they have a mutual incentive to act in a trustworthy fashion to enhance the effectiveness of future interactions.

The key question regarding the relative ability of ESAs to turn around "failing" schools centers on their capacity. At issue is not their local knowledge, which is generally broad and deep, but rather their technical expertise, which is unevenly distributed across ESAs and not adequately tested with regard to the specific task of assisting schools to improve student achievement. ESA staffs typically have extensive connections with local districts, and ESA administrators occupy an ideal position to gain a comprehensive view of the educational, financial and political circumstances of districts within their catchment areas.

The verdict is out, however, on ESAs' technical knowledge. Available evidence suggests that a wide range of ESAs may possess considerable capacity.[12] Some ESAs have extensive and expanding capacity to assist districts with instruction, instructional support and administration. Yet there is considerable variation across ESAs in their technical capacity. In Michigan, for example, this capacity is greatest in metropolitan area intermediate school districts, where staffing and expertise rival or exceed that of the Michigan Department of Education for the provision of services needed by "failing" schools. Indeed, a consortium of metropolitan area ISDs in Michigan enjoyed considerable success recently in helping "failing" schools to attain state accreditation. The technical capacity in other ESAs is very thin, however. For now the potential contribution of ESAs to improving student achievement in "failing" schools remains theoretical and untested, for it entails formal responsibilities that most ESAs have yet to assume.

Comparative Institutional Advantage

Who will turn around "failing" schools? Which intermediary institutions are best suited to marshal and deploy the mix of pressure and support that is uniquely appropriate to the task of improving teaching and learning in individual schools? This is a central policy question posed by NCLB, and it has received little systematic attention.

Table 1 summarizes our assessments of the relative ability of five alternative institutions to meet the challenge of turning around "failing" schools. In our view ESAs show particular promise for accomplishing this goal. ESAs currently vary significantly in the technical expertise they can deploy, but this is at least

[12] According to an AESA member survey in 2000, roughly 73 percent of the ESAs have at least 50 full-time employees. In addition, 527 of the nation's 530 ESAs currently provide "staff development and/or curriculum development services." The extent to which this translates into effective capacity for the specific tasks of improving student achievement in "failing" schools remains to be determined.

Table 1. Assessment of Institutions by Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	District	State	Mayor	University	EMO	ESA
Capacity						
Technical expertise	◒	◒	○	◒	◒	◒
Local knowledge	●	○	●	◒	○	●
Scale						
Size	●*	●	●*	◒	◒	●
Proximity	●	○	●	◒	◒	●
Trust	◒	○	◒	◒	○	●

Key

● = meets criterion in most areas
◒ = meets criterion in some areas
○ = meets criterion in few or no areas
* for large districts

equally true of all of the other candidate institutions. Moreover, ESAs appear well situated to develop and extend existing technical capacity. On the other criteria–local knowledge, size, proximity, and especially trust–ESAs seem likely to perform quite well. Other institutions show some promise also, but their potential effectiveness is contingent on overcoming additional critical obstacles. This suggests that the productivity increase associated with an investment in the technical capacity of ESAs will be greater than for an equivalent investment in the capacity of any of the other intermediary institutions.

The primary value of Table 1 is in the framework for institutional choice that it provides. By identifying the strengths and deficiencies of various intermediary institutions, it provides a basis for state policy makers to formulate more realistic strategies for turning around failing schools. For example, any credible proposal to use mayoral takeovers of schools to improve academic performance ought to account for how this strategy would overcome municipal officials' nearly complete lack of expertise on issues of teaching and leaning. Strategies that rely on state takeovers or EMO contracting should specify how these agencies will overcome problems of trust and local knowledge.

We recognize that there is wide variation across individual organizations within each of the intermediary institution categories that we assess. The choice of which institution is suited for a particular "failing" school must ultimately be determined by the demonstrated effectiveness of specific organizations, and not by generalized strengths and weaknesses of different classes of institutions. The choice of institution should reside at the local level. The framework for institutional choice that we propose is valuable for guiding these decisions.

Further Considerations for Policy Design

Beyond the intrinsic strengths of particular intermediary institutions, three additional considerations should inform policy choices about how to turn around "failing" schools. First, the state must establish a policy framework that provides assistance to all eligible schools. Second, the state must ensure that the cost of assisting "failing" schools is appropriately and equitably shared. Finally, the state must take steps to

minimize perverse incentives, including problems of moral hazard and adverse selection. Each of these additional considerations reinforces the conclusion from Table 1 that ESAs represent an especially promising candidate for providing assistance to "failing" schools.

Who Receives Assistance?

In keeping with the spirit of NCLB, a state's policy framework for turning around "failing" schools must provide assistance to all schools needing assistance, to ensure that no schools are left behind. Voluntarism will not suffice. The state must be able to assign responsibility for turning around every school, not just those with which intermediary institutions agree to work. This is an impediment to the effectiveness of EMOs and universities, because they fall outside the direct administrative authority of the state. State officials cannot require EMOs or universities to work with schools that they do not wish to take on. In contrast, every school could fall within the jurisdictional responsibility of an ESA, at least in principle.

Who Pays for Assistance?

Many, perhaps most, schools identified as "failing" will be located in school districts where poverty is concentrated. These districts face the greatest challenges, and their ability to pay for additional support services is limited. Leaving the financial responsibility for turning around "failing" schools with local school districts simply perpetuates these inequities. Payment for these services by state governments would enhance equity, but centralization undermines the efficiency that is gained through local political oversight.

One solution to this problem would be to split the financing burden between the state and ESAs. States could finance and perhaps coordinate the development of ESA technical expertise, supporting professional development for ESA personnel regarding the best practices for assisting failing schools. Such training would benefit from scale efficiencies and the sharing of information on implementation experiences. ESAs could finance the incremental operating costs of providing service to "failing" schools within their jurisdictions. Financing a substantial portion of support service costs through ESAs would promote both equity and efficiency by sharing the tax bases of multiple local districts while retaining local pressure for efficiency in the use of funds.

How Can Incentives Be Aligned with Policy Goals?

State policies aimed at turning around "failing" schools must also guard against the creation of perverse incentives, including those associated with what economists call moral hazard and adverse selection. With respect to moral hazard, district administrators overwhelmed by the challenge of turning around many schools may welcome state intervention that shifts responsibility for the most difficult schools to other agencies. Indeed they may try to create a situation where performance in schools they continue to manage surpasses that in schools receiving assistance from intermediary institutions. When administrators expect outside intervention, they may rationally focus their efforts on improving those schools with the greatest prospect of meeting state standards, while neglecting the worst schools for years before handing them over to other parties. A moral hazard problem arises because there is no way for others to accurately observe administrators' actions or to know with certainty whether observable actions are detrimental to the interests of specific schools.

The adverse selection problem arises because district administrators have better information regarding the true quality of a school (or the obstacles to its improvement) than other agencies. Intermediary institutions including EMOs and universities that contract to provide assistance to specific schools must therefore assume that the schools they are being contracted to manage are "lemons." The suspicion that they are assuming responsibility for the most challenging schools will lead them to increase the price that they demand for providing assistance, and to limit the number of schools with which they work.

State policy can be designed to diminish these sources of inefficiency. On the one hand, policy should be devised so district administrators share some of the risk associated with efforts to improve all of the schools in their district. They should not get off the hook entirely, once an external institution becomes involved with a particular school. On the other hand, long-term contracts can mitigate moral hazard problems by introducing benefits for not exploiting short-term informational advantages and for promoting the accumulation and sharing of information that reduces uncertainty. A state policy requiring ESAs to establish partnerships with districts to turn around "failing" schools could satisfy both of these conditions. Such a policy would also create an incentive for ESAs to provide assistance to troubled schools before circumstances became desperate.

Conclusion

The persistence of "failing" schools serving disadvantaged children is the great failure of the American public school system. The central accomplishment of the continuing "standards movement" in educational reform has been to focus the attention of policy-makers and educators on these schools. The passage of NCLB reflects a national acknowledgement of this failure and a commitment to improve the performance of schools that fail to meet state standards.

Under the traditional institutions of local control the problem of school performance and school "failure" was left to school boards and local school districts. With the introduction of state standards and strengthened accountability measures, however, the problem of increasing student achievement in "failing" schools is no longer a local problem. The states have assumed an obligation to turn these schools around, in order to comply with their own promises to ensure success for all students. The key question, of course, is how to accomplish this goal.

Serious efforts to meet the goals of NCLB in improving the performance of "failing" schools must rely not only on threats and sanctions but also on effective external support. The framers of NCLB implicitly acknowledged this, with the designation of alternative governance arrangements under which various external organizations may assume control over schools that persistently fall short of AYP targets. The problem with the external organizations identified in the Act, however, is that none of them has a particularly strong track record in improving student achievement. The expectation that student achievement in "failing" schools will improve as a consequence of the governance changes required by NCLB amounts to nothing more than wishful thinking.

In this paper we have attempted to move beyond wishful thinking, by addressing the question of how external support for "failing" schools should be delivered, and by whom. We suggest that the answer ought to be sought in an assessment of the relative strengths of alternative intermediary institutions. Our evaluation framework for institutional choice identifies three main criteria for making this judgment: capacity, scale, and trust. We apply these criteria to five institutions–school districts, state and local governments, universities, EMOs, and ESAs–in an effort to explore which one(s) show the most promise for the difficult task of making ineffective schools effective. Our analysis of the literature recommends skepticism with regard to the likely success of some familiar choices among intermediary institutions, including school districts, mayors, universities, and EMOs. In contrast, ESAs appear to have significant potential, but largely untested, advantages as we assess the candidates for the task of turning around "failing" schools. Our analysis supports further efforts to cultivate the capacity of ESAs to fulfill this role. In addition, since ESAs have strengths that could compensate for weaknesses observed with each of the other institutions, there also may be benefits to joint arrangements between ESAs and other intermediary institutions to assist schools.

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Educational Service Agencies are Essential to Improve Student Achievement

by
Ted Stilwill

Iowa has long known that regional educational service agencies play an essential role in ensuring greater economy or efficiency through cooperation and collaboration among schools and school districts. Now other states and the federal government are recognizing this as well, with the conclusion that ESAs are likely to be one of the most critical assets available in building the capacity needed to significantly improve student achievement.

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There was a day when educational leaders – like many business leaders – would have been satisfied to simply reduce costs to gain greater efficiencies. But just as business cannot "save its way to prosperity," neither can educators save their way to higher learning. Today our advocacy for students means that we must find ways to dramatically improve the productivity of our education system so that we are more effective with more students. The "No Child Left Behind" legislation is only the current manifestation of this need, and although it is an imperfect solution, the law has served as a catalyst for awareness and understanding of a basic principle: If we are truly advocates for the academic needs of young people, then we must be committed to high standards and goals, though without the threat of sanctions and with immunity from the current political rhetoric.

The harsh reality that threatens our idealism is perhaps most difficult because of its simplicity. Our centuries-old educational system was not designed for all young people to succeed at the levels that we expect today, and no amount of raucous accountability will force that transformation without meaningful, fundamental changes. And before that can happen, we must find ways to redistribute our resources and to find new resources so that we can build the capacity in our educational system to support higher levels of success for a broader range of students.

The basic elements of success in the new system are not that difficult to describe, but they are costly and time-consuming to implement. Some important preliminary work already has begun, primarily in that the

educational system has become more research-based and results-oriented. Thus, we have sharpened the focus on student learning by identifying clear indicators of student needs. This step has allowed us as student advocates to monitor and record results. But such a results focus will only accelerate frustrations if we do not support it with initiatives to build the capacity to help more students succeed.

The research and results also show us that the central ingredient to improving student achievement is improved *instruction*. The most effective way to improve instruction is through extensive professional development that helps teachers acquire, continuously, a broader repertoire of proven teaching strategies.

Providing this type of professional development is very difficult given the limitations of most school districts today. The assumptions of both staff and patrons are that once teachers have completed a higher education training program and are then licensed, they can be presumed to be competent for the remainder of their careers. That might have been acceptable when we expected teachers to prepare only a narrow range of students for college, but an educational program lasting no more than four or five years no longer meets society's growing expectations for schools. Today, teachers need intensive, ongoing professional development that goes far beyond an initial exposure to new teaching methods. We must now be committed to identifying the best teaching practices from research, to allow for their demonstration, and to allow time for practice of these new strategies in current classrooms in a way that enables teachers to gain feedback from their colleagues.

Educational service agencies are ideally suited to provide this kind of systemic support for the improvement of teaching. Enlarging professional development to a scale that continuously supports all teachers throughout their careers will be one of the greatest challenges faced by education if we are to even approach success in meeting our national educational goals. Being able to direct the resources of educational service agencies toward this cause will be an essential prerequisite to our success.

There are three necessary system elements needed to integrate quality professional development into today's schools:

- We must gather a stronger base of research regarding effective teaching strategies, tools and technologies that can target specific learning needs.
- Teachers must be allotted the time to acquire these new strategies.
- Teachers must have access to these new strategies – and this is where ESAs can fulfill a critical need. Federal and state governments must partner with higher education and the private sector to develop the needed research and development. States and school districts must partner to find ways to provide educators paid access to professional development. This task involves both additional financial resources and creative scheduling of such programs. ESAs will need to partner with local districts in order to provide teachers with the expertise and knowledge necessary to be successful with all students.

Is this a possibility, or just more idealism? Can ESAs move to such a pivotal role? Several states already have moved in this direction. Iowa is a good example.

In Iowa, educational service agencies are called Area Education Agencies (AEAs). Each AEA serves a designated region, and all districts are obligated to access services (such as professional development, technology assistance, special education assistance) through their assigned AEA. Every AEA receives state and federal funding through a formula based on the number of students served.

Iowa's AEAs began in 1976 as a means to providing equity in education, and the services of each evolved over time in response to local needs. In 1988, the Iowa General Assembly mandated a study to determine the efficacy of AEAs and whether the number should be reduced. One important result of this study was a recommendation that Iowa establish uniform standards for a core set of services that every AEA would provide, and several years later an accreditation process was also added to the system. The result is that today AEAs are an essential component of Iowa's educational system in which all levels – local, regional, and the state – work cooperatively and are accountable for providing the myriad essential services to schools, teachers and students.

Today it is hard to imagine how we would provide support to teachers without our Area Education Agencies. Several years ago, we asked for and received permission and funding to develop and implement a two-year mentoring and induction program. Because the passage of state laws can be a protracted process, we had just several months to complete and launch the program, which involved identifying and training hundreds of mentors (as well as developing the evaluation criteria to assess the program). We didn't want to sacrifice quality just because we were on a fast track. We achieved our goals through a responsive system of AEAs.

