Volume 12, Fall 2006

Perspectives

A Journal of Research and Opinion About Educational Service Agencies

Data-Driven ESAs

Published by AESA: the Association of Educational Service Agencies

Table of Contents

Preface i

Introduction iii

Data-Driven ESAs

Using Data to Help Schools Meet Adequate Yearly Progress:
A Role for Educational Service Centers 1
By Michael L. Fuller and Margaret E. Ronning

Educational Service Agencies:
A Significant Partner in District-wide Improvement 9
By Gene Sharratt, Kathy Budge, and Brian Talbott

Beyond Compliance:
Building Evaluation Capacity in the ESA 17
By Hobart L. Harmon

Leading Change:
Implementing the Professional Learning Communities Model
Across Diverse Departments of a Regional Service Agency 29
By Joanne E. Hopper

Leading ESAs: Are Special Talents Necessary?

Exploring the Uniqueness of the Core Leadership Roles of CEOs of an
Educational Service Agency 39
By E. Robert Stephens, William G. Keane, and Brian L. Talbott

ESAs: New Times, New Programs

SUPPORT: A Program for Including Physically Aggressive Students 57
By Terry L. Smith

Helping Teachers Teach Through County-wide Training 65
By Sarah Zablotsky

Preface

by
Brian L. Talbott
Executive Director, AESA

Before writing this preface, I reviewed our previous 11 editions of *Perspectives: A Journal of Research and Opinion about Educational Service Agencies*. I was struck by the quality of the articles and the commendable expansion of research demonstrated each year.

It was interesting to note that the research articles have taken on more of a balance between ESA research and research from a system-wide state and national perspective. This shift is reflective of the positive growth of ESAs over the past two decades - expanding from 280 to 551 ESAs. Today we are witnessing the impact of not only strong ESAs at the local level, but the emergence of strong statewide networks of ESAs. AESA is increasingly able to represent ESAs as a system at the national level.

This year's edition of *Perspectives* includes five essentially research-based articles written by the following:

Michael Fuller and Margaret Ronning

Hobart Harmon

Joanne Hopper

Gene Starratt, Kathy Budge and Brian Talbott

Bob Stephens, Bill Keane, and Brian Talbott

Nothing can exceed the value of sound research data in demonstrating to policy makers and the public the importance of educational service agencies in providing cost-effective, cost-efficient services to local districts.

A special thank you to our editor, Bill Keane, and our Editorial Board for another outstanding issue of *Perspectives.* As your Executive Director, I want to thank those of you who contributed to this and past issues of *Perspectives.* With a circulation of over 7,000 copies, *Perspectives* readers include not only member ESAs, but every state Department of Education, numerous universities, other educational associations and our business members and partners. This journal provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate through research why ESAs continue to be recognized as a critical part of the American education system.

Introduction

This Issue

There have been so many changes in public education in the last decade that it is hard to rank them in importance because most are linked to each other in the delivery of instruction to young people. The following are clearly some, though not all, of the more significant changes:

- Accountability for results
- Standards-based curriculum
- Research-based curriculum materials
- High-stakes testing
- Technology-mediated instruction
- High expectations for the quality of pre-service and in-service teachers
- Professional learning communities
- Data-driven decision-making

Perhaps the final topic on the list, data-based decision-making, can be considered the glue that makes all the others possible. It is through the analysis of data that educators can move to *information*, data that has meaning and guides action.

This issue of *Perspectives* features four articles that approach the subject of turning data into information in various ways. We start with two examples of service agencies working with local districts to turn data into usable information. Michael Fuller and Margaret Ronning describe how one service agency in Ohio works with schools to aggregate data that will help move toward achieving "adequate yearly progress" classification for schools. Gene Sharratt, Kathy Budge and Brian Talbott share a similar story from service agencies in Olympia and Yakima, Washington. In addition their article reinforces the argument laid out two years ago in *Perspectives* by Arsen, Bell, and Plank (2004) that service agencies are best positioned of all external agencies to help local districts because they have created and continue to sustain a relationship of trust with district personnel.

We complete the section on data-driven decision-making with a foundational article by Hobart Harmon designed to help ESAs assess their capacity to assist districts to turn data into information and an article by Joanne Hopper about one Michigan service agency's effort to become a professional learning community (PLC). Early on in her piece Joanne reminds readers that a PLC school focuses on three questions:

- What should students know?
- How will schools know if students have learned the intended curriculum (a data-based decision of the first magnitude)?
- What will schools do if students do not learn?

Like so many local school districts, this ISD is in the process of becoming data-driven.

The second section of this edition features a summary of the ongoing research of Bob Stephens, Bill Keane and Brian Talbott to determine the *special* leadership characteristics necessary to maximize success as a chief executive of a service agency. Their mixed-method study asked 18 former local superintendents, now service agency chief executives, to compare and contrast the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for success at both levels of school leadership. We note parenthetically that we are aware of one doctoral dissertation now in process in Pennsylvania that is intended to gather a state view of this question.

We conclude this issue with two innovative programs currently being delivered by service agencies. Terry Smith describes a program in West Virginia designed to help teachers deal with angry/aggressive students who have been mainstreamed into regular classes. Sarah Zablotsky describes a one-day, all-county in-service program run by request of local superintendents for teachers and administrators in the IU's jurisdiction.

Future Issues

This journal was started 11 years ago as a vehicle for "research and opinion" from and about educational service agencies. Research and opinion continue to be its chief interests. One of the more encouraging effects of a history that extends beyond a decade is the growing comfort we find in authors supporting their submissions with research. We are further encouraged to note that authors are citing other authors who have appeared in this publication.

We look forward to a cornucopia of submissions (by April 1, 2007, if possible) for next year's edition. (Wouldn't you like to see your name in the reference list of a future edition?)

We also seek advice and recommendations about topics that should be featured in this publication. Email us your thoughts.

Bill Keane, editor
248-370-4204
keane@oakland.edu

Using Data to Help Schools Meet Adequate Yearly Progress: A Role for Educational Service Centers

by
Michael L. Fuller and Margaret E. Ronning

Background

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 mandates that every student meet state-defined grade level standards by the end of the 2013-14 school year. Schools must separate student achievement data to ensure that all student subgroups make academic progress. Schools that do not meet the state's definition of "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for two consecutive years in any subgroup or school-wide are labeled "in need of improvement." Repeated failure to meet AYP has school and district consequences, which may include offering school choice, instituting a new curriculum, reconstituting administrative and teaching faculty, withholding Title I funds, or exercising other options. It is clear why most educators feel that they are part of a high-stakes accountability system. It is also clear why such serious consequences for local schools and districts that fail to meet improvement standards put service agencies under pressure to make a significant contribution to improving learning in the schools or risk the possibility of being deemed irrelevant.

State education systems vary throughout the nation. This diversity results in unique state-level approaches to NCLB accountability requirements (No Child Left Behind: A road map to state implementation, 2006). Nationwide, for the 2003-04 school year over 19, 000 schools failed to meet AYP (*Education Week*, 2006). For school year 2004-05, over 27% of Ohio schools and nearly 48% of Ohio districts were "At-Risk" to go into improvement status or were already in some level of improvement status (Ohio Department of Education – Data Retrieval, 2006). Ohio and North Carolina use AYP requirements as a condition for achieving each state's highest school ratings.

No matter the perceived merits of NCLB, its mandates will become increasingly difficult for many schools to achieve (Center on Education Policy, 2005). Instructional and curriculum improvement and embedded high-quality professional development are rightly seen as critical components to meeting AYP. Too often, however, educators do not have necessary and timely data to inform their practices.

In this paper, we briefly describe how to use previously released achievement tests to meet AYP and to examine instructional, curriculum, and staff development needs.

To accomplish this, we make use of bubble sheet technology, extractions from district data warehouses, various data analyses using Microsoft Excel, and customized student reports. Although many schools do not have the in-house means to undertake what is herein described, as an educational service center (ESC), we can offer this service to member schools.

Somerdale

To ensure a realistic example, we use actual data from one of our client schools. We mask the school's identity by assigning it a fictitious name. Somerdale is a rural elementary school, housing kindergarten through the fifth grade. It has a student enrollment of 486. Nearly 52% of the students are economically disadvantaged. Slightly more than 20% of the students have an identified educational disability and over 97% of the students are white. For the 2004-05 school year Somerdale earned a designation of Academic Watch, second from the lowest possible school rating. (See Ohio Department of Education – Accountability 2006 for a description of Ohio's school ratings). In addition, Somerdale failed to meet AYP with the economically disadvantaged subgroup in both mathematics and reading. If it fails to meet AYP for the 2005-06 school year, Somerdale will slide into year one of school improvement. Somerdale has a history of various improvement initiatives, but has yet to find the right mix to post sustained achievement gains.

Gathering Data

Ohio releases parts or all of previous year's achievement tests and as such, these can be used as practice tests. Although previously administered test items are retired, they still can serve as a reliable and valid measure of how students are likely to perform on the current year's achievement tests.

With our help, Somerdale agreed to administer last year's mathematics and reading achievement tests to students in grades three through five. We developed bubble sheets for students to mark their answers to the multiple choice items. Teachers were trained to score students' constructed responses and to record the assigned points on the students' bubble sheets. The bubble sheets were preset with student names and identification numbers, which enabled us to query the district data warehouse for various student characteristics such as gender, race, economic disadvantage and disability status. The bubble sheets and access to the data warehouse allowed us to rapidly score and compile results from the completed achievement tests. We are usually able to complete our scoring, analysis, and report compilations within two weeks of receipt of all bubble sheets.

Using Data

Once test results were compiled, we needed to determine how likely Somerdale is to meet AYP this school year. Our first step was to compare the practice test results to the AYP targets for this year. Due to space restrictions, we will limit our discussion to third grade mathematics.

Table 1 shows that there are 36 economically disadvantaged students who completed the third grade mathematics practice test. Ten of the students scored Proficient or higher; 26 students were below Proficient.

In Table 2 we see that 45.5% of economically disadvantaged third graders were proficient or higher on the 2004-05 mathematics achievement test. Ohio has set an AYP target of 60.6% for the 2005-06 school year. However, our practice results suggest that, without further interventions, only 28% of our third graders are likely to score Proficient or higher. The 60.6% target may be too ambitious for Somerdale. Somerdale has the option of choosing the Safe Harbor target, which is a 10% reduction in the percent below proficient in 2004-05. In this case, the Safe Harbor target is 51%. Table 2 further shows that Somerdale will need 18 of its third grade economically disadvantaged students to score Proficient or higher to meet the Safe Harbor target. Practice tests results suggest it has 10 students likely to do that. To find the additional eight students, Somerdale will need to study the performance of students scoring below Proficient who, with suitable interventions, may be able to score within the Proficient range on the upcoming mathematics test.

Table 1. Performance of Economically Disadvantaged Third Graders on Practice Mathematics Achievement Test

	Count	Percentage
Limited	6	16.7%
Basic	20	55.6%
Proficient	6	16.7%
Accelerated	3	8.3%
Advanced	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

Table 2. Count of Students Needed to Meet 2005-06 AYP Targets

	04-05 Report Card	05-06 AYP Goals	Safe Harbor	Count Taking Practice Tests	Count Proficient or Above Needed For AYP	Count Proficient or Above on Practice Tests	Additional Count Needed
Third Grade Math	45.5%	60.6%	51.0%	36	18	10	8
Third Grade Reading	47.7%	71.2%	52.9%	36	19	15	4
Fourth Grade Reading	43.6%	68.3%	49.2%	43	21	20	1
Fifth Grade Reading	59.4%	68.3%	63.5%	43	27	29	0

Test results are presented in an Excel spreadsheet. In Excel, data can be quickly sorted by various attributes. In the present example, Somerdale can sort those 20 students who scored within the Basic range from the highest to lowest raw score. In so doing, we find eight students who scored within four raw score points of the Proficient range. Each of these eight students can then be examined individually by teachers to clarify the reasons for the present performance and to determine the best course of action to help students

improve. This usually entails such student considerations as behavior, motivation, test taking skills, and content knowledge and skills. To aid in the analysis of each student's performance, we provide a student report (see Appendix) for staff review as well as for sharing and working with each student.

Christopher Wood is the pseudonym of an economically disadvantaged student who missed scoring within the Proficient range by one raw score point. He displayed a relative strength in Data Analysis and was relatively weak in Measurement and Patterns. On the second page of the student report, we see that overall Christopher earned 55% of the constructed response points, but was only able to earn 25% of the constructed response points within Patterns, one of his weak areas. Somerdale is encouraged to examine each item Christopher missed by looking at the actual test item and the correct response. In addition, Somerdale should see whether Christopher's errors are common to the class. In this case, Patterns was relatively weak for the class, suggesting instruction and curriculum gaps.

"ESCs are in a unique position to provide such data services in a cost-responsible fashion."

Many times, by looking at the student and class, we may be able to glean why students answered in the manner they did and, importantly, take data-informed corrective action. The action may be specific to the student (e.g., teaching an impulsive student to underline a reading passage to ensure the whole passage is read prior to answering a question), appropriate to a group of students (e.g., correcting common cognitive errors committed on past test items), appropriate to curriculum and instruction (e.g., ensure necessary content is covered well before the test is administered), and appropriate to staff development (e.g., learning how to incorporate writing across the curriculum).

It seems reasonable that teachers can find ways to help Christopher score in the Proficient range.

We have briefly described a means by which schools can use data to meet AYP that highlights interventions for students close to meeting the proficient score. Administrators and teachers must be very clear about AYP goals and minimum numbers of students needed to meet those goals. However, we do not recommend a practice that only focuses on the marginal students. The process used to examine and help Christopher should be repeated for all students scoring below proficient on the practice tests. Some of the students may present more or different challenges, but the goal is the same – to use data to inform practice and produce positive results.

The ESC's Role

For the most part, schools do not have on staff the personnel or expertise to provide the kinds and amount of data support described above. ESCs, by virtue of their service mandate, are in a unique position to provide such data services in a cost responsible fashion. We offer to schools what they can not otherwise do for themselves as cheaply or as well. We have a fee-for-service agreement with each of our members that bundles a variety data services. Each of our members pays four percent of what it costs us to run our data department. The remaining moneys come from our ESC general fund, grants, and nonmember customer fees.

The use of previous year's achievement tests is only one part of a comprehensive array of data practices to improve student achievement. By offering a range of data services that is consistent with best practices, we remain a valued service to our member schools. And in no small way, we help to safeguard our future as an ESC.

References

Center on Education Policy. (2005). *From the capital to the classroom: Year 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved March 29, 2006 from http://www.cep-dc.org/nclb.

Education Week. (2006, January). *Quality counts at 10: A decade of standards based education.* Retrieved March 29, 2006, from http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2005/tables/17standacct-t1h.html.

No Child Left Behind: A road map to state implementation. Retrieved March 29, 2006, from http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead.account/roadmap/index.html.

Ohio Department of Education - Accountability. Retrieved March 29, 2006, from http://www.ode.state.oh.us/ http://www.ode.state.oh.us/Accountability/ilrc.asp.

Ohio Department of Education – Data Retrieval. Retrieved March 29, 2006, from http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/default.asp.

Michael Fuller, Ph.D., is Director of Data Services and Margaret Ronning, Ph.D., is a research psychologist at the Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center in Zanesville, Ohio, 43701. Dr. Fuller can be reached by phone at 740-452-4518, by fax at 740-455-6727, and by email at mfuller@mvesc.k12.oh.us.

Dr. Ronning can be reached by phone at 740-452-4518, by fax at 740-455-6727, and by email at mronning@mvesc.k12.oh.us.

