

Volume 11, Fall 2005

Perspectives

A Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies



Developing Leaders: What is the Role of ESAs?

Published by AESA: the Association of Educational Service Agencies

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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 eleventh issue of *Perspectives*!

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Preface

by
Brian L. Talbott

As your Executive Director I am so proud of the work Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) do every day across this nation to serve their local school districts and the students in their regions. I am truly amazed at your responsiveness to local, state and national needs.

As I visit various agencies and read about ESAs around the country, I quickly recognize how far we have come and how well positioned we are to take on new opportunities and responsibilities. With regional service agencies now in 44 states serving over 87% of the public school districts and 85% of the private schools, it is easy to understand why ESAs are very successful businesses providing over \$14.7 billion worth of educational support to over 43 million students.

Perspectives: A Journal of Research and Opinion about Educational Service Agencies continues to be the centerpiece for research on ESAs. It also serves as the germination point and incubation site for further writing and research.

For example, Craig Stanley authored an article for *Perspectives* in 2003. Craig was then asked by the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research in Boston to expand on this work. In June 2005, the Pioneer Institute published White Paper Number 23 entitled *Massachusetts Collaborative: Making the Most of Education Dollars*. See <http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/> for more information.

This year Bob Stephens, the leading researcher on ESAs in the nation, combined his talents with Bill Keane, another leading educational researcher and editor of *Perspectives*, to zero in on some of their earlier journal writings. This moved them to the next level by authoring their newest book *The Educational Service Agency: American Education's Invisible Partner*. To order copies of the book, please visit www.aesa.us for details.

Our AESA Journal, *Perspectives*, and these new publications, which have grown out of previous journal articles, are all “must reads” for ESA executives, staff, boards and anyone else interested in why ESAs are so successful and are playing such a critical role in today’s education system.

Each year *Perspectives* takes another step forward. This year is no exception. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this issue. I also want to urge those of you who have not contributed to 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, libraries, other educational associations as well as our business members, partners and sponsors.

Lastly, I want to thank our editor, Bill Keane and his editorial board made up of Wayne Bell, Administrator, ESU 10, Kearney, NE; Rita Cook, Executive Director, Smoky Hill ESC, Salina, KS; Edward Frye, Retired, Capitol Area IU, Summerdale, PA; Gary Hayden, Retired, AEA 4, Sioux Center, IA; E. Robert Stephens, Director, Institute for Regional and Rural Studies, Edmond, OK; and Colleen Wilcox, Superintendent; Santa Clara COE, San Jose, CA for all of their work on this outstanding edition of *Perspectives*.

Brian L. Talbott, Ph.D., is executive director of the Association of Educational Service Agencies. He may be contacted by phone at 703-875-0739, by fax at 703-807-1849, and by e-mail at btalbott@aesa.us



Introduction

In this edition of *Perspectives* you will find an article by Bob Stephens, Brian Talbott and me. The concept of the article came from Bob, including the first draft of a reference list. When I looked at the reference list for the first time, I was struck by how many of the articles cited came from the very journal now in your hands. More than a decade after this publication was initiated, it has become the primary source of research and opinion about educational service agencies for university scholars as well as service agency staff members. That's the good news.

There is no bad news, but there is certainly a thinness to the good news. Service agency personnel and scholars have barely scratched the surface of what needs to be known and promulgated about service agencies to the education community, legislators, policy-makers, and other decision makers. As has been hinted at before in this introductory piece, the more good news about service agencies we can promulgate, especially news that might be based on solid research, the more likely we can expect a positive future for our agencies throughout the country.

In the last article in this journal, Anita Varatti makes an important point that we allow to go unnoticed at the risk of all of us. She notes, "There is a shortage of research in the area of ESA support activities that help schools improve and sustain effective, high quality instructional programs." In other words, we need much, much more evidence that service agencies are making a critical difference in school improvement. In trying to generate articles for the journal I am sometimes advised that "We are too busy doing it to find time to write about it." That's a risky position. Legislators, chief state school officers and even local boards and superintendents want to know: What are we getting for the money spent at the service agencies? Even if the agency lives almost completely by sale of programs and services and does so successfully, the message of cost effectiveness and/or efficiency needs to be heard by state and federal policy makers. We again solicit your articles of research and opinion for next year with a deadline of April 1. Everyone who sends a manuscript will get any help needed to produce a quality finished product.

This year we feature two articles about what almost everyone agrees is fundamentally necessary if schools are to continue to improve – leadership, everywhere in the system. Recent research and writings about the leadership capacities of teachers have had a significant impact in how we think about the role of the teachers. National and local programs designed to train teachers to take a significant role in school planning and assessment are growing rapidly. However, as one of my colleagues is fond of saying, "Woe to the school building that receives back a trained teacher leader but has a principal that has no idea what that training is about." Ron Fielder begins the discussion with a substantial history of the changing role of school leaders and then describes a program in Iowa designed to take school and agency personnel to the next level of achievement. Tom Svitkovich shares information about a collaborative program with the same purpose in Michigan.

Think your agency has financial problems? It would be hard to find worse economic circumstances than faced Texas education service centers over a year ago when the state made Draconian cuts in state-based funding. Region IV in Houston reduced full- and part-time employees from 700 to 350 employees within a three month period. Kathy Helm and Jo Ann Wheeler explain how, by application of data-driven decision making and a fierce attention to customer needs, employment has recovered significantly.

Stephens, Keane, and Talbott address a very complicated question: Do some agencies in state systems of service agencies fail to achieve at a high level because they are not capable or because the system is not designed to assure the resources necessary for all to be successful in whatever environment they operate? The essay speaks to ways to assess the capacity of service agencies as a first step in making all state systems sound at all points.

Four other articles round out the issue. Joanne Hopper demonstrates how a small service agency in Michigan leverages its resources through networks at the local and state level to achieve solid gains for students. Kathy Beatty and three professors from the University of Nebraska share solid data (we do love that word) about a program whereby the ESA successfully trains locals to involve the community in budget decisions, even decisions that involve cutbacks. Barbara Goodshall's study suggests that ESAs may have an important role in helping local districts prepare to replace a large complement of special education directors in the near future. Anita Varatti, a former service agency staff member and now a professor at Kent State, looks at the changing face of Pennsylvania's IUs as they work with local districts to meet the challenges of No Child Left Behind.

Thanks again to the editorial board members who read all the manuscripts and the leadership of AESA for finding the resources to make this journal possible both in print and on-line.

Bill Keane, editor



ESAs and Leadership Development: History, Research, and One Agency's Experience

by
Ronald S. Fielder

Introduction

During the past couple of decades, education service agencies (ESAs) have experienced a profound shift of service focus, driven by the change in the focus of education policy from “equity” to “excellence, or accountability.” The existence of No Child Left Behind legislation and emerging global economic competition will likely drive U.S. education policy makers toward an even more “frenzied” focus on accountability and improvement of our system of public education.

As it has since the early 1980s, the call for such improvement continues to cry out for better quality leadership for the nation’s schools. In his latest book, *Leadership and Sustainability*, Michael Fullan (2005) suggests, “As society places higher and higher expectations on the performance of public and private agencies, leadership is bound to come to the fore.” The research on educational leadership and student achievement during this period argues for elevated attention to leadership development on the part of policy makers, service providers, and post-secondary education institutions. Such attention will need to be focused on both pre-service preparation and the professional development of education leaders. Education service agencies throughout the country are demonstrating daily that they are well positioned to be a key player as a partner and provider of leadership development activities for aspiring leaders, principals, superintendents, teacher leaders, and school board members.

Through a review of this brief historical perspective and examples of practice, it will become apparent that ESAs have the potential to drive significant improvements in schooling and student learning through the provision of high quality leadership development programs.

The Emergence of School Leadership as a Profession

The profession of school leader/administrator has evolved in the U.S. over the past 200 years. The origin of the “school district” system of education can be traced back to 1789 when Massachusetts passed legislation calling for a district system. From approximately 1776 through the 19th century, schools were seen as a panacea for society’s

ills with their purpose being to preserve America's democratic institutions, inculcate patriotism and spiritual/moral values, and to increase economic productivity. As schools became larger, the idea of a master in charge of a school took prominence. This master was also expected to teach. The first principals were teachers; hence the oldest form of public school administration was derived from the classroom (Cuban, 1988; Guthrie & Reed, 1986; Wirt & Kirst, 1974)

During the 19th century, public education was seen as essential for economic development; thus, governance structures and formal leadership positions evolved. During the period 1836-1870, most states appointed Chief State School Officers and established State Boards of Education. By the end of the century, the legal and ideological framework for governance of America's present day school system had been developed (Guthrie & Reed, 1986; Tyack & Hansot, 1982; Wirt & Kirst, 1974).

The position/profession of school administrator made significant gains during the 19th century. The origins of the modern day principal can be traced to the urban schools of the time. The position of superintendent became more common, especially in large eastern and midwestern cities. From 1837-1860, 27 urban districts had superintendents. From 1860, the number grew rapidly. The title of "superintendent" as leader of school districts can be traced to the early 1800s. The term was most likely adopted from the factory managers of 19th century mills, and/or the church and Sunday school movement of the time (Cuban, 1988; Guthrie & Reed, 1986).

By the 20th century, common schools existed in nearly all U.S. communities. Public education was, for the most part, locally controlled. Despite their growth, state and federal governments exercised minimal control over public education at the time (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

As the 20th century unfolded, formal education was deemed essential for a person's economic and social success; thus, education assumed a new importance in maximizing equality. The period was also known as the era of efficiency. During this time, school administrators began to borrow from the corporate sector. They adopted the principles of "scientific management," thus introducing the bureaucratic organization into public schools. While these methods had little effect on student achievement, they did promote the professionalization of school managers (Cuban, 1988; Guthrie & Reed; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

As the number of school districts decreased, the size and complexity of districts increased, thereby increasing the focus on the preparation and employment of professional school managers. As the profession matured, it soon became apparent that improved preparation and training of administrators would be essential. The first full program in school administration was established at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1905 (Cuban, 1988; Guthrie & Reed, 1986; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

State intervention in the preparation and on-going professional development of school administrators became increasingly influential early in the 20th century. The period saw the establishment of certification standards and specific course requirements, specialized credentials, and substantial training requirements (Cuban, 1988; Tyack and Hansot, 1982).

By 1980, the position of school administrator had become the norm in American education. Fourteen thousand superintendents were employed by local boards. While most of the superintendents carried out their roles in the technical management mode, the early 1980s saw an increasing demand for the superintendent to return to an instructional leadership orientation (Cuban, 1988; Guthrie & Reed, 1986).

In summary, the period from the mid-seventeenth century to the 1980s, while seeing the establishment of the American public school system, was a time of great change and growing complexity. This period saw the emergence and professionalization of the school leader, and both universities and state departments of education became increasingly involved in the training and credentialing of administrators. State involvement in education increased

gradually until the mid-twentieth century, when the increase became rapid and the number of participants at the state level expanded.

The Modern Era of Leadership Development

Brown v. Board of Education and the subsequent civil rights activity of the 50s and 60s helped “equity” replace “efficiency” as the dominant policy theme in education.

The focus on equity continued as a dominant policy theme into the 1970s, but a new theme of “quality” (excellence or accountability) also emerged and began to command attention. Because of declining test scores and loss of confidence in public schools, quality became a dominant theme driving policy decisions in most states by the early 80’s (Boyd, 1988; Clark & Astuto, 1986a; Mitchell & Encarnacion, 1984).

This new emphasis on excellence or quality was reflected in the landmark reform report of 1983, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report was a catalyst for an explosion of educational reform reports in the 1980s (Kirst, 1988). While this report and various others that followed (Sizer, 1984; TFTP, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986; NCEE, 1987) did speak to school administration and leadership, very little attention was directed at the topic until the nation’s governors, through the National Governors Association (NGA), entered the arena with the release of *Time For Results: The Governor’s 1991 Report on Education* (NGA, 1986).

Time for Results and three additional reports in the 1980s set the stage for major effort directed at school administrator improvement. The additional prominent reports include: 1) *Leaders For America’s Schools*, released in 1987 by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEE), 2) *School Leadership Preparation: A Preface For Action*, 1988, by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), and 3) *Reform in Educational Leadership: The Program of The National Policy Board on Educational Administration*, 1988, by the National Policy Board On Educational Administration (NPB). Then Governor Bill Clinton, who chaired the Task Force on Leadership and Management for NGA stated, “Strong leaders create strong schools. Research and common sense suggest that administrators can do a great deal to advance school reform. I believe that they must and will lead the second wave of reform” (NGA, 1986).

Recommendation number five of the NGA report suggested that states “Provide in-service training to school administrators through, for example, state-sponsored training centers or higher education institutions, developing regional academies, and promoting partnerships between schools and universities and private business.” Among a myriad of recommendations, the subsequent prominent reports also asserted the importance of professional development for practicing school administrators as well as the importance of differentiating between leadership and management training (NCEE, 1988; AACTE, 1988; NPB, 1988).

Beyond the four reports mentioned above, numerous other reports and articles written in the mid to late 1980s offered specific recommendations regarding school leadership. These secondary reform reports focused primarily on different ways of thinking about leadership, different ways of structuring schools, and the new roles that would emerge from such new proposals (Fielder, 1989).

Considering the number and volume of the voices calling for change, universities, state and national associations, and ESAs began to ponder their potential role in the various recommendations. As the administrator of an ESA in Iowa, this author was encouraged by the future opportunities and potential impact of providing high quality leadership development activities as a service of the agency. Thus, in the early 1990s, the Grant Wood Area Education Agency established “leadership development” as a strategic priority and embarked on various programs which will be discussed later in this paper.

The Research

While significant research was underway in the late 80s and early 90s regarding classroom instructional effectiveness, very little research of consequence appeared to be driving or supporting administrator improvement activities. Instead, many of those involved with training/supporting school administrators looked to the corporate world for strategies to improve personal and organizational effectiveness. The more prominent strategies pursued during this period included:

1. Strategic Planning
2. Total Quality Management and the work of Dr. Edwards Deming and his followers
3. Systems thinking from the work of Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, Russell Ackoff, Jamshid Gharajedaghi, and others
4. Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence
5. Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

During the 1990s researchers strengthened their search for the connections between leadership and student achievement. Much of that research focused on the principal. As Waters (2004) suggests, "Over the past

"Several recent reviews of leadership suggest that evidence is growing that demonstrates the impact of principal leadership on student achievement. These reviews suggest that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning; thus, leadership appears to matter."

decade, the principal's role as instructional leader has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor for improving student achievement." Several recent reviews of leadership suggest that evidence is growing that demonstrates the impact of principal leadership on student achievement. These reviews suggest that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning; thus, leadership appears to matter. (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Cotton, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom 2004). It appears that the research during this period began to narrow its focus on the specific skills and behaviors that were most related to student success. For example, UCLA school management program leaders suggest that the three most critical skill dimensions for improving schools are reflection, inquiry, and dialogue (Martinez, 2001).

This focus on skills resulted in the identification and assertion of standards for leadership. The mid-1990s saw the establishment of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). This effort was a partnership between the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). Working with state and national educational leadership organizations, practitioners, and policy-makers, they developed and published a set of model standards suggesting what school leaders should know and understand; what they should be able to do; and what they should believe, value, and commit to (CCSSO, 1996). This standards-based approach has resulted in significant improvement in the quality and consistency of administrator preparation and licensure policies and practices. By 2004, 40 states had incorporated the ISLLC standards into principal licensure policies (Waters & Grubb, 2004).

Despite their contributions, the ISLLC standards prompted discussion among researchers and practitioners. Some suggested that the standards were too traditional and lacked key contemporary ingredients, while others suggested that they went overboard with 184 indicators for the six developed standards. Questions emerged about important skills versus those essential to student achievement (Gronn, 2002; Murphy, 2003; Waters & Grubb, 2004).

In response to these concerns and a desire to build on the ISLLC work, the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a major study of principal research. The findings of this study resulted in the development of McREL's *Balanced Leadership Framework* (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), which specifies leadership responsibilities and practices that are correlated with student achievement (Waters & Grubb, 2004).

The McREL study is the latest and most focused research on the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. McREL researchers suggest that what sets this research apart from other school research studies is sample size, rigor of the analyses, and the utility of the findings (Waters & Grubb, 2004). This extensive meta-analysis and factor analysis resulted in a number of significant findings. Among them is the identification of 21 specific leadership responsibilities, and 66 associated practices that have a significant statistical relationship with student achievement (Waters & Grubb, 2004b).

Following these studies, McREL researchers authored the *Balanced Leadership Framework*, which offers guidance through the identification of leadership responsibilities and practices grounded in quantitative research (Waters & Grubb, 2004b). This framework builds on the ISLLC standards by helping leaders distinguish principal leadership responsibilities that are essential from those that are important; and by identifying key practices not found in the ISLLC standards. Additionally important in the research, is the identification of behaviors that are most effective during second order change efforts (Waters & Grubbs, 2004a & b).

This research of the last 15 years seems important for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that the field of administrator preparation and training/leadership development may now benefit from some "science." If they are so inclined, those who define this as their work can now do so with greater focus, and hopefully, better results.

ESAs are among those providers who can benefit from the maturation of the field.

Because ESAs are entrepreneurial and flexible, they can utilize this new learning in their approach to a variety of audiences: prospective school leaders, practicing school leaders, as well as those who teach and govern schools. Thus, the importance of this research in a discussion about ESA involvement in leadership development is critical in a number of ways:

1. There is now an empirical basis on which to base practice – in fact, stakeholders in the future might insist on programs tied to such research.
2. There is now the potential for more positive and lasting impact from leadership development efforts.
3. There is now an opportunity to focus on what makes a difference.
4. ESAs are well positioned, and should be better equipped to differentiate training and programs to various target audience groups.
5. There is now opportunity for widening the scope for service to include work around standards, evaluation, training, certification/endorsement, mentoring, action research, etc.
6. Greater partnership opportunities are likely as entities align themselves with the emerging research.

The Leadership Development Experience in East Central Iowa

As stated earlier, the Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa has been involved for over a decade in various internal and external leadership development efforts on behalf of its employees and its stakeholders in its seven-county East Central Iowa region. Those efforts mirror the evolution of the field described throughout this article. In the late 1980s, the agency became one of the first K-12 education institutions in Iowa to undergo a comprehensive, high involvement, strategic planning process. As a consequence of that effort, the agency

developed its capacity to assist school districts, community groups, and whole communities in such processes. The majority of the school districts served by GWAEA availed themselves of this technical assistance, as did other groups in the state.

As the 90s unfolded, both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations turned their attention to the work of Dr. Edwards Deming. Despite his dislike of the term, the new knowledge born by his work and thinking was referred to as “total quality management” (TQM). Because of its potential to improve GWAEA and the districts it serves, the agency undertook a significant effort to train employees in “quality tools” and a “systems” perspective. To assist in this effort, the agency contracted with noted consultant Dr. Susan Leddick. This association with Dr. Leddick was critical in the long-term success of the organization’s leadership development efforts. For over a decade, Dr. Leddick has remained an important “critical friend.”

The TQM era at GWAEA involved both internal and external stakeholders. Agency staff members were trained in “quality tools” and continue to be encouraged to apply that learning in their work. The external TQM focus included the following:

1. Training in TQM and its applications by Susan Leddick and others.
2. Training in “Data, Not Guesswork” by Susan Leddick and Lee Jenkins.
3. Student quality team training by David Langford.
4. Co-authors/developers of the Woods Quality Center (WQC) – a joint project between GWAEA and Kirkwood Community College to offer training, resources, and networking opportunities to the education, retail, service, government, & manufacturing sectors of the community. The WQC has now evolved into the Iowa Quality Center, a statewide effort that is the home of the Iowa Recognition of Performance Excellence program (Iowa’s effort toward Baldrige recognition.)
5. Partnership with the American Association of School Administrators to operate their TQM in schools initiative in the late 1990s.

A logical next step for agency learning emanating from involvement in TQM was the focus on systems or “systems thinking.” A systems focus was fundamental to Deming’s work. Throughout the 1990s, agency leaders sought to increase their knowledge and expertise through an exploration of the work of Peter Senge and associates. An immersion in books, articles, videos, and attendance at “systems thinking” conferences helped agency leaders to understand that such a systems focus was perhaps fundamental to high quality leadership. As participants learned more about “systems thinking,” it became apparent to them that many of the popular systems thinking sources were lacking in applicable methodology. Thus, the learning was expanded to include the thinking and writing of internationally prominent thinkers/consultants Russell Ackoff and Jamshid Gharajedaghi. Their work offered methodology deemed practical and useful to a variety of organizations. Their focus was on the design/redesign of human systems, utilizing “systems thinking.” The learning and involvement with their work continues today in a variety of ways. Dr. Leddick, the agency’s “critical friend,” now works in collaboration with Gharajedaghi.

This commitment to continuous contemporary learning prompted agency leaders to intensify their strategic focus on leadership development. In 1996, agency staff worked with Dr. Leddick and local district representatives to develop a specific program for prospective school leaders. The program, which became known as the Contemporary School Leadership Program (CSL), provides a unique 10-day learning experience for educators and board members who aspire to educational leadership positions.

The developers were not interested in duplicating traditional university-based school management coursework/learning. Rather, the program was designed to focus on leadership, regardless of position, relying on contemporary thinking and resources as content. Additional features of the program included:

- A cohort focus – with 25-30 individuals selected for each yearly class site.
- Course length – approximately 10 days per school year (a two-day initial retreat followed by monthly meetings.).
- Course content – team building, planning, systems thinking, systems design, quality tools, data driven decision making, school/instructional improvement, and personal reflection/development.
- Course methods – lecture, group interaction, hands-on learning, reading, and the development of an application project connecting actual leadership experience at the school or district level with new learning from the course and with the Iowa Leadership Standards.

Since 1997, 302 prospective school leaders have completed the course in the GWAEA region. Based on the program's success, interest in the program spread to other regions of Iowa. Since its beginning, an additional 98 people have completed the program in AEAs 7, 11, 8, 16 (Cedar Falls, Des Moines, Fort Dodge, & Burlington). Of the 400 people who have completed the program, approximately three-fourths report that they have experienced increased leadership responsibilities such as elevated teacher leader responsibility in their buildings, enrollment/graduation from administrator preparation programs, or selection/promotion to designated building/district leadership positions. Three sections of CSL are scheduled for 2005-06. A few principals in Iowa are systematically assuring that nearly all of their teachers are CSL participants, as a way to establish consistent language and a common thinking framework at their schools.

In a survey of 2004-05 CSL participants, 100% of respondents said they would recommend this program to others. Twenty-seven of 29 respondents rated the program a four or five on a five-point scale when asked whether the program was valuable to them in their current leadership role. Participant comments were very positive. One participant provided the following, "This was a very profound learning experience for me...and I have grown in my personal and professional life." Another offered, "This is the best course I have taken in regards to the amount of applicable information I have learned."