The same legislation that brought about the induction and mentoring program provided three additional challenges as well: it established a statewide set of performance standards for beginning teachers, it required that the Iowa Department of Education establish consistent evaluation procedures for all districts across the state, and required that all supervisors be trained in the new system. How did Iowa provide for 10 days of training for these administrators? Again the best and most cost-effective solutions were to work through our Area Education Agencies. The expertise of their staff and ready access they have to local districts are increasingly important because it has never been practical for a state education agency to directly provide training on this scale, but it is even more difficult today with severely diminished state resources.

Today we are working with our AEAs and with the higher education community to develop a stronger base of research on proven teaching strategies in reading, math and science. Networks in each subject area will provide the knowledge base for the design of professional development strategies that will serve teachers at all grade levels. The content standard model already has shown success in Iowa; we have used it to implement a statewide program to improve instructional strategies in reading in grades K-3. Statewide reading scores have now improved significantly for three consecutive years.

Area Education Agencies in Iowa recognize that they have a responsibility to help improve student learning in their client schools. In addition to being accountable for indicators such as customer satisfaction, AEAs in Iowa are also accountable for student performance. It is a clear message to their schools that they have a shared sense of responsibility for student learning.

Given the need to build the capacity in our educational system to help more students to succeed, educational service agencies will play an increasingly important role in complementing the work of local schools and state education agencies.

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Meeting the New Requirements of No Child Left Behind

by
Colleen B. Wilcox and Porter Sexton

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 established a new national environment for public education in which Education Service Agencies (ESAs) are uniquely situated to have substantial impact.

"As an ESA, we have established trust in our program offerings over the years."

NCLB is outcome driven, establishing standards for student performance that states must set and meet. In turn, states are placing more rigorous demands on schools and school districts to demonstrate adequate student progress each year as defined by each state's measures of Adequate Yearly Progress.

In addition to being outcome driven, NCLB is process prescriptive. The law establishes that teachers and paraprofessionals who work with children must be highly qualified, and it sets strict requirements on how such qualifications must be demonstrated. The law also sets new standards on parent involvement, and choices and assistance that must be made available to parents.

Many schools and school districts are finding that, on their own, they are unable to meet either the student outcome requirements or the prescriptive process requirements of NCLB. States have been required by the US Department of Education to demonstrate the standards that are being set and the measures that are being enforced to ensure compliance. Overwhelmed with the need to meet such federal requirements, states have not always been able to supply the support and assistance to the schools and districts needed to bring about full compliance with the act. This situation has led to new opportunities for ESAs to assist schools and districts.

In Santa Clara County, California, the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) is able to effectively and efficiently offer services to meet these new needs. In this article, we will review four new programs being offered through the SCCOE to help schools meet the new requirements: SChool Plan, Mathematics Teacher Institute, Math Mentor, and Paraprofessional Training.

In the feature article of this issue of *Perspectives*, researchers Arsen, Bell, and Plank argue that regional education service agencies (ESAs) are well situated to help schools meet increasing accountability

requirements. They propose that three criteria – capacity, scale, and trust – uniquely qualify ESAs to provide the needed assistance. It is interesting to examine how each of those three criteria apply to the new applications SCCOE has initiated.

School Plan

To help educators at all schools meet the new student performance requirements, SCCOE has created a comprehensive school planning and reporting tool, known as "SChool Plan." SChool Plan's system of balanced professional development and computer applications makes it easier to analyze and incorporate data from state and local sources to produce a school-level plan for working with students. The approach considers the context within which students function, their demographic attributes, how their schools are perceived, and most importantly, how well the students are achieving.

Scale

To initiate SChool Plan, the mayors of three cities joined with the SCCOE to apply for funding from 3Com Corporation. Then 17 school districts within the county formed a consortium to boost the project. In January 2003, these districts began building a powerful infrastructure for SChool Plan's web-oriented student tracking database and software. We now serve over 200 schools in 27 school districts.

Capacity

For our SChool Plan initiative, it was clear from the inception that no single district in the county would have the capacity to design, implement and maintain such a sophisticated system. In fact, considerable augmentation of our own capacity was required. Hardware upgrades were required to host a system designed for up to 250,000 students, and implementation had to be paced to allow for load balance testing at different hardware capacity. The capability for such capacity enhancement was greatly dependent on the expertise and experience of our regional technology center. There were no single software vendors that had the overall capacity to build the software system itself, from student database to data manipulation and analysis to administrative applications to report mechanism to meet state and NCLB requirements. The SCCOE expanded its capacity by pulling in vendors that were willing to collaborate.

Trust

In terms of scale, SCCOE had already implemented EdJoin, a web-based statewide educational employment system, and had provided School Accountability Report Cards (SARC), a web-based school-by-school reporting system designed to meet state reporting requirements, to districts in several counties. We had the requisite experience in developing and implementing large-scale web-based systems with districts in multiple counties. And considerable trust had been developed based on school and district use of EdJoin and SARC, as well as general high expertise of RTC and school support programs. Trust in the ESA was essential in two important aspects of the development of SChool Plan: getting software vendors to trust that sharing their proprietary systems was safe, and getting districts to trust that SChool Plan would be compatible with and not corrupt their existing systems.

Mathematics Teacher Institute

The SCCOE Mathematics Teacher Institute offers a week-long summer institute for mathematics teachers throughout the county who teach sixth grade math through Algebra 1. The institute focuses on the content standards and on research-based instructional strategies. After attending the summer institute for a week in August, teachers then attend four all-day Saturday institutes during the school year, one in October, November, January, and March. The Saturday sessions deal with number sense, statistics, data analysis, and probability.

In addition to the instructional sessions, the teachers also participate in regularly scheduled after-school meetings that focus on teacher needs. Topics include classroom management, differentiated instruction, assessment, and curriculum mapping.

Teachers receive a $1,000 stipend for successfully completing all aspects of the Institute, and continuing education units of credit are available through the San Jose State University Professional Development Center. There is no charge to the teachers to participate. The costs of the Institute are underwritten by a grant from Wells Fargo Bank.

In the summer of 2002-2003, 15 teachers attended the first Institute. Last summer the number rose to 58, and it was expected to rise again in summer of 2004. Although the data analysis is still anecdotal, teachers in the Institute are reporting gains in their students' test scores. Plans are to expand the program to cover elementary and high school level mathematics courses.

Because of the SCCOE's strong curriculum and training background through its Instructional Services Branch, we had the capacity to develop and establish the Mathematics Teacher Institute while individual school districts or universities might not. Existing expertise and leadership were available to put together a service that would meet needs of practicing teachers. Because of the ESA's relationship and past experience with funding institutions, we were sought out by the Wells Fargo Foundation to implement the program.

Only the SCCOE has the scale to offer the program countywide. Although a similar program might have been possible on a regional scale through a university, the countywide scale offered here reinforces other ongoing countywide efforts and provides for continuing growth as more schools and districts participate. Some of the local school districts might have the capacity to offer their own program, but would not have access to the resources of multiple districts and multiple support providers that are available. Financial support now comes from sources throughout the county, and the Institute is staffed by experienced teachers from throughout the county as well. Such resources would be more limited if offered by individual districts.

As an ESA, we have established trust in our program offerings over the years. This trust led to the initial funding for the Institute and has led to the enthusiastic participation of teachers from ten separate school districts.

Math Mentor

For students, SCCOE offers Math Mentor, a live television show and interactive homework hotline. The show is broadcast from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. on school days. Students call the show with their homework questions. All students who call receive help from a tutor, and the students with the most interesting

questions work with the instructor on the telecast. The program is carried on cable television as well as the local educational channels, and hotline phone numbers are available free of charge throughout the county. Bi-lingual teachers answer math questions in Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Mandarin. Students can also email their questions. There is also a website with interactive programs. And there are also graphing calculator lessons and televised instruction to assist students prepare for the high school exit exam.

Certified mathematics teachers provide the on-air discussions of homework problems, and have general homework tips for all students. Teachers know the materials covered in the standard curriculum throughout the year and are well-prepared to supplement classroom instruction.

A new feature of Math Mentor is the TV game show "Math Squares," which is patterned after the "Hollywood Squares" television program. High schools teams of freshmen and sophomores are selected at participating schools to compete on the telecast in April. Students are asked math questions of a difficulty that would appear on the California high school exit exam and are given 45 seconds to successfully calculate the answer.

During the hour-long broadcast, an average of about 40 students call or email in and receive help each day. Over 10,000 inquiries have been addressed in the two years of the program. And many more students watch the program for help without calling in.

SCCOE's Technology Learning Services developed expertise in assisting districts with televised learning opportunities and had the capacity to take on a project as challenging as Math Mentor. We were able to call upon the capacity of specialists in areas of mathematics, foreign languages, curriculum, and testing, and well as technology. Since its inception, new components of Math Mentor have been developed over time as our capacity has increased.

In order to be cost-effective, Math Mentor needs to reach a large number of students. The County Office of Education, with its linkages to schools through the county, has been able to offer the program and recruit its audience on a scale that makes it effective. The program runs promotional materials and activities in schools throughout the county and calls upon the resources of multiple districts in staffing the program and developing new materials. Of course, the access to these resources is dependent on the trust that the County Office, as an ESA, has established with the schools and districts.

Test Preparation for Paraprofessionals

The SCCOE collaborates with National Hispanic University to form a Cooperative Organization for the Development of Employee Selection Procedures (CODESP). CODESP offers services to districts dealing with the requirements for selection and training of paraprofessionals. One such service is the CODESP test for paraprofessionals. Passing the CODESP test is one way to meet the NCLB requirement that paraprofessionals be "highly qualified."

The two-hour test consists of three parts: math, English/language arts and ability to assist in instruction. Test questions were developed by reviewing current California high school graduation standards, community college placement exams, and other standardized tests currently administered in California. SCCOE offers preparation courses that are designed to provide paraprofessionals with support, instruction and practice in key areas of the CODESP test.

Conclusion

Single school districts generally do not have the capacity to develop both the test and the training program to prepare paraprofessionals for the test. Universities generally lack the delivery capacity to bring sufficient numbers of participants into the program. Here the ESA augmented its capacity through collaboration with a local university.

Because of the limited numbers of paraprofessionals in any single districts that may need to be tested at any one time, the scale of providing the service countywide is necessary to achieve sufficient participation. District trust that the test will measure the qualities required by NCLB and that the preparation courses will prepare participants with the skills and knowledge needed for the test.

For each of these new SCCOE programs, it is seen that capacity, scale and trust were necessary components to the inception and success of the program. Arsen, Bell, and Plank propose that these criteria uniquely qualify ESAs to meet the needs of "failing" schools. This review indicates that these criteria are almost by definition generic to ESA programs and may uniquely qualify ESAs to help meet the needs of a variety of schools in the new accountability era following passage of the No Child Left Behind Act.

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Nebraska ESUs Have Heads in the Stars: Supporting NCLB

by
Pat Geary and Gil Kettlehut

Educational Service Units (ESUs) in Nebraska, in conjunction with the Nebraska Department of Education, have embarked on a journey to move schools from respectable local community learning institutions to *highly accountable* systems of student learning. Nebraska's approach to standards, assessment, and accountability begins with Nebraska L.E.A.R.N.S (Leading Educational Achievement through Rigorous Nebraska Standards) in the areas of reading, which includes writing, speaking, listening; mathematics; science; and social studies. The assessment and accountability to these standards are included in its School-based, Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) Program. It is grounded in the belief that decisions about student learning should be standards-based and should be based upon classroom knowledge of the student.

"The ESU staff offer a variety of supportive programs to these quality indicator processes."

The key components of the STARS program were carefully selected and deserve close analysis:

School-based - not state- or federally-based-governmental demands.

Teacher-led - not driven by state- or federally-based governmental officials.

Assessment - not a single, state test.

Reporting - not punitive actions.

System - not a one-step process.

This movement started prior to the No Child Left Behind Act because it was the "right" thing to do to enhance both the opportunities for student learning and to improve learning through informed teaching strategies and assessment practices.

Now with the enactment of No Child Left Behind as a federal expectation imposed upon school districts, one would expect that current local and state programs would either be "shelved" or significantly modified to comply with NCLB regulations. Well, not so in Nebraska. Its plan for meeting the requirements for No Child Left Behind and its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) component are woven into the STARS process while maintaining its foundational components.

Intermediate agencies in Nebraska often find themselves in a rather un-empowered position when it comes to supporting mandates imposed directly on school districts. Nebraska ESUs were in this very position at the start of STARS. However, this school-based and teacher-led process necessitated massive professional development and technical support to develop standards-based principles, assessment literacy, instructional alignment processes, statistical applications, and documenting procedures. The expertise required and the process to bring about a rapid deployment required time and resources only available through the ESUs. Quickly Nebraska Educational Services Units began playing critical roles in all dimensions of the process.

Working locally, regionally, and statewide, ESUs are facilitating processes and strategies which help member districts to:

- build understanding of a standards-based system
- "unpack" the Nebraska L.E.A.R.N.S. standards to reach clarity of intent
- confirm the Nebraska L.E.A.R.N.S. standards as local standards OR decide whether to develop district standards which meet or exceed the Nebraska standards (permitted in legislation). In some areas, regional curriculum teams are formed to set curriculum standards.

ESU staffs have been working in consort with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to build a high-quality and consistent curriculum and alignment processes. The integration of state-developed standards with locally developed curriculum has challenged existing values and traditions. It has also forced districts to consider the opposing force of curriculum development – the organized abandonment of content traditionally taught.

Once the district's standards-development process is complete, assuring alignment across grade levels and curriculum areas, and local ownership of the standards has been established, teams of teachers and administrators are brought together to enhance their assessment literacy. Nebraska utilizes the work of Dr. Rick Stiggins extensively.

As one might imagine, replicating this inclusive process in nearly every school district requires significant financial resources. The state has put in place STARS grants to help fund this massive assessment development process. Actual assessment development is facilitated both through regional teams and individual district work. Both require teachers to be freed from classroom responsibilities or paid summer stipends. The work is intensive and time consuming. ESUs coordinate and facilitate grant-supported regional work to assure both economy of scale and collaborative development. Generally, districts are developing unique curriculum-referenced assessments. However, because of the large number of small school districts in some of the more rural areas of Nebraska, regionally developed consortium assessments are sometimes more appropriate. In a few cases, commercial software programs are used as a basis for test item development.

It is important to note that the Nebraska plan allows for the integration of norm-referenced, curriculum referenced, and/or locally developed classroom assessments within each district's assessment plan. Although the norm-referenced test is readily available and already a component in every district's assessment plan for

state accreditation (Nebraska statute, Rule 10), its use as the primary assessment tool for standards is strongly discouraged by the state.