Appendix

3rd Grade Ohio Achievement Test Practice
Individual Student Report
Mathematics – Released Test (March, 2005)

Student Name: WOOD, CHRISTOPHER **Administration:** **January, 2006**

School District: Big Valley Local SD	**Grade:** 3
Building: Somerdale ES	**Teacher:**
Class:	**Period:**

Summary

Content Standard

Content Standard	Possible Points	Points Earned	% of Total Points Earned
Geometry	**9**	5	55.6%
Measurement	**9**	4	44.4%
Data Analysis	**9**	9	100.0%
Number	**15**	8	53.3%
Patterns	**10**	4	40.0%

Student Performance

Total Points Possible	Points Earned	% of Total Points Earned	Class Percentile Rank	Performance Level
52	30	57.7%	52.9%	Basic

Overall Performance

Average Points Earned	Performance Level				
	Limited	Basic	Proficient	Accelerated	Advanced
30.8	13.0%	46.4%	23.2%	13.0%	4.3%

(Overall performance of total group tested, e.g., district, building, class)

Content Standard	Question No.	Type	Correct Answer	Student Response	Earned Points	% of Total Points
Geometry and Spatial Sense	5	SA			1	
	9	MC	A	A	1	
	13	MC	C	A	0	
	19	MC	C	C	1	
	24	MC	A	A	1	
	28	MC	C	B	0	
	40	MC	B	B	1	
	43	MC	B	A	0	
Geometry Total	**Possible Points = 9**				5	55.6%
Measurement	2	MC	B	C	0	
	6	MC	C	B	0	
	16	MC	B	B	1	
	22	MC	A	B	0	
	27	MC	B	A	0	
	31	MC	A	B	0	
	44	MC	C	C	1	
	46	SA			2	
Measurement Total	**Possible Points = 9**				4	44.4%
Data Analysis and Probability	3	MC	A	A	1	
	12	MC	B	A	1	
	20	SA			0	
	26	MC	B	A	0	
	30	ER			4	
Data Analysis Total	**Possible Points = 9**				9	100.0%
Number, Number Sense and Operations	1	MC	A	A	1	
	7	MC	C	A	0	
	11	MC	B	B	1	
	15	ER			1	
	17	MC	A	B	0	
	21	MC	A	A	1	
	25	SA			2	
	29	MC	B	C	0	
	39	MC	C	C	1	
	41	MC	A	A	1	
	45	MC	C	B	0	
Number Total	**Possible Points = 15**				8	53.3%
Patterns, Functions and Algebra	4	MC	B	B	1	
	8	MC	B	B	1	
	10	SA			0	
	14	MC	B	A	0	
	18	MC	A	B	0	
	23	MC	B	B	1	
	38	MC	A	C	0	
	42	SA			1	
Patterns Total	**Possible Points = 10**				4	40.0%

Educational Service Agencies: A Significant Partner in District-wide Improvement

by
Gene Sharratt
Kathy Budge
Brian Talbott

Introduction

It has been more than 20 years since John Goodlad (1984) documented the nature of the place we call school. In the years since Goodlad's study, schools (and districts) have increasingly been held accountable for a great social experiment: providing learning environments in which *all* students learn at rigorous academic levels. The most recent mandate, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), requires district accountability for all students. Improving learning opportunities for all children requires more than individual talents or school-by-school efforts. It demands district-wide approaches that touch every child in every school (Togneri, 2003). School district practices influence building-level decisions, which shape the classroom learning environment, thus impacting student learning (Fouts, 2003).

To provide a better understanding of improved school districts and their characteristics and actions, the Research and Evaluation Office at the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction collected and analyzed more than 80 research reports and articles. An analysis of the studies identified 13 common themes, which were clustered into four broad categories: *Effective Leadership, Quality Teaching and Learning, Support for Systemwide Improvement, and Clear and Collaborative Relationships* (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004).

A central tenet of clear and collaborative relationships was described as interpreting and managing the external environment to invite stakeholder participation and build collaborative partnerships. Fullen, Bertani and Quinn (2004) reported effective district-level change consisted of 10 crucial components. One component, *External Partners,* involved district leaders actively engaging education and business agencies,

foundations, community-based organizations, and universities in their efforts to improve schools. These and other education-related service agencies and partnerships strengthen the district's professional capacity.

Educational Service Agencies Offer Capacity, Scale and Trust

Demands of standards-based reform have increasingly caused districts to acknowledge the limits of their internal capacity and the need for external support organizations to assist in their reform efforts (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004; Kronley & Handley, 2003). Case studies have demonstrated that "intermediary organizations" with geographic proximity to the local school district can form relationships with and among local stakeholders and can enhance available internal resources (Honig, 2004).

Arsen, Bell, and Plank (2003) conducted an extensive analysis to determine which type of intermediate organization might be best suited to assist low-performing schools. Three aspects of organizational efficiency were considered in their analysis: scale, trust, and capacity. Educational Service Agencies (ESAs), they argued, were likely the best policy choice among intermediary institutions. While the capacity to provide technical expertise can vary in ESAs, this is equally true of other intermediate organizations such as universities, private-sector entities, and other governmental agencies. However, unlike these other external agencies, ESAs provide efficiencies of scale and are trusted because they have longstanding, beneficial relationships with local districts and intimate knowledge of local contexts (Arsen, et al., 2003). One could assert that these factors may be greatly enhanced by geographical proximity because ESAs share a "sense of place" with the districts and communities they serve. A sense of place can be described as the way in which humans experience a specific geographical context.

ESD 113's Teacher Connection Project

Students in classes with teachers involved in the Educational Service District 113 Teacher Connection Project (TCP) demonstrated significantly greater improvement gains than the state's average on the WASL reading and math tests (see Figure 1 & 2).

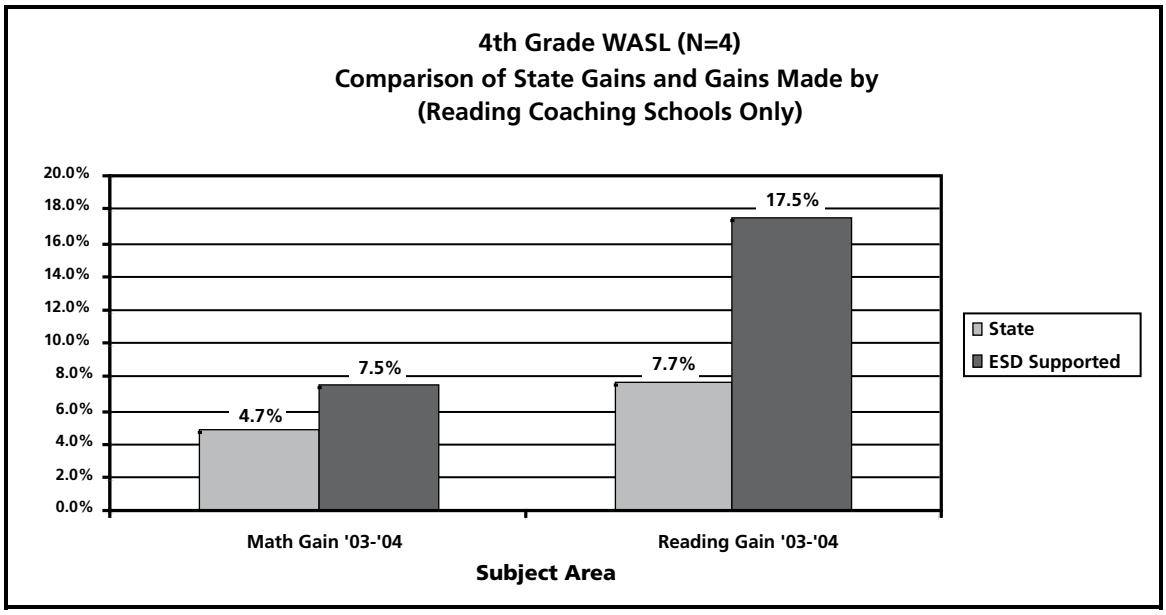

Figure 1. Reading Scores

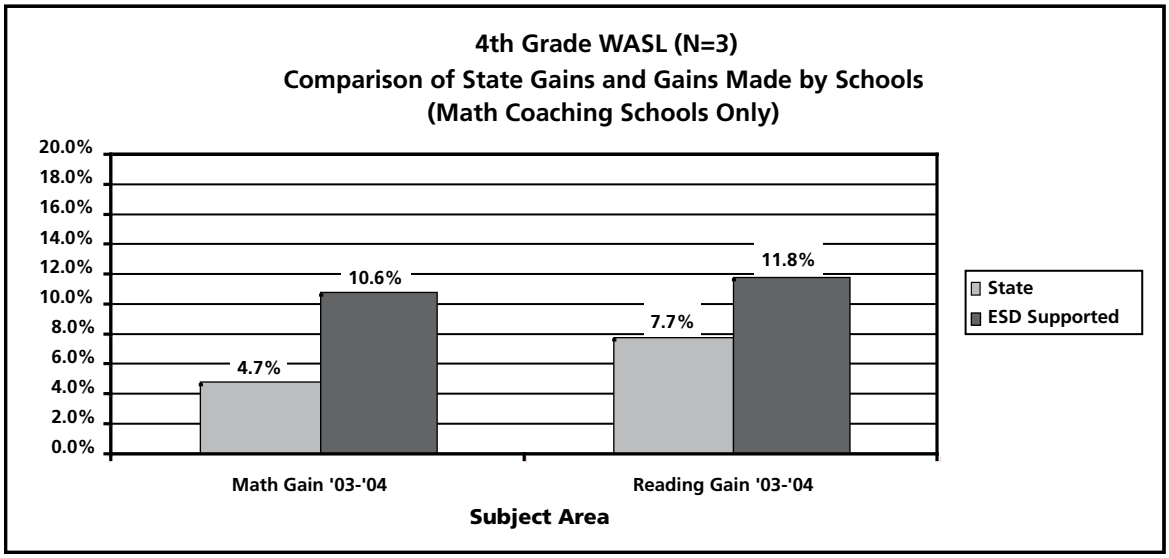

Figure 2. Math Scores

TCP was conceived and implemented five years ago by the Teaching and Learning staff at ESD 113, located in Olympia, Washington. The project aligned with the National Staff Development Council's standards for professional development and drew heavily on the research of Showers, Joyce, & Bennet (1987), who demonstrated that teachers' use of new instructional approaches greatly increased when their learning experiences provide not only theory, but practice, feedback, and coaching in the context of their schools and classrooms.

Teachers participating in TCP received coaching from "master teachers" who were specialists in their content areas in a job-embedded professional development model. Each school in the project received services an average of one day per week. These services included in-class coaching, alignment of curriculum, facilitation of lesson and unit planning, training in specific pedagogy, and assistance with the use of assessment to guide instruction.

As the project progressed, those involved in TCP—both local educators and regional service agency staff—increasingly understood the importance of the following essential conditions for second-order change (Fouts, 2003) in teacher practice to occur: strong leadership, shared values and beliefs, a shared vision of what is possible, readiness skills, resource support, a data-based school improvement plan, and relational trust.

Relational trust is a core resource for school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Moreover, teachers will rarely take the risk of growing in front of another person, or their advice or coaching, unless they first have a relationship of mutual trust. Because ESD 113's coaches were hired from school districts in the five-county region, they had the benefit of being viewed as a "trusted insider" with an "outsider's" expertise. Having worked in schools with similar demographics to those in which they provided coaching services, as well as possessing knowledge of the history, culture, politics, and economics of the area, they understood the challenges and opportunities posed in such schools and communities. One superintendent noted that ESD 113's coaches *"fit well in the district."* Successful coaches understand that approaches to reform and resource availability vary from district to district. They must be able to "customize" their support within the system and adapt their coaching methods to the knowledge and skill of the teachers with whom they work (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). As one high school principal commented, "A successful coach has to be an individual who can come across as not being a know-it-all, but as someone who is obviously very

competent." He went on to say, "We have been very, very fortunate both this year and last to have been associated with coaches who obviously love their jobs…and who listened to us as opposed to simply telling us what to do."

School Improvement in ESD 105

Wahluke School District is located within the service boundaries of Educational Service District #105, near Yakima, Washington. With a student population consisting of just over 85 percent English Language Learners, many of whom are recent arrivers from Mexico, the district experiences both high student and staff turnover. In addition, most of the parents work in the agricultural community, earning wages at or below the federal family poverty level. High levels of poverty, little competence in the English language and rapid turnover of teachers and administrators provide a backdrop for what would traditionally be considered a "failing" profile. However, this is not the case; in fact, Wahluke students are "beating the odds" as measured by continuous student learning on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) exam.

"Because ESD 113's coaches were hired from school districts in the five-county region, they had the benefit of being viewed as a 'trusted insider' with an 'outsider's' expertise."

How could this happen? Did partnerships with "outside" agencies provide needed support? How important was the role of educational service agency staff as outside resources in facilitating this success? The answer to these and related questions is at the heart of Wahluke School District success.

The 1,600 student population resides in four individual schools. Three of the four schools were eligible for "School Assistance" from the state office (OSPI). The fourth school, Mattawa Elementary, a K-2 building, was not eligible because students were not assessed in a WASL grade level test, which begins at grade three. However, building and teacher leadership at Mattawa Elementary School insisted upon entering the three-year school improvement process and, like the other three schools, demonstrated continued strong student learning assessment scores as measured by a variety of norm, criterion and WASL referenced measures.

As a participant in "School Improvement Assistance," each school was provided an outside, experienced facilitator to assist in the development of a school improvement plan and to build capacity within the school team for sustainability of effective student learning strategies and professional development. A strong segment of this professional development was involved the use of data to inform instructional decisions and construction of a professional learning community for staff and students.

Educational Service District (ESD) 105 developed a strong and effective support and resource team aimed at assisting the school improvement facilitator, the school staff and in the support of connecting and building a strong external partnership with parents, community leaders and support resources throughout the region. This required a great deal of trust.

ESD 105 staff enjoyed a history of relationships based on trust with Wahluke staff prior to the recent school improvement initiatives. These long-term relationships extended quickly into new partnerships for professional development services, leadership in grant writing and grants management connected to school improvement planning strategies, and the facilitation of regular school improvement support initiatives among other school improvement school districts within the ESD 105 service region.

In the past staff from ESD 105 had been regular visitors to the Wahluke schools and had established positive professional relationships with teachers, administrators and school board members, making the transition to school improvement assistance a natural progression of their continued trust with each school staff member and district level staff as well. School district leadership viewed ESD 105 staff as trusted friends who understood the context of their school improvement challenges.

Specific examples of ESD 105 school improvement initiatives implemented with the Wahluke School District include Math Helping Corps, educational technology planning, special education technical assistance, migrant and bilingual instructional strategies, and parent and paraprofessional training.

The results of the ESD 105 and OSPI School Improvement efforts over the past four years have been highly effective. Recent independent evaluation, conducted by the Center for Educational Effectiveness, demonstrated "steady and continuous improvement" on student scores (WASL) for those same students who attended fourth grade and were tested again at seventh grade and for those students tested at seventh grade who were in attendance as tenth graders. In other words, comparing the same students over time clearly indicated significant growth in student learning from fourth to seventh grade and from seventh grade to tenth grade. (WASL assessment was mandated at that time for fourth, seventh and tenth grade students.)

In addition, two of the schools, Mattawa Elementary and Saddle Mountain Intermediate School, participate in Washington's Reading First project. Their ability to maintain Reading First status is dependent upon their continued demonstrated gain in student reading. Because of their continued growth in student scores, over the past three years, both schools were awarded continuation grants.

These and related assessment measures demonstrated the important role ESD 105 staff, OSPI facilitator assistance, and teacher and building leadership played in developing and implementing an environment where relationships based on trust, understanding of the curriculum and community culture, and long-standing partnerships played in facilitating continuous student learning.