In 2002, the superintendents in the GWAEA region called for a CSL-type of program for their own learning. For the last three years, over two-thirds of the region's 33 superintendents have made a commitment to this program which involves approximately eight days throughout the school year. These superintendents report a high level of satisfaction with this program, which focuses on content such as instructional leadership, teacher standards, leadership standards, performance evaluation, data-driven decision making, systems thinking, etc. In a July 2005 survey, 80% of respondents stated that they "highly value" the learning sessions. Additionally, 93% of the superintendents surveyed supported the continuation of this learning opportunity in the years ahead.

In addition to these recent successful efforts, the agency partnered last year with AEA 9 (Bettendorf) to provide a Principal's Leadership Academy (PLA) with a focus on instructional effectiveness for the region's principals. Participant response to the academy has been overwhelmingly positive. One principal remarked, "Wow! PLA contributed to my growth as an educational leader immeasurably! It has made me a more conscious and conscientious leader." Another stated, "I have probably grown more as an administrator this year than any other year." Based on feedback from participants, a second year of the Principal's Leadership Academy is being planned for GWAEA principals. Desiring to increase the impact of the learning experience, planners intend to bring experts from McREL to the area to share expertise on the newly developed *Balanced Leadership Framework*. University and re-licensure credit is offered in conjunction with PLA.

As part of its service focus on leadership development, the agency is also involved in the following:

1. Consultation/training with individual school boards.
2. Facilitation of selected books/readings study groups in the region.

3. Partnership with School Administrators of Iowa and other AEAs in mentoring and administrator training programs in the region and across the state.
4. Participation in the Baldrige Examiner training through the Iowa Quality Center.
5. Partnerships with colleges and universities to offer on-site endorsement and full degree programs in school administration.
6. Collaboration with Susan Leddick and Jamshid Gharajedaghi to increase agency capacity to provide assistance to Midwestern organizations in systems design/redesign.

Internal Leadership Development/Succession Planning

As GWAEA enhanced its leadership development capacity as a service to clients, its leaders realized the long-term success of the organization would depend on its ability to develop leadership capabilities of its own employees. To that end, the organization “benchmarked” successful leadership development programs in both the public and private sector. From these efforts a new four-phase development program will be launched agency-wide in 2005. The program will provide employees four ways to elect involvement in the program:

1. *Personal Leadership Strand* – The agency will identify opportunities from its current professional development offerings so that all employees may choose to engage in courses, classes, and other ways that might serve to introduce, expand, and/or strengthen their leadership capability.
2. *Role Leadership Strand* – Interested staff are selected to participate in specific training opportunities deemed essential to agency mission and strategic direction. Participation in such opportunities is essential for those interested in pursuing internal leadership positions. Such training varies with the context but has included CSL, Four Hats (Garmston/Wellman), Data Coaches, etc.
3. *Organizational Leadership Strand* – This strand is designed for those interested in, and who are actively preparing for future formal leadership positions. A small cohort of participants will be selected each year through an application process to experience a two-year tailored learning experience under the direction of the agency’s executive leaders.
4. *Internship Strand* -- This strand is intended to provide an applicant a significant, direct leadership experience for one year. Working with a designated mentor, the person will have an opportunity to provide leadership for an agency program or service and will engage in deeper learning opportunities than those provided in the other strands.

Given GWAEA’s experience and success in leadership development, its partners and customers can assume continued service and leadership in this area. The programs mentioned previously will be delivered and continuously improved upon. It is hoped that the newly-created internal program will provide a new generation of leaders equipped to take GWAEA and ESAs in general to even higher levels of achievement.

Conclusion

Through a review of the history, the emerging research, and examples of one agency’s efforts, it was the intent of this author to demonstrate that ESAs have an unprecedented opportunity to impact student and school success through the provision of high quality leadership development services. Given the contextual focus on excellence and accountability for our schools, the cry for better quality leadership for schools is unlikely to fall silent. Recent research would suggest that a focused approach to training and support has the potential to make a significant difference in both student achievement and “second order” change. The time is right for ESA involvement in leadership development. The following points are offered to support that assertion:

1. ESAs tend to be flexible and entrepreneurial – more able to “turn on a dime” and “scale up” quickly.
2. ESAs have strong trusting relationships with those they serve in their regions, thus allowing for strong networking and easy access to potential leaders.
3. ESAs have high flexibility to use successful practitioners as teachers/mentors to aspiring leaders.
4. ESAs are well positioned to attract and offer training experience to those who teach and aspire to designated positions of leadership.
5. The “standards” based rather than content/course driven approach to leadership development broadens the scope of who might successfully deliver leadership development activities, a contextual feature upon which ESAs can capitalize.
6. ESAs can deliver programs at non-traditional times/places and in non-traditional ways.
7. ESAs can and do connect with a wide variety of partners, both public and private, who can add value to the leadership development experience.
8. ESAs generally have a strong relationship with state departments of education so that issues of training and licensing can be handled in a smooth and effective manner.
9. ESAs are one of the few entities that have access to and ability to provide for the development needs of the full range of potential participants: board members, teachers, para-professionals, principals, & superintendents.

This author agrees fully with the recent observations of E. Robert Stephens and William Keane (2005), who assert that, “As long as each state stands fast to the imperative of providing a free public education for all who want it, the publicly funded service agency will continue to be the best, though least visible, bargain available to support American public schools in their never-ending task of maintaining a thriving democracy.” The thoughts presented in this paper suggest that ESAs are the “best bargain” available to deliver leadership development activities. It is the opinion of the author that ESAs have not only an opportunity to develop leaders, but a responsibility to be deeply involved in this arena. This responsibility should be an essential function for today’s ESAs.

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Ronald Fielder, Ph.D., is chief administrator of the Grant Woods Are Education Agency 10 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He can be reached by phone at 319-399-6700, by fax at 319-399-6457, and by e-mail at rfielder@aea10.k12.ia.us.



A Collaborative Approach to Leadership Development

by
Thomas Svitkovich

Over 20 years ago in Genesee County, Michigan the Greater Flint Educational Consortium (GFEC) was formed. History tells us that at that time there was not an existing forum for the various educational leaders to discuss issues impacting students and schools. One leader, the CEO of General Motors Institute (GMI), took charge and created that forum. GMI, now known as Kettering University, has been a premier institute for students committed to a career in engineering and over the years has graduated many engineers for General Motors Corporation. The CEO of GMI brought together his partner CEOs from the University of Michigan-Flint, Baker College, Mott Community College, the 21 K-12 superintendents of Genesee County, as well as Powers Catholic High School (representing the parochial system) and the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) to form the collaborative. Eventually, the mission was crafted, dues were set, GISD volunteered as fiscal agent, and an executive director was appointed. The GISD superintendent, three representative superintendents from the K-12 system, the principal of Powers Catholic High School and the CEOs of Genesee County's postsecondary institutions formed the board of directors. Later, the CEO of Detroit College of Business-Flint (DCB) was welcomed as a member of the board.

Since that early time, the organization has been significantly transformed. However, it is important to understand the basis of the original partnership in light of current programs, particularly those focusing on leadership development. Over time, the implementation of the original mission has evolved dramatically as a function of both external and internal forces. By broadening its focus to respond to emerging and unforeseen needs, the organization has become stronger and more productive for the overall Genesee County educational community. In order to meet the changing educational landscape and address systemic needs, such as leadership development, GFEC has become very agile in its ability to develop new programs and products.

The Mission of GFEC

The mission of the organization is fulfilled by many unique projects. Over the last several years, there has been a major focus on developing tangible and measurable products for GFEC members. Currently, seven major initiatives are in place:

- A collaborative of high school and college writing instructors to help students transition more successfully from high school to college and to address the very significant issue of high school seniors being placed in remedial writing classes.

- A collaborative of high school and college math teachers to help students transition more successfully from high school to college and to address the very significant issues of high school seniors being placed in remedial math classes.
- A collaborative of middle school and postsecondary staff created to promote among eighth grade students and their parents an understanding of the need to secure education/training beyond a high school diploma.
- A collaborative of high school principals and postsecondary representatives to determine a restructuring of the high school senior year experience.
- A yearlong Administrative Leadership Academy for teachers aspiring to become administrators.
- A yearlong Institute for Beginning Administrators for those in their first or second year of service as a support in this critical period of their professional experience.
- A survey of high school seniors designed to give feedback to K-12 and postsecondary staff on the career interests of seniors, their assessment of the quality of their high school experiences and identification of factors impacting their postsecondary decisions.

In addition to these major initiatives, there are many other projects the GFEC is addressing to expand and enhance leadership within Genesee County's educational system. The need for leadership development in three distinct areas has been met with tailored programming from GFEC. As the pace of organizational change quickens and educators transition through the various leadership ranks, it has become clear that structured programming is needed for beginning administrators, current administrators seeking to enhance skills and for new superintendents. Most germane to the subject of this article is a program that GFEC Executive Director Dr. Robert Burek and I are implementing to support new superintendents in Genesee County.

Leadership Support for New Superintendents

Over the last three years, 11 new superintendents have been appointed in our county. Within the next two years, it is estimated that at least an additional five appointments will be made. Because of this great change, Dr. Burek, retired Fenton (MI) Area Public Schools superintendent, and I developed a plan to support superintendents as they face the day-to-day challenges of their jobs. This program is voluntary and in addition to the traditional county-wide superintendent mentor-mentee program currently in place. In essence, Dr. Burek and I schedule monthly discussion meetings, provide feedback, act as assets, do research and provide historical perspectives of local districts, as well as provide assistance to answer questions on a 24-7 basis. All of these resources are provided in a completely confidential, frank discussion format. All of the components of the program are developed to provide direct assistance, expand communication and help maintain a strong Genesee County Superintendents Association. We believe this work is essential to the success of our new superintendents and the maintenance of a tradition of superintendent trust and collaboration, which has existed in Genesee County for many years. Positive superintendent-to-superintendent relationships are the bedrock of many Genesee County school district collaborative programs, including GenNET, our very successful voice, video and data fiber optic network, as well as two collaborative transportation programs involving all of our 21 school districts. New programs such as GISD's data warehouse initiative could not be possible without support from the top that is built on trust, positive superintendent relationships, cooperation and collaboration. Most importantly, acting in this role with new superintendents helps me in my role as the regional service agency superintendent. As the GISD superintendent, I am able to quick-start positive relationships that build strong support for regional programs.

Administrative Leadership Academy

GFEC programs dealing with students, staff and parent communities require the full support of all local district superintendents and boards of education. This support is particularly crucial to GFEC's Administrative Leadership Academy for aspiring administrators. GFEC's Institute for Beginning Administrators and the Administrative Leadership Academy are driven by superintendent support. The benefits of this program for local districts and the members of GFEC are significant. Over 25% of the graduates of this leadership academy have been selected to fill administrative positions. However, not all graduates choose to pursue an administrative career. They make this decision with a positive perspective after completing the program. Despite the decision not to move into administration at this point in their lives, they return to their home district with a renewed spirit to provide leadership from their non-administrative positions for new initiatives.

The major benefit of the Administrative Leadership Academy is a stronger candidate pool for Genesee County K-12 districts. Additionally, our program dropout rate is virtually nonexistent. It is less than 1%. For those individuals who successfully complete the program and pursue an administrative position, the vast majority (90%) accepts assistant principal or principal positions. At this point, retention and success rates are outstanding. I do not know of any Administrative Leadership Academy graduate leaving or failing in his or her new administrative position. In current times, when qualified candidates are difficult to attract, our program brings individuals to the interview table with strong interest, knowledge and skills.

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University, Fer- and Saginaw Valley State University are partners in this endeavor. These credit arrangements generate revenue for GFEC and contribute to reduced fees for GFEC member organizations. Therefore, Mott Community College, Baker College, as well as GISD, benefit. The program is a win-win for all participants.

The yearlong Administrative Leadership Academy for aspiring administrators includes: 11 core group meetings, 100 hours of field work/internship, a major project, job shadowing experiences, homework assignments, a portfolio and a mentor for each program participant. All candidates must submit, as a condition for selection, a resume, a signed participation letter from their local superintendent and a letter of interest. The candidates selected for the program are expected to attend all meetings and seminars, complete field work, pay course fees for graduate credit if applicable, cooperate in obtaining a mentor, as well as complete major project program assignments and a program portfolio. Genesee County districts are expected to select candidates for participation, provide district administrators to serve as mentors and pay \$300 per participant to offset the cost of cohort meetings and closing program (\$350 for out-of-county participation).

The Role of Mentors

The closing program is a luncheon opportunity for mentors, program participants (mentees), presenters and GFEC members to give and receive feedback regarding program outcomes. Mentors selected for each participant must provide time for monthly sessions with mentees and review, comment on, sign and date the mentee's logbook. Suggestions are made regarding topics to be addressed with mentees. Areas for mentor/mentee involvement include orientation programs, scheduling, budget development and administration, curriculum development, textbook selection, staff development/in-service programs, parent-teacher conferences, standardized testing, events and student supervision, school improvement/North Central Accrediting Association, handbook revision, assemblies/school programs, student discipline and attendance, evaluation and supervision, student records/report cards, district/board committees and diverse environments. The mentor should also be prepared to address any specific items of interest raised by the mentee. The mentor also helps the mentee prepare for the mock employment interview, a very important part of the program. Obviously, the mentor plays an important role in the overall program and is also a critical factor in the recommendation and subsequent employment of the program participant (mentee).

Instruction

Dr. Burek facilitates the entire program, including curriculum, instruction, projects and evaluations. He is in charge and fully responsible for all aspects of implementation. Program participants are also responsible for the quality of the program. Each session is completely evaluated, and decisions are made regarding changes for future programs. A key point of the program is that sessions are actually delivered by Genesee County administrators, predominately superintendents. In exchange for the voluntary participation of administrators/ superintendents, they obtain first-hand knowledge of the pool of potential administrative candidates. Dr. Burek also shares his candid evaluation of potential candidates with superintendents in a confidential format.

Program sessions focus on the following topics: student supervision, curriculum/school improvement, budget, leadership skills, interviewing, teacher evaluation, technology, school law and strategic planning. There is also a specific orientation session and a culminating celebration for all program participants, mentors, presenters, as well as GFEC members.

Institute for Beginning Administrators

The Genesee County Administrative Leadership Academy for aspiring administrators has met with great success, and as a result, due to the high employment rate of participants, many graduates made initial requests to institute a support program during their first/second year as an administrator. After careful consideration, the GFEC Board of Directors decided to implement an Institute for Beginning Administrators to ensure the success of the overall administrative program and increase the retention rate for new administrators in our county.

The program is now in its third year. Executive Director Dr. Burek has stated that the program, "has been successful beyond my expectations." His statement is supported by participant evaluations, superintendent comments, the evaluations of the new administrators by their supervisors and input from mentors. The program provides participants with valuable content and an opportunity to share through a roundtable phase, which is a part of every session. Program evaluations stress the fact that new administrators established strong bonds with their colleagues, which helped them well after the program sessions have been completed. Once again, superintendents must give permission for their first or second year administrator to attend the program, and each school district must pay the \$250 cost per participant. As in the Genesee County Administrative Leadership Academy, college credit is available through

participating institutions of higher learning. At the participant's choice, Michigan State Board Continuing Education Units (MI SB-CEUs) can be obtained at no cost to the participant through GISD's sponsorship. The program goals are obviously to provide support for beginning administrators, establish contact with outstanding administrators in the field, allow participants to engage in in-depth discussions on key components of building administration and engage in roundtable discussions of issues associated with administration. The components include monthly sessions, homework, networking with first/second year administrators, as well as mentoring with a current outstanding administrator and completing a major project for those seeking graduate credit. Candidates for admission are expected to submit a signed participation letter acknowledging the superintendent's permission for participation, supply appropriate documentation, attend all sessions, carry out program assignments, complete a program portfolio and assist in securing a mentor to help guide participant experiences. Initial meetings are structured to discuss program components, monthly assignments and issues related to job expectations/performance. Obviously this institute assures the success of our leadership training program graduates and helps account for our current 100% retention rate for new administrators in their first positions. As the regional service agency superintendent, I am able to work with participants of both the Administrative Leadership Academy and the Institute for Beginning Administrators to build positive support for GISD and for collaborative programs.

Other Leadership Initiatives

Teacher Recruitment

In addition to the three phases of leadership development addressing potential administrators, beginning administrators and new superintendents that have been described above, discussions are underway to implement programs for students focusing on becoming teachers/school employees. The educational leadership of Genesee County is particularly interested in expanding the population of minority teachers in our schools. We believe that the full implementation of a "grow your own" program will require the development of a middle school/high school career path that will specifically focus on education. We believe this step is possible in the very near future because of the strong relationships that have been developed between the K-12 educational community and the postsecondary institutions in Genesee County.

Board of Education Development

Boards of education have also been made aware of GFEC's various administrative programs designed to develop leadership and sustain skilled leaders in their respective school communities. Through interaction with boards and resulting discussions, conversations have occurred centering on board development. Given the great turnover of board members in office and given the involvement of GFEC in leadership development, it is logical to assume that parallel board development programs could be designed for our boards of education. These programs would complement and support GFEC's leadership development experiences already in place. It is completely possible that as this discussion progresses, GFEC will expand and partner to include the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) and the Genesee County Association of School Board Members (GCASBM). These organizations have excellent board development programs in place; however, a partnership could increase the local focus and make training more appealing to new board members from our county.

Conclusion

A training program for all educational leaders with common themes indeed builds a stronger overall team, and as a result, provides an improved education for all students. The success of all these programs requires strong leadership, trust and a commitment to collaboration and cooperation. The direct benefit to our regional service agency (GISD) is that during these times of great change we are able to stabilize support for county-wide programs, enhance effectiveness and increase efficiencies through the development of positive relationships with our newest leaders.

Thomas Svitkovich, Ed.D., is superintendent of the Genesee Intermediate School District in Flint, Michigan. He can be reached by phone at 810-591-4402, by fax at 810-591-4899, and by e-mail at tsvitkov@geneseeisd.org



Keeping a Laser Focus on Quality: A Framework to Turn the Worst of Times Into the Best of Times

by
Kathy Helm and Jo Ann Wheeler

Reaching a strategic goal of becoming financially independent within a five-year time line seemed obtainable when established in 2003. Little did Region 4 Education Service Center (Region 4) in Houston, Texas realize that legislative action would reduce that time line from five years to a mere five months.

This story began in 1990 when Region 4 made systematized strategic planning the focus of efforts to pursue excellence. In 2001, using a business model based on the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, Region 4 established a “Big Hairy Audacious Goal” or a BHAG (Collins & Porras, 1997): To be the first choice for educational services and solutions. The strategic planning process continued in 2003 by setting intermediate goals with a targeted completion date of 2008. Five goals, including an objective to achieve financial independence, set the stage for reaching the vision of becoming the first choice for educational services and solutions. However, by late spring 2003, Texas legislation that resulted in a 92% state-base funding reduction for Region 4 forced the questions, “Is this a case for the worst of times for Region 4? Can the goal of financial independence become an immediate reality rather than a target with a five-year time line?”

“...the legislated reduction of funding necessitated a personnel cut of 50% within a three-month time period, reducing the Region 4 full-time and part-time staff from approximately 700 to 350 employees.”

Strong evidence for this case prevailed. As with all organizations facing this type of financial dilemma, painful discussions took place about where to significantly reduce expenditures while maintaining the delivery of quality services. To Region 4, the acronym ESC (Education Service Center) in reality stands for Excellence, Service, and Children, so an immediate decision

was made to protect services to the classroom educator to the fullest degree possible. This mind set left the Education Services Division with little impact on current staff numbers while programs and services that had no state funding, such as Field Service Agents and Drivers Education, were significantly reduced or eliminated. In the end, the legislated reduction of funding necessitated a personnel cut of 50% within a three-month time period, reducing the Region 4 full-time and part-time staff from approximately 700 to 350 employees.

Each division within Region 4 ultimately recognized that in reality this seeming crisis was an opportunity for the best of times. On the horizon lay a chance to verify that customer needs were truly being met because Region 4 products and services were their choice for *real solutions to real problems in real-time*®—the theme that emerges each time Region 4 evaluates customer satisfaction. The Education Services Division knew that this task could be accomplished because of Region 4’s strong commitment to principles that bring about the best of times: data-driven decision making, effective use of available resources, management systems for accountability and quality control, and monitoring progress systems.

Data-Driven Decision Making: Customer Needs Not Wants

Data-driven decision making proved to be the foundation for providing quality products and services that increase student achievement. Studying both quantitative and qualitative data resulted in identifying true customer needs, not merely customer wants. For the Education Services Division, two basic types of data needed to be analyzed: state assessment data and formal and informal customer feedback.

In the data-driven decision making portion of the framework, the achievement results for each grade level were analyzed, looking at statewide, Region 4, and individual district results by comparing current to historical data. However, far more emphasis was placed on the analysis of cohort data—following groups of students from one grade level to the next. Following cohort groups of students forced a deeper examination of curriculum, assessment, and classroom practices, a necessary component to positively impact student achievement. In addition to using quantitative data, several types of qualitative data were studied to determine customer needs. Qualitative data were obtained through a variety of means: content/topic-specific advisory groups, focus groups for specific products or services, evaluation/satisfaction surveys, and field-test feedback and student performance results for new products. Field-test information provided both quantitative and qualitative data.

The analysis of these data identified two specific needs that would provide a deeper level of service to our customers: 1) intensified customized service, and 2) products for all content areas. These data verified, just as all professional development research confirms, that “drive-through” professional development has little or no impact upon student achievement. Customers wanted and needed more intensified services that included in-the-classroom coaching and mentoring along with service to the customer’s instructional leaders. This realization merited an analysis of how work could be done differently to serve customers and not merely how different work could be added onto current tasks. What transpired was a decision to de-emphasize the delivery of professional development given through open-enrollment offerings that typically produce the “drive-through” mind set and emphasize to customers the services that Region 4 could provide through a customized contract.

Secondly, the data analysis showed that it was necessary to develop products for all content areas that addressed the entire curriculum, assessment, and instruction process. A review of the current market for content-area products identified many available products that focused on assessment, while few products existed that assisted the teacher with improving daily classroom instruction and assessment practice. The data analysis confirmed that these products needed to be written with teacher-ready lessons, using a research-based lesson model complete with student assessments that analyze misunderstandings and misconceptions.

Effective Use of Available Resources

The next step of the framework was to evaluate available resources to meet the needs that had been targeted: 1) intensified customized services, and 2) products for all content areas. A study was conducted of both financial and human resources. In the financial area, an evaluation of the current and desired status was made. For human

resources, only current status was evaluated because the significant funding reduction made it necessary to organize the work based upon the current staff.