Regardless of the assessment combinations selected, school districts must document that their assessments meet the Six Quality Assessment Criteria established by the state of Nebraska and applicable to all school districts. The district must provide carefully described evidence of both process and outcomes for each of the six criteria.

The first of the quality criteria centers on *the degree to which the assessments actually align to and reflect the state or state-approved local standards.* This includes the documented process used to develop and then independently check for alignment. The ESUs often facilitate a "peer review" process which brings teachers from multiple districts together to follow a carefully designed process to review each others' assessment packages.

The second quality criterion focuses on *instructional design to verify that students actually have the opportunity to learn the standards at each grade level*. This, too, can be reviewed within the peer-review process.

As a third quality criterion, the *assessments must be carefully reviewed to assure that all items are free from bias or offensive situations.* The language bias analyzed includes gender, race/ethnicity, religious or socio-economic terminology or phrases. There is also a check for any offensive language.

The fourth quality criterion assures that *the assessment tasks reflect learning and assessment items that are developmentally appropriate for the target grade level.* The process used for the assessment development is carefully outlined in the documentation.

Quality criterion five requires the school district to assure *consistency in scoring the assessments.* This has been a large challenge for all but the largest school districts, which may have statisticians on staff. ESUs have developed and enhanced their professional development capacities and software data support to address this area. They have developed statistics "mini-courses" offered to train districts in setting up and conducting measurements of reliability, including KR20, KR21, Coefficient Alpha, test-retests, split half, or alternate form testing. Many ESUs have formulated spreadsheets and other software applications that allow for efficient data entry, calculations, and factor analysis.

Finally, the sixth quality criterion centers on processes used to *assure that appropriate mastery levels have been set for each standard measured.* Processes such as Contrasting Group, Modified Angoff, and Analytical Judgment are taught and applied to district assessments to assure score consistency. ESUs support and provide model documentation to illustrate the rigor imposed in establishing cut-scores, proficiency ranges, etc.

All of this evidence is included in the District Assessment Portfolio. This portfolio is submitted to NDE, where independent reviewers evaluate it. ESU personnel continue to be actively involved in the development and refinement of this quality-control facet of STARS.

The ESU staff offers a variety of supportive programs to these quality indicator processes. Regional training on processes to determine and verify standards alignment, depth and breadth of coverage, elimination of bias, and assuring developmental appropriateness are common. Some ESUs offer bias review

panels to assure objective process reviews. In addition, some coordinate peer review panels to offer third-party analysis of alignment, opportunity to learn, and developmental appropriateness. Many of the ESUs offer data collection tools, both locally developed and commercially purchased, to assist in the determination of reliability factors and validity of mastery scores.

A challenge to the Nebraska STARS process is the collection and reporting of mastery data from locally-unique assessments into a common state system, as well as allowing the data to be reported out in ways that are meaningful to the school and teacher, while also meeting the requirements of NCLB and the AYP stipulations. ESUs offer a variety of data support elements. They range from unit-wide comprehensive student management systems to ESU-developed curriculum and AYP-specific spreadsheets (both desktop and web-based).

Once the data is generated, collected, and reported, the most meaningful element of the work takes place. What does the data tell the local school, teacher, student, and parent about student learning? Where must the school focus its improvement strategies to assure yearly progress? This is critical conversation. The ESUs play an important role. Many of the Units offer "data retreats." These retreats offer the opportunity for teams from multiple schools to come together to synthesize local data, identify trends, explore causes, and plan for more in-depth discussions at the school site. Units also offer support in either facilitating or training in-district facilitators to conduct such retreats locally.

In all of these various support services to Nebraska STARS and the spirit of NCLB, the ESU recognizes its true value lies in getting the required expertise and strategies internalized at the district level, thereby "working itself out of a job." Units continue to coordinate opportunities of teachers to come together to share expertise and explore further "best practices" in this important work of STARS and No Child Left Behind.

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Leading Through Technology: Leave No Administrator Behind

by
Judith H. Miller

"Education leaders are key in the development of a broad vision for technology in education"

From catfish to forestry, Mississippi has long been known as an agricultural state. However, the face of Mississippi is rapidly changing. Today's Mississippi is unmatched in the Southeast for its supercomputing capabilities and cutting-edge processes in polymer science, remote sensing, marine research, and rapid prototyping. Telecommunication, physical acoustics, microelectronics, artificial intelligence, robotics and high-voltage electricity are just a few of the high-tech businesses and industries that reflect the diversity of 21st century Mississippi. To meet the challenges and opportunities that accompany high-tech employment, Mississippians are looking to their public schools to prepare an educated citizenry for the competitive jobs created by these industries.

Much attention has focused on how education leaders are meeting the goals and requirements outlined in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001. Title II, Part D of NCLB, *Enhancing Education Through Technology*, requires that schools focus their use of technology on improving academic achievement so that every student can be *technologically literate by the time the student finishes the eighth grade*.

Barriers to Success

Preparing citizens for the 21st century requires teachers and administrators, as well as students, to cross the *digital divide* described in the act. As with other components of NCLB, the core issue is to determine how the use of technology is improving student academic achievement. This requires educational leaders to focus on the quality of technology use by teachers and the extent of technology integration.

A study done by NetDay in May of 2001 was conducted to see how teachers are using computers and Internet connections to improve classroom instruction as well as to ascertain their comfort levels with integrating the technology into classroom instruction. Three key findings resulted from the study. The first was that 94% (9 out of 10) teachers said that they were comfortable using computers. Of that 94%, 87% said that they were also comfortable using the Internet. Despite the report of high comfort levels, 67% of the teachers involved in the study admitted that the technology was not well integrated into their classroom

instruction. Teachers cited administrative support, access to professional development, time, and availability of hardware and instructional software as continued barriers to integrating technology into instruction (Sviba, 2002).

The link between the school administrator's leadership role and the integration of technology in the classroom is strong. "Principals play a big role in setting the climate of a building," according to Cathy Chamberlain, a technology consultant in the Oswego (New York) City School District. "In my experience, technology integration is highest in buildings in which the principal is involved and excited about technology and its possibilities and is lowest in buildings in which the principal doesn't demonstrate technology use while encouraging others to use it too. Modeling technology usage is key if administrators want teachers to play an active role in technology integration" (Starr, 2001).

Early technology studies conducted by Wolf (1993) and Pelgrum (1993) determined a positive correlation between the attitude of teachers and principals in using computers and in integrating computers into instruction. Principals with more positive attitudes for using computers tended to emphasize the impact, purposes, and integration of computers in classroom instruction and encourage teachers to use computers more. Pruett (1993) also found that teachers whose principals encouraged them to use computers were more likely to use them in instruction.

However, before schools can successfully help students attain the lofty goal of being *technologically literate by 8th grade*, teachers and school administrators must be competent users of information and technology tools. "Administrators play a pivotal role in determining how well technology is used in our schools," according to Jim Bosco, chairperson of Collaborative for Technology Standards for School Administrators. "In order for teachers and students to fully use technology to achieve academic goals, they need the support and vision of tech-savvy administrators" (Hopkins, 2001).

Connecting Technology and *NCLB*

ESAs across the country have been called on in numerous ways to support state and local efforts to meet the goals of NCLB. Foremost in these efforts is the development and delivery of high-quality professional development particularly in the area of technology. U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige emphasized this connection in his keynote address to the U.S. Department of Education's first technology leadership summit in March 2004. "Technology will play a very important role in achieving the goals and objectives of No Child Left Behind," he said. "Technology empowers the education reforms of No Child Left Behind by expanding educational opportunities for students, equipping teachers with engaging instructional tools and enabling parents to become more involved in their child's education" (Paige, 2004).

Likewise, the *National Leadership Institute (NLI) 2002 Toolkit – States Helping States Implement No Child Left Behind*, produced by the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) and the U.S. Department of Education, asserts, "Education leaders are key in the development of a broad vision for technology in education" and "they need ready access to research results and innovation both nationally and internationally to help develop and implement the vision."

Leading by Example

East Mississippi Center for Educational Development, Inc. (EMCED), is a small, rural service agency that serves 21 public school districts and one federal tribal school district in the east central Mississippi area.

Encompassing 15 counties, EMCED serves an educational community of approximately 160 schools, 4,800 teachers, and 350 administrators. Since the early 1990s, EMCED has established itself as a state leader in developing high-quality technology training for teachers, administrators, school board members, and paraprofessionals.

In 1997, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)'s Office of Leadership Development and Enhancement contracted with EMCED to develop a *School Executive Management Institute* (SEMI) to assist Mississippi school administrators in acquiring the necessary skills to become technology-oriented leaders. The SEMI, *Technology: An Administrator's Perspective,* was designed and developed by EMCED executive director Judith Miller, Julie Jordan and Brooke Woods. The module was successfully delivered through Mississippi's five ESAs from 1997 until 2001, with 815 (55%) career-level administrators completing the 10-day training.

Today, the program is currently in its third revision by Miller and, in addition to training school administrators in technology basics, provides administrators with knowledge and strategies to successfully implement NCLB, develops a shared understanding of ways that technology can improve student achievement, and identifies technology tools and resources to support the accountability, student information and data requirements of No Child Left Behind.

During the first five days of training, administrators study the current research about teaching and learning with technology, discuss the tenets of 21st century literacy, evaluate their own skill level, review national and state technology standards for administrators and teachers, learn to use productivity tools (email, Internet, word processing, spreadsheet, database, and presentation software) to enhance their own professional practice, and participate in a field trip to observe examples of teachers integrating technology into instruction.

Table 1. Technology–An Administrator's Perspective

The training module addresses skills administrators need in four major areas:

1. Efficient and knowledgeable manager - to access and organize information using productivity tools (i.e., the Internet and an integrated tool package);

2. Communicator – to effectively communicate with board members, parents, students, teachers and community (via presentation tools, telecommunications, fax, e-mail, etc.);

3. Instructional leader - to lead staff in developing classrooms of the future, to assist in integration of technology into the classroom, to evaluate appropriate and inappropriate instructional strategies utilizing technology, and to understand software evaluation; and,

4. Decision maker and problem solver - to make appropriate decisions regarding such diverse topics as accountability, student information, data analysis, budgetary considerations, technology planning, staffing, professional development needs, space utilization, networking and equipment needs.

The second five days of training are focused on acquiring an understanding of networking and infrastructure, developing school technology plans and acceptable use polices, adapting and/or expanding existing and new applications of technology and evaluating instructional software. Throughout the institute, participants work in groups to research a significant issue related to educational technology that is currently impacting their schools and/or school district. The institute culminates with group presentations of their research to the cohort.

Impact of Training

A study conducted by Miller in 2004 determined the SEMI module had a positive effect on increasing school administrators' understanding of the impact of technology on teaching and learning and administrators' self-reported technology skill levels. During the 2002-03 study period, Mississippi employed approximately 1480 administrators in 149 school districts; 184 (12%) school administrators completed the module. The study was based on data collected from administrators' self-reported technology competencies prior to the training and upon completion of the training. The cumulative results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. MS School Administrators' Self-reported Technology Compentencies *Technology–An Administrator's Perspective SEMI, 2002-2003 (N=95)*

Competency	Prior to training	Completion of training
Impact of technology on student achievement and administrative leadership role in integrating technology	*Minimal to limited understanding* 22%	*Increased knowledge a great deal* 64%
Knowledge of productivity tools (word processing, spreadsheets, databases, presentation software)	*Minimal to limited understanding* 24%	*Increased knowledge a great deal* 77%*
Experiences with and understanding of email	*Non-existent to limited use* 47%	*Use it regularly or daily* 66%
Experiences with and understanding of WWW	*Non-existent to limited use* 59%	*Use it regularly or daily* 67%
Understanding of computer hardware, including networking	*Minimal to limited understanding* 20%	*Increased a great deal* 77%
Comfort level with technology	92% reported 2 to 9 point gains (of 10)	
Comfort level with data analysis	92% reported 4 to 9 point gains (of 10)	
Use of a variety of technologies to communicate with students, teachers, parents and the public	95% reported 3 to 7 point gains (of 10)	
Comfort with making budget/purchasing decisions	92% reported 2 to 8 point gains (of 10)	
Understanding of how to utilize distance learning technologies	91% reported 4 to 9 point gains (of 10)	
Knowledge of ethical and legal issues as related to technology	92% reported 2 to 8 point gains (of 10)	
Overall Training Effectiveness and Quality	4.8 on a 5-point scale	

** numbers are rounded*

Feedback provided by participants through review of post-evaluations indicated a high level of satisfaction with the overall effectiveness and quality of the training (4.8 on a 5-point scale). An analysis of administrators' self-reported skill levels before and after the module also indicated increases in skills and knowledge levels of more than 90% of the participants. Participants also indicated positive changes in attitudes towards the use of email, the Internet, and the role of administrative leadership in integrating technology into teaching and learning.

Looking to the Future

The previous illustration serves as one example of the many ways that ESAs across our nation are working hard to assist and support states and school districts in meeting the requirements of NCLB. While some leaders are projecting that reaching proficiency for all students by 2014 is unrealistic, others remain hopeful of their abilities to meet these requirements. Although many variables will ultimately impact the final outcome, whether we as a nation are successful in *leaving no child behind* will ultimately depend on the collective 21st century vision that we can create and the leadership and support that we can provide to each other. Whether it is through professional development, innovative programs or technical support, educational service agencies of today and tomorrow continue to build partnerships that provide services that local schools cannot feasibly or economically provide. The goal of producing an educated citizenry for the 21st century is everyone's responsibility.

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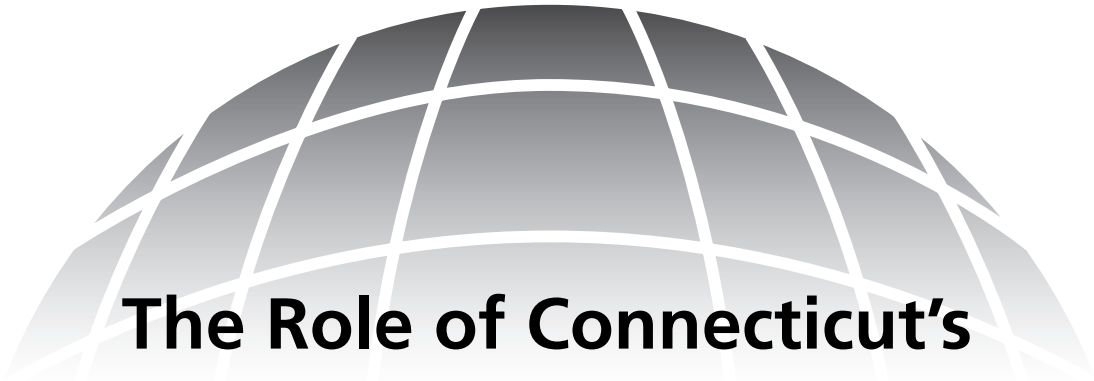


The Role of Connecticut's Regional Educational Service Centers in School Improvement: A Case Study in Mathematics

by
Carolyn McNally
and
Mark Abdella

"ACES combines this trust with the content expertise and organizational capacity necessary to influence what is taught, how it is taught, and how educators determine whether or not students are learning."