Establishing Trust – Why Place Might Matter

Although the influence of place, or "a sense of place," may sound like a sentimental notion, researchers from a variety of disciplines have observed that "our behavior, emotions, dispositions, and thoughts are indeed shaped not just by our genes and neurochemistry, history, and relationships, but also by our surroundings" (Gallagher, 1993, p. 12). Because of its centrality to human experience, the study of place has recently gained attention across a variety of disciplines, including architecture, ecology, geography, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, literary theory, psychology, cultural studies, and education (Gruenewald, 2003). Educators around the globe are rediscovering the importance of place in the process of learning and in the greater work of living together in diverse communities.

For some people, a sense of place is experienced as belongingness stemming from a generational connection with family and community. For others, it is manifested in civic involvement for the purpose of a creating a better place to inhabit. Some speak of a spiritual connection with place. Still others experience place as interdependence with the land. For all who experience a sense of place, it becomes a part of their identity.

In her ethnographic study of a rural high school in Appalachia, Maureen Porter (2001) found a sense of place to be inextricably linked to how local stakeholders responded to state mandated reform and how

leaders "localized" state mandates to create a basis for action. She reminds us that regardless of where policies are written, "reform is radically local" (p.265). The power of place in our lives is profound. Nothing we do as humans is unplaced (Casey, 1987). How can this concept not be important to organizations desiring to provide effective support to local school district?

Although it warrants further study, we theorize that a shared sense of place may have enhanced the capacity of regional service agency support in both case studies described. ESAs have the advantage of sharing a regional geography with the school districts they support. Sharing a regional geography is powerful, because it allows for an understanding of local culture, history, politics, and economies and the ways in which these factors influence local stakeholders. This is likely not true for most other external support agencies.

"Educational Service Agencies, by virtue of their proximity, local knowledge, 'sense of place,' trustworthiness and collaborative nature, provide significant opportunities for district-wide reform...."

Conclusion

Effective school districts seek active external partners. These partners support the district's professional capacity and provide valuable expertise. Trust is a central component in the district's selection of external partners. Educational Service Agencies, by virtue of their proximity, local knowledge, "sense of place," trustworthiness and collaborative nature, provide significant opportunities for district-wide reform, professional capacity building, and improved student learning.

References

Arsen, D., Bell, C., & Plank, D. N. (2004). *Who will turn around failing schools? A framework for institutional choice*. *Perspectives*, 10, 1-19.

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002) *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Casey, E. (1997). *The fate of place: A philosophical history*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fullen, M., Bertani, A., & Quinn, J. (2004). *New lessons for district-wide reform*. Educational Leadership, 61(7), 42-46.

Gallagher, W. (1993). *The power of place*. New York: HarperCollins.

Goodlad, J. L. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). Foundations of place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 619-654.

Fouts, J. T. (2003). *A decade of reform: A summary of research findings on classroom, school, and district effectiveness in Washington state*. Lynnwood, WA: Washington School Research Center, Seattle Pacific University.

Honig, M. (2004). *The new middle management: Intermediary organizations in education policy implementation*. Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 26(1), 65-87.

Kronley, R. A., & Handley, C. (2003). *Reforming relationships: School districts, external organizations, and systemic change (Report for School Communities That Work: A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts*). Providence, Rhode Island: Initiative of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform Brown University.

Neufeld, B., & Roper, D. (2003). *Coaching, a strategy for developing instructional capacity: Promises and practicalities*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute/Providence, RI: The Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Porter, M. (2001). *"We are mountain":* Appalachian educators' responses to the challenges of systemic reform. In M. Sutton & B. Levinson (Eds.) *Policy as practice: Toward a comparative sociocultural analysis of education*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishers.

Shannon, S. G., & Bylsma, P. (2004). *Characteristics of improved school districts: Themes from research*. Olympia, WA: Assessment and Research, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Showers, B., Joyce, B., & Bennet, B. (1987). Snythesis of research on staff development: A framework for future study and a state-of-the-art analysis. *Educational Leadership*, 45, 77-87.

Togneri, W. (2003). *Beyond islands of excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools – a leadership brief*. Washington, DC: ASCD, Learning First Alliance

Gene Sharratt, Ph.D., is Clinical Assistant Professor with Washington State University. He is the co-director for the Washington State University superintendent certification program. He was superintendent of North Central Educational Service District in Wenatchee, Washington for 11 years. He can be reached by phone at 509-674-9776 and by email at gsharratt@wsu.edu.

Kathy Budge, Ed.D., is Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership at Boise State University. She was Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning with Educational Service District 113 in Olympia, Washington for five years. Her doctoral dissertation focused on "a sense of place" and the relationship to educational reform and educational leadership. She can be reached by phone at 360-426-3758 and by email at kathleenbudge@boisestate.edu.

Brian Talbott, Ph.D., is executive director of the Association of Educational Service Agencies. Brian was superintendent of Educational Service District 105, in Yakima, Washington, and Educational Service District 101, in Spokane, Washington. He may be contacted by phone at 703-875-0739, by fax at 703-807-1849, and by email at btalbott@aesa.us.

Beyond Compliance: Building Evaluation Capacity in the ESA

by
Hobart L. Harmon

Is your ESA a learning organization, positioned to offer high quality services and products in a knowledge-oriented society and global economy? As the CEO or leadership team member, have you tried to plan and implement some small accountability changes, only to find an alarming amount of resistance or confusion within the organization? Perhaps one of the problems is that the ESA lacks adequate evaluation capacity. Without evaluation capacity, it may be difficult for ESA leadership to foster a learning organization that actively embraces the concept of continuous improvement, rather than a culture of compliance.

Stockdill, Baizerman, and Compton (2002) provide a conceptual definition of evaluation capacity building (ECB):

> ECB is a context-dependent, intentional action system of guided processes and practices for bringing about and sustaining a state of affairs in which quality program evaluation and its appropriate uses are ordinary and ongoing practices within and/or between one or more organizations/programs/sites. (p. 8)

They maintain, "ECB is the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine" (p. 14). In other words, once institutionalized as ordinary practices, the evaluation capacity becomes part of the ESA's culture in the "way we do things around here."

The culture of successful ESAs is constantly changing to accommodate new expectations. For example, ESAs today are seeking ways to respond to the growing expectations of the federal No Child Left Behind law and state accountability requirements. More than ever ESA staff members are using assessment data (e.g., state test results) to plan professional development opportunities. Fortunately, this practice may also position the ESA to examine its own performance and build evaluation capacity necessary for responding to increasing accountability of ESA services. An essential next step for ESA leadership may be helping all staff value and apply basic evaluation principles for improving programs offered by the ESA.

"Evaluation results must reveal more than the number of satisfied participants in a professional development program, or the number of times the ESA offered services...."

Unless staff members have taken a formal program evaluation course in their graduate studies, experiences in managing a grant project may simply have reinforced a compliance mentality. A compliance culture usually seeks to provide whatever data are required in a final report to satisfy the funding agency. This culture fails to foster the potential of evaluation in building a culture of continuous improvement that is so essential for the ESA to be a learning and accountable organization.

Selected ESA staff may have assessment and basic research skills but lack an understanding of the differences between evaluation and research (see Table 1). Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001) explain that while there are clear similarities between research and evaluation, important distinguishing characteristics make evaluation a unique endeavor. Although both use the same data collection and analysis methods, Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001, p. 9) note they differ significantly in three ways:

1. They are often initiated for different reasons.
2. They respond to different kinds of audiences or client questions and needs.
3. They communicate and report findings in different ways and to different groups.

Russ-Eeft and Preskill (2001) acknowledge some scholars will argue the differences are merely technical, with no practical difference. They maintain, however, "The bottom line is the collection of quality information that will inform and guide learning, decisionmaking, and practice" (p. 9).

The bottom line today, compliance with funding agencies, or clients, has taken on a new meaning. Evaluation results must reveal more than the number of satisfied participants in a professional development program, or the number of times the ESA offered services to the school district (or some other client). Both federal and state funding opportunities commonly define outcomes to be achieved by the program funded. School districts, confronted with the standards movement, must select and implement programs that come accompanied by research-based evidence that they will achieve positive results based on measurable outcomes.

Doing "business" today means the ESA must be a learning organization, with the capacity to evaluate and continuously improve services and products. And the more entrepreneurial the ESA, the more critical evaluation capacity is to success of the organization.

Evaluation Basics

Numerous resources are available to help ESA personnel understand how to conduct quality evaluations, such as the work of Stufflebeam (2001), who classified 21 models for conducting program evaluations. While no one best model will fit all evaluation circumstances, standards exist to guide the conduct of program evaluations (Joint Committee, 1994). Posavac and Carey (2003) suggest the overall purpose of program evaluation is for "contributing to the provision of quality services to people in need" (p. 13). They maintain the primary goals of program evaluation can be achieved by using one of four types: (1) evaluation of need, (2) evaluation of process, (3) evaluation of outcome, and (4) evaluation of efficiency. Posavac and Carey (2003) explain the logical sequence to these four general types of evaluations: "Without measuring need, planning cannot be rational; without effective implementation, good outcomes cannot be expected; and without achieving good outcomes, there is no reason to worry about efficiency" (p. 10).

Evaluation of need seeks to determine the level of unmet needs within an organization (e.g., school district). This type of evaluation is essential in planning a program. Most commonly, evaluation of need is performed to determine which program, or aspects of a program, are likely to be most appropriate, or unacceptable, based on needs of the client. For example, ESA staff recommendations for implementing a new program in a school district (or ESA) are most valuable (and rational) when staff can accurately determine the specific need addressed by the program, and objectively evaluate the scientific-based evidence of alternative programs in view of the identified need.

Table 1. Relationship Between Evaluation and Research*

	Evaluation	Research
Purpose	- Provides information for learning and decision-making (intention in use) - Seeks to describe particular phenomena - Is undertaken at the behest of a client—is service oriented	- Develops new knowledge - Seeks conclusions - Seeks new laws, new theories - Is based on topic and question determined by the researcher
Audience	- Focuses on clients (internal and external)	- Focuses on other researchers
Study Focus	- Identifies background of *evaluand* (that which is being evaluated) and purpose of evaluation - Identifies evaluation stakeholders and audiences - Develops key questions that will guide evaluation	- Develops a problem statement - Reviews the literature on the topic - Develops theory-based hypotheses or research questions - Identifies terms and definitions - Identifies variables to be studied
Study design	Considers: - Naturalistic/qualitative - Experimental/quantitative - Organization's time frame requirements	Considers: - Naturalistic/qualitative - Experimental/quantitative - Researcher's timeline and available funding
Data collection methods	Considers: - Tests, surveys/ questionnaires, observation, interviews, archival analysis, unobstrusive measures	Considers: - Tests, surveys/ questionnaires, observation, interviews, archival analysis, unobstrusive measures
Reliability and Validity	- Includes pilot testing, member checks, controlling variables through triangulation, test/retest reliability measures - Is rooted in values and politics - Considers ability to generalize findings not a major goal or concern	- Includes pilot testing, member checks, controlling variables through triangulation, test/retest reliability measures - Attempts to be objective and value free - Seeks to establish generalizable findings
Data analysis	- Uses inferential and descriptive statistics - Uses content analysis/grounded theory	- Uses inferential and descriptive statistics - Uses content analysis/grounded theory
Results of study	- Reports results to evaluation clients - Makes recommendations relevant to evaluation questions - Rarely publishes the results	- Reports results to other researchers and practitioners - Makes suggestions for future research - Often publishes study's findings

* Adapted from Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001, pp. 8-9). Used with permission of Perseus Publishing.

Evaluation of process is essential to document that implementation of a program has met design specifications. Success of the ESA program may be less than expected, but all too often the client may not have implemented the "best practices" called for in the project plan. Key improvement decisions by project leadership are impossible without objective evidence on implementation of planned activities. Understanding what and how implementation evolved should produce valuable lessons learned for program (project) improvement. This evidence can help the ESA determine if the original plan is working, or if some planned activities are simply not possible and must be revised to be successful. It is common at project meetings to ask project implementers (e.g., partners) to report on project status. Without objective evaluation data, however, the meeting may take on a cheerleading tone, with little attention focused on issues that are preventing implementation of key activities. Evaluation of process (i.e., formative evaluation) is required by most funding agencies today.

While ESA staff and other partners (e.g., school district personnel) may eagerly describe all the activities implemented during a certain period of the project (program), it also may be difficult to present evidence that the project achieved its expected outcomes. *Evaluation of outcome* (i.e., summative evaluation) is necessary to document project success or failure. Specific goals and outcomes of the project must be planned and measured to satisfy the "so what" question regarding project implementation. Did the project or program produce the intended result? For example, did the professional development conducted for teachers by the ESA result in better classroom instruction for students? This is an outcome question that is much different than asking how many teachers were trained or how many districts were served. Anecdotal, subjective information is less acceptable today as evidence for answering outcome questions about ESA services.

ESAs take pride in providing cost-effective services to clients. For some ESAs, forming a cooperative purchasing arrangement among several school districts to increase buying power for what might otherwise be a cost prohibitive service or product is a major service. ESAs also may find it desirable to form a partnership or consortium of school districts to compete and win federal, state or private funds to offer a program. *Evaluation of efficiency* may be necessary to prove to constituents that the program is the least costly way to achieve the school/district's goal; that is, ESAs may be asked to show how the cost of implementing the program compares to other programs "on the market" that produce similar outcomes. School patrons want the program that gets the best results for the least cost.

In addition to understanding differences in the four general types of evaluation-need, process, outcome, and efficiency–building evaluation capacity will require ESA staff to also have a working knowledge of basic program evaluation terms, such as those defined by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994) portrayed in Table 2. Routine and appropriate use of these terms by staff in planning, implementing, or evaluating an ESA program provides evidence that the organization is building evaluation capacity. Agreement on terms is necessary to create a common language that facilitates implementation of evaluation practices. The more comfortable and competent staff become in talking about evaluation, the more likely staff will use evaluation practices for improving current programs and planning new initiatives.

One or more ESA staff members need to develop skills in core evaluation competencies (see Appendix). Evidence of evaluation capacity includes staff being able to present objective evaluative results for their programs that answer the "so what" question. Quality of evaluation plans described in ESA proposals submitted to funding sources would likely improve. But most important, an ESA with evaluation capacity will have staff that routinely view and use evaluation practices for improvement of ESA programs and services.

Creating Capacity

Building evaluation capacity in the ESA will require more than asking staff to use findings from good evaluations of program. This strategy is inadequate to provide essential learning experiences for staff to understand the "practice of evaluation." Evaluators have discovered that being involved in the actual evaluation process, rather than only interpreting findings, leads to an increased knowledge level. Patton (1997) calls this phenomenon *process use*, defined as:

> Individual changes in thinking and behavior, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, that occur among those involved in evaluation as result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process. Evidence of process use is represented by the following kind of statement after an evaluation: "The impact on our program came not just from the findings but from going through the thinking process that the evaluation required." (p. 90)

Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001) note that "process use is particularly important if evaluation is to be integrated into daily work practices, if organizational learning is required, and if a team approach to evaluation is encouraged" (p. 31). Using a team approach can be a significant strategy for creating evaluation capacity in the ESA, or other organizations. Preskill and Russ-Eft (2005) also advocate forming small groups as a key strategy for training evaluators. A team approach for training evaluators has proven highly promising in the early stages of my work in a multi-year project funded by the National Science Foundation to build evaluation capacity in the Mississippi Delta.

Increasing evaluation capacity in the ESA through skill development of staff will likely call for strategies that address the reasons evaluation is neglected in organizations. Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001, p. 17)) list the top 10 reasons, in rank order:

1. No one has asked for it.
2. Previous experiences with evaluation have been either a disaster or disappointing.
3. Organizational leaders think they already know what does and does not work.
4. Perceived costs of evaluation outweigh the perceived benefits of evaluation.
5. Organization members view evaluation as a time-consuming and laborious task.
6. Organization members don't believe the results will be used; data are collected and not analyzed or used.
7. Evaluation is considered an add-on activity.
8. There is a real or perceived lack of evaluation skills.
9. Organization members fear the impact of evaluation findings.
10. Organization members misunderstand evaluation's purpose and role.