Evaluating current financial resources was a quick task; there was a loss of 92% of the previous year's state-base funding. More important to the success of the framework, emphasis was placed on determining the revenue needed by the division to cover expenses. To begin this process, a study of past expenditure reports produced a personnel unit cost with the unit defined as one professional and one-third of a support-staff person—the current ratio of professional to support staff employees. The personnel unit cost covered not only salary but all inclusive personnel costs such as benefits, office expenses, and reimbursements. The next step in establishing the desired funding amount was to determine a professional development daily rate and a projected number of possible open-enrollment and customized service professional development days per consultant. Targeting the goal of economy and efficiency for customers, a daily rate below the competition was set. For the number of days per consultant, it was projected that 100 days of professional development per consultant was a feasible target. The 100-day figure was established by studying past calendars of customers' requests, attendance at professional development, and the amount of preparation time required to deliver professional development.

Multiplying the daily rate times a targeted 100 days of professional development revenue projected a shortfall of \$60,000 per unit. This information verified that revenue goals could not be met exclusively through professional development; it was clear that to meet both programmatic and fiscal targets it would be necessary to deliver professional development and develop products. While recognizing that staffing levels were low for such a large task, many positive, intangible human resources among the Region 4 staff assisted in reaching this goal. The staff had strong intellectual capacity and exceptional content knowledge; an easily recognizable culture of high expectations, dedication, commitment, and service; and an excellent relationship with customer districts. The combination of these attributes produced a workforce that had the content knowledge and dedication to accomplish the tasks at hand.

Management Systems for Accountability and Quality Control

The next segment of the Region 4 re-engineering success story was the development and utilization of management systems for both accountability and quality control. In the area of accountability, the development of tools for consultant, department, and division accountability received focus. Staff members understood that clear goals must be known by all and progress toward those goals must be “laid out in black and white” if the established targets were to be met. To maintain consultant accountability, consultants kept an Excel calendar on an internal network so that it would be readily accessible by the department director. The calendar identified the work task for each day (open-enrollment professional development, customized service, product development, planning), summed the work tasks by category, and calculated total revenue per consultant or work team. All tasks on the calendar had been previously agreed upon by both the department director and the consultant. Making the most effective use of human resources, this process resulted in some consultants exclusively assigned to the delivery of professional development, both open-enrollment and customized service; some consultants exclusively worked on product development; and some consultants assigned to a combination of the two work tasks. It was an expectation that the consultant's calendar would be established during planning for the next year, typically in the months of January through May, and then continually updated for accuracy throughout the year. This process required consultants to maintain two calendars for six months of the year, one for the current year and one to reflect planning for the upcoming year. A sum of all consultant calendars, showing the total work task days and accrued revenue, was a part of a monthly department director report.

The system established for department accountability began with the department director and the managing director, the supervisor of department directors. Working together, department budgets were established for the next year based on both fiscal and programmatic needs. Throughout the year, department directors held direct responsibility for the continual monitoring of their budgets with quarterly budget meetings held between each department direc-

tor and his or her managing director. To prepare for these meetings, department directors completed a standardized form that outlined for each budget the program/fiscal goals, strengths, areas of concern, and plans of action.

The final process in the department accountability system was a monthly department report, completed by the department director, to gather a year-to-date snapshot of revenue and expenditures. Individually for all areas of service (open-enrollment professional development, customized contracts, and products), the snapshot reported four critical elements to monitor budgetary financial and programmatic status: 1) revenue currently budgeted; 2) estimated sales—information from consultants' calendars and projected product sales reports; 3) actual sales—information from *escWorks*®, a Center-wide accountability system; and 4) revenue actually posted. Department directors also recorded total expenditures per budget. To provide a division snapshot, managing directors maintained division accountability by combining these monthly department snapshots in real time through the electronic linking of the individual department reports.

The concept of quality control for professional development had proven to be a critical part of success in previous years; Region 4 had worked hard to gain and keep a name associated with quality. For continued success, a plan for product quality control was necessary.

As earlier described, the first part of this plan was data analysis to determine product need. Once data had been analyzed to determine the product premise, an evaluation of the development effort necessary (time and financial commitment) compared to the possible revenue was completed. When this analysis showed that the product should be developed, the development process began with a team of Region 4 consultants and/or a department or managing director serving as primary authors and some portion of the content completed through contracted work with in-the-field educators. Once the development team completed the product, several procedures took place to ensure quality. First, internal and external focus groups reviewed the product for feedback, and then teams of external content educators reviewed the product for content accuracy. Then the product was returned to the Region 4 development team to make revisions deemed necessary. After these content revisions, the Region 4 development team sent the product to internal and external editors for compositional and grammatical editing. Once finalized, Region 4 field-tested the product with students, analyzed the field-test data, and made applicable product revisions. The product was not released for distribution to customers until after the completion of this entire quality control process.

Monitoring Progress Systems

The dashboard on a car reports, at a glance, all critical elements that are necessary to the successful operation of the vehicle. Likewise, Region 4 needed to develop a tool that organized and helped monitor progress. This final component of the framework monitored success in meeting the strategic goal of becoming financially independent while keeping a laser focus on quality.

Each division in Region 4 developed a digital dashboard that compactly and accurately reported and measured progress toward the five Center-wide strategic goals:

- 1) Make every customer a “Raving Fan.”
- 2) Establish and maintain a supportive work environment.
- 3) Increase effectiveness of organizational processes.
- 4) Build human resources to support innovation.
- 5) Achieve financial independence.

For the Education Services Division dashboard, the three strategic goals of establishing and maintaining a supportive work environment, increasing the effectiveness of organizational processes, and building human resources to support innovation were combined into the strategic goal of increasing organizational and intellectual capacity. For this goal, the dashboard was created to measure growth toward target measures such as achieving a specific return rate and a specific percentage of responses in the “top box,” indicating overall satisfaction and/or usefulness of the product or service. Each target measure was displayed on the dashboard with the division goal for meeting that objective and the actual achievement data by department and summed by division.

Education Services developed several target measures for the strategic goal of achieving financial independence: increase revenue per professional; increase percentage of professionals in local budgets; increase percentage of local compared to grant revenue; achieve reasonable variation between actual as opposed to budgeted revenue and expenditures; increase contribution to Research and Development; and maintain appropriate balance among customized services, open-enrollment professional development, and product revenue.

For a Center-wide monitoring progress system, these dashboards were the basis of discussion for the individual quarterly managing director reports with the executive director and for quarterly management review meetings attended by the entire executive director council. At these meetings, each managing director discussed the trends, plans of action, and Center-wide implications determined from the division dashboard.

So what did the final 2003-2004 Education Services dashboard reflect? The Region 4 commitment worked, turning what could have been a worst of times scenario into the best of times. The framework established was successful while maintaining a focus on quality. Customer overall satisfaction and/or usefulness data obtained a 99% “top box” rating; not only did revenue cover expenditures but the Education Services Division contributed a significant amount to the Center-wide Research and Development fund, a necessary component if this type of model is to continue successfully.

To be certain, the transition to this type of financial model represented the very hard work of all Education Services Division employees. While Region 4 had previously established a reputation for delivering quality services and products, the biggest challenge in this transition was establishing and implementing systems that maintained that level of quality while services and products were developed and delivered at a very fast pace. Had Region 4 not had a previously established reputation of quality and an employee culture of high expectations and dedication, this task would have been much more difficult.

The future for Region 4 remains strong; the commitment to this framework is now an ingrained part of the Center’s philosophy. In fact, Region 4’s goal is to develop a process to distribute any future funding received from the state directly to Region 4 districts so that they may purchase products and services from the vendor of their choice. If Region 4 has done its job well in meeting customer needs, selecting where to purchase needed services and products should be an easy task for Region 4 customers.

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Kathy Helm and Jo Ann Wheeler are Managing Directors for Education Services at Region 4 Education Service Center in Houston, Texas. They can be reached by phone at 713-744-6508 for Kathy Helm and 713-744-6507 for Jo Ann Wheeler, and by e-mail at khelm@esc4.net and jwheeler@esc4.net.



Addressing the Parity Issue in State Networks of ESAs: Capitalizing on the Collective Intellectual Capital of the Network

by
E. Robert Stephens
William G. Keane
Brian L. Talbott

Introduction

The primary motivation for undertaking this writing assignment is to promote an extended discussion that will address a common problem in most state networks of educational service agencies (ESAs), the lack of parity in the organizational capacity of some of the member agencies. The parity issue, it is argued here, has been the root cause of much of the regular controversy that seemingly has surrounded many state systems over the length of their life span.

The lack of network is viewed cause for the un-individual agencies. work of a few is to indict the entire performance of an however, can not to the inadequacy or the leadership or the subpar performance of staff, the lack of innovativeness, or other commonly acknowledged symptoms of organizational deficiency. It may in large part be due to systemic issues in the network, the non-controllable factors beyond solution by an individual agency.

“The underperformance of an individual agency....may in large part be due to systemic issues in the network, the non-controllable factors beyond solution by an individual agency.”

parity in a state to be the primary derperformance of The disappointing then frequently used network. The under-individual agency, always be attributed the nonfeasance of governing board,

There is a new urgency to address forthrightly the long-standing parity issue that has been the bane of many of the nation's state networks. The issue of the organizational capacity of state networks of educational service agencies is clearly of renewed high interest in a significant number of state policy circles. This heightened attention is in part due to the unprecedented prominence given these types of organizations as a result of the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law No. 107-110). Though the role of ESAs will likely continue to increase, a trend already evident in some states, it is also true that Supplemental Educational Services provisions of NCLB will cause an acceleration of another trend that is also already evident, new competition for ESAs both from other providers and each other.

Supplemental services can and are being provided by state-approved for-profit organizations, nonprofit agencies, and approved school districts, public or private schools, and faith-based organizations. Expanding the eligible pool of service providers is but another chapter in efforts to apply principles of the free market to the delivery of public services. It follows the growth of the use of for-profit organizations to manage underperforming schools in some of the nation's largest and medium size local school districts.

Gavigan (2000), Administrator of Cooperative Educational Service Agency #1, which serves schools and school districts located in the metropolitan Milwaukee area, described the new realities likely facing many ESAs beyond the borders of Wisconsin with his statement that:

Unlike other state agencies, CESA #1 finds itself in a highly competitive marketplace. Its primary sources of funding to support the agency are local district service contracts, grants, and other revenue sources such as service fees. Moreover, direct state support for the agency is limited to \$25,000 per year or .25% of its revenue. School districts in the area are not required to use any of its services nor even required to be members of CESA #1. This condition is compounded by the fact that Wisconsin state statutes allow school districts to collaborate with each other outside of a CESA, thereby making them not only clients, but also potential competitors. There is also an increasing number of private vendors in the area seeking direct access to school districts. Consequently, a strong entrepreneurial spirit is required to maintain the agency. (p. 55)

There certainly have been others in the ESA community who in the past have expressed similar views regarding the need for ESAs to be aware of the pressures to become more entrepreneurial in marketing their programs and services in response to increased competition. For example, Frye (1997; 2000), at the time the Executive Director of Capital Area Intermediate Unit serving districts in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania metropolitan area, wrote about this general theme in two articles appearing in *Perspectives*, the official journal of the Association of Education Service Agencies.

The organizational capacity of public sector organizations is commonly measured by assessing whether they possess the financial and non-financial assets necessary to fulfill their mission in an effective and efficient way. The methods used for an assessment of financial assets are fairly well standardized and have been largely institutionalized in all states. However, the measurement of what is being increasingly recognized as even more critical, the non-financial assets, which are often intangible and frequently unobservable, is quite another matter. Moreover, the measurement of the non-financial assets is perhaps even more difficult to achieve for those public sector organizations that can be characterized as knowledge organizations. Any number of methodological approaches or combination of approaches has been advanced for achieving this goal, each having both advocates and detractors.

Another argument advanced in this essay is that the use of the construct Intellectual Capital (IC) as a measurable asset offers an important tool by which to assess the organizational capacity of a state network of ESAs. It is further argued that the state network of ESAs should be the primary unit of analysis. A state network of ESAs is defined here to mean situations where three-fourths or more of the schools and school districts are designated by the state to be included in the catchment area of one of the state's formally chartered ESAs and eligible to participate in the programs and services of the service agency. It is estimated that in 2004-05 24 states have a state network of ESAs.¹ This claim is based on two important premises: (1) a state network that is chartered by the state to provide programs and

services to schools and/or school districts as well as the state should be viewed as a collection of knowledge organizations; (2) the Intellectual Capital of the entire state network is potentially its greatest asset as well as potentially its greatest area of vulnerability.

A trend is already evident in a number of states to expand the role of ESAs, resulting in more state networks increasingly being asked by both local and state interests to play additional roles in their efforts to enhance and sustain school improvement efforts. Therefore, it is in the interests of local and state policy makers as well as a state ESA community to develop the most meaningful assessment of the organizational capacity of the network to do so. An approach for assessing the Intellectual Capital of a state network holds promise for achieving this goal.

This paper will attempt to answer five key questions surrounding the assertion that the IC of a state's network of ESAs needs to be assessed.

- Why focus on the construct IC since such an investigation can only generate difficult-to-measure indicators for use in assessing the organizational capacity of a state network?
- How should the construct IC be defined?
- Why concentrate on a state network as the primary unit of analysis?
- What major measurement issues are inherent in attempts to do so?
- What are potential indicators for measuring the Intellectual Capital of a network?

No attempt will be made to recommend strategies for addressing the parity issue. Rather, it is hoped that what is presented here will prompt interest in the development of a consensus position on the design of an IC assessment framework. Final decisions about implementation strategies for the purpose of enhancing the IC of a state network in many respects must be state-specific.

Why Focus on Intellectual Capital?

There are several principal reasons that together explain why this piece has a focus on the construct Intellectual Capital rather than concentrating on one of the more traditional foci such as the direct assessment of the organizational capacity or the organizational effectiveness of a state network. On the one hand, the last decade has witnessed a virtual explosion of interest in the corporate organization: how to define it, how to measure it, how to manage it, how to monitor it, how to enhance it, and why it is important to do so.

This accelerated interest should now be safely viewed as a major movement in organizational studies, both nationally and globally, not one of the frequent fads that seemingly come and go with regularity. Of significance, one of the major reasons interest in the topic should be viewed as a bona fide movement, a tidal wave, not a ripple, is because many of its advocates are to be found in two often antagonistic circles, the financial accounting and auditing professions and the research and organizational development communities specializing in organizational capacity and organizational effectiveness questions. It should be noted at the onset that though the concepts organizational capacity and organizational effectiveness are in many respects different, they are commonly intermingled in the literature to the point that they are viewed by many as synonymous. The two concepts are used interchangeably here, as are their measures and indicators, another common practice in the organizational performance measurement literature.

Advocates in both circles have reached what appears to be a robust consensus that knowledge has become, and only will continue to be, an organization's most important asset, if not the one indispensable resource it must have. This is so in part because of the emergence of the Information Age, or, perhaps more accurately, the emergence of the Knowledge Age in deference to the view that information does not always result in knowledge. In this regard,

Bellingers (2004) offers a useful reminder that “information relates to description, definition, or perspective (the what, the who, the when, the where); knowledge comprises strategy, practice, method, or approach (the how); and, wisdom embodies principle, insight, or archetype (the why)” (p. 1).

Still others prefer to describe the emerging decades as the “network economy” including Kelly (1999), who asserts that “... the network economy is rewriting the rules for all of us. Everyone’s organization will have to play the game” (p. 171). Kelly is clear in his prediction that the emergence of the network economy will impact both private and public sector organizations. Among other implications, this new era has changed how one should define the organizational capacity of an organization, and then how one should think about strategies for enhancing its capacity. In the view of many, the work of most organizations, large or small, public or private, is now clearly based on its Intellectual Capital, the intangible knowledge of organizations.

It has always been true that all organizations have intangible assets. However, some observers take the position that the intangible assets of most successful private sector corporations now represent a strong majority of their assets, a huge increase from the typical case as recent as a quarter century ago when natural resources and other physical assets were imperative for success.

“Advocates have reached what appears to be a robust consensus that knowledge has become, and only will continue to be, an organization’s most important asset, if not the one indispensable resource it must have.”

Steward (1997), an editor at *Forbes* magazine, should probably be credited with giving national visibility in the corporate world to the importance of Intellectual Capital when he argued that “accounting firms and regulatory bodies have begun to examine whether rules of financial reporting should be changed to recognize that generally accepted accounting principles generally do an unacceptable job of accounting for the principal activities of knowledge - intensive businesses” (xvi). Sveiby (1997), another early advocate of the singular importance of intellectual capital, opens his book by offering a powerful illustration when he cites the case of shares of Microsoft that “changed hands at an average price of \$70 during 1995...,” at the very time when their “... so-called book value or equity was just \$7,” and that therefore “... for every \$1 of recorded value the market saw \$9 in additional value for which there was no corresponding record in Microsoft’s balance sheet” (p. 3).

Edvinsson and Malone (1997) make use of an often-cited, true metaphor in stressing the importance of valuing intangible assets of a competing or any type of organization or institution. In their view:

The trunk, branches, and leaves, the parts ... visible to the observer, are the company as it is known and what is expressed by the accounting process The fruit ... is the profits and products The hidden value ... is the root system ... and for that tree to flourish and bear fruit ... it must be nourished by strong and healthy roots. (p. 31)

These same authors also make one of the most pervasive arguments of why the presence or absence of Intellectual Capital will increasingly dominate the way organizations are valued in a knowledge economy, a trend that is inevitable “... because it alone captures the dynamics of organizational sustainability and value creation ... of any model for measuring corporate performance, pierces the surface and uncovers true value” (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997, p. 22).

To be certain, for service organizations, including educational service agencies, the Intellectual Capital they possess has always been a critical condition in their organizational capacity to be effective in achieving expectations held for them. However, in what will be referred to as the new “knowledge economy,” the cumulative stock of knowledge is growing exponentially, a pace that potentially will cause fundamental changes in how service agencies engage in the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of their programming efforts.

Educational service agencies are primarily knowledge organizations. Moreover, the knowledge they possess is of two types: explicit and tacit. As described by Edvinsson and Malone (1997), explicit knowledge can be expressed in words and numbers such as data, manuals, and policies. It can be readily transmitted to others. The second, tacit knowledge, is difficult to formalize and therefore hard to communicate because it is in part based on intuition and insights gained through experience. Further, tacit knowledge is of two major types: the technical dimension that can be referred to as “know-how” and a cognitive dimension that consists of beliefs and values held by members of an organization and that are part of the culture of the organization (pp. 10-15).

Unleashing the tacit knowledge of personnel is important because tacit knowledge often leads to explicit knowledge. Choo and Bontis’s (1998) position on the criticality of tacit knowledge is that all organizational knowledge is embedded in tacit knowledge. Their argument is that it must be unleashed because “... as long as tacit knowledge remains the private property of individuals or select groups, the organization cannot multiply its value in at least two important modes” (p. 15). Failing to unleash tacit knowledge limits the organization’s ability to leverage that knowledge to, for example, realize economies of scale in its programming efforts, or to realize some other strategic advantage. Secondly, and of particular significance for educational organizations, where a looming crisis that has its roots in the “graying of the profession” is on the horizon, the organization is handicapped in that it “... is unable to sustain cycles of new knowledge generation that depend on the continuous conversion of tacit and explicit knowledge, and on the amplification of this knowledge across many levels of the organization” (p. 16).

Sveiby (1997) takes the position that “the economy of the knowledge era offers unlimited resources because the human capacity to create knowledge is infinite,” and of importance, “unlike physical resources, knowledge grows when it is shared” (p. 28).

How Should the Construct Intellectual Capital Be Defined?

At this time there is no universally accepted definition of Intellectual Capital (IC). Developing an agreed-upon definition will be a necessary first step toward the ability to apply the concept to a broad spectrum of private, public, and nonprofit organizational assessment exercises. Steward (1997), whose primary focus was on private sector organizations, consistent with most of the growing literature on IC, defines the construct as “... intellectual material – knowledge, information, intellectual property, experience – that can be put to use to create wealth It is collective brainpower” (p. xx). Steward’s position is that IC is of three types: Human Capital assets, Structural Capital assets, and Customer Capital assets (p. 69).

Also, Sveiby (1997) made use of a different classification, though his descriptions of each are similar to Steward’s. He defines the construct as “the invisible assets on an organization’s balance sheet” that can be “... classified as a family of three features: employee competence, internal structure, and external structure” (p. 10). He argues that “in a knowledge organization there is little machinery other than the employees” and that “because only people can act, employers become both the minders of the machines and the machines themselves” (p. 10). He defines the internal structure as assets “that are created by the employees and are generally owned by the organization” (p. 10). In Sveiby’s conceptualization, the external structure includes relationships with customers and suppliers, also acknowledged as intangible characteristics.

In his work on classifying the components of the IC of a nation, Malhorta (2003) identifies six major characteristics: Human Capital, Structural Capital, Market Capital, Organizational Capital, Process Capital, and Renewal and Development Capital (p. 23). Though the distinction between several of the components of the Malhorta framework could be argued, he is one of the few who have written on this topic to make the important recommendation that the presence or absence of Renewal and Development Capital (how the unit of analysis prepares for the future) should be included in any IC assessment.

Other, more recent, advocates of the need to address the intangible Intellectual Capital assets of organizations tend to classify these along the same lines as does Steward. There seems to be a consensus that regardless of how intangibles are best classified, the goal for doing so is to capture those characteristics of an organization beyond its financial assets that help account for its success or shortcomings.

The conceptualization of Intellectual Capital of educational service agencies used here makes use of two of the three conventional categories: Human Capital and Structural Capital. The recommended classification system differs with regard to the third conventional category; namely, Relational Capital, a description preferred over the frequently used expression Customer Capital, when the focus is on private sector organizations. This substitution is made because educational service agencies typically have numerous relationships with entities that should ordinarily not be viewed as customers. For example, the state education agency could hardly be viewed as a customer when the service agency provides a state mandated core program or service that is monitored by the state.