State governments across the country are scrambling to develop a clear plan for addressing their obligation to improve "failing" schools. In Connecticut, the state's public education system poses interesting opportunities and challenges in answering this call. Considered small by most measures, Connecticut actually has a large number of school districts given the state's size. The state operates 169 local and regional public school districts enrolling 570,000 students. When one considers that a state like Virginia operates 137 local school districts to serve 1.2 million students, the complexities that come with navigating 169 school system bureaucracies become obvious[1].

Connecticut's Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) were created in the 1960's to help address these school system complexities by bringing together leaders from the local school districts to meet regional needs. For more than 34 years, Regional Educational Service Centers have been playing a key intermediary role in the delivery of student and staff services to local school districts and in dissemination and leadership functions for Connecticut State Department of Education initiatives.

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES), the Regional Educational Service Center that serve 26 member districts in the south central portion of the state, has been a leader in, among other things,

[1] Data from State Profiles on the National Center for Education Statistics website (June, 2004) http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/.

developing and running high quality special education programs for students whose needs surpass the resources of individual school districts.

ACES constituent districts include a diverse mix of urban and suburban districts and span a broad spectrum of economic resources. Currently, ACES has three main priorities: increasing *equity and educational opportunities* for underserved students; addressing the needs of *students with disabilities*; and delivering *professional development and school improvement services* to teachers and administrators.

With the recent findings of a locally generated lawsuit, the "*PJ case*," school districts have turned to ACES to develop and run programs for special education students placed within schools in their home district so that they are more able to learn in regular classrooms.

Another Connecticut lawsuit from the late 1980's found that the state of Connecticut was responsible for inadequate education for children in racially and economically isolated Hartford. ACES, and its sister RESCs, took the lead in running community forums and then developing and implementing magnet schools and inter-district programs with the purpose of reducing racial, ethnic and economic isolation, and improving student academic performance.

ACES was also responsible, with its sister agencies in the 1980's, for helping develop the state teacher induction process, called BEST, and then disseminating it throughout the region through professional development workshops, coaching and support models. In each of these cases, the Connecticut State Department of Education turned to ACES and the other RESCs to address a glaring educational need in the state. ACES built the capacity to help schools turn research into practice to improve teaching and learning.

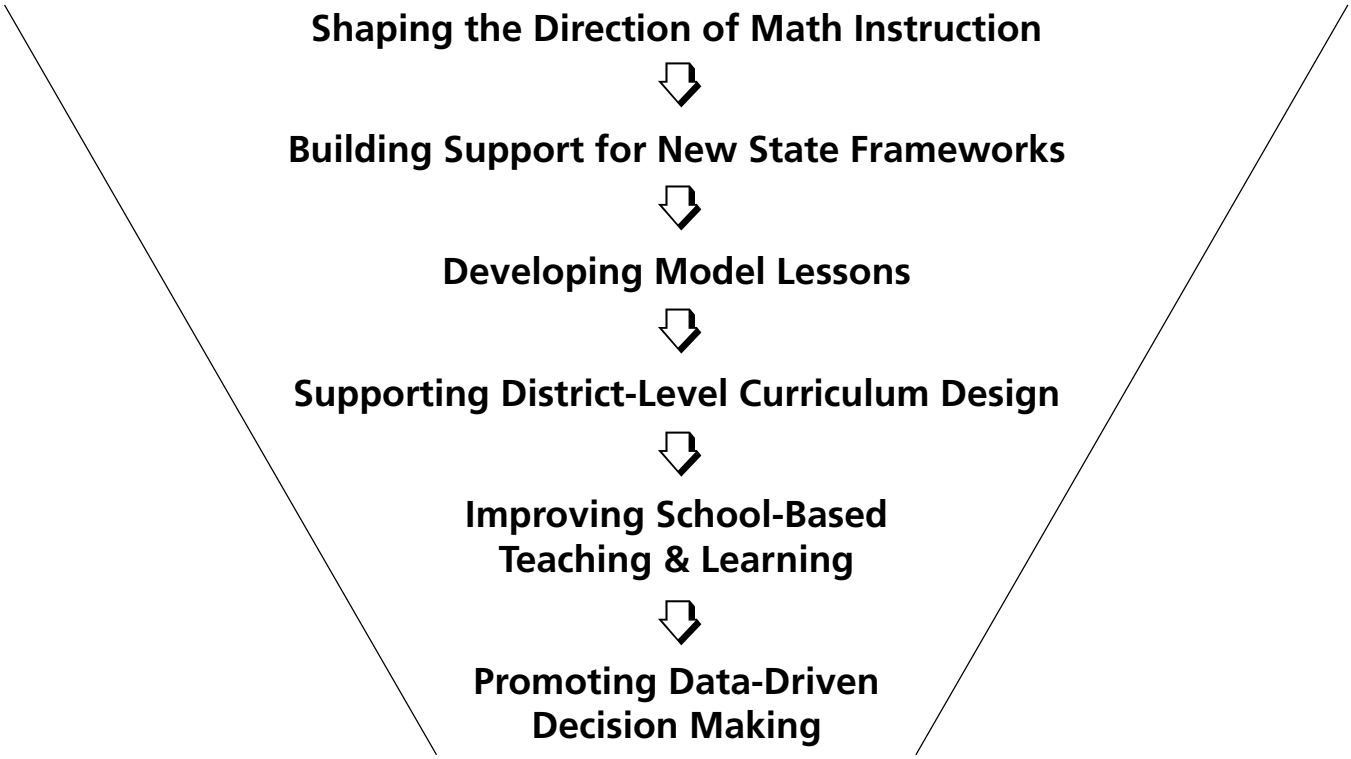
ACES Role in New State Curriculum Frameworks

In 2003, faced with budget constraints similar to those across the nation, the Connecticut State Department of Education experienced a number of restructuring efforts that left many local districts searching for direction and support as their test results generated compliance issues with the federal No Child Left Behind legislation and mandates.

The following is a description of the role that ACES and its sister Regional Educational Service Centers played during this critical time in the state's education history. By looking closely at the events surrounding the development and rollout of new mathematics content standards, it is clear the value that Regional Educational Service Centers will continue to play as the state of Connecticut looks to support local school districts in improving "failing" schools.

Shaping the Direction of Math Instruction

The Connecticut State Department of Education conducted a conceptual framework session in the fall of 2003 for staff from the RESCs, among others, to respond to the draft mathematics curriculum frameworks and to provide feedback and input to refine them. Suggestions from the RESC teachers, specialists and experts in the field were offered and accepted. Based on validated concepts and strategies to improve teaching and learning, the standards-based math curriculum frameworks were ready to share with the 169 school districts in the state. The process for this initiative is portrayed in the following figure.



Building Support for New State Frameworks

During the winter of 2004, ACES worked closely with the State Department of Education to introduce these new mathematics frameworks to educators. In an effort to improve the teaching and learning in Connecticut schools in its region, ACES convened regular meetings of school district Curriculum Directors and Assistant Superintendents. These "Curriculum Councils" came together to share challenges and successes and discuss issues of common concern. ACES Professional Development/School Improvement Division staff invited state education agency staff to join its Curriculum Council to present a detailed overview of the new frameworks. ACES hosted this full-day session and provided Education Specialists from the Connecticut State Department of Education the opportunity to explain the content and rationale behind the new standards.

Developing Model Lessons

In February of 2004, ACES was awarded a grant from the Connecticut State Department of Education to lead a state-wide effort to identify a cohort of talented elementary school teachers and develop model mathematics lessons based on the new content standards. In partnership with the state's five other Education Service Centers, ACES designed series of professional development activities to help teachers become more familiar with the new content standards and engaged 80 teachers in developing model lessons to support students in the application of math concepts.

For a full week this July, this cohort of 80 elementary school teachers met with ACES staff and math experts from the University of Connecticut to develop an increased understanding and comfort with higher-level content area concepts. Teachers had the opportunity to work with ACES specialists to apply this knowledge by designing student lessons including benchmarks and assessments. At the end of the week, each

participant departed with a series of grade-appropriate lessons tailored to math themes and concepts which run throughout the state frameworks. In the fall of 2004, participants will receive in-class support and modeling to fine tune these lessons. By winter 2004, these lessons will be disseminated electronically throughout the state so that all teachers have access to the curriculum units and assessment measures to inspire high quality student outcomes. This demonstrates how ACES plays a critical role in the professional development of staff members who are expected to "turn around" low performing schools.

Supporting District-Level Curriculum Design

Each school district in the state of Connecticut is required to formulate a district-wide math curriculum. As more of our districts find themselves identified as "in need of improvement" due to low math scores, reacting to the new state mathematics frameworks becomes a more urgent issue. ACES has developed a number of programs to help curriculum leaders (Assistant Superintendents, Curriculum Directors, etc.) develop the capacity to use the math frameworks to increase student achievement and drive school improvement. This work includes identifying gaps in district plans and high need instructional areas as well as developing a strategy to introduce changes to building level administrators and classroom teachers. Our work with district leaders also involves skill building in areas that help them develop the capacity to lead education reform.

Improving School-based Teaching and Learning

ACES also provides a critical link between district-level curriculum planning and the teaching and learning that occurs in each classroom. During the 2003-04 school year, ACES staff provided over 250 days of customized professional development and technical assistance to educators across 20 school districts. These efforts resulted in advanced uses of technology, more scientifically based approaches to building literacy skills, differentiated instruction strategies to support and challenge diverse learning styles and abilities, and much more. This body of work has helped RESCs establish a level of trust with classroom teachers through hours and hours of personal interaction. These relationships led to improved teaching and ultimately increased student achievement. One elementary school teacher had this to say after participating in an ACES training session: *"I value the commitment of the RESC staff to helping us become better teachers…. Thank you for that."*[2]

In the area of mathematics, one ACES Education Specialist has been working with 500 students and 22 teachers in six local school districts to increase students' ability to solve mathematical problems that require critical thinking skills. The participating teachers have attended centralized workshops as well as received one-on-one technical support in their classroom, which has included modeling effective instructional strategies. The outcomes of this work show not only the strength of content and process expertise, but they also exemplify the strength of relationships among and between ACES staff and local educators.

Promoting Data-Driven Decision Making & Continuous Improvement

Developing capacity for high quality teaching and learning strategies is only one of several far-reaching school improvement initiatives in which ACES specializes. Highly qualified technical staff and educators

[2] Anonymous quote was taken from workshop evaluation on July 16, 2004. Original on file with Rosemary Burdick, ACES Education Specialist.

also assist local school staff to develop another critical skill for school improvement, that of data analysis and data-driven educational decision making. ACES, along with our sister Regional Educational Service Centers, has led a state-wide effort to encourage and prepare school districts to leverage the power of technology in using data to turn around failing schools. In an era with such a strong emphasis on assessment and communicating performance, the role of technology has become more and more essential to districts' operations. ACES has contracted with TetraData Warehousing to fill our districts' need to collect, analyze, report, and store data. For the past two years, ACES has been working hand in hand with educators to install the technology, train users, and import and clean existing data. Case by case, as school districts are identified as failing to meet adequate yearly progress, ACES will work with district staff to more clearly identify what areas are in need of improvement and use TetraData as a tool for informing improvement activities.

Summary

As a regional educational service center, ACES demonstrates daily, via hundreds of programs and services, its capacity to serve teachers and administrators and to improve teaching and learning in schools in Connecticut. While ACES works to support the role of the State Department of Education, it has effectively steered clear of assuming any monitoring functions that might impede its ability to form relationships and carry out its primary purpose of capacity building. It has built trust among its clients over the past 34 years based on prompt, informed and high quality services that make a difference to the children and to the teachers and administrators to whom their learning and development is entrusted. ACES combines this trust with the content expertise and organizational capacity necessary to influence what is taught, how it is taught, and how educators determine whether or not students are learning. This influence stems from the value added at all levels of public education.

• At the ***state level*** ACES adds value through teams of content experts who have years of teaching and administrative experience. These staff are viewed as credible partners by our state education leadership in shaping and implementing education reform and school improvement efforts.

• At the ***district level*** ACES adds value due to its capacity to implement and replicate programs and services throughout a region. True to its purpose and mission, ACES helps its 26 member school districts address common problems of greatest concern.

• In ***schools and classrooms***, ACES adds value largely because of the trusting relationships that have been formed. ACES staff developers are viewed as allies to building and classroom staff often overwhelmed by state regulations and federal mandates.

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The authors acknowledge the contributions of their colleague, Craig Edmondson, Director of ACES Professional Development and School Improvement Unit.

CESA 7's Online Charter School Approach

by
Carol Conway-Gerhardt

Starting and sustaining an online computer curriculum for students in grades 6-12 as a shared service is challenging enough for an educational service agency (ESA). Not only is Cooperative Educational Service Agency 7 (CESA 7) in Green Bay, WI, accomplishing this task, but also is designing, with the commitment of 36 of its 38 school districts, the program for a charter school opening in the fall of 2004. The mission of the Northeast Wisconsin Online Charter School (NEWOCS) is to meet the needs of students whose needs are not being met for whatever reason in the traditional classroom. Other educational service agencies may want to consider a similar approach.

"The final online design supports students in grades 6-12 taking supplemental courses as well as grades 9-12 taking a full program."

Planning, headed by agency administrator Dr. Carol Conway-Gerhardt and initiated with a small team in the fall of 2002, led to an ever-expanding team. The Professional Advisory Committee (PAC), composed of the region's 38 school district superintendents, and the CESA 7 Board of Control, decided to seek a charter school grant to support the initiative and to provide alternatives to legislative statutes. Superintendents knew that their schools could access courses online for their students, and some already were. Superintendents wanted a more collaborative and cost-effective way to provide online courses for their students. The charter school seemed to be the way to proceed.