Douglah, Boyd and Gundermann (cited in Arnold, 2006) propose that individuals within an organization will fall on a continuum of evaluation capacity that includes doubters, proctors, practitioners, specialists, and scholars. These authors maintain that ideal evaluation capacity in public agencies should have a high number of individuals who are practitioners of evaluation, with very few doubters or scholars. Practitioners are those who have and use the level of evaluation skills expected and needed by the organization.

Table 2. Selected Evaluation Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Assessment	The act of determining the standing of an object on some variable of interest, for example, testing students and reporting scores.
Case study	An intensive, detailed description and analysis of a single project, program, or instructional material in the context of its environment.
Comparison group	A group that provides a basis for contrast with an experimental group (i.e., the group of people participating in the program or project being evaluated). The comparison group is not subjected to the treatment (independent variable), thus creating a means for comparison with the experimental group that does receive the treatment.
Control group	A group as closely as possible equivalent in all variables to an experimental group (exposed to a program, project, or instructional material), and exposed to all the conditions of the investigation except the teaching methodology or instructional material being studied.
Data	Material gathered during the course of an evaluation that serves as the basis for information, discussion, and inference.
Design (evaluation)	A plan for conducting an evaluation (e.g., data collection, schedule, report schedules, questions to be addressed, analysis plan, or management plan).
Evaluation	Systematic investigation of the worth or merit of an object (e.g., a program, project, or instructional material).
Focus group	A group selected for its relevance to an evaluation that is engaged by a trained facilitator in a series of discussions designed for sharing insights, ideas and observations on a topic of concern.
Formative evaluation	Evaluation designed and used to improve an object, especially when it is still being developed.
Program Evaluation	Evaluations that assess ongoing activities that provide services.
Project evaluation	Evaluations that assess activities that are funded for a defined period of time to perform a specified task.
Qualitative information	Facts and claims presented in narrative, not numerical, form.
Quantitative information	Facts and claims that are presented by numbers.
Random sampling	Drawing a number of items of any sort from a larger group or population so that every individual item has a specified probability to be chosen.
Summative evaluation	Evaluation designed to present conclusions about the merit or worth of an object and recommendations about whether it should be retained, altered, or eliminated.

Changing Minds

Ultimately, creating evaluation capacity in the ESA will require strategies that change the minds of individuals. Renowned Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner offers some sage advice regarding significant changes of mind. In the book *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Mind*, Gardner (2004) describes seven factors (or levers) he has identified that should be considered in trying to change an individual's mind. They include reason, research, resonance, representational redescriptions, resources and rewards, real world events, and resistances.

Reason implies a rational approach will be used to identify relevant factors before reaching a final judgment. Reason can involve sheer logic, the use of analogies, or the creation of taxonomies. Reason is applied, for example, when an ESA staff member creates and thoughtfully considers a list of pros and cons

when deciding if a reading program will meet the predetermined needs of a school district.

Research involves the use of relevant data, which may include scientific evidence, in promoting a change of mind. A less formal approach to using research may simply involve identifying relevant cases and a judgment in deciding to change one's mind. For example, the ESA staff member may decide the reading program is inappropriate for the school district after considering facts presented by persons in other school districts that have tried to implement the same program.

Resonance addresses the affective aspects of deciding to change one's mind, unlike reason and research that appeal to the cognitive aspects of the human mind. For example, the ESA staff member may determine that the reading program "feels right"; the program seems to fit the particular circumstances of the school district's needs. Gardner acknowledges that resonance may follow the use of reason and/or research. But "resonance often comes about because one feels a 'relation' to a mind-changer, finds that person 'reliable,' or 'respects' that person" (p.16). Rhetoric can be a key element for changing minds. Gardner notes, "In most cases, rhetoric works best when it encompasses tight logic, draws on relevant research, and resonates with an audience" (p. 16). Hearing a noted researcher or highly respected reading specialist say the program works may be all the ESA staff member needs as evidence to recommend the reading program under consideration.

Representational rediscriptions refer to changing one's mind when the idea lends itself to numerous forms of representation that reinforce one another. These forms may be linguistic, numerical, and graphical. Gardner notes:

> Particularly when it comes to matters of instruction—be it in an elementary school classroom or a managerial workshop—the potential for expressing the desired lesson in many compatible formats is crucial. (p. 16)

Similarly, the ESA staff member may envision a number of ways that together reinforce how the reading program can be implemented successfully. Consequently, the ESA staff member concludes the program is the best choice for meeting circumstances and needs of the school district.

Resources and rewards change minds through incentives that make the thought more desirable or doable than would otherwise be the case. Additional funds readily available from the state or U.S. Department of Education for implementing the reading program could help change minds of school district leaders and teachers who are hesitant to consider changing current practices. Public recognition of teachers who use the new reading practices, whether by the district superintendent, school board president or some other person of prestige, provides positive reinforcement for changing minds. Gardner notes, however, that ultimately unless the new course of thought is in agreement with other criteria—reason, resonance, and research—it is unlikely the change in behavior will last beyond the provision of resources and rewards.

Real world events include events that impact broadly, such as Hurricane Katrina. Students enrolled in public schools in New Orleans, for example, were forced to continue the education in other schools, including schools throughout the U.S. Another example is how ESAs across the country quickly organized staff and other resources to assist ESAs crippled by the hurricane to continue offering some key services to school districts in Louisiana and Mississippi. A highly significant example is the federal No Child Left Behind law that affected the kinds of ESA services schools need. Arguably, global competition is an example of a real world event with major impact on U.S. public schools (e.g., standards movement). All of these examples are changing minds of educators, parents, and the general public.

Resistances refer to the strong views and perspectives that develop over time and serve as major barriers

to changing one's mind. For example, strong resistance to some provisions of the No Child Left Behind law can easily be found among various stakeholder groups in public education. In ESAs, some staff with much previous success in reporting the many great activities associated with key services (e.g., professional development) may resist the current emphasis on answering an outcome question for the service, such as "Did the professional development produce any changes in how teachers instruct students, as measured by student performance on state tests?"

Gardner (2004) notes:

> A mind change is most likely to come about when the first six factors operate in consort and the resistances are relatively weak. Conversely, mind changing is unlikely to come about when the resistances are strong, and the other factors do not point strongly in one direction. (p. 18)

Conclusion

Leaders of ESAs are experiencing significant challenges as they position resources and services to meet rapidly changing needs of clients (e.g., school districts). In recent years, over 30 articles have been published on ESAs and change in the AESA *Perspectives* journal (Harmon, 2004). Change, leadership, and accountability clearly rang loud in recent annual conferences of the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA), and with intensity at the 2005 and 2006 AESA CEO Summer Conferences. Building evaluation capacity may be the next essential change for many ESAs! Key leadership in the ESA, including board members, may need to be the first persons to change their minds about the value of evaluation capacity to future success of the organization. And ESA leaders must continue asking questions that reveal if the organization has the evaluation capacity necessary to support a culture of continuous improvement, rather than compliance.

"Building evaluation capacity may be the next essential change for many ESAs!"

Consider asking the following questions at your next ESA leadership team meeting or retreat:

1. How does the annual ESA report include evaluation findings to support statements about the organization's success?
2. Who are the leaders in the ESA in knowing about and using sound evaluation practices to improve ESA services and products?
3. How does the ESA have the evaluation capacity to compete successfully for funds that can support new services or products needed by clients (e.g., school districts)?
4. How do professional development opportunities for ESA staff address the organization's need for building evaluation capacity?
5. What strategies might work best in changing the minds of staff to value and use evaluation skills for achieving the mission and goals of the ESA?

ESAs without internal evaluation capacity may want to consider collaborating with other ESAs to gain access to necessary expertise. State networks of ESAs may find this strategy particularly valuable and consistent with previous efforts to share limited resources through partnership arrangements. A similar strategy may be useful in attracting external evaluators for special projects, as well as for offering staff

professional development opportunities that build evaluation capacity in the ESA. Contracting with an external evaluation consultant may also be a desirable strategy for building a team of evaluators in the ESA that is capable of changing the culture from compliance to continuous improvement.

References

Arnold, M. (2006). Developing evaluation capacity in extension 4-H field faculty: A framework for success. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 257-259.

Ghere, G., King, J. A., Stevahn, L., & Minnema, J. (2006, March). A professional development unit for reflecting on program evaluator competencies. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(1), 108-123.

Harmon, H. L. (2004). Creating a culture of high-performance in ESAs: Focus on the three Rs. *Perspectives*, 10, 57-64.

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (1994). *The program evaluation standards (2nd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

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

Posavac, E. J., & Carey, R. G. (2003). *Program evaluation methods and case studies, (6th edition)*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Pearson Education, Inc.

Preskill, H., & Russ-Eft, D. (2005). *Building evaluation capacity: 72 activities for teaching and training*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Russ-Eft, D., & Preskill, H. (2001). *Evaluation in organizations: A systematic approach to enhancing learning, performance, and change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stockdill, S. H., Baizerman, M., & Compton, D. W. (Spring, 2002). Toward a definition of the ECB process: A conversation with the ECB literature. In Donald W. Compton, Michael Baizerman, and Stacey Hueftle Stockdill (Eds.), The art, craft, and science of evaluation capacity building (pp. 7-26). *New Directions for Evaluation*, No. 93. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Stufflebeam, D. L. (Spring, 2001). Evaluation models. *New Directions for Evaluation*, No. 89. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Hobart L. Harmon, Ph.D., an independent education and external evaluation consultant living in Timberville, VA, is an adjunct Associate Professor of Education Leadership in the Department of Education Policy Studies at Penn State University. He can be reached by phone at 540-901-9932 or by e-mail at hharmon@shentel.net.

Appendix: Core Competencies for Program Evaluators*

A. Professional Practice
1. Applies professional evaluation standards.
2. Acts ethically and strives for integrity and honesty in conducting evaluations.
3. Respects respondents, program participants, and other stakeholders.
B. Systematic Inquiry
4. Understands the knowledge base of evaluation (terms, concepts, theories).
5. Is knowledgeable about quantitative data collection methods.
6. Is knowledgeable about qualitative data collection methods.
7. Is knowledgeable about mixed-methods approach to conducting evaluations.
8. Conducts literature reviews.
9. Specifies program theory.
10. Frames evaluation questions.
11. Develops evaluation design.
12. Identifies data sources.
13. Collects data.
14. Assesses validity of data.
15. Assesses reliability of data.
16. Analyzes data.
17. Interprets data.
18. Makes judgments.
19. Develops recommendations.
20. Provides rationales for decisions throughout the evaluation.
21. Reports evaluation procedures and results
C. Situational Analysis
22. Describes the program being evaluated.
23. Determines program evaluability.
24. Identifies the interests of relevant stakeholders.
25. Serves the information needs of intended users.
26. Addresses conflicts.
27. Examines the organizational context of the evaluation.
28. Analyzes the political considerations relevant to the evaluation.
29. Attends to issues of evaluation use.
30. Attends to issues of organizational change.
31. Respects the uniqueness of the evaluation site and client.
32. Remains open to input from others.
33. Modifies the study as needed

D. Project Management
34. Negotiates with clients before the evaluation begins.
35. Communicates with clients throughout the evaluation process.
36. Budgets an evaluation.
37. Identifies needed resources for evaluation (e.g., information, expertise, instruments).
38. Uses appropriate technology.
39. Conducts the evaluation in a non-disruptive manner.
40. Presents work in a timely manner.
E. Reflective Practice
41. Is aware of self as an evaluator (knowledge, skills, dispositions).
42. Reflects on personal evaluation practice (competencies and areas for growth).
43. Pursues professional development in evaluation.
F. Interpersonal Competence
44. Uses written communication skills.
45. Uses verbal/listening communication skills.
46. Uses negotiation skills.
47. Uses conflict resolution skills.
48. Facilitates constructive interpersonal interaction (teamwork, group facilitation).
49. Demonstrates cross-cultural competence.

* Adapted from Ghere, G., King, J. A., Stevahn, L., & Minnema, J. (2006, March). *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(1), 108-123.

Leading Change: Implementing the Professional Learning Communities Model Across Diverse Departments of a Regional Service Agency

by
Joanne E. Hopper

In the environment of educational reform regional service agencies are expected to be on the "cutting edge" of innovative school leadership, serving not only as models for local districts (Buford, 2001; Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts, 2001; Stephens & Keane, 2005), but also as supportive mentors to districts striving to improve teaching and learning (Talbott, 2001). ESAs are expected to seek out proven change models, test their worthiness in an educational setting, share them with local districts, and support their implementation. Sanilac ISD, one of Michigan's 57 service agencies and located in a rural area, responded to this challenge. In the summer of 2002 at a leadership retreat, the administrative team made a commitment to becoming a professional learning community (PLC) based on their study of DuFour and Eaker's *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998) and conversations with other school leaders implementing PLCs. In brief, PLCs focus on what students should know, how schools will know if students have learned, and what schools will do if students do not learn. For many years, educators have focused on the first two components – the *what* of curriculum and instruction, and the *how* of assessment. What stands out differently, and significantly, is the question: "What will schools do if students do not learn?" (emphasis added, DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This question is the distinguishing element of a PLC. It is the focus of a culture where it is unacceptable to allow students to fail.

"What will schools do if students do not learn?"

While no literature on the application of PLCs to a regional service organization was uncovered, the Sanilac administrative team was committed to embracing the PLC tenets in order to help local school districts raise student achievement, and to enhance learning for the students enrolled in the center-based programs operated by the ISD. The ISD team was committed to changing the way its staff – within four distinct departments – thought and operated in relation to the focus on student learning. The team was challenged to pave a new path to becoming a PLC as a regional service agency. In so doing, it began a

cultural change initiative to help fill the gap in understanding about how the PLC model could be applied to a regional service agency and, ultimately, to improved student learning.

Significant cultural shifts occur in organizations when the vision or purpose is accompanied by focused efforts to achieve the vision. Schmoker (1999) suggests that it is not only teachers who should be collaborating to achieve hoped for results. Administrators must engage in collective inquiry as well. This is the perfect reason for establishing the culture of a professional learning community.

> Just imagine the benefits if administrators began to do their own action research on effective ways to promote a culture of effective collaboration and data-driven improvement. Have administrators nothing to learn from each other? Can we afford to assume that they will learn all they need about improvement on their own? If we can't engage in such action research at the district level, how can we expect teachers to engage in it at the grade and site level? In many school districts, such discussion is long overdue. Administrators and schools and students have everything to learn and much to gain from doing so. (Schmoker, 1999, pp. 19-20)

The ISD administrative team committed to a change process that allowed opportunities for such discussion and sharing. The organization embraced the PLC model to alter the way the central office staff worked together as leaders of change, and the manner in which teams of teachers – vocational ed, special ed, and consultants, collaborated successfully to implement student learning goals. Instituting this type of significant change required leadership. In retrospect, the author utilized Kotter and Cohen's (2002) Eight-Step Model for Change to analyze the cultural change process undertaken by the ISD, and to evaluate the model's effectiveness in supporting educational reform. The change model provided a tool to reflect upon progress and suggest positive changes that would influence future success. It is predicated on Kotter's definition of effective organizational leadership versus management.