As cited previously, the organizational capacity of a public sector organization is commonly defined to consist of two types of assets that together will largely determine whether or not the organization will achieve its goals:

$$\text{Organizational Capacity} = \text{Financial Assets} + \text{Non-Financial Assets}$$

The non-financial assets are its Intellectual Capital, viewed here to consist of three major components; in the case of an individual ESA these are:

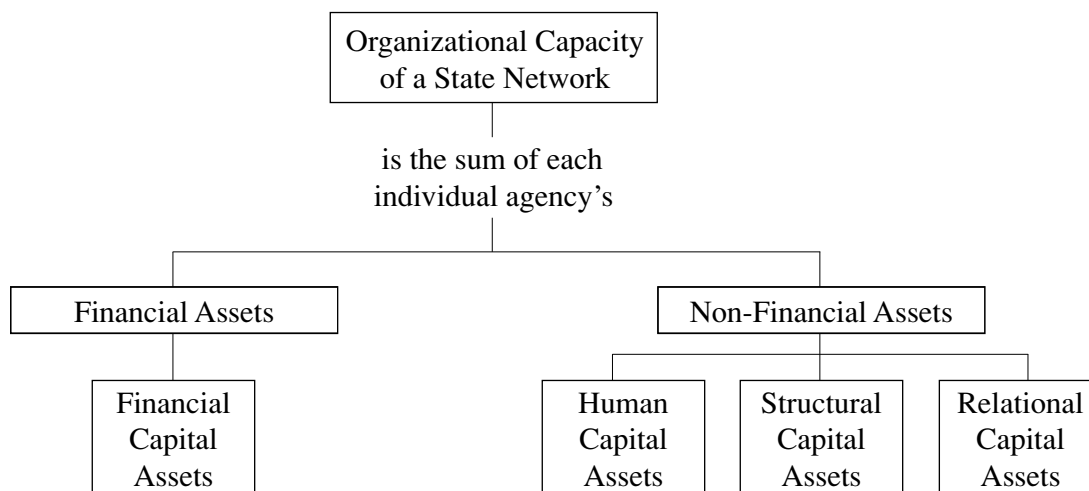
$$\text{Intellectual Capital} = \text{Human Capital Assets} + \text{Structural Capital Assets} + \text{Relational Capital Assets}$$

Therefore, the organizational capacity of a state network, when viewed through the prism of its collective Intellectual Capital, is viewed to consist of:

$$\text{Financial Assets of all ESAs} + \text{Non-Financial Assets (i.e., Human Capital, Structural Capital, and Relational Capital) of all ESAs}$$

A schematic illustrating the above conceptual framework is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Conceptualization of the Intellectual Capital of a State Network



The working definition of each of the three components is described below:

Human Capital Assets: the combined individual knowledge, competencies and experiences that the professional and support staff of each agency in the network takes home with them at the end of their work day, as well as the individual and collective knowledge, competencies, and experiences of leadership and governing board members for the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of program and service expectations held for them.

Structural Capital Assets: the combined knowledge that is owned and remains at each individual agency, as well as the combined infrastructure and organizational processes of each to produce, develop, deliver, and evaluate programs and service expectations held for them.

Relational Capital Assets: the combined knowledge, competencies, and experience of each individual service agency with regard to its relationships with schools and school districts, with other ESAs in the state network, and with other local, state, and national stakeholders and partners for the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of programs and service expectations held for them.

Several components – production, development, delivery, and evaluation – are included in each of the three working definitions. The intent is to highlight representative stages in the typical cycle of activities that are entailed in the work of a service agency in providing programs and services to schools (defined here to mean parochial, private, and charter schools) and local school districts.

One of the principal objectives of conceptualizing the construct as consisting of three components is to facilitate the selection of what would ordinarily be a large pool of potentially meaningful indicators for assessing the likely Intellectual Capital of the entire network. Moreover, and of critical importance, the frequent imperceptible interplay that takes place between the three components is of course of paramount interest. Steward (1997) is again called on, in this case for his emphasis that it is essential to recognize that "... intellectual capital is not created from desired wads of human, structural, and customer capital but from the interplay among them" (p. 78). He elaborated on this theme with the insightful analogy "when human capital, in the form of top-notch engineers and state-of-the-art technology, doesn't interact with customer capital, the result is called an Edsel" (p. 78).

In arguing for the nourishment of communities of practice in an individual organization, Saint-Onge and Wallace (2003) also address the importance of the interrelationships among the three components when they make the key assumption that "Value creation occurs as knowledge is exchanged among the three types of knowledge capital. Knowledge exchange serves as the basis for accelerated learning and systematically developing individual and organizational capabilities." They then assert that "All three forms of capital ... should be developed in an integrated approach, not in isolation" (p. 11).

However, the interplay among the three components is the most difficult to assess in an individual organization. The problem is compounded when the primary unit of analysis is a state network. The measurement problem notwithstanding, it is clear that, for example, the Human Capital assets of an agency can be either strengthened or inhibited by its Structural Capital assets (e.g., talented people are limited in their effectiveness without adequate resources), just as an agency's Relational Capital assets be affected by its Human Capital assets (e.g., it's hard to build positive relationships with other agencies when staff is not competent or congenial).

Measurement issues are discussed in a subsequent section. They are formidably difficult. Though many challenges are inherent in an attempt to assess the Intellectual Capital of a state network, this is no excuse for avoiding an effort to do so. The hope is that this effort ultimately results in a broadly acknowledged design for assessing what is the greatest potential strength and the greatest potential vulnerability of a state network, the systemic issue of achieving parity in the organizational capacity of each agency in a network.

Why Focus on a State Network?

There are several reasons why, in addition to state and local policy interests, the ESA community should devote increasing attention to the issue of the organizational capacity of the state network of service agencies. It is also argued here that it is in the interests of all parties to make use of the construct Intellectual Capital of the network as a meaningful approach to use in inquiries of this type.

The argument for a focus on a state network is framed in a series of seven propositions. The themes of several of the assertions have previously been introduced. Each declarative statement is followed by a brief statement of rationale for why the statement offered should be considered.

Proposition 1. One significant feature of the vast majority of state networks is the huge variations among individual agencies. Such diversity inhibits the realization of state expectations for the system.

Several examples of the diversity in the organizational capacity of what are generally acknowledged as strong, not weak, state networks are provided in Table 1. It is acknowledged that the measure cited, when standing alone, as well as the use of ranges, may not necessarily be the most useful approach for establishing diversity. However, the table can serve the purpose here of introducing the nature of the diversity issue. Size of staff is a useful proxy measure for establishing key components of organizational capacity. Though professional staffing levels, for example, say little about the quality of staff or the effectiveness of their performance, they are a predictor of the likelihood that an agency has adequate personnel resources to address, for example, all of the technical assistance needs of schools and school districts in such diverse areas as curriculum development, technology, and programs and services for exceptional children.

“One significant feature of the vast majority of state networks is the huge variations among individual agencies. Such diversity inhibits the realization of state expectations for the system.”

Proposition 2. The lack of parity in the organizational capacity of individual agencies in a network is the primary cause for the uneven performance among agencies across a state.

The underperformance of some agencies may simply reflect a systemic problem in the state network, a point raised earlier. That is, all agencies may not have the organizational capacity to engage in the development, produc-

Table 1. On the Nature of the Diversity Issue

State Network	Number of Agencies	Ranges in Staffing Members
Connecticut	6	179 - 975
California	58	65 - 36,063
Iowa	12	25 - 1,165
Michigan	57	35 - 990
New York	38	438 - 2,127
Texas	20	68 - 400
Washington	9	77 - 370

tion, delivery, and evaluation of their programming efforts, particularly with regard to the achievement of statewide core programming expectations. The uneven performance across a network might well be due in part to non-controllable differences among agencies. The context in which individual agencies in a network function can differ markedly with regard to a range of significant demographic, economic, and geographic features of the catchment area served by each. Differences might include the number of students, school and school districts served; demographic characteristics of the student population; the number of underperforming schools and school districts; public expectations for education in each local district; populated density or scarcity; and, the long-term economic health of the region. That any one or a combination of the examples cited above can have consequences for the performance of a service agency seems indisputable. A recognition of contextual features of the sort cited, however, should not be viewed as a plea for tolerance for an agency that consistently falls short of expectations. Rather, it is a call for the development of a strategy that acknowledges deep, pervasive systemic issues that may be present in a state network.

Proposition 3. The uneven performance of agencies is the principal cause for what seemingly has been the regular, extraordinary controversy surrounding a fairly large number of networks over their life span.

For much of the past several decades, and especially prior to the passage of NCLB Act of 2001, many state networks have been the topic of repeated controversy. Some of this can be accounted for by virtue of the position service agencies occupy, a planned platform for addressing the frequently competing interests of both local school districts and the state. Some of the frequent legislative scrutiny of service agencies can be attributed to honest disagreements on how the organizational effectiveness of these entities should be measured.

It is also true that much of the prior controversies surrounding many networks can be attributed to the underperformance of one or a small number of agencies. Unfortunately some state interests have tended to taint the entire network based on the performance of one or a few. Legislative responses to situations of this type have been fairly predictable and not likely to change—a strong tendency to take punitive action against the entire network for the perceived or known unacceptable performance of a few.

Proposition 4. It is highly unlikely that complete parity in the organizational capacity of all agencies in a state network, the source of much of the controversy surrounding a network, can be achieved.

With few exceptions, the initial planning for the establishment of the state networks tended to weight heavily the need to assure schools and school districts in a state would have timely access to the programs and services of service agencies. Rapid advances in recent years in technology and in the infrastructure needed to support technology have certainly changed previous ways one should define the criterion **accessibility**, but by no means all. Indeed, the renewed emphasis on focusing school improvement efforts on individual school sites as well as at the school district level has important significance for the work of an external service provider like an educational service agency. So, too, do other “lessons learned” in the ambitious school improvement efforts underway across the country over the past two decades.

Proposition 5. Policy options available to address the underlying systemic issue of creating greater parity in a state network are generally quite limited in number.

Over the years, some states, though probably not a majority, have used various strategies to address the parity issue. These include the following:

- The inclusion of a scarcity factor in the state funding formula, though even student enrollment continues to be the predominant variable in virtually all state formulas.

- The decision to have open competition for the awarding of program-specific grants and then awarding a grant to a small number of agencies with the expectation that the successful agencies provide the program or service to all other agencies.
- Rewrites to statutory or administrative rules governing a network, inserting language that allows collaboration between two or more agencies.

Some of the state networks formed in the 1960s and 1970s that were created by essentially combining former single county offices have undergone mandated restructuring. Though these efforts have reduced the number of agencies in a state, a serious question can be raised concerning whether or not these changes will materially impact the parity question that exists in the states that have followed this practice. A few states in recent years (e.g., Iowa in 1977 and Oregon in 2002) enacted legislative provisions allowing two or more agencies to voluntarily combine. The Iowa network was reduced to 12 agencies on July 1, 2005, down from 15 in July 1, 2001. However, one has the impression that the motives for the few voluntary restructuring actions supported by the states has to do more with a desire to reduce administrative costs, not, or at best only in a secondary way, address the parity issue.

The one recent action by some states that can arguably be held up as a serious recognition of the parity issue is the enactment in several states of provisions that allow a state to force an underperforming agency to reorganize with another agency. In these cases, underperformance is measured by standards and performance measures found in a statutorily created accreditation system, or in administrative rule. Again, one could argue that other motives may have prompted this movement. Whether parity concerns were the primary or secondary objective, the move by a few states to establish sanctions against a low-performing agency will require that state interests ultimately confront systemic issues. This is so for it will likely bring to the forefront equity and adequacy concerns among key stakeholder groups, particularly those who are the state network's most influential partners, local schools and local school districts.

There are also numerous examples across the country where two or more agencies, especially those serving non-metropolitan regions, voluntarily collaborate in the provision of a program or service. Many of these arrangements have been undertaken without specific state encouragement, but through implementation of provisions of a state generic legislation authorizing interorganizational agreements or interlocal agreements. The motive for engaging in these voluntary efforts would seem to be a recognition among some in the ESA community that this strategy can address limitations of one sort or another in the organizational capacity of one or all members of the consortium.

Proposition 6. A policy option having great potential for addressing systemic issues is one that would have as its primary unit of analysis enhancing and sustaining the Intellectual Capital of the network and then viewing the network as a unique sector of the state system of elementary-secondary education whose promise is greater than the sum of its parts.

Viewing the network as a unique sector in the state system of elementary-secondary education should not require a huge conceptual leap. A compelling argument can be made that this is precisely what state interests had in mind when creating the network in the first place, a systemic state network designed to provide all students, schools, and school districts equal access to needed programs and services. Moreover, there are encouraging signs in recent years in a number of states of a renewed commitment to this original policy goal. Perhaps the best example of this would be the relatively recent increase in the number of networks having a requirement that all agencies in the network provide a set of core programs and services thought to be associated with the improvement of teaching and learning in all schools and school districts in the state, which is now a universal policy goal in all states.

But, as cited previously, there is great diversity in the organizational capacity of all agencies in a state network. If this diversity, as argued here, is due in large part to systemic issues, concerns are raised regarding the ability of all agencies to deliver required programs and services. Moreover, and compounding the parity issue, an individual service agency's programming efforts must also honor still other long-standing state expectations that are now receiving increasing attention in state policy circles, the need to demonstrate that programs and services are both effective and

efficient. The call then for viewing the state network as a unique sector, and then concentrating on enhancing and sustaining the Intellectual Capacity of the sector acknowledges the intractability of significant systemic issues that are not always amiable to policy solutions.

Moreover, the call for viewing the network as a unique sector and then concentrating improvement efforts on the sector is consistent with what appears to be underway in support for nonprofit organizations. There is growing anecdotal evidence that a number of foundations are now inclined to discontinue capacity-building grants to a single human service organization and concentrate instead on a sector of similar organizations. The rationale for this change in funding priorities appears in part to be based on the realization that assistance to a sector of like-organizations will benefit all, and from the perspective of the foundation, result in the greatest impact of its capacity-building efforts.

Proposition 7. Viewing the network as a unique sector and then strengthening the Intellectual Capital of the sector will also facilitate positioning the network to be effective in the emerging recognition of the need to develop statewide cross-sector alliances.

It seems indisputable that support is growing for an expansion in cross-sector alliances; i.e., strategic partnerships between organizations in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors.² Advocacy for the greater use of cross-sector alliances has been strong for a number of decades. In the past, however, the emphasis was on greater collaboration between education and other human services to address the needs of children and youth, frequently referred to under the umbrella term “service integration.” Good sources on the development of the “service integration” movement are provided by Gans and Horton (1975), a report of the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, the Future of Children: School Linked Services (1992, Spring), and Bhaerman (1994). These sources also provide insights on “lessons learned” that have utility for the potential key role of a state network in fostering cross-sector alliances with other human services providers.

The context in which the concept is now being advocated is much more ambitious in that the need now is for greater collaboration between all three major sectors, the private, nonprofit, and public. The focus has been broadened beyond the needs of children and youth and is now intended to address most public service functions at the local, state, and federal levels.

In his Presidential Address at the 2000 Conference of the National Academy of Public Administration, O’Neill (2000) identified several forces reshaping the public sector. One of the changes cited in his excellent presentation is of interest. On the one hand he posits that “with tremendous speed, traditional organizational bureaucracies are becoming, at best, irrelevant, at worst, impediments to achieving important objectives,” because he correctly asserted, “Most outcomes of significance require complex, multi-disciplinary solutions” (p.2).

Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) argue that the movement toward cross-sector alliances is due to the convergence of four trends that are changing the shape of public sectors in all parts of the world, not just in the United States:

1. The rise in the use of private firms and nonprofits to do government’s work,
2. Efforts to “join up” governments horizontally and vertically to streamline processes from the perspective of the customer-citizen,
3. Technological breakthroughs that dramatically reduce the costs of partnering, and,
4. Increased citizen demands for more choices in public services. (p. 24)

Of special significance for state networks of ESAs is the position taken by the Three Sector Initiative, a collaborative project partnership of seven organizations in the government, business, and nonprofit sectors. The report of the initiative *Working Better Together* (2002) stressed that cross-sector alliances are needed “... more than ever in addressing the increasing number of complex public issues that spill over sector boundaries,” and further “... [are] required to tackle complex public problems that no one sector can handle alone” (p. 3).

In a review of the report, Fosler (December, 2003), discusses the importance of what he calls “regional stewards,” or coalition builders. A critical feature of paramount importance to the success of cross-sector collaboration, according to Fosler, “is the ability to form strong and enduring alliances and partnerships that are committed to the long-term well-being of their community and region.” Such an outcome “requires change in how issues are defined and approached” (p. 1).

The emphasis in the report on regional approaches in part suggests an endorsement of the position that regions ought to be the primary building-blocks for the development of cross-sector alliances.³ This position is consistent with something advocated for some time (Stephens, 1967; Stephens, 1994) in the service agency literature where the argument was made that the individual agencies in a state network of ESAs, because of their regional perspective and work with schools and human services agencies, were ideally positioned to be a “regional advocate” for education, positioned to interface, collaborate, and in other ways build bridges to other organizations for the purpose of furthering the educational well-being of the region. The emphasis in these earlier outcomes was on the promotion of collaboration with other human services providers who could contribute to the well-being of children and growth. Though less ambitious than what proponents of cross-sectored alliances argue for, much of the early rationale regarding the role that ESAs can play still has merit. The new emphasis on regional cross-sector alliances is not only consistent with the preceding proposition that the focus of state policy ought to be on the enhancement of the Intellectual Capital of the ESA sector; it should serve to reinforce and enrich such an emphasis.

Major Measurement Issues

The measurement of the construct Intellectual Capital of a state network is embedded within the conceptualization of the constructs organizational capacity and organizational effectiveness. However, there is not at this time a universally accepted definition of any of the latter two constructs when these are assessed for a single organization, let alone for a statewide network of like-organizations in a specific sector. Nonetheless, to argue for enhancing and then sustaining a network’s Intellectual Capital (IC), it must be measurable, consistent with the now universal pressure to develop metrics for assessing organization capacity and organizational effectiveness.

But the requirement to do so and success in achieving this goal requires addressing a formidable set of measurement issues. The major issues cited are six in number. The six are not mutually exclusive, as some interact.

1. Perhaps the most difficult measurement issue centers on the absence of a universal definition of IC; that means that establishing the construct validity and external validity (its generalizability to other populations) and the reliability of quantitative measures are comprised.
2. Much of what is a knowledge organization’s most critical asset, the tacit knowledge of the professional and support staff plus governing board members is especially difficult to quantify. As established previously, all organizational knowledge is lodged in tacit knowledge, the private property of individuals.
3. Though it is a common and useful practice to describe organizational knowledge as either tacit or explicit, they both complement each other, and importantly, are in many respects each interdependent of the other. The complementary nature and frequent interrelationship of tacit and explicit knowledge forces one to be especially sensitive to a common measurement issue, the confusion of correlation and causation.
4. Further complicating the measurement task is that of the need to measure the relationship and interplay between the three components of IC. Indeed, it is the “movement” among the three that is of paramount interest, how assets of one component, for example, facilitate or inhibit one or more assets is one or both of the other two components.
5. Another issue is the requirement for comparable measures, standards for use in making judgments concerning the presence or absence of IC in a state network. There are a number of potential approaches that can be

used to establish the comparability of the current status of the Intellectual Capital assets of an organization. These include: normative judgment (select an ideal standard and compare against); goal-centered judgment (compare against stated goal); improvement judgment (compare against past performance); the use of engineering standards; standards of professional associations; and, benchmarks set by best-in-class organizations.

6. Relatedly, one cannot simply make wholesale use of measures to establish the presence or absence of an IC asset of an educational service agency network in another state to establish comparability, unless the contexts in which both function are similar, an unlikely event. The cross-sector use of a common set of assets, however, will not be a major concern, when, or perhaps if, the time arrives when there is evidence that the Human Capital assets, Structural Capital assets, and Relational Capital assets can be supported as basic, core characteristics of an effective service agency. The caution concerning the unlikely possibility of making use of common measures across state networks at this time to establish comparability in IC exercises is similar to the concern raised by Levin and McEwan (2001) on the need to be extra-guarded in comparing two or more cost-analysis studies where sometimes subtle differences on any number of design and contextual features can affect the findings (pp. 220-239).

A number of the issues related above hold true of most measurement tasks of any complexity. However, we were especially influenced by the work of Chatzel (1998), Ebersson, Heath, Naylor and Anderson (2004), and Malhorta (2002) in their treatment of how best to address the special requirements inherent in measurement of Intellectual Capital.

The six themes of major measurement issues cited above pose difficult challenges. It is hoped that this effort to establish a framework to address the issues might be viewed as one modest step in what will undoubtedly be a long series of planned, likely incremental steps that will need to be taken in order to ultimately arrive at a consensus design that is accepted as meeting both validity and reliability issues, and that would also be viewed as economically sensible, administratively uncomplicated, and, perhaps most importantly, politically feasible. In this regard, the framework described in the next section should be viewed as an example of following the insightful recommendations offered by Cameron and Whitten (1983) in their seminal work in trying to arrive at a theory of organizational effectiveness. These authors developed two conclusions over 20 years ago concerning the construct organizational effectiveness that still hold true, and are applicable to this effort to begin to measure what is potentially the greatest asset as well as potentially the greatest vulnerability of a state network.

The first of the conclusions offered by Cameron and Whitten that is applicable to what is being undertaken here is that “there cannot be one universal model of organizational effectiveness,” because “all general theories of organizations have built into them implied criteria for measuring effectiveness” (p. 262). Their second conclusion is equally germane, “that it is more worthwhile to develop frameworks for assessing effectiveness than to try to develop theories of effectiveness”; that is, like other complex constructs in the social sciences they “. . . have been better understood as limited aspects of their total meaning have been measured” (p. 267).

Proposed Framework

The major features of the proposed framework are presented below. Described are what are referred to as the two “pillars” of the design, each reflecting a major design planning decision. Also included is an acknowledgement that the framework does not include the direct use of other prized IC assets, examples of celebrated assets that have been excluded, and a brief statement why these exclusions were made.

The section concludes with a description of the proposed assets and recommended indicators or proxy measures and potential data collection methods for each of the three IC components. The recommended indicators or proxy measures for the most part follow a standard format.

1. The standard used to assess the presence or absence of an asset for an individual agency in a vast majority of cases is always on how well the assessment compares with the presence or absence of the asset across all agencies in the state. Use of this standard is consistent with the overriding objective of this essay.
2. A three-year time frame is recommended for the assessment of the IC asset at both levels, the individual agencies and the state network. This time-period represents a reasonable compromise between the need to take timely snap shots of the performance of an individual agency and the network, and the need to acknowledge that the impact of an ESA's work on, for example, assisting schools and school districts in their efforts to address the "achievement gap" will likely take multiple years to unfold. The only justifiable exceptions to the three-year time frame would seem to be where a state has some other cycle for the accreditation of an ESA (e.g., Iowa AEAs, which have an accreditation cycle of five-years), or where the state makes use of some other schedule for the accreditation of a school or school district.

Selection criteria

Prior to describing the two pillars of the framework, it is important to establish the criteria used for the selection of assets to be given priority in the assessment of the IC of each agency and also for the collective IC of a state network. Four selection criteria are used. All four focus on assets that will establish whether or not an agency can ***provide policy-relevant, timely data that it has the Intellectual Capital to engage in the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of its work in meeting four critical program and service expectations generally held for it.***

The four critical program and service expectations for which data is to be provided center on what are now clearly acknowledged as universal expectations of a public sector educational service provider created by the state to address equity and accessibility issues in the state system of elementary-secondary education and do so in an effective and efficient way.³ The four data-set requirements are:

1. Data on how an agency's programs and services assist schools and school districts in their school improvement efforts, particularly as these relate to what unquestionably appears to be the long-term, universal local and state priority of enhancing teaching and learning. Indeed, the membership of the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESAs) identified school improvement as one of the primary functions of service agencies in a 1995 large-scale planning exercise held during the 1995 national conference of the association (Fielder, 1996, p. 29). AESA has continued to stress this priority over the ensuing years.
2. Data on how its work assists schools and school districts in closing the "achievement gap" in underperforming campuses and districts in their service region.
3. Data on how its work assists school and school districts in addressing the long-standing public policy priority for all public sector organizations, effectiveness and efficiency in their organizational and programming practices.
4. Data on the effectiveness and efficiency of its own organizational and programming practices required for the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of the preceding overriding goals of the network.