Interestingly, in Wisconsin CESAs are not allowed to charter schools. Kohler School District stepped forward to be the chartering agency. Kohler superintendent Jeff Dickert clarified that Kohler wanted CESA 7 to take the lead in applying for and facilitating the school. All 38 districts supported the planning grant and realized that there would be an opportunity to accept or reject the charter school itself when the design was complete. CESA 7 submitted the application with vision, mission, target population, curriculum, instructors, assessment, accountability, and budget by the deadline of August 1, 2003.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) intended to respond to the planning grant application by October 1 but did not. WDPI awarded the grant in mid-December 2003. After slight language

and budget changes, CESA 7 and the Kohler School District resubmitted the application and received the final grant award on April 2, 2004. In the meantime, planning continued under the direction of Conway-Gerhardt with support from internal staff, superintendents, principals, curriculum and instruction directors, teachers, parents, guidance counselors, technology coordinators and community members. The Kiel School District offered the greatest support throughout the planning process. Kiel School District was already administering its own online charter school called Kiel Integrated Electronic Learning Charter School (K.I.E.L. Charter School). Kiel's Director Sue Steiner and local education guide (LEG) Heidi Smith provided information about computer course management systems, course providers, course quality and development, governance, policies, student qualities and needs, online teacher qualities and needs, partnerships, and many other components of an online charter school.

The final online design supports students in grades 6-12 taking supplemental courses as well as grades 9-12 taking a full program. Offerings include remedial, general and advanced courses. Future planning is open to elementary possibilities. Students include those needing to make up credit deficiencies, seeking courses not available at their schools, having difficulties with schedules due to such situations as singleton classes or athletics, wanting advanced placement (AP) or more challenging courses, needing courses to finish high school beyond the senior year, wanting technical college credits to initiate or continue vocational/technical courses leading to further post-secondary schooling, wanting to try an alternative learning format, needing alternative learning due to health or special education issues, being provided an educational option as expelled or about to be expelled students, and so forth.

Each school district decides through its own process which of its students may access the NEWOCS and whether a student will receive a diploma from the school district or the Northeast Wisconsin Online Charter School. Any student taking courses through NEWOCS must be a student in one of the participating CESA 7 school districts. Wisconsin allows "open enrollment" each February during a three-week period whereby a student in one district may enroll in a non-resident school district. The receiving school district then determines if it has the class openings and accommodations to accept the student. The intent was not to advertise and seek students from non-CESA 7 schools; however, students from throughout the state would have the opportunity to participate by being accepted through open enrollment to a CESA 7 school district.

Since there was not enough time and training opportunity for CESA 7 teachers to design an entire program of courses for grades 6-12, the NEWOCS is using courses from a number of providers. CESA 9, under an Alternative Education Grant through WDPI, has individually tuitioned online courses, including advanced placement courses. Agency administrator Jerry Fiene and director Dawn Nordine have established an agreement that offers the lowest price break when the NEWOCS student enrollment exceeds 300 in one semester, including middle school courses. NEWOCS hopes to achieve the 300 plus student enrollment to achieve the price break. K.I.E.L. Charter School has courses available for students *to* access with the same pricing structure. Both technical colleges in the CESA 7 region, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) and LTC, are providing online college courses with a range of 1-3 credits. In addition, the Experimental Aviation Association in Oshkosh is providing two online aviation courses with college credit attached.

Lakeshore Technical College (LTC), located in the CESA 7 region, came forward, through the leadership of Technology Director Dr. Doug Gossen, to assist CESA 7 teachers in putting their course content into the online format. Dr. Gossen has worked with online learning for 20 years and wants high school students to have the opportunity to take both online technical college and high school courses while in high school. During a five-day work schedule starting June 21, 2004, Gossen and his staff assisted 14 teachers with

course development work. Some of the courses will be ready for the 2004-05 school year, either first or second semester.

One of the most important components of online courses is having a course management software system on which to place the content and manage the processes for teaching and learning. LTC, K.E.I.L. Charter School and an Appleton online charter high school have a contract with Ucompass Company for the Educator course management system that encourages expansion of the partnership for additional schools or school districts. Fortunately, NEWOCS was able to create a contract with Ucompass for Educator through the three-member partnership at a much lesser cost than would have been possible on its own.

As part of the financial planning, the committee knew that charter school grant money came in four installments. The first installment of $10,000 is for determining the governance structure and choosing teachers, curriculum, and an administrator. The second installment of $40,000, for planning, focuses on professional development for teachers and other staff members for the school to open in the fall following the award. The third and fourth installments are implementation grants of $150,000 each that are awarded for the second and third years of the school's functioning. The grant is not allowed to pay for the administrator/coordinator or the online teachers of the school; therefore, school district or other funds are required to fill in the deficits.

Since WDPI did not want to award the charter school grant if CESA 7 and Kohler School District could not assure sustainability of the school, the Professional Advisory Committee (PAC), an advisory group to the CESA 7 agency administrator composed of all of the superintendents, determined, based upon a preliminary budget, to have a $1300 district membership in 2004-05, $1400 in 2005-06, and somewhere between $1700 and $1800 for 2006-07 and 2007-08. The cost of each course per semester was established at $200 with the plan that the charter school grant money would pay the difference between the reduced cost of approximately $275 for each tuitioned course and the $200 per course being paid. Right now there is concern that there will not be enough money raised by the grant and the district membership to accomplish paying the $75 discrepancy. Only two CESA 7 school districts did not join the consortium. Kiel did not join since it already had an online charter school. The other district, a very small school district of fewer than 100 students, felt it could not support financially the individual course costs and the required four-year membership. Size of district does not change course cost or membership fee.

Several issues have demanded a great deal of attention. One was providing each school district with representation in the planning process. Every district selected participants, including students, parents, teachers, community members, district board members, technology coordinators, and administrators to participate in the planning sessions. CESA 7 hosted most of the meetings; however, some were held in various school districts of the CESA 7 area. Telephone conferences and email exchanges augmented the communication and planning opportunities.

Another issue was assuring involvement in the governance structure. The result is a layered council system. The planning members determined that each participating school should have a Building Council that would meet to determine placement of students in the online school. Each Building Council would then have representation on a District Council composed of students, parents, community members and school personnel meeting to consider issues and procedures related to the online school. Since there are six counties in CESA 7, the planning committee decided to have each District Council send two representatives to a County Council that would distill the issues from the 5-10 school districts in the county and send two representatives to the Advisory Council. The Advisory Council, composed of 12 people from the six County

Councils, would provide input to the administrator/coordinator or executive consultant regarding solutions. The executive consultant then would take any necessary governance, policy, and budget recommendations to the Governing Board for decisions. The Governing Board, composed of 11 superintendents on rotating terms, would make decisions and send the necessary items to the CESA 7 Board of Control, which oversees all of the CESA 7 policies and budgets. Periodically, reports would go to the Kohler Board of Education.

Establishing policy for the online charter school itself as well as assisting school districts with policy was another issue requiring attention. Some questions that needed to be answered by each district include how to assure equity of access, how to select which students will be successful in an online learning model, how to assure sufficient support for students to complete online computer classes, how to involve the parents in the decision to take online courses, how to assure success for special education students and English Language Learner (ELL) learners, whether to provide computer access at school during a regular class period of study hall, how to assure appropriate use of the computer for classes (i.e., no illegal, pornographic, harassing, for profit, violating of copyright, plagiarizing, vandalizing of hardware or software, disrupting of service actions), whether to permit students to take their entire program online, and so forth. Some of the key general policies include districts providing textbooks as listed in the course descriptions, managing discipline issues, providing a local mentor to assist students online, assisting students in naming a "personal coach" beyond the school setting, and determining the best way to provide access for students to take online courses.

Registration became another issue. Each provider required different information from each student; yet the intent was that students would sign up with the NEWOCS, and the staff of the NEWOCS would assure registration with the appropriate provider. In addition, the NEWOCS wanted to have registration completed online. Ideally the information would populate the registration forms of each of the providers. Currently, the online registration is usable with details going into a database. Technical colleges demand a signature from a high school student taking college courses. The signature indicates willingness to have grade information distributed to the online charter school as well as to the school district. The selected solution was to note that submission of the application indicated approval of the sharing of the grade information.

Another issue was the amount to pay the administrator/coordinator or executive consultant for administering the school and the teachers for teaching a semester course online. The administrator/coordinator or executive consultant's salary continues to be discussed at this writing. The teacher salary took into consideration that CESA 9's online course program pays $1000 for the first 10 students and $65 for each additional student up to a maximum of 20 students. The CESA 7 superintendents wanted a higher salary and determined to pay $2000 for the first 10 students and $75 for each additional student up to a maximum of 20 students. The teachers who work for other providers receive what those providers pay. The *CESA 7 online teachers work outside of the school day* and directly for CESA 7 under special contract. They will receive the $2000 base and $75 increments per student per semester. Teachers who put their own course content into the online format are paid through a special CESA 7 contract and have the first option to teach the course.

Still to be finalized are the following: the selecting of the administrator/coordinator or executive consultant, the annual budget, and the relationships of the charter school Governing Board, the Board of Education of the Kohler School District, and the CESA 7 Board of Control. The Governing Board has not been able to match available budgeted dollars with the requests of the applicants for the administrator/coordinator or executive consultant position. A team approach may end up being the best solution, since there are leadership, governance, policy, curriculum, personnel, technology, clerical, publicity, and budget issues intertwined.

What is most gratifying is that students will have another venue for learning and for accessing courses that they may not have been able to access under traditional circumstances. The more options available to students, the more likely the success for all! Education service agencies across the country could use the model of CESA 7 for creation of an online charter school.

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Working Collaboratively with Parents and the Community to Develop Literacy in the Early Childhood Years

by
Linda Gratz
and
Linda Kempfert

Since the inception of President Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," schools have been working diligently to help children meet standards in the areas of reading proficiency and literacy. However, brain research in recent years has shown that the foundation for literacy development is in place long before children enter school and begin formal instruction. Developing literacy skills in very young children has, therefore, become a priority for our Head Start and Early Head Start staff as they work with parents, schools, community volunteers, and children zero to five. Based on research and cognitive theory, it is now believed that the earlier one begins to challenge the brain with a variety of sights and sounds, the more successful the child will be in developing reading, writing, and communications skills in future years. In fact, current thinking promotes the idea that babies start on the road to becoming readers from the time they are born and first hear sounds and voices of those around them. The importance of parents in the process of preparing children for school and reading can not be overestimated. Parents are truly the first and foremost teachers of their child, and in order for schools to succeed professionals in the field of education must believe in the importance of the role of parents. An emphasis on educating parents in child growth and development and their importance in providing a strong foundation for later learning is crucial to the success of "No Child Left Behind." The schools cannot succeed alone; they need the help of other early childhood programs, volunteers, and, most of all, parents.

"The schools cannot succeed alone; they need the help of other early childhood programs, volunteers, and most of all parents."

Because early stimulation is so important to the development of young children, it is advisable that both parents and caregivers begin as soon as possible to set the stage for literacy development. According to the National Institute for Literacy's "A Child Becomes a Reader" and the U.S. Department of Education's "Helping Your Child Become a Reader," there are some things that should be done with young children to ensure their future success. Essential among these are "giving young children lots of opportunities: to build

spoken language by talking and listening; to learn about print and books; to learn about the sounds of spoken language (phonological awareness); to learn about the letters of the alphabet; and to listen to books read aloud."

Early Head Start staff at CESA #7 (Green Bay, Wisconsin) work hand-in-hand with parents to support early literacy in a number of ways. Program staff identify pregnant mothers who would benefit from and be interested in a home visitation child development program through collaboration with and referrals from community health clinics, public health nurses, and hospitals. As a result of these referrals, parents are trained even before their child is born about early brain development and the importance of early learning in their child's development.

After the birth of the child staff and parents read, talk, sing, and repeat baby sounds to stimulate infant and toddler language development. Opportunities are provided for infants and toddlers to hear and repeat language, which helps to set the stage for early literacy skills to be developed. Early Head Start home visitors meet weekly with the parents and infants in the home. Home visitors model appropriate learning activities and encourage the parents to interact with their baby in a variety of ways, such as playing "Peek-a-Boo," reciting nursery rhymes, singing simple songs, reading books, and imitating sounds. Parents also are taught how to monitor the progress of their children as they grow and develop, and set goals in the area of child growth and development. As a result the parents are actively involved in setting the stage for the vocabulary and phonemic awareness that is essential to early reading skills.

Home visitors work with the parents of infants and toddlers before and after the birth of their child to encourage parents to:

- Talk, sing, listen and repeat babies' sounds daily.
- Read aloud to babies daily so that they will learn from the sounds and rhythms they are hearing. (Parents are even encouraged to read to their child before the birth so that it becomes an on-going habit.)
- Teach young children how to properly handle books – turning the pages, looking at print from left to right, pointing to single words, identifying pictures, using picture cues to retell stories.
- Help build children's vocabulary by naming familiar objects.
- Play simple touching and talking games – "Peek-a-Boo," "This Little Piggy," familiar nursery rhymes.
- Help build children's sentence structure by repeating and adding words to make longer, more complete sentences.
- Ask and answer children's questions and talk about children's experiences to help develop conversational skills.
- Have a variety of books available and encourage children to explore books independently.

After the child turns three, Head Start teachers and classroom staff continue to work with the parents, community volunteers, and school district personnel to encourage literacy skills in pre-school children and their families. Parent involvement is the cornerstone of Head Start's ongoing success in the field of early childhood learning. Parents are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of their child's learning in Head Start, including literacy and pre-reading skills. Parents receive weekly activity sheets that provide examples of things that they can do with their child to encourage learning and literacy. They also are encouraged to check out take-home fun packs with games, toys, and books that encourage pre-reading and literacy skills in their children. Head Start provides ongoing training to parents in the area of child growth and development through group meetings, one-on-one at home visits, and parent/teacher conferences. Parents discuss their

child's growth and development with teachers and help set goals for their children throughout the year. Teachers encourage parents to track their child's progress at home, and then the teacher uses parental notes as part of the child's ongoing assessment. A resource library is available for parents, as well as a classroom lending library for the children. Family field trips are taken to the local library, and families are encouraged to sign up for library cards. In addition to the other resources mentioned, children also receive several free books throughout the year to start their own family library.

Head Start teachers and family advocates work with the parents to encourage them to:

- Talk with their children about daily activities and experiences.
- Take their children to new places and introduce them to new experiences.
- Teach their children the meaning of new words.
- Play listening games – "Simon Says," "Mother, May I?"— with their children.
- Play word games with children – tongue twisters, repeat rhyming words, name words that begin with the same sound (alliteration), count syllables in words, compare long and short words.
- Keep reading aloud daily.
- Help children to build a book collection of their own.
- Teach children about print and letters – to begin with the children's own name, helping them to recognize their name in print.
- Point out words and letters in the environment.
- Teach children the alphabet song and point out the shapes and names of the individual letters.
- Begin to teach that each letter has its own sound.
- Have writing materials available for children to practice writing.
- Visit the local public library regularly.
- Let the children see them reading and writing on a daily basis so that children understand the importance of using print for purposeful and leisure activity.