> I'm talking about *leadership* as the development of vision and strategies, the alignment of relevant people behind those strategies, and the empowerment of individuals to make the vision happen, despite obstacles. This stands in contrast with *management*, which involves keeping the current system operating through planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving. Leadership works through people and culture….Management works through hierarchy and systems. (1999, p. 10, italics in original)

This distinction made the model well-suited as a basis for analyzing the cultural change process in which the ISD engaged. The findings of the change study provide an analysis of the strengths and shortcomings of PLC implementation that have application for the broader educational community contemplating such a cultural shift.

Structures Before the Professional Learning Community Initiative

Prior to undertaking the change initiative, the ISD functioned through individual departments – Administrative Services, Career Technical Education, General Education and Special Education – each existing independently of one another. The question facing the team was: could they shed the departmental walls that divided them and successfully redesign the organization to become a PLC that collectively focused on improving student learning for students served in site-based programs and those impacted by consultants serving local districts? The goal was to identify ways that departments could maintain autonomy while at the same time work together toward the advancement of the ISDs mission.

Creating staff buy-in was essential, and creating buy-in required changing people. Painting a picture of what it would look like if the desired behavior is realized is a critical component to successful change because, according to Kotter and Cohen (2002), it touches the heart. "In highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought. Feelings then alter behavior sufficiently to overcome all the many barriers to sensible large-scale change" (p. xi). In so stating, they illustrated the Eight Steps for Successful Large-Scale Change in terms of what it would look like if an organization and its employees engaged in changed behavior (Table 1).

Table 1. The Eight Steps for Successful Large-Scale Change

Step	Action	New Behavior
1	Increase urgency.	People start telling each other, "Let's go, we need to change things!"
2	Build the guiding team.	A group powerful enough to guide a big change is formed, and they start to work together well.
3	Get the vision right.	The guiding team develops the right vision and strategy for the change effort.
4	Communicate for buy-in.	People begin to buy into the change, and this shows in their behavior.
5	Empower action.	More people feel able to act, and do act, on the vision.
6	Create short-term wins.	Momentum builds as people try to fulfill the vision, while fewer and fewer resist change.
7	Don't let up.	People make wave after wave of changes until the vision is fulfilled.
8	Make change stick.	New and winning behavior continues despite the pull of tradition, turnover of change leaders, etc.

From: Kotter, J.P., and Cohen, D. S. (2002). *The heart of change: Real-life stories of how people change their organizations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, p.7.

These assertions parallel the PLC philosophy of Eaker, DuFour and Burnette (2002), who articulate the cultural shift from a traditional school to that of a PLC, describing the target in terms of what it looks like when the shift results in changed behaviors.

Though it did not have a vision of how the PLC concept would eventually play out in the organization, the ISD administrative team espoused commitment to the principles of student-focused learning and a culture of collaboration across all departments. This commitment was the impetus to persevere despite several significant roadblocks along the way. New accountability standards required it, but more importantly, moral obligations to today's children and tomorrow's future demanded it.

Four years after the commitment to become a Professional Learning Community, the author employed a case study methodology to examine the process of cultural change at the ISD as the administrative team moved the organization from four separate, uniquely functioning departments to becoming a professional learning community. Institutional documents spanning six school years – including administrative team agendas and minutes, professional development agendas, committee meeting agendas and minutes, memos, letters and other communications – were reviewed. Personal, one-on-one interviews were also conducted with a representative group of administrators and teachers. One fundamental question had to be answered: could the PLC model be successfully implemented to generate organizational change across diverse departments of a regional service agency? What she found is described below.

Organizational Change Strategies

The change process the ISD administrative team undertook had roots in early years of leadership study with county administrators, which was established as an outgrowth of the ISD's strategic plan. When the ISD began the journey to becoming a PLC, the steps it followed did not subscribe to a particular change model. Strategies were developed along the change path based on information gleaned from seminars and readings about successful PLCs. Kotter and Cohen's (2002) Eight-Step Model for Change was applied in retrospect to examine the steps taken.

Step 1 – Increase Urgency

In order to combat the complacency, pessimism and fear that accompany change, Kotter and Cohen (2002) found that successful organizations begin by creating a sense of urgency, often through appealing to the senses and creating visual representations of the need for change, among "relevant people" (pp. 19-20). Initially the ISD administrative team recognized the need to breakdown the walls dividing the four departments and to work collectively to meet changing educational demands. They began to create a sense of urgency through professional development sessions focused on cultural change. They studied the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998) and attended leadership seminars with Rick and Rebecca DuFour. Then they led staff in addressing the three big questions of a PLC: What do we want students to know? How will we know they have learned it? What will we do if they don't? These questions applied both for the students in the ISD's center-based programs and those served by consultants in local districts.

The Leadership Team members also implemented strategies to heighten their own sense of urgency: redesigning meeting agendas to give priority to PLC implementation, creating time for team meetings, and developing specific ways to deepen staff understanding of the PLC concept. But the urgency created was inconsistent as the demands of operating the district intervened. Meeting minutes revealed several occasions when the team postponed book studies, discussions and action plans.

Kotter and Cohen (2002) note, "In highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought. Feelings then alter behavior sufficiently to overcome all the many barriers to sensible large-scale change" (p. x). Initially this step was missing in the ISD effort. and, arguably, is one of the reasons why the staff did not readily buy into the need for change. They struggled to connect the PLC tenets with their diverse programs and services, and to identify commonalities among their curricula and assessments with so many single programs and services offered.

Step 2 – Build the Guiding Team

As the administrative team moved forward, members recognized the need to enlist key staff to help lead the change initiative. They started doing business differently in terms of the way they involved staff in planning, sought staff input, and structured team collaboration. This was in keeping with Step 2 of the change model. "The more successful change agents pull together a *guiding team* with the credibility, skills, connections, reputations, and formal authority required to provide change leadership" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 4). However, the efforts were, once again, inconsistent. While several individuals were selected to participate in teams learning about PLCs, none were charged with the direct responsibility of creating buy-in.

According to Kotter & Cohen (2002), one of the common mistakes organizations make is, "Guiding change with weak task forces, single individuals, complex governance structures, or fragmented top teams" (p. 60).

In addition, the departmental teams did not learn how to collectively confront the issues hindering change. Four distinct departments existed within the organization, each trying to muddle its way through a change initiative with no training on how to effectively collaborate. Difficulties occurred and lack of buy-in resulted. This, coupled with the lack of a crystal clear vision, spelled difficulty for implementation.

As the administrative team pushed on toward full PLC implementation, the teacher's union took issue with the additional meeting time involved and pressed for parameters in contract language. Eventually agreement was reached about how time could be carved out of the day. In the spring of 2005, the professional development team, self-named the Sanilac Learning Partnership, was created to serve as the guiding team to advance the PLC initiative. Kotter and Cohen (2002) assert that when people, "understand why they have been selected…their hearts are usually touched. So they feel inspired, which leads to an excited acceptance—not 'Oh no, another task force!'" (p. 47). This sentiment was corroborated by a team member interviewed. "I'm a whole lot more likely to buy into something if I had something to do with it... at least I had some input." Another echoed support of the guiding team's role, "I take it seriously because I believe what we're doing is for the greater good of kids. Hopefully, with all the things that we're doing, any reflection that we can bring back as a whole group to help the students in the long run will be great."

Step 3 – Get the Vision Right

Very much a part of getting the vision right is painting the picture of that vision, helping people see what it would look like when the school shifts from a culture of teaching to a culture of learning. The team struggled to create a vision. According to Kotter and Cohen (2002),

> Without a good vision, you can choose a bad direction and never realize that you've done so. You will have difficulty coordinating large numbers of people without using endless directives. You'll never get the energy needed to accomplish something very difficult. Strategic plans motivate few people, but a compelling vision can appeal to the heart and motivate anyone. (p. 69)

After the Sanilac Learning Partnership was formed, the group articulated its own vision: "To establish the ISD as a collaborative culture through professional development experiences aligned with the ISD mission" (Meeting Minutes, June 27, 2005). Though not sufficiently comprehensive to encompass the organizational vision, the picture created is one that has promise to move the organization forward to improve student learning.

Step 4 – Communicate for Buy-In

"Communication of the vision and strategies comes next – simple, heartfelt messages sent through many unclogged channels. The goal is to induce understanding, develop a gut-level commitment, and liberate more energy from a critical mass of people" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 4). Many opportunities were provided for staff to collectively engage in discussions about what a PLC looks like, feels like, and acts like. The Sanilac Learning Partnership sought ways to help employees see the PLC vision. Working together, the group created a visual design (Figure 2) to help accomplish this goal.

Figure 2: Sanilac ISD Professional Learning Community Model

The team shared the model with the entire ISD staff on the first day of school in 2005, connecting it to previous ISD initiatives – addressing curriculum, instruction, assessment, support and intervention, and school culture. The importance of the graphic surfaced in the case study interviews. One participant stated, "When we followed up with the graphic and...said, we did all of these and this is how they affect us, that was like an eye-opener." Another said, "I can see how it all melds together. I have a real hard time with things that are more abstract….When we put that model together…I could see we did this and it fits here." The model helped employees understand this was not another initiative that soon would pass, but rather a commitment to doing whatever it takes to assure high levels of learning for all students.

Step 5 – Empower Action

The issue at Step 5 is one of "removing obstacles, not 'giving power'" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 5). This means helping people remove their own obstacles and barriers to success – lack of confidence, inept teamwork skills, substandard instructional expertise – whatever the case may be. The guiding team focused on developing leadership and collaborative skills in teachers, enhancing curriculum development and instructional expertise, and creating opportunities for teams to meet. Staff meetings shifted to PLC team meetings. Some teams elected to meet during their lunch hours to address instructional goals. Others met before school, designing strategies for data collection and accomplishing other team goals. After-school meetings also provided time to share student work and analyze progress. This is a change in paradigm that has taken time to develop. One study participant understood the importance of getting to this point, "It seems like it's a process, not an event. It takes a long time to get that point where people are buying in. Of course, the other side of that coin is, once that happens, you'd better get out of the way because they're gonna run with it whether you want to or not. That's the great part."

Even though the ISD programs are diverse, teachers recognize the value of the PLC structure. One case study participant stated, "We get together as a group and hear everyone's opinion. That has led to improvement in everyone's class. Everyone has a chance to speak up….I feel everyone in the group wants students to be successful." Another said, "I've learned to look at things a whole different way through the use of collaboration and a focus on student learning. It's put an end to excuses as to why students don't learn."

Step 6 – Create Short-Term Wins

The importance of celebrating short-term wins cannot be overstated. "Without a well-managed process, careful selection of initial projects, and fast enough successes, the cynics and skeptics can sink any effort" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 5). Several short-terms wins have occurred in the PLC implementation process: staff members are continuously engaged in learning how to effectively function as PLCs; teams are meeting regularly to establish, implement and assess student learning goals; the guiding team continues to oversee PLC progress; and instructional practices show evidence of learning from one another as well as increased student engagement.

Interview participants noted successful progress. When asked, "Do you think PLCs are effective at the ISD level?" the comments were overwhelmingly positive. "Most definitely." "Yes, Absolutely!" "Yes, Most definitely!" "Yes, I do." One person added insightful comments on the organizational challenge: "I think the PLC concept has potential to be effective at any level. The greater struggle here is how to make implementation possible within a group that does not share students, does not have a lot in common between what they teach….In the past three years, efforts have been made to determine common ground."

Despite the positive comments, minimal evidence was uncovered to indicate the organization is celebrating these short-term wins. Schmoker's research (Results, 1999) found that absent positive recognition from administrators, teachers' improvement efforts falter. "Just as regular consultation of data and indicators is essential to sustained, targeted effort, so also is regular praise, recognition, and celebration necessary to keep the effort focused and energized. Success and improvement are every bit as social as they are structural" (p. 112). The guiding team has agreed that celebrating short-term wins will be a goal in the coming year.

Step 7 – Don't Let Up

In the best cases, change leaders don't let up. Momentum builds after the first wins (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 5). Evidence gathered from the case study highlights the significant time and energy devoted to the PLC change initiative. Even though it has been an ongoing process that has spanned several years, there is no evidence that anyone is ready to let up. If anything, interviews reflected the desire to step up the tempo, arguably an indication the culture is beginning to change. One person said meeting more frequently would be beneficial. Several responded to a question about what they would change in the ISD's journey to becoming a PLC by stating they would like to find a way to silence or "circumvent" naysayers. "If we could change the mindset and say, 'Take a deep breath. Don't worry about change. Embrace it. Make the changes that you can now and go with that, and then just continue on.'"

Not allowing people to opt out of participation was another clear message. "As a group we've identified common needs. No one has objected or said it's not a good thing. So now, when I see loose/tight…there should not be a question….I don't see why there should be anyone who can check out and not do what we agreed to do."

Step 8 – Make Change Stick

"In the best cases, change leaders throughout organizations make change stick by nurturing a new culture....A great deal of work can be blown away by the winds of tradition in a remarkably short period of time" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 6). At the time of this study, it was too early to tell whether cultural change will stick, or whether traditional paradigms will overpower the PLC change initiative. There is evidence that critical mass is developing to embrace and lead change. Interdepartmental dialogue occurs on a regular basis, and the guiding team is leading the PLC charge. The administrative team continues to connect with others outside the organization in order to hold itself accountable. Continuing to function as a learning community – reading, dialoguing, questioning, collaborating, and evaluating impact – holds promise to propel the organization forward until there is assurance the change really did stick.

Implications of PLCs for ESAs

The challenges of moving a diverse ISD organization forward in a single change initiative is evident in this study. Several implications emerge that serve to inform others planning to undertake a similar effort. The urgency of helping students be competitive in the 21st century must be personalized by every teacher to the point where teachers accept the responsibility for the success of every student – whatever it takes. Creating this sense of urgency requires a strong commitment on the part of a guiding team inclusive of all facets of the organization. At Sanilac ISD, once the guiding team was created, the PLC momentum grew.

"The organization embraced the PLC model to alter the way the central office staff worked together as leaders of change, and the manner in which teams of teachers...collaborated successfully to implement student learning goals."

At the same time, gaining the support of the masses does not come easy. The key message from Kotter and Cohen (2002) is, "People change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings" (p. 2). This is precisely the reason why the PLC model is an effective organizational model for ISDs. Despite the disparity among departments, in a PLC the persistent focus on student learning, and student success is the key. At the heart of every educator is the desire to positively impact students, help them learn, and in doing so, to touch the future. It is the passion that keeps educators in the classroom, struggling to reach just one more child. And if that passion starts to wane because of a "bad year," a negative situation, or other compounding factors, it is critical that the school's culture is supportive and nurturing to both teachers and students to help restore the commitment. A PLC provides the support and nurturing that teachers need. While it was difficult to find common ground given the diversity of content areas and departments at the ISD, the PLC commitment was perceived as very important and value-added.

Arguably the most important aspect of implementing change is establishing a crystal clear vision of the target outcome. This is an area where the ISD continues to struggle. It is impossible to move forward with any degree of clarity, to gain sufficient buy-in, or to empower action if the target is unidentified or unclear. On this point Kotter & Cohen's (2002) model specifically aligns with PLC tenets. "An effective vision statement articulates a vivid picture of the organization's future that is so compelling that a school's members will be motivated to work together to make it a reality.…Until educators can describe the ideal school they are trying to create, it is impossible to develop policies, procedures, or programs that will help make that ideal a reality" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, pp. 62, 64). The vision defined by the Sanilac Learning Partnership

helped move the ISD forward. Framing a comprehensive organizational vision connected to student learning is absolutely necessary for the ISD.

The stops and starts faced by the administrative team illustrate the difficulty of leading organizational change. Functioning as a learning organization provides a support system for ISD administrators and teachers who are unsure of the "how," but are willing to explore, learn together and support one another. Cultural shifts have begun to happen at Sanilac ISD. Originally, teachers rarely engaged in opportunities to collaborate. Today, the group is working together to realize positive gains in student achievement. Leading change requires leaders to show others by their own example that they're deeply committed to the values and aspirations they espouse. Leading by example is how leaders make visions and values tangible. It is how they provide the evidence that they're personally committed. And that *evidence* is what people look for and admire in leaders – people whose direction they willingly follow (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

> 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…people make ordinary things happen by liberating the leader within everyone. (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. xxii)

Through the PLC initiative, Sanilac ISD is developing leadership potential in both staff and students. Extraordinary things are expected.