It is acknowledged that many ESAs are not always involved in the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of their programs and services. For example, some are known to purchase and make use of a professional development program produced and evaluated by a for-profit company. Or, some are known to make use of a third-party like a post-secondary institution to conduct an organizational study of the agency. Still others are known to collaborate with one or more adjacent ESAs to, for example, develop, produce, deliver, and evaluate a regional technology support program.

These types of arrangements are likely very common. However, the onus still rests with an individual agency to provide data in the four priority areas. Data-set four (data on the effectiveness and efficiency of its own organiza-

tional and programming practices) should serve as an effective and transparent check on how an agency engages in the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of program and service expectations held for it. There are, of course, numerous valid reasons why an agency might choose to meet its overriding obligations in the ways suggested above. Data-set four provides a meaningful accountability strategy for both the agency, and the state as well, for assessing the wisdom of the agency's actions.

Two Central Features of the Proposed Design

The proposed design for addressing issues present in an assessment of the IC of a state network is based on two major planning decisions that serve as the two pillars of the approach: (1) make use of only a "vital few" for each of the three components of Intellectual Capital; (2) where necessary, make use of one or more proxy measures, as is frequently necessary, as an acceptable alternative to the direct measurement of the "vital few."

Pillar 1. The use of a "vital few"

There potentially is a large pool of useful indicators one could select for an assessment of all three of the components of IC. The temptation will be strong in some quarters, particularly in state policy circles, to do precisely this. The use of an extensive list of indicators, no matter how meritorious each might be, is avoided here. Data availability concerns, data burden issues, time and resource requirements are but several of the common problems in assessment exercises that argue against the use of a large number of indicators.

There are perhaps even more substantial reasons, however, why the number of indicators selected should be limited. On this question, we support the position held by U.S. Department of Education State Accountability Study Group in an early 1988 report that asserts, "... not all statistics ... can function appropriately as indicators. Statistics qualify as indicators only if they serve as gauges, that is, they tell a great deal about the entire system by reporting the condition of a few particularly significant features" (p. 5). The 1996 *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act* passed by Congress in 1993 takes the same position. The GPR Act is arguably one of the most far-reaching and influential legislative initiatives ever undertaken to improve the performance across all federal departments and independent agencies and subsequently impacted state government practices as well. Though the legislation is ambitious in scope, the advice to federal departments and agencies of the Comptroller General of the United States, the office responsible for monitoring the implementation of the legislation, also stressed:

"The number of measures for each goal at a given organizational level should be limited to a vital few. Those vital few measures should cover the key performance dimensions that will enable an organization to assess accomplishments, make decisions, realign processes, and assign accountability." (United States General Accounting Office, p. 25).

In proposing the use of what he refers to as an Intangible Assets Monitor, a recommended one-page annual organizational report, Sveiby (1999) argues, "Management should select one or two indicators for each subheading in the exhibit. Computing more than one or two indicators for each subheading can be confusing to the reader" (p. 164). Though Sveiby's recommendation is directed at a form of an organizational annual report, his intent is to provide a broad picture that would provide insight on critical intangible assets of an organization. This is the same goal pursued in this essay. Harmon (2004) also speaks to the issue in a recent article on the general topic of performance measurement. He cautioned, "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" (p. 61). An additional useful quotation also helped guide the decision to focus on a "vital few," one by Rose (March 17, 2000) with the reminder, "All performance measures, including those for intellectual capital, can be overcooked, and the important thing is to look at the whole system" (p. 15).

A total of 19 “vital few” assets are established across all three IC components. This number may appear to be an unusually high number for what is billed to be a list of a “vital few.” The potential pool of useful indicators or proxy measures, especially in the Human Capital and Structural Capital areas is inevitably quite large. When viewed in this context, the total of 19 can appropriately be labeled as a “vital few.”

Key assets not included

Concerns regarding such matters as a data availability, data collection burden, and data validity also entered into the decision to concentrate on the assets that are used in this proposed initial framework. Moreover, the original decision to assess the Intellectual Capital of a state network, though having merit from a policy perspective, has certain drawbacks.

One of the most serious relates to the need to forgo at this time the *direct* assessment of a number of prized assets that would be relatively manageable where the unit of analysis is a single service agency, not a statewide network. It is to be recalled that the primary objective of this essay is to address the perceived lack of parity among agencies in a state network to develop, produce, deliver, and evaluate common programming and service expectations held for them. By definition, this requires comparing the IC assets of an individual agency against the work of the entire network.

Some of the most significant IC assets that are not *directly* addressed in the proposed framework are five features generally acknowledged to be characteristics of high-performing organizations: the agility of an individual agency to meet special needs of its customers; the innovative practices of an individual agency; the adaptability of an individual agency; the organizational culture of an individual agency; and, the effectiveness of the leadership of an individual agency.

It is acknowledged that failure to include the direct assessment of the five potential assets in this “first generation” effort to surround the construct IC is unfortunate. As previously cited, there are valid reasons for doing so. The major loss caused by the exclusion of the five is that an assessment of these potential assets represents some of the most rewarding ways to assess the interplay, the “movement,” the relationship among and between the three components of Intellectual Capital. However, though the issue of the need to assess the “movement” among and between the three components is not entirely absent in the proposed framework, it is not reflected as prominently as it should be under different circumstances.

Pillar 2. The use of proxy measures

The use of proxy measures is justified where there is research evidence that the performance on a proxy measure is related to but is not a direct measure of one or more of the “vital few” intangible assets. This position is similar to the rationale taken by the Baldrige National Quality Program in addressing the intermingling of the terms “measures” and “indicators.” In its 2005 report, no distinction is made between the two terms. The report argues that the term indicator is justified when two conditions prevail: “when the measurement relates to performance but is not a direct measure of such performance,” and, “... when the measurement is a predictor of some more significant performance” (*Education Criteria for Performance Excellence*, p. 70).

A proxy measure, then, must not only shed light on the presence or absence of an intangible asset; it must have support that it is a predictor of the presence or absence of an intangible asset. In this sense, the use of proxy measures can be viewed as a surrogate measure taking the place of a preferred but unattainable measure.

The use of proxy measures in the organizational capacity and organizational effectiveness literature is common. For example, the long-term successful passage of capital improvement bond issues is correctly used as a proxy mea-

sure of a critical characteristic of organizational effectiveness, in this case, of a district’s ability to muster community support for education, a difficult subject to quantify. So, too, are student test scores used by some as a proxy measure for teacher performance, though this practice remains controversial. The use of proxy measures is also necessary in the work of other disciplines (e.g., public administration, social work, mental health) where researchers are forced to rely on one or more proxy measures in lieu of performance outcome measures so long as there is strong evidence that the condition of the proxy measure(s) will likely predict the condition of the performance outcome measures.

Proposed “Vital Few” Human Capital Assets

Seven “vital few” Human Capital assets are proposed for use in the framework, as shown in Table 2. The assessment of each makes use of a proxy measure, as described below.

1. Both the education level and experience level of senior leadership and support staff (assets #1 and #2, respectively) are viewed to be acceptable predictors of the strong likelihood that both categories are staffed with individuals having competence in their areas of specialization.
2. Several of the proposed assets – experience in current position (#2), experience of board members (#3), se-

Table 2. Proposed “Vital Few” Human Capital Assets

Proposed “Vital Few” Assets	Recommended Indicators or Proxy Measures
1. Education level of senior leadership and support staff	Percent senior leadership staff with appropriate graduate degree from an accredited institution, and percent senior support staff with appropriate certification, both over a three-year period, are similar to or above state averages
2. Years of experience of senior leadership and support staff in current positions	Percent senior leadership and support staff in current position is similar to or above state averages
3. Years of experience of board members of the agency	Percent years of experience of board members is similar to or above state averages
4. Organizational investment in training and development of senior leadership, support staff, and board members	Percent annual budget expenditures over three-year period is similar to or above state average
5. Ratio of administrators and all staff	Annual ratio over three-year period is similar to or below state averages
6. Ratio of full-time and part-time employees	Annual ratio over three-year period is similar to or below state averages
7. Attrition rate for senior leadership and support staff	Annual attrition rates over three-year period are similar to or below state averages

nior staff attrition rates (#7), and to a lesser extent, the ratio of full- and part-time employees (#6) are viewed to be meaningful predictors of the highly prized, basic need of all organizations, stability in senior level decision makers and in the governing body.

The inclusion of proxy measures that shed light on the stability in the senior ranks of an agency is consistent with the results of Light’s (2005) work in identifying high-performing organizations, a study that will likely be viewed in the future as one of the seminal works in organizational studies. That is, stability in senior ranks

should be viewed as a precondition for an agency to successfully address what he calls the four pillars of robustness of high performance: alertness, the need to make necessary adjustments; agility, the speed to make necessary adjustments; adaptability, the development of new strategies to shape the desired new future; and, alignment, the consistency of the organization in acting as a whole (p. 123). It is also argued that stability in senior ranks is consistent with a concept given prominence in another study that is already acknowledged as an influential work in organizational studies, Collins's (2001) notion of "executive churn."

3. There should be little debate concerning the inclusion of the proposed asset that addresses the level of each agency's investment in the training and development of senior leadership, support staff, and board members (#4). An organization's investment in the continuous improvement of its most prized asset is unquestionably a predictor of its commitment to remain a learning organization. A concern raised, however, is that the standard to be used for the measurement of this asset, state averages, may itself be too low. The possibility certainly exists that the use of state averages for the measurement of other assets may also be poor benchmarking. Where this might be the case, however, the consequences are not likely to be as damaging to a knowledge organization like an ESA where the collective organizational knowledge, particularly as it relates to the human capital assets, is its greatest potential asset as well as its greatest potential vulnerability.

There is a huge literature on the related topics of the importance of an investment in human resources, the need to foster a learning community, and the importance of these broad subjects for organizational effectiveness. Drucker's (1999) comments on these kinds of issues serve as a useful summation statement that is particularly germane to a service organization: "Knowledge people ... have to be managed as if they were volunteers ... who carry their tools in their heads and can go anywhere" (p. 117). He then stressed, "... we know what attracts and holds volunteers ... the first, a clear mission ... the second, responsibility for results ... the third, is continuous learning" (p. 117).

Proposed "Vital Few" Structural Capital Assets

Six proposed "vital few" Structural Capital assets are included in the framework, as shown in Table 3. Four of the six differ from the other two and the recommended "vital few" assets in the Human Capital and Relational Capital categories.

The four differing assets require that an agency address major organizational capacity issues: planning capacity (asset #1), evaluation capacity (asset #2), management processes capacity (asset #3), and infrastructure capacity (asset #6). These features are not compared to norms in the state network. Moreover, all are amenable to direct observation in that an agency must provide documentation of effectiveness in each area, where effectiveness can be assessed, at a minimum, against professional standards.

The adequacy of an agency's capacity in these four assets is at the heart of its ability to successfully engage in the design and implementation of effective and efficient strategies for the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of core program and service expectations held for it. As noted, the emphasis is on core programs and services of an agency, those expectations established by the state that are applicable for all agencies in the state network. The focus is not on discretionary programs and services that an agency may offer in response to a request by schools or school districts. In this case of discretionary programs, market forces will ordinarily be the final determinant of the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning, evaluation, and management processes used by an agency.

The remaining recommended two assets that center on an agency's information technology system capacity (asset #4), and its annual investment in information technology (asset #5) are both critical for a knowledge organization. Both serve as proxy measures of an agency's commitment to enhance the effectiveness of professional and support staff, and by extension, the organizational effectiveness of the agency.

Table 3. Proposed “Vital Few” Structural Capital Assets

Proposed “Vital Few” Assets	Recommended Indicators or Proxy Measures
1. Planning capacity	Documentation of effectiveness over a three-year period of agency ability to base decisions on school and school district needs, analysis of organizational strengths, and projections of future human and fiscal resource requirement.
2. Evaluation capacity	Documentation of effectiveness over a three-year period in the use of assessment data in all major organizational and programming decision making
3. Management processes capacity	Documentation of effectiveness over a three-year period of processes used in financial planning, human resources planning, communications planning, and facilities planning
4. Information technology system capacity	Information technology support per professional and support staff over a three-year period similar to or above state averages
5. Investment in information technology	Percent annual budget expenditures over three-year period similar to or above state averages
6. Infrastructure capacity (other than information technology)	Documentation of adequacy over three-year period of facilities and required special equipment to effectively engage in the work of the agency, as well as enhance the productivity and quality-of-work environment for professional and support staff

The importance of the capacity of an agency’s information technology system cannot be overstated. It is essential for the full realization of the potential for the success of staff who are co-located within the organization. It is also a prerequisite for what is one of the most meaningful ways to unlock the full potential of the collective Intellectual Capital of a state network, the creation of “communities of practice,” the ability, for example, of content specialists in multiple agencies to collectively solve common problems in the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services. As a result, and importantly, the creation of “communities of practice,” the leveraging of

the knowledge of content specialists, is one of the most effective strategies for addressing noncontrollable barriers that are the source of much of the parity issue in many state networks.⁴

“The adequacy of an agency’s capacity in these four assets is at the heart of its ability to successfully engage in the design and implementation of effective and efficient strategies for the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of core program and service expectations held for it.”

The infrastructure requirements for the promotion of virtual networking are of two basic types, hardware and software that create a network operating system that can be successfully managed internally within an agency and across the state network of service agencies. A recommended

basic architecture of such a system is described in the Appendix.

While infrastructure requirements are critical for the achievement of the clear potential benefits of the creation of “communities of practice” in a state network, there are still other preconditions that must be met. For example,

the leadership of participating agencies must dedicate staff time and resources to facilitate their full engagement, and must also set clear measurable goals for all virtual teams, two points stressed by Duarte and Snyder (2002). Moreover, another key to success has to do with several of Bennis’s (1999) conclusions based on his hundreds of studies over an extended, rich career in examining what he calls “Great Groups” in both private and public organizations. Common to all was that “Great Groups are products of meticulous recruiting ... and at the heart of every Great Group is a shared dream” (pp. 317-320).

Proposed “Vital Few” Relational Capital Assets

The proposed “vital few” Relational Capital assets are six in number, as shown in Table 4. The assessment of most also makes use of proxy measures, as described below.

- Given prominence in this category are the participation rates of schools and school districts located in the region served by the agency in both core programs and services that the agency is required to provide (asset #1) as well as the rate of participation in selected discretionary programs that are offered by all agencies in the network (asset #2), both over a three year period. The selected discretionary programs could include a program that is offered by one or a small number of agencies at the behest of all agencies in the network, like, for example, a statewide cooperative purchasing program.

Program participation rates over an extended period are important proxy measures of an agency’s ability to achieve and then sustain quality programming. This is especially the case in the growing number of states that have removed all real or imaginary legal barriers that may have prevented a school or school district

Table 4. Proposed “Vital Few” Relational Capital Assets

Proposed “Vital Few” Assets	Recommended Indicators or Proxy Measures
1. Customer participation in core programs and services offered by all agencies	Annual percent participation rates of school and school districts in service region over three-year period are similar to or above state averages.
2. Customer participation in selected discretionary programs and services offered by all agencies	Annual percent participation rates of school and school districts in service region over three-year period are similar to or above state averages.
3. Customer satisfaction with both core and selected discretionary programs and services	Annual percent quality satisfaction ratings by school and school district personnel in service region over three-year period are similar or above state averages.
4. Customer loyalty and commitment	Annual percent participation of school and school district personnel in service region over a three-year period in available standing venues for involvement in agency decision making for the production, development, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services is stable or increasing.
5. Customer success in enhancing teaching and learning	Percent of human and financial resources devoted annually over a three-year period is similar to or above state averages.
6. Customer success in realizing cost savings in selected instructional and management support services offered by all agencies ⁵	Cost savings to schools and school districts for selected instructional and support services are similar to or above state averages.

from participating in the programs and services of any ESA in the state, not just its home agency.

- Though participation rates are important, using these as the only proxy measure of the ability of an agency to maintain and then sustain a quality program must always be tempered by several contextual considerations. On one hand, participation in a core program or service that is funded in whole or in part by the state or federal/state monies will likely loom large in the participation decisions of a school or school district. So, too, are situations where a school or school district is located in sparsely populated nonmetropolitan regions of a state where accessibility to other service providers is generally more limited.

It is for these reasons that customer satisfaction is cited as a separate potential asset (asset #3). Customer satisfaction with both core and discretionary programs and services of an agency is unquestionably the single most valuable indicator of program effectiveness.

- A valuable proxy measure of customer loyalty and commitment (asset #4) to the success of a service agency is the degree to which school and school district personnel actively participate in standing advisory committees established by an agency. Active participation means mean more than regular attendance at meetings. The standard should be meaningful involvement in the agency's decision making processes. Austin (2002) is one of many who take the position that "the process of participating can be as important as the substance ... and that genuine participation in collective decision-making fosters respect, and respect fosters trust." (p. 152). That trust in the work of a service agency is of paramount importance is indisputable.
- The proposed proxy measure to be used to measure customer success in enhancing teaching and learning (asset #5) will be viewed by some as limited in that what is asked for is that the agency indicate the annual percent of its organizational human and financial resources that are specifically targeted on achieving this objective. It stops short of trying to make an association between what the agency does or doesn't do with a school or school district's performance on one or more measures included in a state performance accountability system. Rather, the objective is to establish whether or not an agency is committing its resources to this important task and then comparing this against all other agencies in the network. Doing this will provide sufficient evidence on which to make judgments regarding the relative IC of an agency on meeting this priority policy goal.
- The proposed indicator, not a proxy measure, to assess customer success in realizing cost savings as a result of the work of an agency in providing selected instructional and management support services (asset #6) is straightforward. It asks only whether or not cost savings are realized when compared to what is true as a result of the work of all agencies in the network in the delivery of comparable support services. Cost studies are themselves time-intensive and costly. Therefore, the recommendation is that only selected instructional and management support services be the focus of such efforts, and that these be rotated through an extended time frame. It is also important that attention be given to some of the cautions concerning conduct of state-wide cost studies (Stephens & Harmon, 1996).

Concluding Comments

The overriding objective of this article is to start a process that would focus on what is claimed to be one of the principal reasons why, in many states, the full realization of the rich potential of a systemic state network of ESAs is not being as fully utilized as it should, despite what is typically true, the exemplary performances of some agencies in a state network. The claim advanced is that the lack of parity in the organizational capacity among agencies in a network is not only the root cause of the underperformance and underutilization of a network but is the root cause of the regular controversies that have surrounded most networks over their life span.

Moreover, both the underutilization issue and the seemingly almost annual debates about a network that take place in far too many state policy circles is strange for still another reason. A state network of ESA is arguably the best example at all levels of education, pre-K through post-secondary, of a development widely recognized in the pri-

vate sector and in academia as the most powerful organizational movement of the last part of the 20th and early 21st centuries—networking among organizations for the development, production, delivery, and evaluation of products.

The position taken in this article is that one potentially meaningful way to begin to address the parity issue is to assess the Intellectual Capital present in a state network. The construct IC was defined to mean the collective Human Capital assets, Structural Capital assets, and Relational Capital assets of all agencies in a network.

A possible framework for undertaking this challenging task has been introduced here. The features of the proposed framework would clearly benefit from the knowledge and perspectives of others. So, too, would the involvement of others benefit a discussion of a subject deliberately omitted here, the identification of meaningful strategies for enhancing and then managing the Intellectual Capital of a state network once initial and subsequent IC audits are completed. There is a rich literature on the subject of building capacity in nonprofit organizations that is relevant to the design of strategies to enhance the Intellectual Capital of a state network of ESAs.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in bringing parity to the intellectual capital of a state network of ESAs is the matter of political will. The steps necessary to bring equity to these systems, though there is still much to be learned, are within the knowledge base of policy makers. They must feel the need to take these steps. ESA leaders must help give them the information and encouragement to make this happen. If it does, America's children will be the winners.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The state networks that are concentrated on here all maintain membership in the Association of Educational Service Agencies, the major national professional association representing the interests of ESA-type organizations in over 40 of the 50 states. In 2003-04, 24 states have in place a statewide network of ESAs that satisfy the working definition of a state network. These are:

AZ, County Office of Education; AR, Education Service Cooperatives; CA, County Office of Education; CO, Boards of Cooperative Services; CT, Regional Educational Service Centers; GA, Cooperative Education Service Agencies; IL, Educational Service Regions; IN, Education Service Centers; IA, Area Education Agencies; KS, various titles used; KY Educational Cooperatives; MI, Intermediate School Districts; MN, Educational Cooperative Service Units; NE, Educational Service Units; NM, Regional Education Cooperatives; NY, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services; OH, Educational Service Centers; OR, Education Service Districts; PA, Intermediate Units; SD, Education Service Agencies; TX, Regional Education Service Centers; WA, Educational Service Districts; WV, Regional Education Service Agencies; WI, Cooperative Education Service Agencies.

² It is a common practice to classify organizations in one of three ways: public, private, or nonprofit. In this classification a state network of ESAs would be labeled a public entity, a correct placement in that service agencies are chartered by the state and function under a (varying) set of statutes, regulations, and/or administrative rules set by the state.

It is also true that many individual agencies, and in some cases, a state network are engaged in entrepreneurial activities that

might cause some to view these agencies to be for-profit organizations, a defining characteristic of organizations in the private sector. However, most agencies maintain Internal Revenue 1004C status, meaning that profits, if any, from entrepreneurial endeavors go back to the agency to support the work of the agency, and not to any member of the agency.

Perhaps the best way to classify a typical ESA is that it is one of the seemingly growing number of organizations that should be typed as a hybrid, an organization characteristic of all three conventional categories – public, private, and nonprofit.

³ The most common themes in the mission statements for the 24 networks cited in statute or administrative rule are: promote efficiency in delivery of programs and services; provide programs and services that are effective; and, promote equity in the state system of elementary-secondary education by providing students and schools access to programs and services. Other frequently cited themes are: promote cooperation and coordination among school districts; promote cooperation and coordination between school districts and other human service providers; assist state-level bodies and/or state officials in the discharge of their statutory responsibilities; and, provide services to special populations of students and/or school districts with limited enrollments.

⁴ The New York State Effective Schools Consortia, launched in 1979, represents one of the first known efforts to enhance the ability of a state network to collaboratively identify and share successful programs and services statewide. As described by Kelly (1998) the intent of the program is to facilitate the "... systematic sharing (networking) of information, the best programs, trainers, planning materials, and other resources..." so that "effort, time, and money aren't wasted recreating wheels" (p. 46). The then-existing 41 Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCESs) were divided into five consortia regions, most comprised of eight BOCESs. A regional manager and advisory group are appointed to implement the goals of the state consortia.

There are even examples in the ESA community where service agencies in different states are engaged in "communities of practice." One of the earlier known efforts is an effort between Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit (Pennsylvania) and the Southeast Educational Service Center (Kansas) to collaborate on the development of online courses for teachers to meet state in-service requirements (Dubble & Swengel, 2002).