Along with building partnerships with parents, Head Start staff also work in collaboration with school district personnel. School district teachers are consulted and surveyed regarding what they see as pre-reading skills that we need to focus on before the children enter school. Children who are identified as having possible developmental delays are referred to the school districts for evaluation and possible placement. CESA 7 Head Start works closely with all of the school districts within its service area to ensure that children are identified and served as quickly as possible to ensure greater success when the child enters school. One of our classrooms, located in East DePere, is a combination Head Start /Early Childhood classroom where children are served in a collaborative setting with a Head Start teacher and a district Early Childhood teacher working together. In addition to our East DePere site, other school districts within our service area provide speech and language therapy on site to the children who qualify for these services, and special arrangements have been made as needed for other services as well. By working together with the school districts we can provide the best possible service to children and families as we prepare them for kindergarten and early reading experiences.

In addition to parents and school district personnel, we have also enlisted the help of over 60 community volunteers who come into the classrooms and read to small groups of children on a monthly basis during the program year. The First Books Program, operated in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin Extension and the Home Community Educators group in Manitowoc and Brown Counties has been a wonderful example of community involvement to promote literacy in the classroom and in the home. The children receive nine books during the year to add to their home library. Volunteers read the chosen book to the children, prepare and lead a related activity, and send a family activity sheet home for the parents to use

to expand on the book that was read. Not only do the 262 children who are involved in the Head Start program benefit from this program, but their siblings at home also get to share the book when it is sent home. This program has been running now for five years and has been very successful as part of our approach to early literacy and family literacy in Head Start.

The expected result of this focus on early literacy with young children is children better prepared for formal reading and writing instruction in later school years. A survey of our area school district kindergarten teachers indicated that they valued the pre-literacy emphasis that Head Start promotes with children and families and found that, as a result, children were better prepared for kindergarten. While early literacy training is a priority for our program, we realize that it is important to keep this early learning focus relaxed and fun, providing activities that the children will enjoy while interacting with parents and caregivers. The expectation at this age is not to teach young children to read, but rather to introduce young children to the wonder and joy of print, and to increase their self-esteem with regard to literacy skills so that they are better prepared for a future of reading, writing, and communicating in an ever-evolving world of school and work.

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Creating a Culture of High-Performance in ESAs: Focus on the 3Rs

by
Hobart L. Harmon

Another summer has passed! What did you do with the time? If you were like most leaders in educational service agencies, you probably tried to find some time to reflect on the past and future performance of your ESA. Maybe you participated in a retreat with your ESA's board of directors, perhaps hopeful that another strategic planning event would "show the way" for another year, or five years. Maybe you also found time to read another book on leadership, of which there are many to choose these days. How does any of this time investment contribute to the focus of what the organization is doing today? How does the ESA leadership focus on what was planned, and more importantly, will the daily focus of leadership move the organization closer to one that is high-performing?

"Programs cannot stand alone, or long, without the support of a strong, high-performance organization."

Most ESAs are nonprofit organizations. Whether superintendents of local school districts served by the ESAs, persons elected in one fashion or another or person appointed to these positions, their boards of directors commonly represent individuals and organizations with high interests in achieving a social impact (i.e., education). The leadership challenge is great! As Letts, Ryan and Grossman (1999) note:

> Nonprofit leaders are beginning to confront the most important unfinished business of their sector. Having invented scores of successful model programs to address virtually every type of social problem or goal, they are discovering that large-scale, sustained impact remains elusive. Today, the only way to get the full benefit of successful programs, however, is for nonprofit leaders to begin building high performance organizations—nonprofits that are capable of creating sustained, effective impact. (p. 1)

Meeting this challenge may require ESA leadership to reframe the question from "How do we sustain and expand our programs" to "How does the organization perform?" Traditionally, nonprofits have relied on "programs" to create impact, and on expanding those programs as a sign that they are achieving their missions. Increasingly, we find that even the best programs do not survive indefinitely, much less grow

(Schorr, 1997). Programs cannot stand alone, or long, without the support of a strong, high-performance organization.

As Letts, Ryan and Grossman (1999) note:

> The missing ingredient in the prevalent, program-centered conception of social impact is *organizational capacity*. Programs need solid organizations behind them—organizations focused on fulfilling a mission in a changing environment. Organizations not only develop programs, but also operate, sustain, improve, and grow them—eventually replacing them with new approaches. It is the capacity for strong performance in organizations—the ability to develop, sustain, and improve the delivery of a mission—that provides the foundation for lasting social benefits. (pp. 4-5)

Need for Organizational Focus

Serving as a voting member representative of a state department of education on the board of directors for several regional educational service agencies over a five-year period gave me the opportunity to review accomplishments of the agencies—and wonder how strategic planning of the board and ESA leadership aligned with what customers wanted (i.e., school districts). Obvious too was that while a parade of ESA staff could always describe in great detail at monthly board meetings and the annual retreat the vast array of activities and services delivered to constituents, seldom could program leaders reveal significant *impact or outcomes* of their programs. As soon as ESA staff completed their "show," a board member usually began a discussion of how the organization could achieve greater impact from the services in this time of increasing accountability on school districts and ESAs.

A review of articles published since 1998 in the *Perspectives* journal of the Association of Educational Service Agencies reveals several authors have addressed topics related to the challenge of leading the ESA in this era of rapid change and increasing accountability (see Appendix). The authors consistently reveal ideas that paint a picture of where leaders of the ESA might focus the organization's energy and tell its story of success (i.e., outcomes/impact).

In 1998, AESA Executive Director Brian Talbott noted:

> This nation's service agencies are very alike and yet surprisingly different. Though we share a common goal of serving school districts, our strength is found in our ability to deliver customized services reflecting state and local needs. This uniqueness is our strength and, at the same time, can be our weakness. It is a weakness because our educational system doesn't always embrace differences and tends to force fit educational entities into one-size-fits-all educational models. This is an important concept for educational service agencies to understand and protect as we become more effective in responding to our school districts' needs. At the same time, because of our impact at the local, state and national levels, we are finding politicians asking questions about our effectiveness…. (p. 1)

In describing ESA opportunities five years later, Talbott (2003) noted that ESAs were being asked to provide more and more services to local school districts. He further noted, "This increased responsibility comes at a time when all levels of education are facing reduced funding and are examining ways to leverage limited resources. ESAs are the agencies best positioned to leverage resources into high quality cost-effective

services to local school districts…. In the area of NCLB, ESAs are best positioned to offer support in areas critical to school improvement" (p. 1).

In describing service as a value proposition for ESAs, Frye (2003) points out the stark reality facing many ESAs today:

> Increasingly, because of stringent funding changes, ESAs are no longer wards of the state, robustly supported by government largesse. To survive, ESAs must now be more entrepreneurial, carving out specific marketplace niches. Like it or not, we have to sell something—and make some money doing it—or we and all our wonderful programs perish. In this regard, we are similar to any other business. Simply put: no margin, no mission. (p. 73)

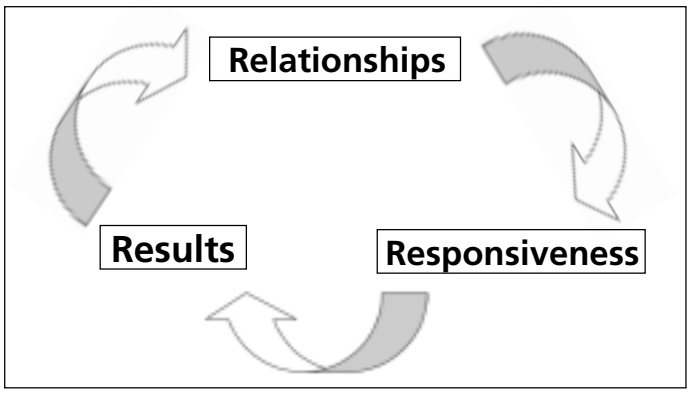
One can also argue that few ESAs can change to meet new demands of the changing marketplace and increasing accountability unless leadership can create a culture of high performance and focus on outcomes that have value to stakeholders of the organization, including employees. I contend one way to address the complex problem of leading the ESA toward greater impact in this environment of accountability and limited resources is to focus the organization on the 3 Rs: Relationships, Responsiveness and Results.

The 3 Rs: Relationships, Responsiveness, Results-focus

My consultant work for the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation, a nonprofit ESA, has shown me that the 3Rs model of performance and accountability holds the most promise to transition the organization's culture to one of high performance. A sound strategic planning process can provide the necessary foundation for direction. A focus on the 3Rs offers a fairly simple way for all stakeholders to understand, articulate and take actions that accomplish the vision and mission of the organization. Consequently, focusing on the 3Rs can lead to a culture of continuous improvement and high performance for the organization.

Figure 1 illustrates the straightforward concept of the 3Rs: establishing and nurturing relationships will stimulate opportunities and resources that enable the ESA to be responsive to customer needs, which in turn enable the ESA to achieve results of impact that further enhance relationships—and the cycle continues to spiral the organization toward a culture of high performance. Linking the 3Rs to the organization's strategic plan and customizing a performance measurement approach to gauge implementation are critical elements to influencing the culture of the organization.

Figure 1.
Performance Cycle of the 3Rs



The ESA's mission and strategic plan will likely offer many possibilities for linking the 3Rs in ways that focus the organization on important outcomes. It is the performance measurement approach, however, that must be customized to facilitate a culture of continuous change and a focus on outcomes desired for high performance. This is the leadership challenge!

Performance Measurement Matrix

A well-planned performance measurement matrix can help focus desired change in the organization. In the book *Managing at the Speed of Change*: *How Resilient Managers Succeed and Prosper Where Others Fail*, Conner (1992) offers some sage advice:

> Human transformation is too complex to be described by a set of rigid laws. Change is not a discrete event that occurs by linear progression; rather it unfolds on many levels simultaneously. Instead of relying on hard and fast rules that can get you into trouble, acknowledge the complexity of change by focusing on… patterns and principles for your direction. They provide a much more realistic guidance system because they allow for the subtleties and paradoxes inherent in the way people experience real life. (p. 11)

Conner (1992, p. 39) attributes the increasing magnitude of change we now face to seven fundamental issues:

1. Faster communication and knowledge acquisition;
2. A growing worldwide population;
3. Increasing interdependence and competition;
4. Limited resources;
5. Diversifying political and religious ideologies;
6. Constant transitions of power; and
7. Ecological distress.

In the broader context of ESA planning, circumstance related to the seven attributes might be influencing leadership decisions. As ESA leadership scans the environment for internal and external issues that influence how to make decisions to change the organization, the identified issues must be considered in creating a performance measurement approach. Letts, Ryan and Grossman (1999) maintain that the three primary categories of stakeholders for a nonprofit organization are clients, employees, and funders. In the matrix I propose, the ESA leadership team would determine the outcome measures that align with the desired cultural change in the organization. It is this set of outcomes that individually and collectively also influence the behaviors of the organization toward achievement of its mission and strategic plan.

Table 1 represents a performance matrix that considers the 3Rs in light of key stakeholders of a nonprofit organization.

An example might illustrate the operation of the matrix. An ESA might decide that the outcome most appropriate for measuring the organization's *relationships* with clients is customer complaints. Indicators would be established for quantitatively tracking each outcome and determining if it was achieved for the specific client in question (e.g., a particular school district). Similarly, outcomes and indicators would be selected for measuring ESA performance in relationships with its employees (e.g., communication) and funders (e.g., renewed contracts).

Table 1.
Example Customized ESA Performance Measurement Matrix for the 3 Rs

3 Rs	ESA Stakeholders			
	Clients	**Employees**	**Funders**	**Total Score**
	Outcome Measures			
1. Relationships	*Customer complaints* Score:	*Teamwork* Score:	*Contracts* Score:	?
2. Responsiveness	*Customer satisfaction* Score:	*Job satisfaction* Score:	*Satisfaction with project implementation as planned* Score:	?
3. Results Focus	*Shared accountability* Score:	*Use of outcome-oriented logic model* Score:	*Impact* Score:	?
Total Score	?	?	?	**CPM Index Score** **?**
Benchmarks (where ESA is now)	?	?	?	**?**
Benchmarks (where the ESA wants to be)	?	?	?	**?**

** A question mark (?) denotes a total points score that would be calculated and inserted in the matrix during the selection and weighting of performance measures.*

It is necessary to use caution in selecting the measures. Every effort should be made to select a measure or a few of the most feasible and valued measures, rather than a laundry list of "nice-to-have" measures. Moreover, whether the stakeholder highly values the measure should weigh heavily on the decision. For example, some ESAs may need to incorporate performance measures required in state accountability systems for ESAs.

Of primary concern also is the feasibility of being able to select a reliable indicator for tracking the performance measure. For example, in measuring *responsiveness* of the organization's services to clients, satisfaction of clients may be the appropriate measure. Indicators for tracking client's satisfaction with the ESA service might be timeliness, quality, and appropriateness of programs or services. Likewise, indicators

should be selected that allow the organization to track satisfaction with how the ESA implemented the project(s) funded.

As reflected in numerous articles in previous issues of *Perspectives* (see Appendix), achieving a *results focus* in the ESA's culture may be one of the most highly desired changes today in many ESAs. In the matrix, the ESA might decide that achieving such a focus requires measuring *shared* responsibility as an outcome measure with clients (e.g., school districts). Encouraging ESA employees to use an outcomes approach for planning and evaluating major programs may be an excellent way to transition the culture of the organization from a focus on program activities only (Frechtling, 2002; Harmon , et al., 2002; Poister, 2003; United Way of America, 1996). This evaluative approach also is useful if results are to reveal an impact, a desirable outcome measure for most funders of ESA programs or projects.

Lastly, the proposed matrix enables the ESA leadership to place a value on each of the 3Rs that can be a total score based on individual scores for each stakeholder category. Thus, this gives the organization's leadership a way to weigh or place a higher priority value on each stakeholder and measure if desired. Again, leadership would consider the unique internal and external influences on desired change in the ESA's performance (and accountability). Total scores could also be calculated for the 3Rs by stakeholder category. An ESA composite performance measurement index could be calculated and compared from one year to the next to gauge progress toward becoming a high-performing organization.