References

Buford, C. E. (2001). Ohio's ESC network: Best practice expectations. *Perspectives*, 7, 20- 24.

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & Burnette, R. (2002). *Getting Started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Kotter, J. P. (1999). *John P. Kotter on what leaders really do*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kotter, J. P., & Cohen, D. S. (2002). *The heart of change: Real-life stories of how people change their organizations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schmoker, M. (1999). Results: *The key to continuous school improvement* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Stephens, E. R., & Keane, W. G. (2005). *The educational service agency: American education's invisible partner*. Lanham, MD: University Press.

Talbott, Brian. (2001). Preface: 25 years of educational leadership. *Perspectives*, 7, 1.

Joanne E. Hopper is the Director of General Education Services at the Sanilac ISD in Peck, Michigan. She can be reached by phone at 810-648-4700 ext. 201, by fax at 810-648-4834 and by email at jhopper@sanilac.k12.mi.us.

Exploring the Uniqueness of the Core Leadership Roles of CEOs of an Educational Service Agency

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

Introduction

Books and journal articles on the role of leadership in the private sector have in the past and continue to be published at a relentless pace. There is a particular focus on the expectations held for those charged with the responsibility of serving as the chief executive officers of the nation's K-12 organizations. Given little attention, however, are the unique leadership requirements of those charged with the responsibility for providing direction for the successful operation of educational service agency-type (ESA) organizations, which provide support services to local schools and school districts. This condition is particularly unfortunate given the recent, seemingly unprecedented, interest in this type of organization at all levels of government- local, state, and federal. Moreover, in many cases across the country, ESAs are being asked to accept new roles in the furtherance of local and state school improvement strategies, or are voluntarily redirecting their work in an effort to be even more responsive and supportive of school improvement requirements of their clients and customers.

There are, of course, many types of educational service agencies. The focus of this article, however, is on organizations that satisfy two criteria. On the one hand, they must meet the definitional guideline of an ESA contained in Pub. L. No. 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: "regional public multiservice agencies authorized by state statute to develop, manage, and provide services or programs to local education agencies." Secondly, our interest is on member organizations of the Association of Educational Service Agencies, the single national professional organization that devotes its energies to the improvement of practice in organizations that meet its membership requirement that they are "created primarily for the purpose of providing educational services to multiple local educational agencies" (American Association of Educational Service Agencies, 1996, p. 2).

The proposition that the leadership roles of the chief executive officers (CEOs) of an educational service agency are unique is grounded in the claim that organizations of this type are themselves unique in the universe of organizations charted by the state to address issues in elementary-secondary education; that is,

they display organizational and programming characteristics that are atypical to what clearly is the dominant type of state-charted organizations serving the elementary-secondary school-age population, local schools and local school districts.

The claim that leadership of an educational service agency requires an uncommon set of core competencies and skills rests on the fact that these individuals must exercise leadership at two quite diverse levels. A schematic that illustrates the two levels is provided in Figure 1. Note that in both cases the emphasis of the work of the chief executives is squarely on whether or not in the exercise of their leadership roles the goals of organizational effectiveness and accountability are successfully achieved. These three constructs will, of course, likely continue to be defined differently and stand the chance that they will be largely place-specific, as well as continue to evolve as they have for much of the past half century. However, there can be little doubt these constructs will serve as the focus of most of the criteria by which leadership of all public sector educational organizations will be evaluated.

An investigation of the merits of the argument introduced here is long overdue. This initial, exploratory effort represents one small beginning step in what is hoped will be a series of required in-depth analyses.

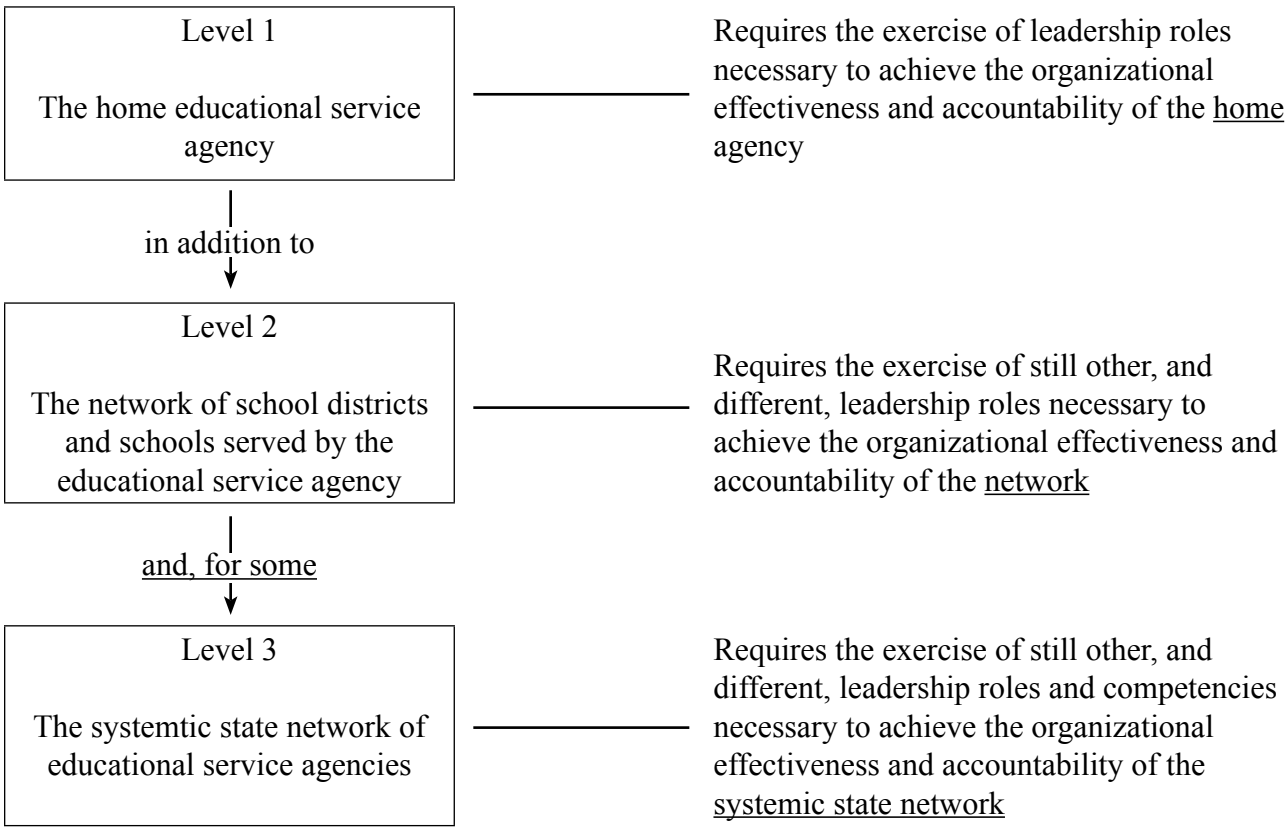

Figure 1. The multiple leadership levels of a chief executive officer

The Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study is to engage in an initial assessment of the hypothesis that the knowledge and competencies and skills required to provide successful leadership for an educational service agency are unique to the position when compared to those necessary to serve in this same capacity at the local school district level.

The following questions were framed to guide this inquiry:

1. How do CEOs of service agencies who have also served as local superintendents rank the relative importance of commonly accepted core knowledge and skills required for fostering success at a local school district when compared to those required to provide leadership in their present position?
2. How do CEOs of a service agency rank the relative importance of five commonly used skills sets (i.e., cognitive abilities, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, group facilitation skills, and leadership skills) required for fostering success as a local school district when compared to those required to provide leadership in their present position?
3. What do CEOs of service agencies regard to be the essential knowledge and skills necessary to maximize success as a service agency director?
4. What do CEOs regard to be the knowledge and skills that are necessary to operate successfully in the particular environment that a service agency might function?
5. What essential knowledge and skills, if any, did CEOs of a service agency have to develop after taking the position?
6. In what ways, if any, did CEOs of a service agency have to adjust behavior from that of their previous position?

The pursuit of answers to these six questions serves as the principal framework for the design of the project. Two ancillary questions, however, were added in response to high-interest in the educational service agency community:

- Do members of governing boards of service agencies view succession planning as one of their responsibilities? And, relatedly, are CEOs of the agencies providing assistance in succession planning?
- Do CEOs of service agencies believe that their national professional association, the Association of Educational Service Agencies, has a role in helping to develop the next generation of AESA leaders? And, if so, what should the organization be doing?

Working Definitions of Key Terms

Working definitions of three key terms are provided below.

In the context of an educational organization, the term "leader" is defined as one who, with others, sets the direction of the organization and strives to influence those in the organization, as well as other stakeholders and the public, to move in the direction once set.

As defined here, the "leadership roles" of a chief executive officer of an educational organization center on her/his performance on a set of responsibilities and expectations that, while working with others, have as their outcome the successful direction of the organization and the successful influencing of others to follow the direction once set. The potential sources that establish role requirements and expectations are many, and sometimes conflicting. Some of these major sources are identified in the following section. We agree with Sarben and Allen's (1968) now generally accepted conclusions in role theory that a role should be defined as a set of behaviors that are widely accepted as expectations of an identifiable office, like that of a chief executive officer of a public sector educational organization serving school-age children and

youth. Moreover, these roles are in many respects relatively well-laid out and designed and calculated, and then institutionalized with a purpose in mind. This does not mean that all chief executives will necessarily interpret how they will implement these roles in the same way, for they of course do not.

The third term, "competencies" of a chief executive officer concerns the question of whether or not she/he possesses the required knowledge and skills that are essential in working with others in setting the direction of the organization, and then influencing others to see the same organizational goals.

Two Caveats

Two major caveats should be noted at the onset. The first relates to the claim of some that one should not confuse an inquiry into the leadership roles of a chief executive officer of an educational organization of the two types focused on here, a local school district and an educational service agency, from that of her/his management roles. Those who support this claim ("Managers do things right; leaders do the right things.") tend to argue that the focus of the leadership roles ought to give emphasis to the need to provide vision and direction to the organization, whereas the focus of attention of the management roles ought to be on the processes (e.g., the traditional view of the five core management functions of planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling, and evaluating.)

The position taken here is that attempts to draw a clear distinction in these two roles are overdrawn, and, if carried to the extreme, as some are inclined to do, can in fact be severely damaging to any organization. It is true, of course, that the competencies and skills required to be effective in the exercise of the leadership roles and those of the management roles may need to be employed at different times. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of all management functions of an organization, however these might be conceptualized, is critical to the overall effectiveness of the organization. Robbins and Alvy (2004) note, "We view management as an essential leadership tool" (p. 283). That is, these processes are embedded within the broader leadership function and without proper attention to them little effective leadership is possible. Moreover, this assertion applies not only to those educational organizations at the local or service agency level that are too small to justify a number of management specialists and where the chief executive must carry out all or virtually all leadership and management roles, but to all organizations of whatever size or complexity as well.

Bush and Coleman's (2000) synthesis of the distinguishing features of the leadership and management roles is judged to reflect a current consensus on this issue. The authors take the position that "leadership tends to be equated with vision and values and management of processes and structure" (p. 4). Further, they suggest that it is useful to consider that "the division between management and leadership may be akin to the division into tactical and strategic leadership" (p. 20), a dichotomy identified by a number of organizational theorists. Bush and Coleman also share the position that attempts to make a distinction between leadership and management are questionable in that not only do both roles contribute to the effectiveness of educational organizations, but moreover, "in practices…these…functions are likely to overlap and be carried out into the same role" (p. 19).

The second caveat is related to the first. It is acknowledged that in most educational organizations of any size direct responsibility for the oversight of the work of the organization is delegated to others who in this capacity also perform critical leadership and management roles (e.g., governing boards in the case of most public sector organizations, central office specialists, principals, teachers). The concept, and need for, "shared leadership" in educational organizations is fairly well-institutionalized in most successful

organizations. In fact, the ability and willingness to create an organization driven by shared leadership is today recognized as a hallmark of effective leadership in all organizations (Barth, 1990; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

How education service agency-type organizations engage in "shared leadership" is, of course, also of interest, especially the ways that highly effective agencies have successfully addressed what Mentzberg's (1973) seminal work, has correctly identified as the: "…two fundamental and opposing requirements…" in the structuring of the organization "…the division of various tasks to be performed and the coordination of these tasks to accomplish the activity" (p. 2). Inquiries along these lines will likely be forthcoming given the renewed interest in state and federal policy circles in the workings and accountability of educational service agencies. This (relatively) heightened interest represents a potentially promising "window of opportunity" to engage in a broad-based, long-term research agenda on this and related topics.

Design of the Study

Three principal procedures were followed in the design of the study.

1. The selection of a small number of practicing CEOs of service agencies that hold membership in AESA who had previously served in the same capacity for a local school district.
2. The development of an electronic survey instrument in order to elicit the views of the CEOs concerning the relative importance of commonly accepted core knowledge (question #1) and commonly accepted skill sets (questions #2).
3. The development of a telephone interview protocol to elicit the views of the CEOs concerning: what they regard to be the knowledge and skills essential for successful ESA leadership (question #3); those specific to a particular environment (question #4); those developed once taking the position as ESA CEO (question #5); and, behaviors that had to be adjusted (question #6). The two ancillary probes were also included in the telephone interviews.

Selection of Participants

Three early decisions were made concerning the selection of participants in the study. Four selection criteria were established in order to identify each service agency CEO to be asked to participate in the planned survey and telephone interview.

1. The individual must have served in her/his present position, or as a CEO of another service agency, a minimum of three years.
2. The individual must have had experience as the CEO of a local school district, preferably one that was a member of a service agency.
3. The respondant's service agency serves a large metropolitan area, a predominantly non-metropolitan area, or a mix of metropolitan and non-metropolitan.
4. The service agency is part of one of the numerous state networks of either Type A: Special District ESAs, or Type C: Cooperative ESAs. These two types of state networks are in general distinguishable by the degree of state oversight with the former being more extensive than the latter. State oversight is the key variable first used by Stephens (1979) in the construction of a typology of

state networks. The initial typology classified networks on the degree of state oversight concerning the specificity of their legal framework, governance, programming and services, and fiscal support practices. The typology was later amended to include state oversight concerning accountability practices, a factor not prominent in the late 1970s (Stephens & Keane, 2005, p. 87).

The rationale for the use of these four selection criteria is straightforward. Criteria 1 and 2 require that study participants have served in both capacities for a reasonable period of time in order to form judgments about this matter. Selection criteria #3 and #4 were used in recognition of what is now a commonly accepted proposition; namely, it is important to understand that the context in which an organization functions if one is to better understand the commonality, or lack thereof, between role expectations and required competencies and skills of those responsible for providing direction for the organization. Situational variables have a profound influence in shaping leadership role expectations, a position held by a long list of students of both leadership and organizational studies.

Secondly, the decision was made not to attempt to include a representative sample of CEOs that satisfied the four selection criteria in this initial probe of the argument advanced in this work. This must be done in any subsequent efforts. It was not deemed to be critical here where the intent is to begin to uncover whether or not there is merit in the uniqueness question, and if so, begin to unravel the nature of this issue. Therefore, we sought nominations of potential candidates from numerous sources familiar with the educational service agency community across the country. Finally, the number of individuals required to make conclusions of the study valid was deemed to be in the range of 15 to 20, a pool judged to be adequate to achieve the intent of this exploratory study.