⁵ Many individual ESAs across the country are developing sophisticated management information systems. One of the most comprehensive is maintained by Region IV Education Service Center serving 58 school districts and charter schools in the metropolitan Houston region, called escWORKS. One of the system's capabilities includes the ability to address an important accountability requirement, a detailed report to each school and school district on all services and products provided by Region IV for each of the preceding five years (McKinney & Gauntt, 2001).

E. Robert Stephens, Ph.D., is director of the Institute for Regional and Rural Studies in Edmond, Oklahoma. He may be reached by phone at 405-341-1147, by fax at 405-341-1385, and by e-mail at erstevens@aol.com.

William Keane, Ed.D., is associate professor of Educational Leadership at Oakland University in Rochester, MI and editor of *Perspectives*. He may be reached by phone at 248-370-4204, by fax at 248-370-4605, and by e-mail at keane@oakland.edu.

Brian Talbott, Ph.D., is executive director of AESA. He may be reached by phone at 703-875-0739, by fax at 703-807-1849, and by e-mail at btalbott@aesa.us.

Appendix

Basic Architecture of an MIS¹⁾

E-mail Mailing Lists

E-mail mailing lists are a critical component in sharing information. E-mail Mailing lists (commonly known as listservs) allow the dissemination of information from one source to many others and, if the software is configured to allow it, for a many-to-many discussion to take place. Service agencies can choose whether to host their own E-mail mailing lists (in which case they need to have a server capable of doing so and a reasonably fast Internet connection) or to contract for such services (which are available inexpensively from a variety of sources).

Web Sites (Portal/Discussion)

Increasingly, specialized websites are being widely used to disseminate information and gather responses from participants. These websites take a wide variety of forms. Traditionally, bulletin board style discussions, where users can post comments and feedback in a sequential manner, have been used for soliciting feedback and remarks, or simply discussing issues. The technology for providing this function is fairly simple; virtually any web server (whether hosted by an ESA or contracted to the ESA) with a decent Internet connection is capable of doing so. These sites are slowly being replaced by more advanced websites, called portals, where information is customized for the user based on his or her preferences and/or assignments, making the amount of information that the user needs to sort through much smaller. Portals allow for the sharing not only of ideas and comments but also the sharing of documents, presentations, and the like for easy comparison. Unlike discussion forums, which are a relatively simple technology, portals are (from an administration perspective) very sophisticated and complicated pieces of software. Hosting a portal requires good Internet access, a powerful server, and significant storage space; services providing portal hosting are available, but are fairly expensive and do not provide the level of customization that most administrators would want.

Internet-based Video

While educators have long made use of distance learning for professional development and student education, the advent of the Internet presents tremendous potential for expanding the use of video. While traditional distance learning typically requires a special, dedicated facility (with thousands of dollars of equipment, such as cameras, monitors, microphones, etc.) with a high speed video connection, Internet-based distance learning offers the potential of turning any reasonably powerful computer with a good Internet connection into a distance learning station. This means that Internet video can provide learning opportunities virtually anywhere. Furthermore, Internet-based Video typically comes in two forms – live and on-demand. Live broadcasts require that the user be receiving the video signal as it is being broadcast. Live broadcasts are typically used for classroom instruction or trainer-based instruction where interaction is a significant part of the learning experience. On-demand Internet video allows for “anytime anywhere” learning, where the “student” can connect from any appropriately equipped computer and retrieve the video presentation. While the demands for receiving internet video are relatively modest, the requirements for hosting such a video session are not. For live broadcasts, extremely high amounts of bandwidth and processing power must be available. For stored broadcasts, you also need to have significant storage space available for all of the stored broadcasts.

¹⁾Source: Aleck Johnson, Director, EPIP, Association of Educational Service Agencies.



Small Staff, Big Results: Creating Systemic Solutions for Delivering General Education Services

by
Joanne E. Hopper

Background: The Context of Community Within Sanilac ISD

In the social context, community has always been part of the fabric of everyone's life, but in the educational context, the focus on community is just recently emerging. In the past, most teaching was conducted behind closed doors with little sharing among colleagues. Individual buildings and districts generally operated in isolation from one another. Not so today. In his book, *Results* (1999), Mike Schmoker summed up the way schools need to operate, "The kind of improvement that we not occur in an isolate where no one knows doing or what each are...Schools improve fort unite" (p. 111).

"...there seemed to be no way that two people could meet the professional development needs of every content area, support principals, carry out student programming, and represent the ISD at regional and state networks, given the minimal staffing of one full-time and one part-time secretary, and one kit specialist..."

significant, sustained need in schools will later, freelance culture what anyone else is other's operative goals when purpose and ef-

In Sanilac County, tion and community are important in the en-schools strive to pre-21st century within the shrinking budgets and direction of the Sanilac and his colleagues

Michigan, collabora-becoming increasingly deavors undertaken as pare students for the financial constraints of rising costs. Under the ISD superintendent in the seven local

districts served, the ISD General Education Services Department is discovering ways to build a culture of collaboration where the leadership and energy of a few have become the catalysts for significant changes that are leading to restructuring and improved student achievement.

Previously, the General Education Department offered minimal countywide professional development. Curriculum Council meetings were not well attended. A Talent Development Coordinators' group existed, but the ISD carried out most of the responsibility. There was little countywide or inter-district collaboration, sharing of responsi-

bility, ideas or expertise. In the past six years, the General Education Department has developed powerful networks where teachers and administrators are receptive to learning from one another, sharing the responsibility for hosting events, and contributing to collective efforts for improvement. It all started in the 1999-2000 school year with an emphasis on collective responsibility at the top levels, and a countywide leadership academy for superintendents, principals, and curriculum directors who began learning together how to lead schools in an environment of change.

The early initiative was lead by the Sanilac ISD General Education Department, under the leadership of a director and an assistant director. Yet, there seemed to be no way that two people could meet the professional development needs of every content area, support principals, carry out student programming, and represent the ISD at regional and state networks, given the minimal staffing of one full-time and one part-time secretary, and one kit specialist (who stocked and distributed the K-5 science kits used by every elementary school). The solution was to implement a countywide support network among the seven local districts. Rather than explore the “strategy du jour,” the network has maintained a focus on the goal of improving achievement for all students.

Model for Delivery of General Education Services Within Sanilac ISD

Even though each Michigan ISD provides some level of General Education Services, the amount and type of services vary from county to county, as do the models of service delivery. General Education departments are probably the least understood among the various program and service areas. Unlike special education, which has gained a definition from legislation and common public vocabulary, and career technical education, which is familiar to stakeholders because of the nature of the department, the term “general education” does not reveal the essential programs and services for which it was designed. Hence, the role is framed by the relationship among the department administrators, the ISD board and central office staff, and the stakeholders served.

Sanilac ISD serves seven local school districts ranging in size from 629 to 2,533 students. Most local districts financially cannot afford to employ curriculum directors or content area consultants to assist administrators and teachers with alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment, facilitation of professional development, implementation of school improvement initiatives, and delivery of student enrichment programs. To address these needs, the Sanilac ISD General Education Services Department developed and continues to coordinate a countywide infrastructure. The ultimate vision is to create a system of schools focused on student learning.

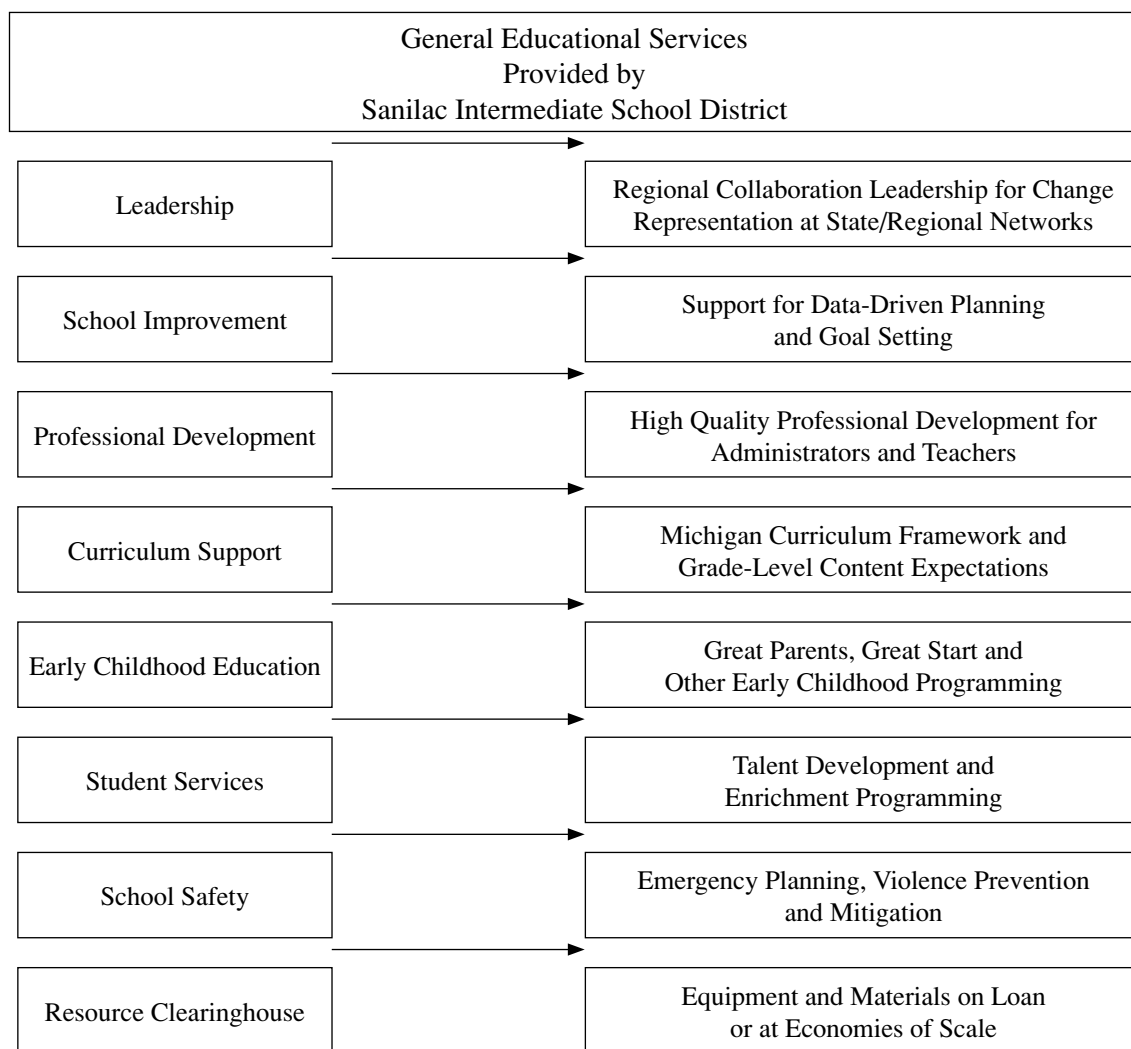
Programs and Services

Most General Education Services Departments of Michigan ISDs deliver programs and services in the functional areas of leadership, school improvement, professional development, curriculum support, early childhood programming, student services, school safety, and classroom resource sharing. Figure 1 identifies these functional areas and details specific programs/services delivered at Sanilac ISD. Funding constraints have forced the staff of two administrators to think differently about how they leverage resources to meet local districts’ needs.

Leadership services provided by Sanilac ISD’s General Education staff include participation in various state and regional networks, membership in collaborative ventures that will advance the goals of the local districts served, and partnerships with higher education institutions, businesses, community leaders, and other stakeholders (Figure 2).

Recently, Sanilac partnered with six other ISDs in the region to form the East Central Michigan Education Consortium (ECMEC). The group has successfully acquired grants to support its vision. One, a U.S. Department of Education grant to improve school land security, is helping schools conduct vulnerability studies, train teachers, and network with local emergency responders. The second, a state grant, is supporting the design of on-line professional development modules for teachers and administrators. Through this grant, districts are learning about specific instructional and assessment strategies aimed at addressing needs at the classroom level.

Figure 1
General Education Services Provided by Sanilac Intermediate School District



School improvement services provided include supporting local districts with implementation of state and national mandates such as No Child Left Behind and Michigan’s Education YES! accreditation program. General Education Services employees stay abreast of current research and best practice in school improvement and provide technical assistance to local districts in understanding and carrying out these mandates. Recent changes in state and federal laws pertaining to school accountability have required ISD personnel to intensify their efforts to understand and disseminate information from the Michigan Department of Education to local districts. Another major component is assisting local districts in understanding and using data to make decisions for improving student achievement. This area became a focus during the first-year professional development series offered with ECMEC partners. The outcome led to a unified data management software product that is currently used by all seven local districts. Time is spent during monthly meetings sharing ideas for its effective use.

Sanilac’s General Education Services Department also provides high-quality professional development for administrators and teachers within and outside of their service area. These programs are supported by a variety of funding sources, including local district dollars expended in consortium, registration fees, and/or grant funding. Recently, the ISD partnered with Saginaw Valley State University to provide presenters for a series of teacher and administrator seminars and workshops. One, a leadership series with Dr. Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour, inspired the implementation of professional learning communities in several local districts (via different times/formats/structures within individual districts). It is creating momentum for significant changes in the way the schools think about students and learning.

Depending upon the size of the local district and the personnel available on site, districts also rely upon the ISD General Education Department for assistance with alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The General Education staff is responsible for staying current with changes in the statewide curriculum (Michigan Curriculum Framework and Grade Level Content Expectations), making local districts aware of impending modifications, and enlisting local educators' input for statewide revision and updating projects. An ECMEC professional development series with national presenter, Deborah Wahlstrom, provided a powerful school improvement model that is helping districts address key questions about curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Other General Education programs and services include: early childhood education, student services, such as talent development and enrichment programs, school safety and violence prevention programs. The ISD also operates an extensive kit-based elementary science program that maintains and delivers over 550 kits to classrooms each year. When a devastating fire destroyed the building housing the kit program last year, the ISD program director marshaled support of teachers and administrators from local districts. Within a few weeks, kits were restocked and ready for delivery. The director's goal was "to get the kits into the hands of teachers and students without missing a beat." Because of the cooperative spirit, it happened.

Service Delivery Model

In an effort to think and communicate about this collaborative community, a Model for Delivery of General Education Services (GES) was created as a framework for delivery of programs and services within the seven local districts (Figure 2). The model addresses the functional areas of administrative leadership, curriculum and instruction, school improvement, professional development, and student talent development. Although not specifically depicted in the GES Model, the 8,400 students served directly by local districts and indirectly by the ISD are very much the focus of all efforts, and the purpose for which the system exists.

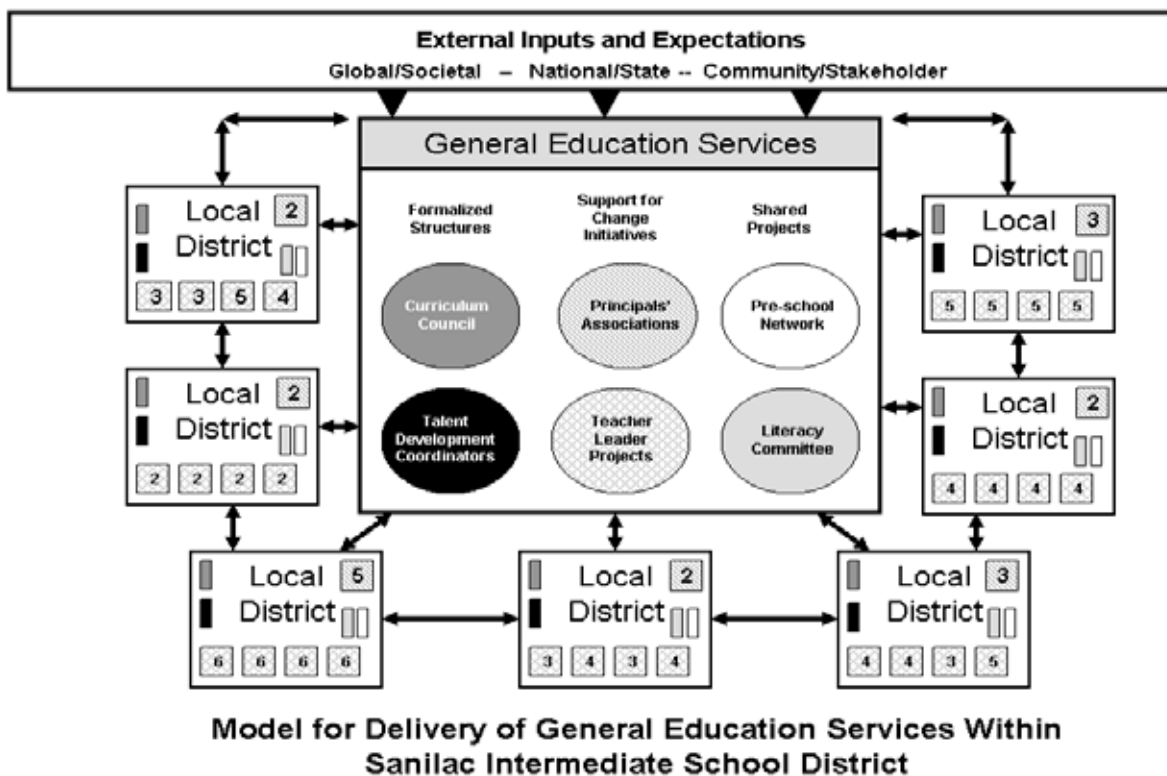
The model illustrates how a very small department can, with limited staff, serve local districts in a manner that builds capacity within and among districts. The system emerged out of a real need to do more with less. The questions facing both the ISD and its local districts were: Can we redesign our systems and processes to increase productivity (and ultimately student achievement) at reduced costs? "Can we find ways of inventing completely new ways of seeing (our) environment?" (Morgan, 1997, p. 90)

As the model illustrates, the General Education Services Department receives input and information regarding expectations from the external environment, including global and societal, national and state, community and stakeholder inputs and expectations. The Department provides formalized structures to support change initiatives and provides forums for shared projects across the county. It also provides input to and receives feedback from each local district. The collective system of districts also offers feedback within the entire system. Depending upon the nature of the task involved, subgroups within the GES Model receive input, gather feedback, and take direction from one another. For example, at times the Teacher Leader Network takes direction from either the Curriculum Council and/or the Principals' Association. On other occasions, the Teacher Leader Network provides input and makes recommendations to each of these groups.

Model subsystems

The GES Model highlights six of the specific networks that serve Sanilac County schools. The groups include: Sanilac County Curriculum Council; Teacher Leader Networks in math, science, language arts and social studies; Elementary and Secondary Principals' Associations; Talent Development Consortium; Pre-school Providers' Network; and Literacy Committee. In the GES Model, each local district representative who serves one of the various networks is represented by a patterned box corresponding to the appropriate group. Single bars indicate one representative for a given network group. Numbers indicate actual numbers of representatives from each local.

Figure 2
Model for General Education Services Within Sanilac Intermediate School District



The groups have studied the research of Schmoker (1999), Fullan (2001), and DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (1998, 2002, 2004) regarding schools as results-oriented professional learning communities. Not only do they meet regularly to conduct business and plan and implement change initiatives, they also perceive themselves as key leaders who bear a responsibility for the greater whole. Occasionally, the General Education staff conducts formal and informal pre-meeting planning sessions to exchange ideas with one or more representatives in order to clarify meeting objectives. The districts sense a collective responsibility to contribute to continued progress as a county. This is not a case where one district is heading off on its own.

From a political standpoint, the operational model establishes a coalition for supporting curriculum, instruction, assessment and school improvement in seven diverse local districts. The goal is to determine ways in which individual districts can maintain autonomy of educational program delivery while at the same time allowing districts with divergent interests to explore commonalities and work together with expediency to advance common goals.

The GES Model presupposes that the General Education Department is prepared to address political conflicts that arise as participants approach goal-setting and implementation in various ways. Clarifying goals to derive one common plan; i.e., a common process for developing and monitoring curriculum among seven local districts, requires collaborative skill. Yet the system serves an important function for small districts that lack capacity to conduct such work on their own.

The Networks try to help each other learn what works as new ideas/methods emerge. For example, recently 95% of the county's K-5 teachers participated in Michigan Literacy Progress Profile training. Teachers, under the direction of the Literacy Committee, then set about sharing best practices from their own classrooms by attending summer and Saturday sessions, and visiting each other's classrooms in after-school sessions.

Now, the county is moving forward with training in the development of early literacy skills. Nearly 100% of the K-12 special education teachers have received training in four modules this year, and 60 K-2 teachers and paraprofessionals will be trained yet this spring. This kind of commitment does not happen in isolation. Schools need support – from the ISD and from each other – to launch into new learning about student learning. It is challenging, but exciting to see what is happening.

Viability of the Model

The viability of this model is dependent, to some degree, upon the success with which the General Education Department leads the learning communities. Internally, the department strives to develop the requisite variety of skills and expertise to adequately support the networks. With a two-person administrative staff, the strains upon personal capacity are significant. For example, while the background and strength of the two administrators may lie in science, language arts, and school improvement, they are called upon to deliver programs and services encompassing such diverse areas as school safety, early childhood education and mathematics. For this reason, the systems model is particularly useful because the administrators can tap into the skills and resources of a broader educational community – participants of the network – to address identified needs across the system.

A strong culture of collaboration must be developed to foster continuous growth and progress within the learning system. “A culture cannot be taken for granted, nor can it be viewed as a simple variable that societies or organizations possess or something that a leader brings to his or her organization. Rather, it must be understood as an active, living phenomenon through which people jointly create and recreate the worlds in which they live” (Morgan, 1997, p. 141). Such a cultural phenomenon is fostered in the GES Model.

The Model’s Six Subsystems

The GES Model identifies six subsystems functioning in diversified roles: the Curriculum Council is composed of one key administrative representative from each local district who is accountable to the local superintendent and has the ability to make decisions obligating the district to joint initiatives with other members. The Curriculum Council is the lead group which helps determine needs, assess capacity to meet the needs, develop solutions, and support implementation plans. The group engages in ongoing dialogue during monthly meetings to evaluate progress and address problem areas. This group also guides plans for countywide professional development, such as a recently-held inservice where all schools worked on school improvement planning with national presenter Deborah Wahlstrom (2002).

Four Teacher Leader Networks operate within the GES Model, representing math, science, language arts and social studies content areas. The networks are comprised of at least one teacher leader from each building for each content area. In this manner, every district is represented by a minimum of eight to a total of 24 teachers. These leaders gather on a regular basis to learn about state curriculum expectations, new research and best practices in their content areas, as well as to share professional expertise among members. They are expected to share the information with colleagues upon return to their individual buildings.