For comparative purposes, the ESA leadership could also determine benchmark (baseline) scores of where the organization is now and target scores for where the ESA leadership wants to be regarding achievement of the index; that is, first year results would be the baseline score for comparison with scores in future years. This process also enables the ESA to report gain in organizational performance in the 3Rs as measured by achievement of selected outcome measures for each stakeholder category, and/or in the composite performance index score. Ultimately, the customized performance matrix provides the framework for both encouraging a culture of change in the organization and credibly reporting such change (and impact) to all stakeholders.

Summary

Peter Drucker (1990) proclaims, "When non-profit executives face a risk-taking decision, they must first think through the desired results—before the means of measuring performance and results can be determined. For each non-profit institution, the executive who leads effectively must first answer the question, How is performance for this institution to be defined?" (p. 107) Moving from mission to performance requires converting good intentions into results.

Programs cannot stand alone, or long, without the support of a strong, high-performance organization. The missing ingredient in the prevalent, program-centered conception of social impact is *organizational capacity*. Creating a culture of high performance in the ESA can be complex and challenging for leadership. One way to begin this challenge is to focus on assessing the effectiveness of the 3Rs: Relationships, Responsiveness, and Results-focus.

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Appendix
Selected Articles in *Perspectives* Reflecting Organization Change

Year	Article Title	Author(s)
1998	Standards and Performance Measures on the Horizon	E. Robert Stephens Hobart L. Harmon
1998	An Accountability System for Regional Educational Service Centers: The Approach in Texas	Judy M. Castleberry Felipe Alanis
1998	Oregon's Regional Educational Service Agencies: Evolution of Accountability from Territorial Commissioner to Education Service District	James G. Maxwell
1988	Iowa's Area Education Agency Accreditation Standards: Moving Towards Alignment of an Education System	Judy Jeffrey
1999	Building a Customer-Focused Culture: From Vision to Action	Donald A. Ogilvie
1999	The Future is Now: Trends and Issues for ESAs	Jim Mahoney
2000	Performance Measurement in Educational Service Agencies	Angela Davis
2000	An Evaluation of Product and Service Awareness, Utilization and Quality	Bill McKinney Ken Gauntt
2000	Stimulating Innovation and Entrepreneurialism in ESAs	Joseph F. Lagana
2000	Towards the Development of a Culturally Competent Corporate Identity	Bruce Hopkins William G. Keane

Appendix *(continued)*

2000	The CESA Paradox: Competing and Collaborating During the Storm of Reform	Timothy C. Gavigan
2000	Building a Partnership Between the Central Education Agency and the Service Centers in Texas: Moving Beyond the Shotgun Wedding	Margarethe B. Uglam
2001	Ohio's ESC Network: Best Practice Expectations	Craig E. Burford.
2001	Proving the Worth of ESAs: A Cost Efficiency Study for an ESD in Oregon	David Campbell
2001	Radical Changes in Decision-making: The Nebraska Story	D. Gil Kettlehut
2001	Educational Service Agencies in Arizona: Changing to Meet New Needs	Jack W. Harmon
2002	The Significant Role of Metropolitan Area ESAs: Framing an Agenda	E. Robert Stephens
2002	Wayne ESA Challenges the Future in Southeastern Michigan	Frederica Frost, Sally Vaughn, Michael P. Flanagan
2002	The Oregon Trail: Ensuring Success for Every Student Through Regional Services, or Compared to This, Lewis and Clark didn't Have It So Bad	Edward D. Schmitt
2002	The Challenge of Building and Maintaining Relationships with Metropolitan School Districts	Ronald S. Fielder
2002	Mobilizing Metropolitan Regional Resources to Meet Highly Diverse Needs	Timothy C. Gavigan
2002	Measuring ESA Performance in Improving Student Achievement	Hobart Harmon, Stan Riggs, Tom Lewis, Sharla Six
2002	7 SHARE: Turning a Promising Practice into Reality	Jean T. Papandrea, Robert J. Reidy, Barbara Walkley
2002	Virtual Learning: Success Through Collaboration	Janet Dubble Kristen Swengel
2003	Opportunities for ESAs Serving Rural School Districts	Hobart L. Harmon
2003	Alaska: Delivering Educational Services to the Last Frontier	Joan Padres
2003	Kansas Rural Schools and Education Service Centers: A 21st Century Solution	Rita Cook
2003	Meeting the Needs of Rural School Districts in Georgia: One ESA's Story	Terry Nelson
2003	Educational Collaboratives: Saving Tax Dollars for Massachusetts Schools	M. Craig Stanley
2003	Did Statewide Strategic Planning Work: A Ten-Year Perspective	J. Gary Hayden
2003	Service as a Value Proposition for ESAs	Edward T. Frye

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The Professional Within Educational Service Agencies: A Neglected Profession?

by
Ruud J. Gorter

All Educational Service Agencies (ESAs), in the broad definition of organizations that provide educational support for schools, including curriculum and instructional supervision as well as professional development among the range of services that they offer. This conclusion can be drawn from reviews of international literature on the kinds of assistance these agencies provide (Firth and Pajak, 1999; Slavenburg, 2000; and various articles in the nine volumes of *Perspectives*: Burfords, 2001; Cook, 2003; Fielder, 2003; Stanley, 2003 and Talbott, 2003). In the aggregate the literature points to the crucial importance of enhancing human resources in highly knowledge-based organizations. An implied and unanswered question, however, remains: What, and how much, do we know about human resource development within educational service agencies themselves?

"Much remains to be explored on the subject of enhancing the quality of professional development within service organizations...."

The Profession and its Journals

Reviews of the literature reveal that very few articles in very few journals address the professional proficiency of those who staff ESAs, suggesting that human resource development is not at the forefront of concerns for professional associations. Several years ago Harris (1998) reviewed the journals *Phi Delta Kappan* and *Educational Leadership* over a five-year period from 1990-1994. He focused on articles that addressed the kinds of assistance provided by educational service agencies, including, the change process, curriculum development, evaluation of personnel, evaluation of programs, leadership for instruction, staff development, and instructional supervision. He found that fewer than 2% of the articles described the professional behavior, competencies, and capabilities of those who actually provide these services.

A more recent analysis of representative volumes of *Educational Leadership* and the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* (both ASCD, USA), *Perspectives* (AESA, USA) and *School en Begeleiding* ("School and Supervision"; WPRO/EDventure, The Netherlands) has been completed using Harris' (1998) criteria. The results were similar to those he reported. Only 1.25% of the articles published in ASCD's

journals (20 out of 1584), 10% of articles (11 out of 99) appearing in *Perspectives*, and 7.8% of articles (15 out of 192) published in *School en Begeleiding* specifically addressed the nature of the work that school supervisors, service agents, or advisors perform (Gorter, 2004, in press).

Except for a few articles in *Educational Leadership* and *School en Begeleiding* almost no explicit and in-depth references were found to the professional staff of ESAs. Although the articles provided information on methods and opportunities for professional development and instructional supervision in schools, most suggested that principals and teachers do this work themselves or provided no rationale, background information, or reflection on external support systems.

Beyond Scholarly Literature

The question, of course, is whether this pattern of neglecting professional development for service providers found in the literature is actually reflected within ESAs. The assumption is that it does. Great concern about professional growth can be found in cases where labor unions are involved or when educational service providers face the pressure of a billing-hours policy at their center. (As will be shown later, external audits using a TQM framework also disclose some weaknesses.) Furthermore, a scan of national and international conference programs show few, if any, sessions dedicated to the profession of educational service agents or advisors, and knowledge networks for sharing experience and insights among practitioners exist on a voluntary basis. We cannot escape the impression that the professional development of staff employed by ESAs, no matter where they exist, is highly dominated by learning directly through on-the-job experience. It is important to get more reliable data about the availability of professional development, however, before action can be taken for policy improvement and opening opportunities for educational service agents or advisors to share professional knowledge. Fact-finding and reliable conclusions are not yet possible here, but it is important to make a start. Where are we at the moment?

Total Quality Assessment Systems

ESAs in the United States currently exhibit a strong interest in Total Quality assessment systems, like Baldrige. Articles in *Perspectives*, however, rarely apply principles of improvement to the organizations themselves (Frye, 2003; Stephens 1999; Stephens & Harmon, 1998). ESAs in the Netherlands that are associated with EDventure, the Dutch equivalent of AESA, apply a comparable system (INK) for assessing quality within their own organizations on a voluntary basis and as a requirement for membership in the association since 1996 (WPRO, 1996). A review of the results of external audits over the last eight years (Gorter 2004) leads to the following conclusions when focusing on fields of internal professional development:

- Educational service centers assess yearly the needs for professional development of their staff;
- Centers have a professional development plan in which needs of the organization and of the individual staff member are matched;
- Qualification standards are fixed and communicated by the leadership of the organization;
- Staff evaluation is scheduled at a regular and frequent basis; and
- A current overview of professional development opportunities is available to all staff.

Overall, the mean of failings identified by the audits when all nine fields of quality assessment are included is 7.3. The average of failing in the specific area of internal staff development is 5.6. These shortcomings are mostly found in the three aspects stated above.

Labor Conditions

The possible influence of labor conditions on the professional proficiency of the staff of ESAs depends on the position of the unions in a specific country, state, or district. Because education in the United States is decentralized, comparisons to countries like The Netherlands or France are difficult. Unions have traditionally had a strong influence in European countries, but trends toward autonomy and decentralization, a legislated shift to a market-driven environment, and decreasing union membership are limiting their influence in The Netherlands very rapidly. Currently, position descriptions, salaries, working hours, vacation, sick leave days, and the obligation of regular staff evaluation are negotiated.

Competency and Capabilities-Based Management

Competency and capabilities-based management can serve as a tool for both individuals and organizations to assess social and technological growth (Ulrich and Smallwood, 2004). In doing so, the focus for ESAs is on:

- An individual's functional competence; e.g., the technical expertise like handling quantitative and qualitative analyses of school performance data and interpreting these for action as well as working with account management tools and writing grant proposals;
- An organization's core competence; e.g., a knowledge based organization like an ESA must be able to help schools to establish a knowledge network or to disseminate information on NCLB;
- An individual's leadership ability; e.g., to be able to communicate visions on a variety of issues, to build bridges;
- An organization's capabilities to understand and communicate its mission, culture, personality, image, identity.

Not much information exists on this kind of management in ESAs. In The Netherlands – because of the transformation from legislated to market-driven operations of ESAs – a comparable system has been developed in cooperation with Deloitte & Touche Human Capital Group and is implemented now by all ESAs. The content relates to attempts, known in the US as well as in Belgium and in The Netherlands, to develop standards for the professional proficiency of service agents, mainly operating in the field of instructional supervision (see Firth & Pajak, 1998). In our opinion, the momentum exists to anticipate accountability and quality issues, to consider these standards again, redevelop them, find member organizations willing to apply them voluntarily, as a sign of strength and proactive organizational behavior. There is no need to hide behind political barriers because the development of these standards should be an intrinsic value of organizations.

Agenda to Explore

Much remains to be explored on the subject of enhancing the quality of professional development within service organizations, particularly focusing on school improvement and student achievement. We are sure that this is an international agenda and will take years to complete. Our belief, based on the current developments, is that we are moving in the right direction.

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Are ESAs Successful? The Research Says "Yes!"

by
Kari M. Arfstrom

In April of 2003, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige sent a letter to all 50 chief state school officers, as well as each state's governor, stating the roles that educational service agencies (ESAs) can play in implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). He specifically noted the capacity of ESAs to provide professional development and technical assistance as required in the law. Secretary Paige stated that ESAs "are able to successfully respond to district needs in a flexible, adaptable, efficient, cost effective, and direct manner." Dr. Paige has first-hand experience with the capacity and effectiveness of ESAs. Prior to being appointed U.S. Secretary of Education, he was superintendent of the Houston School District and worked very closely with the Region IV Educational Service Center.

"This study showed that school districts can save money when shared activities are performed on a regional basis by an educational service agency...."

Many local school districts are calling for additional funds to implement NCLB, especially to provide professional development for their staff. They are also seeking technical assistance in implementing the act. These same districts may be overlooking cost saving measures that are immediately available through their regional ESAs. When local districts pool their economic resources for programs and services, they are highly likely to receive a better quality product and pay less for it. Dr. Paige's letter stated, "Economies of scale through ESAs allow districts to leverage limited resources into targeted support for multiple schools and to share costs with other school districts."

With only a handful of ESA cost benefit studies to draw upon, a few somewhat dated, this paper reviews four well-designed research reports and providing an overview of the costs savings that have been obtained by ESAs from different parts of the country. These reports offer a snapshot of the estimated savings that school districts, schools and other public entities may save by cooperatively bundling contracts and purchases through their ESAs in the effort to save local funds.

Since most school districts are experiencing increased budget constraints, school administrators and their boards are looking both for additional cost saving measures and new ways of effectively conducting the business of education. Regionalization of services, increased collaboration, and reduction of duplicative

actions will assist all school entities. As the studies below will show, average savings of 15 to 75 percent are not uncommon for various cooperative services and programs, many with direct ties to the NCLB Act. These cooperative programs could amount to significant savings, savings that could be redirected to the classrooms and student learning.

Educational service agencies (ESAs), as they are referenced in federal legislation, are known by various names throughout the nation. In this analysis the four studies were conducted in Washington, where the regional entities are known as Educational Service Districts (ESDs); in Minnesota, where they are called Educational Cooperative Service Units (ECSUs); in Oregon, where they are called Education Service Districts (ESDs); and in Massachusetts, where they are called Educational Collaborates. These examples are likely transferable to the other 42 states where ESAs exist.

Affordable and Accessible Services in Washington

In 1995, the Legislative Budget Committee (LBC) for the State of Washington, a bi-cameral, bi-partisan body under the direction of the Legislative Auditor, reported that the current system of Educational Service Districts (ESDs) met the "criteria of providing quality and affordable services to its customers" (*Educational Service Districts*, p. iii). Furthermore, the report stated that some of these services were unlikely to be available to school districts if not performed by the ESDs. The two main objectives of the LBC study were to determine if the services provided by the ESDs were cost-effective and to assess their quality.

The LBC determined that auditing only a couple of ESDs would not capture the breadth of services that are offered state-wide, nor would auditing all services provided by all nine of the ESDs be practical or fiscally possible. Thus, seven services were chosen for analysis from the nine ESDs: data processing cooperatives, unemployment insurance cooperatives; special education cooperatives; educational technology centers; workers' compensation cooperatives; Head Start programs; and Early Childhood Education and Assistance programs (a state program designed to meet the needs of the community when Head Start cannot). Of these seven services, four of the services were performed by all nine ESDs (data processing cooperatives, unemployment insurance cooperatives; educational technology centers; and workers compensation cooperatives) and the other three services were not available in all ESDs, nor to all districts located within those ESDs. These seven services represent various funding sources (federal, state, and local) and include services that are provided directly to students, as well as administrative services.