Letters of invitation to participate in the study were submitted to a panel of 20 potential candidates in late June 2005. The letter asked the nominees to verify whether or not they satisfied the selection criteria, and if they did, would they agree to complete both an electronic survey (estimated time to complete – 10 to 15 minutes), and then submit to a semi-structured follow-up telephone interview (estimated time to complete – 15-20 minutes) that would be based on the individual and aggregate responses to the electronic survey.

Design of Electronic Survey Instrument

The electronic survey instrument was administered in July 2005. Respondents were requested to provide the following background information: their name; organization; years of experience as CEO; years of experience in another service agency, if any; predominant characteristics of region served by agency; and, years of experience as a CEO of a local school district. A profile of the respondents is provided in the following section.

The main body of the instrument was divided into two parts. In the first, respondents were asked to rank the importance of 11 commonly acknowledged core knowledge bases that foster success for a CEO of a local school district, and then for a CEO of a service agency. A four-point scale was used to establish the importance of each core knowledge base (essential, very important, important, of little or no importance). Provision was also made for respondents to identify other required knowledge bases that they felt were not addressed in the 11 cited in the instrument.

The second part focused on securing the respondents views concerning the importance of essential skills needed to foster success for both a local school superintendent and a service agency CEO. The essential skills were divided into the following five conventional categories, each with multiple dimensions.

- cognitive abilities (six dimensions)
- interpersonal skills (five dimensions)
- intrapersonal skills (four dimensions)
- group facilitation skills (three dimensions)
- leadership skills (four dimensions)

Respondents were again urged to identify other essential skills that they felt were not addressed in 22 essential skills cited in the instrument.

In summary, the electronic survey requested the respondents to establish their position on the relative importance of 11 core knowledge bases and 22 essential skills, the latter grouped into five skills sets.

Design of Telephone Interview Protocol

Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted over the extended period October 2005 through January 2006. Six lead questions were pursued in these activities. Each was asked to:

1. Identify a personal view of the most essential knowledge and skills necessary to maximize success as a CEO of a service agency.
2. Identify the skills necessary to function successfully in her/his particular environment.
3. Identify the essential knowledge and skills that had to be developed after assuming the service agency CEO position.
4. Identify what behavior adjustments, if any, were required once assuming the service agency CEO position.
5. Indicate what the position of the governing board was with regard to succession planning, and, what, if anything, a respondent was doing to assist the board in this undertaking.
6. Share any viewpoints regarding a role of AESA in developing the next generation of service agency leaders.

Summary of Findings

A summary of the findings of this initial investigation on the nature of the uniqueness of core leadership competencies and skills is provided below. The summary is divided into three sections: a selective profile of the CEOs and the organizations they lead; the perceptions these individuals have concerning requisite knowledge bases and competencies and skill sets to be successful in providing leadership for their service organizations; and, responses to the questions raised in the follow-up telephone interviews.

Profile

A selected profile of the chief executive officers and of the service organizations they are associated with is provided in Table 1. Though the range of years of experience in their present positions was relatively large (4-18 years), the mean years of experience (9.2) would suggest that the majority of the 18 have had ample time to be sensitive to whatever leadership challenges presented themselves in the transition from a similar position at a local district level, where the mean years of experience (11) was also relatively significant.

The distribution of type of service agency represented in the pool is roughly comparable to the current distribution of Type A and Type C ESAs that hold membership in the Association of Educational Service Agencies. So, too, is the distribution of organizations represented in the pool; that is, it is estimated that the majority of ESAs of whatever type serve regions that are predominately a combination of suburban and rural areas.

Results of Electronic Survey

The composite results of the CEOs views of the relative importance of the 11 knowledge bases for fostering leadership success at the local school district level and the home service agency is provided in Table 2.

Table 1. Selective Profile

Characteristic		
Participants Represented in Pool		
number		18
years experience in current position		
range	4-18	
mean	9.3	
median	8.5	
years experience as CEO of another ESA		0
years experience as CEO of local district		
mean	11	
median	9.5	
Educational Service Agency Represented in Pool		
type of educational service agency		
Type A: Special District	11	
Type C: Cooperative	7	
states represented		18
predominant characteristics of service region		
urban	1	
suburban	0	
rural	6	
combination of 2 or more	11	

The respondents judged most of the 11 knowledge bases to be either "essential" or "very important" for success irrespective of level, local district or service agency. This was especially the case concerning the content areas of organizational theory and leadership theory. Strong views, however, were expressed concerning 5 of the 11 knowledge bases. That is, service agency CEOs in our exploratory work expressed the viewpoints that:

- Knowledge of school finance and law was less important in their current work than when they served in a similar position at the local district level.
- The three content areas of change theory, strategic planning, and inter-organizational partnerships were judged to be more critical for leadership success at the service agency level than at the local district level.

Table 2. Comparisons of the Relative Importance of 11 Knowledge Bases (n= 18)

Knowledge Base	Relative Importance	
	For Success-Local District	For Success-ESA
School Finance*	1.47	2.06
Organizational Theory	1.83	1.44
Leadership Theory	1.50	1.28
Law*	1.78	2.17
Human Resources Theory	2.11	2.11
Evaluation and Assessment	1.89	1.61
Change Theory*	1.78	1.28
Strategic Planning*	1.89	1.17
Politics and Policy Theory	1.94	1.50
Motivation Theory	1.78	1.72
Philosophy and Ethics	1.89	1.65
Inter-organizational Partnerships*	2.61	1.06

Key: 1 = essential; 2 = very important; 3 = important; 4 = of little or no importance.

* Differences between means is statistically significant at $p<.05$

Cognitive abilities. Six cognitive abilities were cited in the electronic survey, as shown in Table 3. Again, the respondents viewed all six to be either "essential" or "very important" for leadership success at either level. Of the six, however, two were viewed to be even more critical at the service agency level than local district. These were:

- Rewards individual and organizational learning
- Displays interest in many fields of study

Table 3. Composite Ranking of the Relative Importance of Cognitive Abilities

Dimension	Relative Importance	
	For Success-Local District	For Success-ESA
Is a self-initiating leader	2.00	1.58
Rewards individual and organizational learning*	2.08	1.62
Displays interest in many fields of study*	2.85	1.85
Sees relation of parts to the whole	1.46	1.00
Expects problems, learns from them, and enjoys solving them	1.31	1.15
Possesses and can articulate a clear vision for the organization	1.15	1.08

Key: 1 = essential; 2 = very important; 3 = important; 4 = of little or no importance.

* Differences between means is statistically significant at p<.05.

The respondents valued highly two core skill requirements for success at either organizational level:

- Possess and can articulate a clear vision for the organization
- Expect problems, learn from them, and enjoy solving them

Interpersonal skills. The respondents were asked to indicate their views concerning the relative importance of five interpersonal skills. As shown in Table 4, all five were regarded as either "essential" or "very important." However, two of the five were judged by the respondents to be of even greater consequence for their work at the service agency level than was the case at the local district level:

- Demonstrate effective listening
- Show concern for interests, needs, and goals of others

Table 4. Composite Ranking of the Relative Importance of Interpersonal Skills

Dimension	Relative Importance	
	For Success-Local District	For Success-ESA
Is friendly and approachable	1.67	1.33
Demonstrates effective listening*	1.69	1.23
Concerned for needs, goals of others*	1.77	1.23
Requires high standards of performance without worker stress	2.00	1.54
Engenders trust in the organization among staff, customers/patrons/ clients and legislators	1.38	1.15

Key: 1 = essential; 2 = very important; 3 = important; 4 = of little or no importance.

* Differences between means is statistically significant at p<.05. All others have differences significant at p<.10.

Intrapersonal skills. As shown in Table 5, the respondents were asked to indicate the relative value of four intrapersonal skills for achieving success at the service agency and local district levels. All four were judged to be either "essential" or "very important." Two of the four (team success is more important than individual success; recognition of subordinates is preferred to personal recognition) received the strongest endorsements as vital intrapersonal skill for success in providing direction for a service agency.

Table 5. Composite Ranking of the Relative Importance of Intrapersonal Skills

Dimension	Relative Importance	
	For Success-Local District	For Success-ESA
Has clear knowledge of own skills and abilities	1.85	1.69
Personal values and goals are clear and consistently demonstrated	1.62	1.54
Recognition of subordinates is preferred to personal recognition*	2.00	1.38
Team success is more important than individual success*	1.85	1.15

Key: 1 = essential; 2 = very important; 3 = important; 4 = of little or no importance.

* Differences between means is statistically significant at p<.05.

Group facilitation skills. As shown in Table 6, the respondents viewed all three of the examples used in the survey instrument as more critical for success at the service agency level than at the local district level.

Table 6. Composite Ranking of the Relative Omportance of Group Facilitation Skills

Dimension	Relative Importance	
	For Success-Local District	For Success-ESA
Manages meetings efficiently and effectively (everyone leaves feeling he/she has been heard)*	2.00	1.46
Moves group to consensus*	2.23	1.46
Seeks investment of group in final decision*	2.15	1.46

Key: 1 = essential; 2 = very important; 3 = important; 4 = of little or no importance.

* Differences between means is statistically significant at p<.05.

Leadership skills. Four examples of what are viewed to be dimensions of leadership were included in the survey, as shown in Table 7. The respondents placed the greatest emphasis on two of the four as prerequisites for success in providing leadership for a service agency as opposed to serving in this same capacity at the local district level. These were:

- See new opportunities for success and direct resources toward exploring these opportunities (is entrepreneurial)
- Embrace changes as a constant

Additional perspectives. Provision was made for the respondents to offer their views of other knowledge bases and essential skills they felt were not addressed in the electronic survey instrument, and a number chose to do so. A summary of the themes expressed are cited below.

The additions to the 11 knowledge bases cited as either "essential" or "very important" for leadership success at the local level centered on the requirement to build and sustain community relations, and the importance of developing expertise in curriculum design, instructional strategies, and evaluation. With regard to the latter related areas, one respondent was very emphatic with the comment that the instrument "missed the most essential knowledge base of all…instruction." Those stressed as critical for success at the service agency level centered on the need to collaborate with others to achieve results for the organization, and the additional requirement to develop competency in the related areas of marketing and entrepreneurialship. The cultivation of government relationships was cited as "very important" at both organizational levels.

Table 7. Composite Ranking of the Relative Importance of Leadership Skills

Dimension	Relative Importance	
	For Success-Local District	For Success-ESA
Sees new opportunities for success and directs resources towards exploring these opportunities (is entrepreneurial)*	3.08	1.00
Embraces changes as a constant*	2.23	1.08*
Understands the political processes and works skillfully to shape those processes to the advantage of the organization	1.92	1.46
Uses data as the touchstone for decision-making. Assessment is required for all programs, new and old	1.77	1.31

Key: 1 = essential; 2 = very important; 3 = important; 4 = of little or no importance.

* Differences between means is statistically significant at p<.05.

Other Responses

The themes of the additions to the five essential skills sets centered on:

- Being passionate for education and for leadership (equally critical for leadership success at both levels),
- Show respect and interest in the welfare of staff (equally critical for success regardless of level),
- Ability to work effectively with others (governing boards, and community, in the case of local districts), and clients and customers (in the case of service agencies).

One respondent stressed the importance of prior experience as a local district superintendent, arguing that this "is incredibly valuable in establishing credibility"…. "and, we never have the conversation surrounding 'you don't understand what our life is like.'"

Results of the Telephone Interviews

A summary of the themes of the 15 respondents responses to the six questions pursued in the follow-up telephone interviews is provided below.

What are the essential knowledge and skills? The first question raised asked the respondents to again reflect on what they regarded to be the most essential knowledge and skills required to maximize success in their current leadership role.

Though not a majority, the most frequently cited theme centered on the issue of prior local district chief executive officer experience. Four respondents assured that local district superintendency "is invaluable, almost essential" if one is to have real empathy with the problems facing local superintendents and their staff.

Other themes cited more than once but less than four times were: understands system thinking; excellent communication skills; political "savvy" and knowledge of the workings of state government; and, offer programs and services that constituents need, not what the service agency wants to deliver by making proposals in such a way that constituents "discover them as their ideas."

Skills necessary to be successful in particular environment. This question was intended to uncover potential situational variables that loomed large in the perceptions of the respondents. A number of common themes were expressed. One centered on the need to develop skills necessary to successfully engaged in entrepreneurial pursuits (cited by four respondents). A second reflected a common issue facing service agencies that serve both large and small enrollment size districts that have differing needs (also cited by four respondents). Two themes cited by at least two respondents had to do with the ability to build a shared vision with districts, and the need to be adaptable, or as expressed by one respondent, "the ability to turn on a dime."

One respondent who serves in the dual capacity as the executive of a service agency as well as an official of the state expressed the view that success in this position required the ability to "balance roles as a state officer, a compliance officer in the constituency, and be an entrepreneur of programs and services."

Knowledge and skills that had to be developed after becoming an ESA CEO. Several common themes were expressed by at least two of the respondents. One related to the need to develop the skills to "think more about the future" as opposed to the present, and the related ability to "think more globally." Another related to the need to develop knowledge and skills to assure the financial stability of the agency, by (especially) developing both a business plan and an educational plan. Two respondents who moved to their present position from out-of-state both stressed the need to acquire knowledge about new and different legal and financial issues.

Another skill stressed by one of the respondents was the need to develop what was referred to as a "servant's heart." Another emphasized the need to acquire skill in assuring that staff "understand that the agency is a cross between a business and an educational agency."

Behavior adjustments. Two themes were expressed at least multiple times. The first, offered by three respondents, was that upon assuming the position they had to learn how to play what was referred to as "second fiddle" in that they now more clearly had to share power, a function of the need to develop a shared vision in the agency. Another behavioral change cited by two respondents centered on a theme previously cited, the need to develop entrepreneurial skills.

Other single responses included: the need to build confidence among staff and local superintendents, whereas as a local superintendent "staff is more ready to assume that you are competent as a leader;" the need to be "less outspoken about solutions;" and the need to delegate more. One respondent indicated that no behavioral changes were required. The job is "easier since it's easier to get a common focus throughout the organization."

Succession planning. All respondents indicated that there was in place a process for identifying, developing, and promoting staff at positions below that of the chief executive officer. One expressed the apparent prevailing view in this way – "Our organization always hires every position with the expectation that the person has the knowledge and skills to move up the ladder to the next position." Two respondents indicated that their board had in fact employed a new deputy with the intent that this individual would ultimately be considered for the chief executive position.

Five respondents reported that they do not assist the board in its deliberations concerning succession planning for a new chief executive officer should a vacancy in this position occur. Various reasons were offered for explaining this situation: the board is made up of local superintendents who view this function as their prerogative; there is a tradition in the state of selecting only local superintendents to the position; and, the state commission has a major role in succession planning for the agency.

Role of AESA in developing leaders. A variety of recommendations were offered concerning how the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA) can best help in developing the next generation of service agency leaders. The most frequently cited recommendation was that AESA expand its recently launched "Executive-In-Residence Program" (cited five times). Another proposal cited by two respondents was that AESA assist governing boards with candidate searches and selection.

Other recommendations cited by an individual respondent included: offer better professional development, especially on a regional basis; expand summer workshops to a week or a week-and-a half; expand opportunities for networking; and, concentrate on professional development at the state level.

Discussion

It seems clear that the leadership role expectations and attendant requirements of CEOs of service agencies, no less than their counterparts serving other types of organizations, are to be found in a variety of sources. Moreover, and importantly, role expectations for an individual CEO of a service agency are also likely to vary according to state-specific or agency-specific situational variables.