Depending upon the overarching goals established by the Curriculum Council, the Teacher Leader groups may be asked to contribute to countywide initiatives, such as curriculum development and school improvement projects. In addition, the networks foster opportunities for professional engagement and learning from one another over an extended period of time. This year, the math and language arts groups were focused on new grade level curriculum standards implemented as a result of No Child Left Behind. Teachers aligned local curriculum, instruction and assessment with the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations, taking advantage of statewide resources as they were made available.

Originally, efforts within local districts were disjointed. Teachers rarely engaged in opportunities to collaborate, while administrators shouldered the responsibility to improve teaching and learning within their building. The sentiment of a teacher quoted in Schmoker's *Results* (1999) sums up the scenario that existed in Sanilac County schools prior to the implementation of the Teacher Leader Networks:

The...myriad of daily events and duties...kept us from reflecting collaboratively on such obvious and challenging concerns as how to teach composition more effectively, how to conduct discussions about literature more effectively, and how to make literature exciting. We did not know if or how anyone was teaching composition – or even what that meant. So we worked, consciously or unconsciously, toward our own goals, within the limitations of what each of us knew and did not know. Day-to-day concerns kept us from reflecting on what our most important goals should be. (p. 11)

Among the seven local districts, there was little commonality. Districts developed school improvement goals with little regard for the expertise within their region, or the common goals that may or may not have been priorities at their neighboring districts. Under the guidance of the ISD General Education Department, the districts now work collectively to advance school improvement goals and build learning communities that support teaching and learning.

Occasionally, teachers are asked to undertake tasks outside of their perceived skills and expertise, or beyond what they believe offers direct impact upon their teaching and learning. Each group struggles to become a self-questioning organization that “learns how to learn” (Morgan, 1997, p. 86) together. Clinging to traditional paradigms, some teachers prefer to attend professional workshops that deliver one-shot learning opportunities where they “sit and get” information they can take back to the classroom and use the next day. The Teacher Leader Networks focus on developing leadership qualities in teachers and providing teachers processes with which to share key information with colleagues in their building. This is truly a change in paradigm. Buchen (in Gabriel, 2005) argues that “the only leadership that will make a difference is that of teachers. They alone are positioned where all the fulcrums are for change. They alone know what the day-to-day problems are and what it takes to solve them” (p. 1). Some Teacher Leaders are uncomfortable with this role; some feel they are not properly identified or accepted as leaders within their building. This is a challenge that the networks must address.

Occasionally concerns arise as the work moves teachers outside of their comfort zone. Recently, an initiative to develop a countywide curriculum in language arts and social studies created a backlash from some Teacher Leader participants. The GES Department moved quickly to gather input from teachers and share it with members of the Curriculum Council, principals' associations, and ultimately the county superintendents (who maintain final authority over all initiatives). Because of the nature of the needs in each content area, two different products/processes were approved: a K-12 pacing guide for language arts, and a K-12 curriculum complete with scope and sequence, units and lessons for social studies. The flexibility allowed teachers to feel valued while administrators were satisfied that the outcomes would effectively advance their intended goal. This experience emphasized the need to consider the perspective of teachers, building principals, superintendents and other key players. A method of continuous monitoring, adjusting and support is critical in order for the system to properly function.

The Principals' Association networks include both an Elementary and Secondary Principals' Association. The groups meet monthly, primarily to gather and share information regarding school improvement, professional development, curriculum initiatives, and student programs. They provide guidance and direction to the General Education Department and support the teacher networks within the system.

Talent Development Coordinators of Sanilac County include representatives from each local district who meet monthly to plan and implement collaborative talent development programs to benefit students in each local district. Even though state budget cuts drastically reduced financial support for talent development, this group continues to collaboratively sponsor an impressive list of events including a fine arts contest and festival, academic games, junior and senior high quiz bowls, Battle of the Books, and summer camps. The group receives input from stakeholders,

including the Curriculum Council and the principals' associations. The enrichment experiences designed by the Talent Development Coordinators provide the only such opportunities for a broad range of students across the rural, economically depressed county.

The Pre-school Network is comprised of pre-school and kindergarten teachers and early childhood agency personnel representing each of the seven local districts, as well as other pre-school providers both private and parochial. The group meets regularly to plan for programs and services meeting the needs of pre-school aged children and their families. In its second year, a Pre-school EXPO sponsored by the group brought nearly 100 families together to learn about literacy, health and safety, and other initiatives of interest to families with young children. The group is also undertaking a county-wide curriculum project to articulate a math and language arts pre-school curriculum that enhances school readiness.

The Literacy Committee was established to assist with the planning and implementation of literacy initiatives within the county. Prior to the establishment of this group in 2002–03, literacy professional development offerings were few and not well attended. Several major professional development trainings have since been established and carried out under the direction of this network. The group has significantly influenced enrollment in program offerings. Its influence has contributed significantly to the development of literacy skills of classroom teachers in every local district.

Through the various leadership groups, Sanilac ISD's General Education Department is working to develop leadership capacity among its local educators – both teachers and administrators. The work includes reframing the definition of leadership, and helping people recognize their own potential. In a study of leadership over a 20-year period, Kouzes and Posner (2002) tried to discover if, after all that time, leadership even mattered anymore; and if it did, how it was different. What they “discovered, and rediscovered is that leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others. What [they] discovered is that people make extraordinary things happen by liberating the leader within everyone” (p. xxiii).

In the bleak funding climate facing school districts, the ISDs must determine which services are a priority and which are deemed ancillary or non-essential. Currently, Sanilac ISD uses a variety of formative, informal measures: regular feedback at meetings, input sought from teacher participants and school leaders to determine the effectiveness of the GES Model. Specific summative measures have not yet been developed. This is an area identified for improvement. The local districts know their student achievement is improving – gradually in some cases, but improving – but other forms of evaluation are missing.

“We don’t have all of the answers, but together we are trying to find ways to move closer to meeting the needs of all learners.”

Reflections

Even as I write, I think about the fact that there is so much more we could do. And, I realize that many other places can share good stories too – we aren't the only game in town. But I do know this: we are collectively committed to improving learning. We don't have all of the answers, but together we are trying to find ways to move closer to meeting the needs of all learners. We are honest in this pursuit; and this honesty is precisely what gives us the courage to keep moving forward together. The Sanilac County school districts and the Sanilac ISD are committed to continued support of the professional networks we have established. We remain steadfast in pursuing opportunities to learn and grow as professionals. The work is messy, challenging, and frustrating at times. Yet, it is also very rewarding to come together with a common purpose, supporting one another in what, arguably, is the most important work

of the day: creating environments where all students can reach their potential and become productive, successful citizens.

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- Joanne E. Hopper is Director of General Education Services at the Sanilac Intermediate School in Peck, MI. She may be reached by phone at 810-648-4700 ext. 201, by fax at 810-648-4834, and by e-mail at jhopper@sanilac.k12.mi.us.



Effective Decisions Through Community Engagement: A Study of the Essential Financial Planning Process and its Implications for Educational Service Agencies

by

Ken Nelson, Marge Beatty, Teara Archwamety, and Patricia Cruzeiro

Introduction

School superintendents and board members have pondered endlessly about the appropriateness of involving community members in pivotal decisions about the future of their school districts. When and on what issues should patron input be sought? The authors hereby present a research-based process whereby Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) can train local school officials in a methodology to involve district residents in a structured process to understand the district's real financial challenges and advise the board about how to use scarce resources most effectively.

When developing a budget, especially one that may involve painful reductions, administration must decide whether to use the “decide and defend” tactic, a la Leightninger (2003, p. 33) or heed the advice of Weber (1916, p. 3), who suggests that important decisions, financial ones in particular, affecting the future of a school district should not be made in secret. Although school leaders pay “lip service” to the merits of community involvement, few have actually identified what this concept means in their districts and, more importantly, how it works most effectively.

“It is time to rethink the place of public engagement in public school policy making and program planning.”

Why do so many districts fail to make the grade when it comes to handling financial issues? According to Moore, “Often the blame can be attributed to lack of communication and failure to invest in public involvement” (Moore, 2003, p. 13). Successful school leaders understand that making major decisions without involving parents, teachers, and other community leaders can create controversy and threaten funding support.

“A successful planning strategy that illustrates the roles and relationships of programs and services can minimize the emotional charge of the cutting process.” An integral part of that strategy is to “objectively identify priorities and protect them from irrational thinking by tax-cutting pressure groups” (Joynt, 2002, p. 1).

In his study of 25 rural school districts, Howley noted (2003), “When the community is ... ignored, leaders can’t access the support rural communities want to give their schools” (p. 17). He reported that some superintendents indicated that although they endorsed community involvement in the really tough decision, they were also aware that some communities were so divided that they judged such involvement as too dangerous. They questioned the readiness of the community to participate in such an endeavor.

It seems apparent that it is time to rethink the place of public engagement in public school policy making and program planning. Sokoloff (2001) cautions, however, that “Changing our view of public involvement requires experimentation and reflection that may feel risky.”

Considering the research of Howley and Sokoloff, it is apparent that a process to engage community on the future directions for a district would be beneficial. The involvement of the community and the elimination of the volatile nature of controversial decisions were the primary motivators for the development of the Essential Finance Planning Process (Howley, 2003; Sokoloff, 2001). The Essentials of Financial Planning Process has been developed and implemented by Marge Beatty, administrator of Educational Service Unit # 16 in West Central Nebraska, in an effort to support area schools in their financial planning. Ms. Beatty agreed to facilitate the community discussions and to assist the groups in setting goals and recommendations. The groups meet six to eight times. The districts involved in this process ranged in size from 160 to 2,000 students.

“The Essential Financial Planning is a process designed to train and develop community leaders in the knowledge of school district programs, services, offerings and finance.”

The Essential Financial Planning Process (EFPP)

The Essential Financial Planning Process is designed to train and develop community leaders in the knowledge of school district programs, services, offerings and finance. This approaches a budget crisis from a positive, pro-active, and community-focused standpoint. Representatives from the board, administration, teachers, and the community at large met a total of six to eight times in three different community settings. Six to eight meetings occurring over a two-month period were held one night a week for a two to 2 1/2 hour period. The groups ranged in size from eight to 35 participants. The Regional Educational Service Agency provided an on-site facilitator at the local level for each of the meetings. The facilitator integrated group training as the participants moved through the process.

At the first meeting of the local EFPP group, the superintendent articulates the purpose for the committee, which is to identify the essential courses and services vital to a quality education, and presents an overview of the process. The group is informed that any plans generated will be submitted to the school board for their consideration, and, upon receipt of the plans, the school board will make the final decision regarding the necessary changes for the district.

Committee members are divided into sub-groups of four to seven people for discussion purposes. Using cooperative learning strategies, these groups identify a leader, a recorder, a timer and a reporter. Further, the sub-groups are instructed on the process of brainstorming. One technique includes a discussion of the best and the worst possible

outcomes regarding essential courses and services vital to a quality education. This allows individuals to have equal opportunity to express thoughts to the larger group. Consideration is given to information focusing on the following: current course offerings, Nebraska Administrative Codes on accreditation, federal regulations, the current district budget of expenditures, additional sources of revenue, college requirements, course offerings in schools of similar size, and class size.

Following the information-gathering and review phase of the study, the committees begin setting program and service priorities by selecting the courses and services believed to be most vital to a quality education. The committees are challenged to give a rationale for each selection, and the rationale is recorded in the minutes of the meetings. This activity identifies what becomes known as “The Vital Few.” The committees then refine the selection of The Vital Few by identifying the level of staffing needed or preferred in the areas of administration, elementary classroom teachers, and secondary core academic instructors for language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Further, offerings in the areas of foreign language, technology, vocational education, physical education, performing arts, and support services are reviewed. Priorities are set for each offering. Extra-curricular activities, transportation, facility maintenance, and food service offerings are considered individually and examined for efficiencies.

Once the priorities are established, each committee brainstorms ideas for additional revenue. Numerous options are identified and examined before the committee determines a priority rating on each option. When consensus is not reached, numerous approaches such as a nominal group technique are utilized to determine support for the suggested offerings. Each group applies budget figures to the priorities and generates a plan to reduce spending. The priority offerings, programs, and services are funded first. As proposed allocations to the budget are applied, recommendations for reducing the overall budget are considered. Items with the least amount of support are reduced or eliminated. Groups generate either a one- two- or three-year plan depending on the extent of financial challenges.

After the budget is reviewed and the group is comfortable with the outcome, the facilitator prepares the first draft of the proposed plans. Committee members react to and refine the draft copy of the final report. Once this process is completed, a verbal and written report is made to the school board. Finally, the school board has an opportunity to review and act upon the proposed plans. The board also considers options for new revenue and begins exploring the use of new dollars to help support the current offerings.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived effectiveness of the Essential Finance Planning Process that was used to assist three High-Plains school districts in identifying data that would support financial decision making. A survey was developed by the authors of this study to determine the perceived effectiveness of the Essential Financial Planning Process. Four research questions guided this study: How effective was the EFPP? What was each participant’s perceived knowledge of the school district’s financial challenges prior to and after the EFPP? How informative was the EFPP? What were each participant’s plans for future participation in school planning activities?

The survey was sent in October 2004 to all 49 participants in the EFPP. The participants included parents, community members, board members, teachers, and administrators. For the purpose of creating groups large enough to warrant the use of statistical measures to establish a level of significance, the respondents were combined into three groups that were labeled (a) board members and administrators, (b) teachers, and (c) parents and community members. A total of 39 (79%) of the participants responded to the survey. There were 17 board members and administrators, 10 teachers, and 12 community members involved in the three groups.

Results

The participants were asked to rate on a five-point scale the effectiveness of the EFPP (1 = strongly disagree that the process was effective and 5 = strongly agree that the EFPP was effective). An analysis was completed using a one-way ANOVA; it indicated the three groups did not differ significantly in their rating ($F[2,36] = 2.5, p > .05$) regarding the extent to which the EFPP was effective. However, the average mean rating was 3.8, which indicated participants perceived the process as effective.

Participants also were asked to rate their knowledge of the financial challenges that the school district faced prior to and after the EFPP. The combined mean score prior to the process was 3.769 on a scale of 1 being unaware and 5 being very knowledgeable. The combined mean score after the process was 4.282. The participants reported significant growth in their knowledge gained by participating in the process. The independent factor was the group (administrators/board members/teachers/parents/ community members); the repeated factor was time.

A two-way ANOVA with repeated measure was completed to determine if there was significance between time (prior and after) and groups. The analysis indicated that there was no significant interaction between the two factors ($F [2, 36] = 2.243, p > .05$). The analysis also indicated that the three groups did not differ significantly ($F [2, 36] = 0.250, p > .05$). However, for all three groups, there was a significant increase in the participants' ratings of their knowledge of financial challenges facing their school districts prior to and after the EFPP ($F [1, 36] = 24.855, p < .05$).

Participants were asked to rate how informative the Essential Financial Planning Process had been. Eighteen of the respondents rated the process as extremely informative and very worthwhile; 15 indicated the process was informative and there was some worthwhile benefit; four reported that the process was somewhat informative, but of limited benefit; and one failed to gain any new information. The analysis included a one-way ANOVA, which indicated there was not a significant difference between the group ratings ($F [2, 35] = 3.806, p > .05$). The mean for the combined group was 3.251 on a 4-point scale. Most participants found the process informative and worthwhile.

The final question asked respondents, "Which best describes plans for your future participation in school planning activities?" Thirty of the 39 participants indicated that they planned to participate in future school finance planning activities; six felt that there was some benefits from the EFPP process but they probably would not plan on future participation; and one person indicated that he would not participate in future planning activities. A one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference between the three groups. There was a combined mean score 2.694 on a 3-point scale. This would indicate a high level of satisfaction with the process.

In summary, participants reported that the EFPP was effective, that it provided the opportunity for them to gain knowledge about the financial challenges of the district, and it was informative. Most respondents (77%) indicated they would continue to participate in future school planning activities.

Implications for Educational Service Agencies

The involvement of community in the decision making process has become a necessity for school officials. Throughout society public services will be competing against each other for the same public funds. An increasing number of older Americans will mean greater voter interest in public funding of programs that are in direct competition with schools. As the American population ages, fewer people will have a personal interest in education, and securing public support for schools may become more difficult. School officials and supporters of public education need to work harder to rally support for public school funding.

It is apparent that educational service agencies need to assist public school educators in the development of an effective decision-making process such as the Essential Financial Planning Process. The development of a service agency cohort of trained facilitators would prove to be essential to schools facing future crucial financial and curricular decisions that lack expertise in the area of group decision making.

The research of this process provided statistical data that would support the effectiveness of the EFPP. However, comments by participants in the process were equally supportive as the core data. Some of the statements on the survey responses included the following: "I believe the Essential Financial Planning Process is vital to school districts that are faced with severe financial cuts." "As a businessman and parent, I feel community involvement is essential as the school makes difficult decisions in the current budget situation. The process aided us immensely in affirming the need and eventually developing support for these decisions." Based upon the research, and comments of participants, the authors believe that the EFPP can be a valuable tool in assisting school personnel and members of the communities they serve to make effective long-range decisions in a manner that will defuse much of the negative reactions that often accompany major financial decisions.

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- Ken Nelson, Ed.D., is Associate Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Dr. Nelson can be reached by phone at 308-865-8359, by fax at 308-865-8097 and by e-mail at nelsonkd1@unk.edu.
- Marge Beatty is Educational Service Unit Administrator at ESU #16, Ogallala, Nebraska. Ms. Beatty may be reached by phone at 308-284-8481, by fax at 308-284-8483, by e-mail at mbeatty@esu16.org.
- Teara Archwamety, Ph.D., is Professor of Counseling and School Psychology at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Dr. Archwamety may be reached by phone at 308-865-8312, by fax at 308-865-8097 and by e-mail at archwametyt@unk.edu.
- Patricia Cruzeiro, Ed.D, is Associate Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Dr. Cruzeiro may be reached by phone at 308-865-8844, by fax at 308-865-8097, and by e-mail at cruzeiropa@unk.edu.



Understanding the Factors That Influence the Job Satisfaction of Special Education Administrators in New York State: A Quantitative Study

by
Barbara M. Godshall

Locating qualified administrators to supervise and coordinate special education services is a challenge for many school districts and educational service agencies. School districts are becoming aware of the need to keep their administrators satisfied and meet their personal and professional goals in a mutually supportive climate. This study was designed to provide measurable factors of Special Education Administrators' perceptions of job satisfaction and components that contribute to satisfaction from their work. The entire population of Special Education Administrators in New York State was surveyed in this descriptive study. The study provides indicators of how educational systems can attend to the satisfaction of their administrators by focusing on qualities that affect their career attitudes, productivity and career longevity.

The importance of the study was to better understand the factors that influence job satisfaction, including personal and organizational demographic characteristics such as administrators' age, gender, salary, employing district type, size and economic status, educational attainment, work experience, and length of service as a Special Education Administrator. According to the New York State Council of School Superintendents (Smithgall, 1999) there will be a "profound turnover in educational leadership in the near future." The Western New York Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) Joint Management Team surveyed 103 school districts and confirmed a 50% anticipated turnover of special education, principal, and other central office administrators in the next five years (Western New York Joint Management Team Study, 2002).

Job satisfaction research involving educators has focused largely on elementary and secondary level teachers. Recently, more studies have been directed toward public school administrators. A research project funded by the U.S. Office of Education, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, attempted to define the role and needed skills of the special education administrator (Whitworth & Hatley, 1982). The study consisted of structured interviews with local administrators of special education in Kansas and Missouri. Leading the list of activities that special education administrators found dissatisfaction with was paperwork, followed by in-servicing and changing the attitudes of other educators. The traditional role of the special education administrator has been to assure compliance with the

myriad of laws and regulations followed by tailoring programs to individual student needs (Hehir, 1999). Special education administrators need to be excellent collaborators and form effective partnerships with parents and the disability community. The role of the special education administrator may be changing due to the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but the need for competent, committed leadership continues.

Research Methods

The research involved surveying the entire population of Special Education administrators in New York State including 702 school districts and 38 Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), New York's name for Educational Service Agencies. One hundred seventy-six (176) participants responded to the first mailing. A follow-up mailing was sent to the non-responding special education administrators to maximize data returns. The response to the second mailing was one hundred forty-six (146) returned surveys. Of the total possible respondents (740), 322 special education administrators, or 43.5%, completed and returned survey questionnaires.

Interviews were conducted with special education administrators to gather information pertaining to their job satisfaction and to provide additional verification of the assessment instruments' validity. Special education administrators selected for the interviews were chosen from rural, urban, suburban, city and Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) districts. The participants were from various sections of New York State; i.e., upstate, downstate and mid-state. They were specifically chosen from different sections of the state to assess whether any trends were limited by geography. Sixty percent of the administrators were females. The administrators interviewed were from the age of 39 to 55 years old with 1 to 19 years of experience as a special education administrator.

The short-form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (20 questions) involved the ranking from one of the five selections which best described their degree or level of satisfaction. Respondents were asked to state whether they were (1) not satisfied, (2) slightly satisfied, (3) satisfied, (4) very satisfied, or (5) extremely satisfied with each item on the questionnaire. A score of five indicated the highest level of satisfaction and a score of one indicated the lowest level of satisfaction. Rank orderings and measure of association were compiled to illustrate the direction of relationships between job satisfaction components overall, intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction, and selected personal and environmental variables.

Profile of a Special Education Administrator

The profile of the Special Education Administrators from this survey indicates that the average age is 47 years old. The respondents (N=168) in the age group of 45-54 years old are employed in school districts with the highest enrollment, largest budget, and largest number of staff as compared to the other age groups. The oldest age range of 55 years or more indicates that 14% of the respondents plan to retire or change positions in the near future.

The respondents were composed of 68% females. With a majority of the respondents as females, one can conclude that this position may be an important entry position into education administration for women. Females have an average of five years in their current position and seven years experience as a special education administrator whereas males have an average of seven years in their current position and 11 years as a special education administrator.

Males are employed in school districts with a larger number of staff members (males—average of 292 staff; females—average of 226 staff); males are older than the female respondents (males—average age 49; females—average age 46); both males and females have a similar education level; and males have a higher salary (males—average salary range—between \$70,000 to 80,000; females—average salary range—between \$60,000 to 70,000).

Almost 70% of the respondents report their highest academic degree achieved to be post-graduate studies equated to a master's degree. The respondents with a doctorate (11.0% of the respondents) are employed in school districts with the largest budget expenditure per pupil, largest number of staff, and most work experience as a special education administrator.

The four types of school districts studied were central, union free or common, city and BOCES. Central school districts are the most common school organization. They were formed by the aggregation or consolidation of smaller school districts. Union Free or common school districts are districts that have not merged to become centralized. Due to financial incentives, many union free or single building school districts were combined to form a centralized school district over the years. Central school districts are governed by an elected board of five, seven, or nine members for three- to five-year terms. The central school district respondents have the fewest number of years working as a special education administrator and lowest salary. The common school district administrators and BOCES respondents earn the highest mean salary. City school districts have a separate governmental unit with their own board of education and independent taxing and debt-incurring power. City school district respondents have the largest enrollment, and the largest number of respondents who did not plan to change careers within the next two years.