The LBC found, "Recipients of ESD services were generally, if not highly, satisfied with the (quality) service they received" (p. 7). Customers also noted in the survey that ESDs provided access to services that might not otherwise be available to local schools. In Washington State, customers of ESDs can include local school districts, the federal government, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, school boards, local communities, as well as students themselves.

Based on the district survey, the report stated that access to quality services was considered to be one of the major benefits of ESD programming. Without such access the alternative for these districts would be to have either no service or a poorer quality of service. ESDs were found to fulfill a specialized role for their local education agencies and offer stateside coverage for those services.

Another dimension of the LBC study measured the cost-effectiveness of ESDs. The study sought to determine not only whether ESAs were a way for local school districts to obtain services at a good price, but

also whether the nine ESDs could achieve other, perhaps larger, economies of scale to maximize savings ever further.

The study found that in many instances there were few alternatives for local districts to purchase services through the private sector. Districts had three choices when it came to access: 1) purchase services from the ESD, 2) provide them in-house, or 3) go without. In a few instances, the districts were large enough to provide services in-house (for example, special education) and a few very small school districts did not obtain certain services from their ESD because they performed their data processing by hand; thus, they did not join the data processing cooperative.

Districts viewed the ESD prices to be affordable, especially when the only other alternative was to provide them internally. For many small and medium sized districts, this option is not financially feasible. For example, districts with low numbers of children receiving physical therapy as part of their special education program would not be able to afford to hire a therapist, but by sharing the cost of a professional they got a higher quality service than they could otherwise be able to afford. ESDs, one of the largest providers of in-service professional development training in the state, provided workshops and speakers of national quality on a regional scale, a service that many local districts would not be able to afford for their teachers.

Cost savings alone would not be sufficient reason to use ESAs if the quality is inadequate. Local districts reported in the survey that personal service is very valuable and in some instances more of a determiner of satisfaction than cost, especially in the areas of data processing and workers' compensation. The report stated that the ESDs in Washington have consolidated some of the work amongst the agencies while still providing the service to the local districts. For example, the nine ESDs received a group rate on their workers' compensation actuarial studies, resulting in about $18,000 in savings. Using the same broker resulted in fewer fees and lower insurance rates and saved an additional $60,000 to $100,000 annually.

The LBC found that the current ESD system in Washington provided affordable quality services for their local districts. The report stated that ESDs provide access to services that would otherwise not be available to local school districts.

Cost Savings in Minnesota

Membership for the almost 100 school districts that are within the geographic catchment area of the Southwest /West Central Educational Service Cooperative (ECSU) in Minnesota is voluntary. The ECSU provides services not only to individual schools and districts but also to parochial schools, other cooperatives, and technical colleges. In 1994-95, the SW/WC ECSU conducted an analysis that provided its members with a detailed report of the actual dollars spent on cooperative programming, along with actual dollar savings that were realized when districts cooperated in their procurement of services (*Cost savings analysis for the 1994-1995 fiscal year,* 1995*).*

The ECSU maintained audited records on all purchases made by their member districts in all 10 of the different categories of services they provided. Those 10 categories were: media services, cooperative purchasing, equipment maintenance, health and safety services, science kits for classrooms, special education, a Regional Management Information Center, group insurance, technology services, and professional development activities. A cost savings estimate was made on seven of those categories for each district. In two categories (special education and cooperative purchasing) further analyses were made.

One example of the level of activity provided to the local districts by this ECSU will be provided throughout this section. The K-M-S school district consolidated students from the three communities of Kerkhovan, Murdock and Sunberg. In school year 1994-95, there were 637 students in grades K-12. To put this in perspective, about 44 percent of all districts in the U.S. have similar or smaller student populations, so it is a typical district overall. K-M-S paid an annual membership fee of $2,115 to the ECSU, a cost which included access to various programs and services, including participation in many free or low-cost programs and a lower price for fee-for-services offered by the ECSU, and free use of the weekly van delivery service. K-M-S used all the 10 services stated above to some extent throughout the school year spending another $358,306 on those services and programs. The total estimate for cost savings for this district was $240,017. This small district would have paid that much more for these programs/services if purchased through means other than the SW/WC ECSU.

Overall, of the 98 school district members of the ECSU listed in this report, membership fees to the SW/WC ECSU totaled $168,194. The total amount spent by all the entities was $25,140,886 for products and services they needed. The estimated savings for a single school year was $16,085,758. Savings were most notable in the following areas:

- 70 percent savings for the districts when using their film/video services
- 45 percent savings when districts utilized their equipment repair service
- 44 percent in estimated savings for their computer repair service.
- 49 percent cost savings to districts with contracts for health and safety programs

For group insurance pools health and hospitalization averaged 33 percent, life insurance 12 percent, and long-term disability coverage about 20 percent.

Savings to districts for professional development activities were approximately 80 percent per participant. Logistical costs were not factored into the professional development savings. The ECSU made every attempt to locate these programs throughout the vast geographic area they covered, thus further savings were realized for transportation, lodging and meal expenses.

The cost savings for special education and cooperative purchasing were also studied in this report. SW/WC ECSU offered seven distinct services and programs in the area of special education. It is cost prohibitive for many small school districts to hire staff necessary to perform required services for children with special needs. By sharing personnel costs, the financial burden can be spread over many districts. (Estimated savings, as opposed to the statewide average cost for the same service for the regular school year, are noted in parentheses below. These savings do not include travel costs or time spent on telephone consultations, report writing, or other office time.) Large savings occurred by hiring staff to be used by local districts:

- Directors of special education (78 percent)
- Psychologists (65 percent)
- Program coordinators (51 percent),
- Teachers (including speech therapists, certified occupational therapists and staff assistants) (42 percent).
- Low incidence consultants (88 percent)

The ECSU also hosted a Special Education Instructional Materials Center, a service not available from any other source, public or private, in rural Minnesota. While no cost comparison could be made for that

particular program, the report noted 2,290 pieces of material were used by the local districts for an average cost of $34.70. Districts were able to share the collection (worth over $174,000) and paid net fees of $79,463. This type of service proved extremely cost-effective.

Again, to use the example above, the K-M-S school district spent $55,792, taking advantage of all of the services offered by the ECSUs special education program. They saved an estimated $78,902 for that school year. For all the participating districts, a total of $2,885,718 was spent on special education services, a savings of $4,371,107 through the ECSU.

The SW/WC ECSU also offered a cooperative purchasing program for those members who wished to pay an addition $325 annual fee for the service. Participating entities again realized significant average savings:

- 26 percent on custodial supplies
- 24 percent on paper
- 52 percent on supplies and equipment for offices, classrooms, audiovisual and furniture
- 42 percent on computer peripherals and supplies
- 22 percent on miscellaneous other items such as physical education/athletic supplies, lumber and industrial arts materials, etc.

The savings were actually greater than noted since the prices offered through the ECSU's program included shipping and handling. Again, to use K-M-S as the example, they spend $11,000 for the year, with an estimated savings of $10,557. The participating entities utilizing this cooperative purchasing service spent $2,094,246, for a savings of $962,655. The ECSU tracked cooperative purchases for five years – from school year 1990-91 to 1994-95. Overall, $10,526,007 worth of supplies and equipment had been purchased through the purchasing cooperative for untold savings to local districts.

The report prepared by the Southwest /West Central Service Cooperative shows significant dollar savings by those districts participating in the program/services offered.

Cost Efficiencies in Oregon

Campbell (2001) conducted a study of some of the services provided by the Clackamas Education Service District (ESD) in fiscal years 1996-97 and 1997-98 to answer, "Whether (ESDs) really did represent a more cost-efficient means for school districts to acquire certain products and services" (p. 25). In this study the researcher determined the unit of measurement for identifying and describing the cost of a particular program or service offered by the ESD and comparing this cost against vendors that offered comparable products/services. This was determined for each program by adding the multiple units that were identified, such as number of participants and length of activity and total hours of staff involvement and indirect program expenditures, for example, when determining the direct program cost for professional development. Thus, he was able to compare the unit cost per service to private sector providers. This type of analysis was completed for each program area under the direction of the department director at the ESD. Specific examples were provided in the study for the unit of measurement as they were identified for comparisons. All expenditures were based on audited expenditures, not budgeted numbers.

Once these units of measurement were determined for the various services provided by the Clackamas ESD, the next step was to ascertain the private sector costs for each program and to compare them to

determine whether the ESD was more cost-efficient for their local school districts than what could be purchased on the open market.

Of the four services for which the costs analyses were conducted in this study, the Clackamas ESD offered the most cost-efficient options for the local district to purchase these services. This included rental fees for items borrowed from the media center, for large copying/printing orders from the production services department, for school improvement/staff development, and for services provided by the ESD's evaluation center.

While percentages are not provided in this study, actual figures have been converted for ease of comparison. Cost per item from the Clackamas ESD's media center for a school to rent was $9.13 compared to the three vender alternatives where the rental fees averaged $60.40 per item, plus shipping in some instances. This represents an 85 percent saving for local school districts.

Clackamas ESD provided production services for large copying jobs for their member districts. Three examples were given in the study. The first order was for 200 copies of a 10-page handbook. The cost for the ESD to print it was $45.54, while the private sector's cost was $104.35. In the second example, 30 copies of a 38-page ABC book would have cost the district $59.60 if printed through a commercial vender, but $33.05 through the ESD's production services department. Again, in the third example, the order was for 1800 copies of a 39-page handbook. The cost for the ESD's print shop would have been $2420.43 and the commercial print shop's cost was $3011, after $450 bulk discount. Overall the cost savings for printing jobs done by Clackamas ESD was 41 percent.

When comparing the cost for staff development opportunities, the Clackamas ESD charged its local districts $78.18 for a six-hour day. On average the three comparison entities charged $103.88 per day representing a potential savings of 24 percent for local districts.

Finally, a full evaluation totaling 30.75 hours provided by the ESD would cost a district $1804.41. A private-sector company cost would be $2380, again a savings of 24 percent for the local district.

With these four carefully calculated examples of specific cost savings analyses, the Clackamas ESD can answer the question posed to them with a resounding "Yes." Education service districts really are a cost-efficient means for school districts to acquire certain products and services.

Proving ESAs Save Dollars in Massachusetts

Stanley's dissertation (1992) hypothesized that dollars spent on education can be spent much more efficiently through greater regionalization efforts. In order for local districts and their boards to make informed decisions on better spending opportunities, a detailed cost comparison between the two options, a local school district and a regional structure such as an ESA, must be made so the potential savings can be calculated. Stanley's research does not compare the costs between service agencies and other entities, such as companies, universities or other vendors; instead it compares the costs of a single district performing the service to multiple districts working collaboratively on similar projects. The design, as described in a later article (1995), focuses on "determining the potential differences in efficiency, quality and equity when a proposed regional ESA activity is compared to individual school district activities. The design yields a detailed cost comparison between the two options so that potential savings can be calculated" (p. 14). This study compared five different activities that the local school districts within the Greater Lawrence

Educational Collaborative in Massachusetts had determined may yield savings if performed on a regional basis instead of locally. A detailed formula outlined the cost ingredients for each activity at the local and regional levels. For fiscal year 1990-91, eight school districts participated in this study. The shared activities to be studied were: staff recruitment and job bank, shared professional staff, a learning resources lending library, a hosted directory of grants, and cooperative contracting for printing services.

The data indicated a clear and significant savings in three of the five services studied – shared recruitment (39 percent), shared staff (78 percent), and printing services (22 percent). Insignificant savings were indicated for the grants directory (1.2 percent less expensive) and the learning resources library (1.7 percent more expensive). For the former, since the number of grants a district may have received and the amount of grant money was unknown, it was not possible to calculate the costs that a district may have benefited from such an activity. In the latter case, the cost of implementing the project was all assumed in the first year so cost savings would be expected to materialize after the initial phase.

Again, this study showed that school districts can save money when shared activities are performed on a regional basis by an educational service agency rather than attempting to provide them at the local level.

Conclusion

So how can local school districts save money by collaboratively working together through their educational service agencies? Which services can best be provided cooperatively through ESAs, thereby savings dollars that can be redirected to classroom learning? There are no universal answers. Every situation is different and requires it own analysis. However, it is clear that most districts, after a careful analysis of service delivery options, will achieve cost savings and probably increased quality of services by working with and through the ESA. The research demonstrates at least five positive consequences of collaborating within an area service agency:

Avoids duplication of services. It is not cost-efficient for single entities to be burdened by the costs when a larger entity, the ESA, can perform the necessary requirements quickly and easily. Funds are saved when each district allows the ESA to provide programs and perform services needed by several districts. Examples from the four state case studies provided in this research summary demonstrate that coordinated professional development workshops and insurance pools are widely seen examples of districts working together for their common benefit. Significant benefits are also shown when the ESA contracts with third parties to acquire various services needed by their member districts.

Improves efficiency of administration and coordination. Local districts may no longer need a full- or part-time professional to administer low-incident activities. Examples of the power of working together include specialized special education staff, coordinating health and safety programs and data processing.

Improves quality of programs. By pooling resources the ESA can contract with higher caliber entities to perform necessary services. This is particularly important in the area of professional development. Combining resources creates the opportunity for ESAs to bring in nationally known trainers or programming, when appropriate, to complement locally-based talent. Small and particularly rural districts cannot afford nor have the ability to attract quality professional development programs for their teachers that are necessary under the new requirements included in NCLB. For many districts the ESA is their lifeline to survival as an independent entity.

Improves equality of opportunity. No matter how small or poor a district, it has access to the same programs and services as other districts through the ESA. This is especially noticeable in programming efforts ESAs provide directly to students. Special education pupils, gifted and talented students, incarcerated youth, homebound children, home-schooled students, and students attending specialized vocational/technical centers often are dependent on the ESA for their programs serving low-incidence needs.

Insures standardization. The ESA plays a role in integrating the mosaic that is public education. For example, when state education agencies or the U. S. Department of Education wishes to quickly transmit information to local school districts, it is much easier to do this through 630 ESAs rather than communicating directly with over 15,000 individual school districts. And when state and/or federal agencies need information, it is easier to ask the ESA to collect it, if they do not already have it, and send it to the requesting body. Communication is more efficiently maintained through the ESA when working with companies, non profit agencies and other governmental bodies. ESAs may also hold contracts and/or grants on behalf of their districts, thus ensuring standardized processes. (Adapted from Stanley, 2003)

In light of the information found in the research, it is no wonder that ESAs are continuing their rapid growth throughout the United States.

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