One hundred thirty-three of the respondents (41.3%) are employed in school districts with a budget between \$10 to \$25 million, with per pupil expenditures between \$7,000 and \$12,500. A smaller number (36%) of respondents work in school districts with 101 to 250 district staff, and 28% have 100 or fewer staff in their district. The largest number of respondents (169 respondents; 52.5%) report their salary as between \$60,000 to \$89,000.

The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire was sent to respondents to determine their degree of job satisfaction. Respondents indicated overall job satisfaction at 3.47 as measured by the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire's five-point scale. New York State special education administrators indicated higher levels of job satisfaction comprised of intrinsic components of job satisfaction (social service, variety, ability utilization, and activity) than to extrinsic components of job satisfaction (district policies, recognition, advancement, and compensation).

Overall job satisfaction was highest for special education respondents in three different categories: (1) were male and 27-34 years old; (2) earned the highest salaries; and (3) were employed in the largest school districts. Administrators employed by BOCES and those who held prior positions as special education administrators also recorded the highest levels of overall job satisfaction.

Analysis of Subgroups

Subgroup analysis was conducted to determine relationships among district type when sorted by gender, age and district enrollment. Subgroups are compared to determine the level of intrinsic, extrinsic and overall satisfaction.

Table 1

<u>District Type & Gender</u>							
District Type	N	Males			Females		
		Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Overall	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Overall
City	24	2.95	2.40	3.19	3.74	3.32	3.61
Central	215	3.67	3.30	3.57	3.60	3.06	3.42
Other	62	3.39	3.27	3.37	3.45	3.01	3.45
BOCES	21	3.90	3.14	3.71	4.00	3.15	3.72

This analysis indicates that male and female respondents from BOCES (Educational Service Agency) have a higher overall satisfaction level 3.71 and 3.72 respectively, when compared to city, central and other district types. Females have the highest overall satisfaction, both intrinsic and extrinsic as measured by the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire. Central school district administrators are an exception.

Table 2

<u>District Type & Age</u>												
Total N=322	N=26			N=83			N=168			N=45		
District Type-Age	25-34			35-44			45-54			55+		
	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Overall	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Overall	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Overall	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Overall
City	3.80	3.58	3.80	3.43	2.90	3.20	3.70	3.01	3.51	2.86	2.50	2.76
Central	3.82	3.23	3.63	3.60	3.09	3.42	3.60	3.13	3.50	3.68	3.30	3.56
Other	3.78	2.94	3.53	3.52	2.92	3.35	3.68	3.00	3.47	3.66	3.91	3.75
BOCES	4.33	3.67	4.15	4.01	2.94	3.71	3.88	3.04	3.61	3.92	3.10	3.66

Special Education Administrators from BOCES have a higher overall satisfaction (4.15, 3.71, 3.61) within the age range of 25 to 54. The respondents from other school districts have the lower overall satisfaction (3.53, 3.35, 3.47) between 25 and 54 years old.

Sub-groups were analyzed using statistical correlations. Below district type was analyzed to determine potential relationships with the other variables.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis by Sub-groups— <u>School District Information</u>				
District Type	BOCES	CITY	CENTRAL	OTHER
<u>School District Data</u>	<u>Correlation Coefficient (Pearson/Spearman)</u>			
Enrollment and budget	+0.93	+0.95	+0.84	+0.35
Enrollment and # of staff	+0.71	+0.99	+0.76	+0.44
Enrollment and gender	+0.52	+0.21	+0.08	- 0.06
Enrollment and highest educational level	+0.62	+0.05	+0.18	- 0.10
Enrollment and # of staff responsibility	+0.66	+0.87	+0.55	+0.26
Enrollment and salary	+0.51	+0.60	+0.57	+0.08
Budget and \$ per pupil	+0.58	+0.31	+0.06	- 0.06
Budget and # of staff	+0.60	+0.93	+0.77	+0.91
Budget and highest educational level	+0.50	+0.16	+0.17	+0.16
Budget and salary	+ 0.58	+0.63	+0.57	+0.49
# of staff and # of staff responsibility	+0.41	+0.85	+0.44	+0.57
# of staff and salary	- 0.50	+0.61	+0.51	+0.54

continued on next page

District Type	BOCES	CITY	CENTRAL	OTHER
\$ per pupil and job responsibility	+0.57	- 0.01	-0.01	+0.00
\$ per pupil and prior Spec. Ed. experience	+0.51	+0.10	+0.18	+0.02
\$ per pupil and job title	- 0.01	+0.67	+0.02	+0.04
<u>Personal Data</u>				
Age and years in current position	+0.60	+0.16	+0.39	+0.27
Age and salary range	+0.61	+0.40	+0.27	+0.28
Age and years as Special Ed. administrator	+0.53	+0.60	+0.46	+0.46
Years in current position and # years as Spec. Ed. admin.	+0.72	- 0.08	+0.53	+0.60
Years in current position and change in position	+0.63	+0.11	- 0.02	-0.08
Years in current position and salary	+0.64	- 0.11	+0.49	- 0.04
Years as Special Ed. administrator and prior Spec. Ed.	+0.17	+0.10	+0.01	+ 0.51
Years as Special Ed. administrator and salary	+0.70	+0.44	+0.49	+0.52

BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services)

The correlations for respondents from BOCES indicate a strong relationship for enrollment and budget (+.93), highest educational level (+.62), number of staff (+.71), and number of staff for whom they are responsible (+.66). The budget and the number of staff members the administrators are responsible for is due to the large BOCES enrollment. The BOCES administrators may be more satisfied than school districts because they have more staff to assist with duties due to the funds available to provide more staff. A negative correlation is noted for number of staff and salary (-.50). This may indicate that BOCES administrators with a larger number of staff have a proportionately lower salary based upon responsibility levels in the position. The correlation between cost per pupil and job responsibility (+.57) or number of prior special education positions (+.51) indicates a moderate positive correlation. The relationship between age and years in the current position (+.60) and salary (+.61) indicates that the respondents were older and therefore have spent more years in the current position and have a higher salary range than the other respondents.

Table 4

	Total Pop.	Central	Other	City	BOCES
Overall	3.47	3.47	3.43	3.39	3.72
Intrinsic	3.63	3.62	3.57	3.56	3.98
Extrinsic	3.12	3.14	3.09	3.03	3.15

The overall, extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction scores for respondents from BOCES are highest among all the district types (see Table 1). Respondents from BOCES rate working with co-workers and security higher than the other district types based upon their responses to the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. The interview findings indicate that the BOCES respondents value their role in the improvement of curriculum, program initiation and related staff training. BOCES respondents had an average age of 50 years old. Their age was the highest among all other district types. BOCES respondents had more years of experience as special education administrators. They also have the most total experience in their current position and supervise more staff than their counterparts in other educational entities.

Conclusions

The conclusions that follow are drawn from findings based on the specific research questions of study and themes which emerged from the data.

Effects Of Salary

Respondents from this study of special education administrators in New York State indicated satisfaction with their current position, but recorded dissatisfaction with their salary. The results of this study utilizing the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire indicate that satisfaction with salary ranks the lowest among the intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction factors. According to the participant responses, intrinsic, extrinsic and overall job satisfaction scores are higher for upper salary categories. Respondent comments from the survey indicated a need for more competitive salaries. Many respondents described the situation where a greater salary can be earned serving as a ten-month teacher, than working twelve months as a school administrator.

Effects Of Age And Work Experience

More than half of the respondents are within the age range of 45 to 55 years old, with 20% planning to retire in the next two years. The respondents that are 55+ years old are the most satisfied. This may be attributed to higher compensation levels, increased job security, and as reinforced with personal interviews, a greater degree of comfort with the challenges of the position. This research indicated that over half of the respondents would be retiring in the next five years. Those currently in the administrative position with fewer years of work experience need to experience increased job satisfaction as they gain more work experience or they will possibly seek other opportunities.

Work experience can be a factor with job satisfaction in an administrative position. According to Gersten, Keating, Yovnoff, and Harniss (1995), a factor that leads to job dissatisfaction was that special education administrators were learning on the job either formally or informally, and through collegial networks. This present study highlights that 41% of the respondents surveyed have been a special education administrator for one to four years; 63% have been in the present position for one to four years; and 48% have had no previous experience as a special education administrator. Therefore, the special education administrators may need more work experience to gain knowledge of the role expectations and job satisfaction. The respondents are most satisfied when they have been in the present position for 10-14 years and if they have 20+ years experience as a special education administrator. A speculation may be that experienced administrators are more satisfied because they have acquired a comfort level with their position, have feelings of job security and a higher salary. Since over 50% of the respondents have been in the position for one to four years, it appears that the satisfaction level of these administrators may increase as they gain more experience within the position.

Effects of Organizational Characteristics

The size of an organization has an impact on the satisfaction levels of the respondents. The relationship among special education administrators from small school districts (500 or less enrollment) and large districts (greater than 5001 enrollment) reflects greater satisfaction than respondents from average size school districts found in central and union free districts. This finding could possibly be explained in that the school district administrators from small school districts may not have as many responsibilities and a smaller number of students whereas the larger districts may have a special education administrator who delegates the workload to other administrators or colleagues because of the large workload and number of students. The respondents who were interviewed and the comments that were received on the returned surveys indicated that a heavy workload and many responsibilities were factors that

lead to lower satisfaction. This combination of heavy workload with fewer support staff was most common in the central school districts.

The administrators from BOCES have the highest overall satisfaction among the respondents. According to the MSQ results, those at BOCES rate achievement, working conditions and security higher than other school districts. They have also spent more years in the current position and have a higher salary than other respondents. The BOCES' staff may not experience the public scrutiny that those in school districts experience. Responsibility and supervision are not high among the MSQ components for BOCES administrators as compared to the other school districts, a finding which may suggest that they have more defined roles and less support staff. As special education administrators seek a career advancement, BOCES is perceived as a higher level of responsibility because the position entails a supervisory role serving multiple school districts and clients with less responsibility for Committee on Special Education duties and paperwork to assure compliance with federal and state rules and regulations. Many of the findings from the study are important and can be used for policy implications and recommendations to school districts.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Analysis of the study resulted in the following implications and recommendations:

- New York State Special Education Administrators from Educational Service Agencies with higher salaries and more experience indicate a higher overall and intrinsic job satisfaction. They value working with co-workers, working conditions, achievement and security. School districts and educational service agencies may need to provide support and guidance to less experienced special education directors to obtain career longevity for these administrators.
- Higher salaries and more experience possessed by the administrators may be the reason why veteran school administrators view the position at the Educational Service Agency as career advancement. This perceived career ladder could be a strong marketing draw for perspective administrators into an Educational Service Agency.
- The most frequent age (168 respondents out of 322 respondents or 52%) of Special Education Administrators responding to this study was 47 years of age. As many as 12% of these current administrators indicated they will retire in the next two years. Information from interviews confirms that many of the respondents will be retiring within the next several years. Similarly, an aging population of employees affects all levels of school administration. School districts and educational service agencies should start planning for the over 66% of the respondents who are 45 years or older and initiate succession planning for those who may be retiring in the next few years. The study also revealed that special education administrative turnover has occurred. Specifically, 131 respondents out of 322 respondents or 41% have been in the position between one to four years, and 156 respondents out of 322 respondents or 48% have had no previous special education administration experience. Mentoring by veteran administrators and opportunities for networking should be emphasized in support of the new administrators and for the purpose of recruiting aspiring administrators to the special education administrator's position.
- Educational service agencies may have a greater role in their unique position to facilitate relationships with local school districts by providing a market for in-service development and reconfiguring of staff training programs to meet the evolving needs of this new inexperienced population.

This study provided new insights into the position as a special education administrator and for all administrators. These findings can be useful to those entering the position as a special education administrator and for those who seek to retain quality school administrators in the position.

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Barbara M. Godshall, Ed.D., is Director of Special Programs for Medina Central School District in Medina, New York. She can be reached by phone at 585-798-4032 and by e-mail at bgodshall@medinacsd.org.



The ESA: The Link Between Top-Down and Bottom-Up Reform

by
Anita M. Varrati

Introduction

Before the passage of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), Pennsylvania's educational service agencies (called intermediate units, or IUs) had been providing technical assistance to schools for over 40 years. Their proximity to local schools allows them to respond to state and local needs and provide the direction, resources, and opportunities to improve their capacity to achieve academic success for all students. IU efforts were designed to facilitate improved efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of a school's instructional programs. Such services were traditionally offered to facilitate local school access to federal and state programs and services such as professional development, technology support, and assistance for disabled students (Stephens, 2000). NCLB initiated an unprecedented level of federal involvement in educational reform by making states, districts, and schools accountable for all students meeting high academic standards and thereby further increased the value of the service unit to the success of the local district.

When NCLB came on the scene, most states were implementing standards-based reform. Many state reform efforts consisted of the development of a curriculum framework to promote student knowledge and skills in core academic areas. State assessments were further designed to determine student attainment of those standards.

To assist schools to achieve these goals, state legislatures and departments of education provided incentives and assistance to facilitate school-based implementation of standards-based reform. Standards-based reform reflected what Fullan (1993) meant about the relationship between top-down and bottom-up initiatives. The traditional role of the state had been one of compliance and monitoring. In a study conducted of reform efforts, Massell (1998) found top-down strategies used by states to promote school-based reform. While the state could provide the framework, assistance, and incentives for change, it fell to the school to develop instructional programs to promote student achievement and the capacity to sustain them. Massell (2000) later acknowledged bottom-up strategies that successful districts used to build local capacity to meet state reform initiatives. By identifying common features of state and local capacity-building efforts, mid-level educational service agencies (ESAs) could establish priorities for programs and services to serve both state and local needs. Table 1 illustrates the relationship between state and local capacity-building efforts and ESA priority linking activities.

Table 1
ESA Link Between Top-down/Bottom-up Strategies for School Reform.

State Capacity-Building Strategies (Top-Down)	ESA Linking Activities	LEA Capacity-Building Strategies (Bottom-Up)
Develop state curriculum framework and assessments.	Curriculum: Produce a variety of accompanying resource materials to assist building administrators and teachers to adopt effective instructional practices aligned to state curriculum.	Align curriculum and instruction to state framework.
Build external infrastructures to provide professional development and technical assistance.	Professional Development: Develop state and regional networks for a uniform approach to the delivery of professional development based on research.	Build teacher knowledge and skills.
Organize and allocate resources needed to meet reform efforts.	Continuous Improvement: Form consortia to focus federal, state, and local resources and technical support to develop high-achieving schools.	Provide services, resources, and interventions to improve low-performing students and/or schools and sustain high-achieving students and/or schools.
Link top-down state reform goals with bottom-up local decision making.	District/School Planning: Provide assistance in the development of district and school-based plans that will achieve results.	Interpret and use data to inform curriculum and instruction and to meet state accountability requirements.

(Based on Massell, 1998, 2000)

The IU Plan for Reform

In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania the Intermediate Units (IUs) partnered with the department of education to form a support network for school reform. This important IU role began in 1999 when Pennsylvania passed *Chapter 4 Academic Standards and Assessments*, which held public and charter schools accountable for providing a quality education to all students. The four areas of curriculum, professional development, continuous improvement, and district/school planning from Table 1 constitute PAIU’s prioritized assistance with state and school reform efforts.

Curriculum

State education agencies (SEAs) have become responsible for fleshing out and implementing policies passed by legislatures and for shaping the reform agenda (Lusi, 1994). Pennsylvania developed the curriculum frameworks upon which districts built their local curriculum in the core academic areas. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) partnered with the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU) to facilitate reform by developing materials aligned to state standards and assessments. IU curriculum staffs across PA networked to develop materials to be disseminated to all 501 school districts. These materials were designed to assist districts with alignment, instruction, and assessment of the state-adopted curriculum in all content areas. Pennsylvania first developed standards in the core content areas of reading and mathematics. The first curriculum support materials developed were *Classroom Connections Kits*. Kits included resource strands for administrators, parents, and classroom teachers designed to provide instructional strategies for the implementation of the reading and mathematics standards.

Other jointly developed resources included manuals for the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to state standards. Each manual contained up-to-date research, best practice, and strategies to assist districts' ability to implement standards-based reform.

Professional Development

The PAIU-developed materials often had an accompanying professional development strand designed to provide teachers with the necessary elements to support effective instruction. The full impact of the resources on the school and classroom would be dependent on the quality and effectiveness of the professional development component. A "train the trainer" model was conducted at the state level for all 29 IUs. Each IU then disseminated the training to its local districts. Trainings done at the regional and local levels could follow several recommended formats including the model demonstrated at the state level. Some followed effective practice by providing:

- Multiple meetings over a period of time to allow for the deepening of teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical strategies linked to the content, and which foster professional habits of reflection, and
- Follow-up support for the school and teachers as they use the content/materials throughout the school year (O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1995).

Continuous Improvement

PDE, like most SEAs, has used incentives such as money and services as a means to bring about change. Pennsylvania used federal and state dollars to establish grants to schools that proposed innovative programs for school restructuring. An early source of funding for standards-based reform was Goals 2000. In March 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* into law. This legislation was created to promote and endorse national and state academic standards and assessments. Goals 2000 also funded a grant program for reform plans from participating states. Funding ended in 2000, which was unsuccessfully designated as the year that all students would be performing at a high level of academic achievement. By the time NCLB was enacted in 2002, federal dollars appropriated through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act were re-designated to provide districts with more flexible access to needed monetary resources. Increased flexibility also meant stricter accountability for increased academic achievement. Through consortium projects and as a direct service to individual districts, IUs have written grant projects to help schools focus federal, state, and local resources on student achievement of academic standards. IU-written grants have promoted reform activities to align with state academic standards. Grant activities focused on the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as well as strategies to assist low-performing schools and students.

District/School Planning

While the IU is in a better position than the SEA to provide direct assistance to schools, it is the school that will ultimately be held accountable for student performance. School-based change starts in the behavior and culture of teaching and teaching relationships, which, in turn, spread and lead to changes in the school structure (Fullan, 1994). A tactic that many states have used to promote local capacity is the requirement of a strategic plan. Pennsylvania is no exception. IUs have been providing assistance with the strategic planning process for several years in the form of training, sample materials, and other technical support. When strategic planning was first mandated in the Commonwealth, IU personnel were trained in the facilitation process. For many years, IU personnel facilitated the entire planning process for school districts. As districts have become more skilled in the process, facilitation has been internally assumed. While strategic planning can be a useful method for schools to organize for educational success

and continuous improvement, districts have to take the process seriously in order for true organizational change to take place.

In 2001, IUs joined together to provide more direction to districts in the planning process. More effective analysis and interpretation of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) results were achieved through data analysis training. It has been increasingly recognized that data and results can be a powerful force for generating an intrinsic desire to improve (Schmoker, 1999). By leading districts through the process of test data interpretation, IUs helped individual schools develop the tools for focused strategic planning pertaining to improved and targeted curriculum and instruction efforts.

ESA Contributions to School Reform

Pennsylvania IUs undertook a prominent role in assisting districts at the regional level to build capacity for reform. Whether precipitated by federal initiatives, state mandates, or local needs, IUs have been working with districts to provide resources and technical assistance to schools for the implementation of standards-based reform. Three important reasons why Pennsylvania IUs were able to provide this type of educational leadership can be identified:

- They were positioned to enhance educational equality, quality and efficiency,
- They had the capacity to disseminate current and pertinent knowledge based on research, development, and evaluation procedures, and
- They contained the planning, communication, and coordination mechanisms to inspire excellence (Stephens, 1977).

Within this context of leadership, IU reform activities can be summarized by discussing three functions they assumed to provide services to schools: initiation, development, and support. These functions make more sense when viewed along with phases of local school improvement identified by Lambert (2005) as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Functions and Phases Pertaining to Local School Improvement

ESA Functions for School Reform	Evolving Phases of Local School Improvement
Initiation: Introduce state reform initiatives to districts and schools through resources, materials, and processes that facilitate implementation.	Instructive: Period of organization as the school initiates new collaborative processes that relate to norms, teams, vision, use of data, shared expectations, and ways of working together.
Development: Accompany resources with targeted professional development based on current research and aimed at building site-based expertise.	Transitional: School leadership releases some authority and control while providing continued support and coaching as teachers take on more responsibilities.
Support: Respond to and support district and school leadership to sustain continuous improvement.	High Leadership Capacity: The school encourages teachers to take responsibility and initiate actions related to teaching and learning.

(Based on Lambert, 2005)

Because of the focused nature of standards-based reform, the IUs provided services in a more prescriptive manner. By collaborating with PDE on the goals of PA curriculum mandates, IUs initiated prescribed reform activities across the Commonwealth. The IUs provided a forum for valuable networking among educators who were experiencing identical issues. IUs in Pennsylvania had already had a rich networking tradition. IU curriculum coordinators from across the state had been meeting on a quarterly basis for several years. They had already established collaboratives for the development of materials and professional development of prior state initiatives. They could depend on this collaboration as well as model it internally within constituent districts. Such initiation activities helped reduce isolation for both regional and school-based facilitators and implementers of reform efforts. The usefulness of building such an infrastructure was also important as one considers additional reform implications decreed by NCLB legislation in 2002.

As the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania progressed into the adoption of Chapter 4, IUs also assumed a development role. In partnership with PDE, IUs across the state formed a network for educational reform by developing and providing more targeted technical assistance. This development involved IUs in the creation of resources for standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Along with these resources, IUs disseminated professional development programs to help schools use these resources to improve student achievement. This phase challenged the IUs to assist districts to incorporate these resources in many cases before staff was conceptually ready to utilize them. Various professional development opportunities occurred regionally and on-site to introduce and reinforce new concepts.

Since the inception of Chapter 4 and NCLB, districts have progressed at varying rates. The 2005 report from the Pew Charitable Trust, *No Small Change: Targeting Money toward Student Performance*, indicated that states are making slow gains in their reform efforts. PA averaged a grade of C across four categories used to measure how well states are meeting the requirements of NCLB. This grade is on par with the majority of states.

Conclusion

PAIUs have proved their efficacy through initiation and development activities that elevated district knowledge and implementation. However, the real variable in this process is whether standards-based reform has actually changed what matters most: classroom instruction. According to Lambert (2005), successful school implementation is a product of a school that exhibits a dynamic leadership culture built around a vision-driven, student-focused conceptual framework for school improvement. At this time, there is a shortage of research in the area of ESA-support activities that help schools improve and sustain effective, high-quality instructional programs. Acquired information would direct ESAs in critical areas such as the recruitment and retention of personnel with specific knowledge and skills. It would further guide ESAs to prioritize services and deploy personnel in areas of proven need. Such research would ultimately serve to enhance the ESA's overall efficacy as a partner to both the SEA and the local school district.

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Anita M. Varrati, Ed.D., is Assistant Professor of Educational Administration at Kent State University, Kent, OH. She may be reached by phone at 330-672-0630, by fax at 330-672-3246, and by e-mail at avarrati@kent.edu.

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