Two useful ways to conceptualize the nature of major situational variables that can shape an individual CEO's role expectations are provided in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

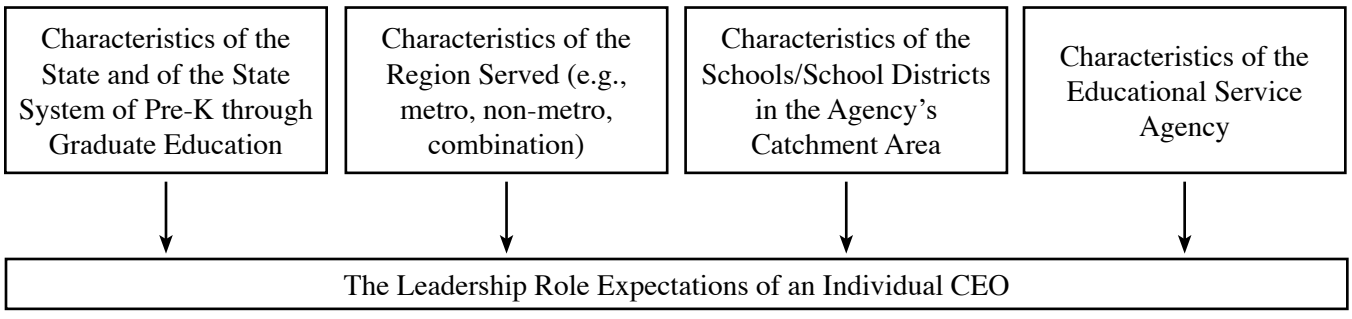

Figure 2. Major situational variables that can shape leadership role expectations

Figure 3. Major potential sources of leadership role expectations

Contingency theorists have, of course, long advocated that leaders who are effective in setting direction for an organization can be characterized by their ability to adapt and align their behavior and style so that these are in harmony with the major situational variables in which leadership is to be exercised. The prevailing contemporary view, however, is that contingency theory, while still important, is but only one of a number of management theories that can contribute to the study of leadership effectiveness.

We introduce the issues of the importance of reflecting on the variety of situational variables that can shape leadership role expectations, and then the major potential sources of these for one principal reason. The 18 participants in this initial probe serve service agencies in 18 different states representing two different major types of state networks. The diversity found among the 18 state networks is huge, whether one focuses on governance structures, programming mix, financial support base, accountability requirements, and a host of other significant situational variables. Yet, despite differences in the context in which the 18 respondents function, the 18 independently came to a number of common positions. Some of the most significant of these to be cited here are four in number.

1. The respondents recognized and singled out three knowledge bases (i.e., change theory, strategic planning, and interorganizational theory) from other knowledge bases that they also prized that are for them clearly of extraordinary importance to their work and the success of their organizations. The relatively lower assessment of the two knowledge bases of school finance and law comes as somewhat of a surprise. Knowledge of finance, for example, would appear to be an area of high interest for many service agencies, not only those that receive little or no state funding, but virtually all that are deeply engaged in what is frequently uncertain federally supported programs and services and/or entrepreneurial programming. Perhaps the inclusion of "school" in the title explains this surprising result. Additionally, it could be argued that legal issues that likely surface in the work of a service agency get there because ESAs are often viewed as the initial resource school for guidance in addressing legal matters. Indeed, many service agencies stress legal services as one of their programming efforts. Still others, but likely to a lesser extent, employ or retain an attorney for the purpose of providing legal consultative services to schools and have such experts available to help in dealing with agency legal issues as well.

2. The relative importance the 18 respondents also assigned requisite competencies and skills is also consistent with those proffered by observers of interorganizational networks in other public sector fields and in the nonprofit sector. As cited earlier, the respondents placed greater emphasis on 10 of the 22 competencies and skills listed on the electronic survey instrument, and many of these were repeated again in the follow-up telephone interviews. Though in some cases the language used in our listing differs from that employed by other observers, there is a striking similarity.

For example, two students of network management, Goldsmith and Eggers (2004), argue that network management requires competencies and skills in numerous other areas in addition to those of traditional government organizational requirements. They hold that the tasks of "activating, arranging, stabilizing,

integrating, and managing a network" require at least some aptitude in such matters as "…negotiation, mediation, risk analysis, trust building, project and business management, big-picture thinking, coaching, strategic thinking, interpersonal communication, and team building" (pp. 157-58).

Agranoff and McGuire (1999) take the position that "networking requires capabilities, skills, and knowledge that are different from that of single organization management" (p. 28). On the one hand, they concede that "managing networks must make use of the application of applied behavioral science techniques such as team building, conflict resolution skills, and coordinating abilities" (p. 28). But they add that this is not sufficient for success. Also needed are competencies in groupware (development of mutual understanding), simultaneously arguing and utilizing knowledge from multiple disciplinary fields, and, trust building in recognition that collaboration does not come naturally (pp. 29-30). Austin (2000), in a discussion of the need for nonprofits to form alliances, asserts that "how an alliance is managed ultimately determines its effectiveness" (p. 144). He argues that the key areas of concern in the management of interorganizational relations are "organization, trust, communication, accountability, and learning" (p. 121).

3. The third major point to be singled out here centers on the issue of whether or not local district chief executive officer experience should be viewed as a condition for success in providing leadership for a service agency. Support for this position has long been regarded as unassailable doctrine by governing boards in many state networks and individual service agencies of whatever type. Endorsement of the doctrine was also expressed by a number of the 18 participants, especially in the telephone interviews. However, it is important to emphasize that the relatively strong views of some of the respondents is due to the fact that all followed the career path – local district to service agency – one of the selection criteria used.

Our judgment is that this issue will likely always be state-specific or agency-specific. Our further judgment is that an individual governing board should not be too arbitrary, keep an open mind on this question, and that all things being equal, not to automatically dismiss consideration of highly-qualified individuals who may not have had prior local district experience. Many CEOs in all parts of the country do not have experience as a district superintendent, yet seemingly enjoy great success in providing leadership.

4. Adding to the potential leadership challenges facing service agency CEOs whose agency is a part of a systemic state network is the likelihood great that they will at some point in their career assume a leadership position in the state ESA professional association, which should be viewed as merely another type of network. A systemic state network of ESAs can be characterized as a nonhierarchical collection of agencies that have a common state prescribed core mission yet enjoy a degree of discretionary authority to meet regional needs. It is common in states where this situation prevails for the state professional association to be active, not just in pursuing their legislative goals, but in other substantial areas as well (e.g., developing position papers on their role in assisting schools and districts in various aspects of school improvement, developing a strategic plan for the state network.).

The relatively small number of ESA chief executives in the vast majority of states raises the probability that individuals will assume a leadership responsibility, perhaps several times in her/his service agency career. This possibility holds true even in those cases where a state network has employed a full or part-time executive director.

Many of the same previously cited essential competencies and skills must also be exercised in the performance of leadership roles in the more expanded state network.

Proposed Research Agenda

There are many aspects of the work of educational service agencies of the type focused on here that would benefit greatly from the development and completion of a comprehensive research program. None, however, is more important than an evaluation of the characteristics of effective leaders of organizations of this type.

The results of this initial probe of the perceptions of CEOs of service agencies suggest the framing of several research propositions:

1. Many of the leadership attributes that foster success in providing direction for a local school district and then for a service agency are similar in kind and in nature.
2. Successful leadership of a service agency requires proficiency in still other knowledge bases that are essential for mastering the dynamics of managing an interorganizational network like a service agency.
3. Successful leadership of a service agency also requires proficiency in the execution of competencies and skills that are also inherent in the workings of an interorganizational network.

These three propositions form the basis for a fourth and final assertion:

4. The successful leadership of a service agency is more difficult than serving in the role for a single organization, in part because of the multiple leadership role requirements as described earlier.

Concluding Comments

The challenges of providing direction for a service agency are huge. Yet, the respondents clearly assert that so are the potential rewards of a rich and rewarding professional career.

The preliminary work reported here suggests the nature of a number of implications for service agency, local and state policy communities. These center on the full cycle of how service agency leaders are prepared, their recruitment and selection, the design of their job descriptions, their compensation, and, of course how they are best evaluated. Moreover, the results deserve careful consideration by those who aspire to a leadership role in a service agency.

References

Agranoff, R., & McGuire, M. (1999, Spring). Managing in network settings. *Public Studies Review*, 16(1)18-41.

Association of Educational Service Agencies. (1996). *By-Laws*. Arlington, VA: Author.

Austin, J. E. (2000). *The collaboration challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barth, R. S. (1990). *Improving schools from within*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publisher.

Bush, T. & Coleman, M. 2000. *Leadership and strategic management in education*. London: Paul Chapman.

Goldsmith, S. & Eggers, W. D. (2004). *Governing by network: The new shape of the public sector*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper & Row.

Robbins, P., & Alvy, H. (2004). *The new principal's fieldbook: Strategies for success*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Stephens, E. R. (1979). *Education service agencies: Status and trends*. ESA Study Series/Report No. 1. Burtonsville, MD: Stephens Associates.

Stephens, E. R. & Keane, W. G. (2005). *The educational service agency: American education's invisible partner*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

E.Robert Stephens, Ph.D., is director of the Institute for Regional and Rural Studies in Edmond Oklahoma. He can be reached by phone at 405-341-1147, by fax at 405-341-1383, and by email at erstephens@aol.com

Bill Keane, Ed.D., is chair of the Department of Educational Leadership at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. He can be reached by phone at 248-370-4204, by fax at 248-370-4605, and by email at keane@oakland.edu

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

SUPPORT: A Program for Including Physically Aggressive Students

by
Terry L. Smith

The West Virginia Safe Physical Intervention SUPPORT Techniques program, operating under the auspices of the state's Regional Educational Services Agency II (RESA II), is designed to enable teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school personnel to deal effectively with physically aggressive, impulsively violent students (Smith, 2003). In doing so, it favors social integration over isolation, avoidance of restraint over restriction, and commonality over clinically labeled difference. In this way, when compared with other social institutions, the SUPPORT program manifests the affirmative efforts of public education to assure quality programs for all students in environments that maximize learning for everyone.

After all, community-based deinstitutionalization in mental health has stalled and, by some accounts, has been reversed (Stroman, 2003). Community-based corrections, work release, and other less restrictive alternatives to incarceration have fallen out of favor in criminal justice (Schmalleger, 2002). Similarly, restrictive developments have characterized the recent history of the juvenile justice system (Roberts, 2004).

In public education, however, minimizing restrictions and promoting inclusion remain paramount concerns (Gates, Boyter, and Walker, 1998). The Bush administration's re-authorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary School Act, under the admonition "No Child Left Behind," has re-emphasized this commitment, binding it firmly to accountability measures and costly sanctions (Moyes and Moreno, 2001).

The federally mandated assumption is that effective schools can educate everyone (Bickel, Howley, and Maynard, 2003). This applies even to actively disruptive, sometimes violent, students whose behavior is uncontrollable by conventional procedures and practices.

Therefore, when a program is developed that enables educators routinely to work with difficult students in a safe, non-damaging, non-restrictive fashion, it generates interest. Safe physical intervention SUPPORT techniques constitute such a program. Consisting of a set of easy-to-teach, easy-to-learn, minimally intrusive physical interventions, SUPPORT emphasizes de-escalation of angry episodes and maintenance of established and workable social relationships (Smith, 2003).

Safe physical intervention SUPPORT techniques are designed to be effective while assuring the safety and dignity of educators and students. Its final objective is inclusion of all in a common social and educational endeavor.

Safe Physical Intervention SUPPORT Techniques

Teachers in today's schools often face danger because of angry, aggressive, or violent students. Although they are expected to deal with these students, few teachers know how to handle a situation which becomes dangerous because of a student's inability to control his rage, aggression, or behavior. Every day teachers walk into classrooms expecting to teach only to discover a student who refuses to cooperate, who wants to hurt someone, or who cannot express his emotions in a constructive manner. What should the teacher do when violence erupts in his classroom? How does the teacher escape from injury without injuring the student? How does the teacher keep the other students safe when the angry or aggressive student becomes physically violent?

The teacher who knows how to handle such situations can benefit from safe physical intervention SUPPORT techniques, which can maximize the teacher's ability to avoid injury. They also provide hints for spotting aggressive students before they become physically dangerous. In addition, the teacher can minimize the chances of a student having an unfair advantage in an encounter. Each safe physical intervention SUPPORT technique has steps that are easy to master and perform (Smith, 1999). The teacher must practice each step of a technique until the process is automatic. When the technique is automatic, the teacher can take calm, controlled action in a crisis situation.

Not all interventions result from aggression and violence. Sometimes a student becomes unable to protect or save himself from a dangerous situation. For instance, if a student is prone to panic attacks and freezes up when frightened, he may be unable to move himself to safety in the event of a crisis, such as a fire. With the intervention techniques the trained teacher can help the student relocate to safety without getting hurt in the process. Many times, students become frightened and begin to lash out at anyone who approaches them. While this behavior is certainly dangerous, it is not motivated by aggression or anger. Regardless of the root cause of the behavior, it is still potentially harmful to the teacher and/or the student. After learning the safe physical intervention SUPPORT techniques, the teacher can safely approach such a student, get close enough to help him, and assist him in moving away from the source of his fear (Smith, 2000). If a student becomes ill, weak, or faint, the teacher can utilize these techniques to assist the student in a move to a better location. The same techniques that have their origins in dealing with negative situations can be used to create positive outcomes.

After working his way through the techniques, the teacher will be a more confident and competent member of the faculty. Teachers who know what to do when a situation escalates into a crisis are beneficial to their fellow faculty members, their students, and themselves. If a teacher takes the safe physical intervention SUPPORT techniques seriously and makes them an automatic part of his teaching behaviors through training and practice, he will become a more complete teacher. Described below is a capsule summary of the elements of SUPPORT training.

Body Stance

The human body has several vulnerable and sensitive areas. A strike, blow, or hit to any of these areas can almost instantaneously immobilize or incapacitate the victim. Even a stretch, pull, or squeeze of certain sensitive areas, such as the joints or the throat, can have equally devastating results.

Some students know how and where to inflict maximum damage to the body and willingly and deliberately choose to inflict this damage. Other students may cause injuries as a subconscious or accidental

reaction to stress. While they may not attack or injure with malicious intent, they are just as capable of hurting a teacher as those who plan an assault.

Just as teachers need to know where and how they can be hurt, they also need to know how to avoid or escape from serious injury. Many teachers are vulnerable to injury or attack because of their manner of standing. Others are injured when they walk into an aggressive situation in an unprotected stance. A teacher's improper stance can create an added advantage for the angry or aggressive student who physically assaults the teacher. Paying attention to stance can make the teacher less vulnerable to physical confrontations with students.

There are 12 major vulnerable areas of the human body. Knowing the most likely places for a dangerous or serious injury provides the teacher with a foundation for knowing what to protect by correcting his stance, movement, or actions.

Facial Expression

The teacher's facial expression can play a major role in reducing the student's anxiety and aggression. Although frightened and anxious thoughts may be coursing through the teacher's mind, his face must show a calm and confident expression. The angry or aggressive student reacts to a situation which he perceives as stressful. A calm expression on the teacher's face may help reduce that stress for the student. If the teacher appears anxious or frightened, the student may become even more aggressive because he feels the teacher is not in control of the situation.

Eyes

The teacher's eyes also help control the situation in the protective stance. The teacher's focus should be on the area of the student's chest or waistline. The teacher should not focus his eyes on the student's eyes or face. Gazing into another person's eyes or face in a stressful situation is often interpreted as an aggressive action that can cause heightened anger or aggression in the student.

Arms

The teacher's arms should be held close to the body in the area between the chest and waistline. This position reduces the student's ability to gain a hand hold or leverage on the teacher in order to grab and push or pull the teacher off balance. It also protects the teacher from potential strikes to the rib cage. When the arms are held above the chest level, they are in a potentially aggressive position from which the arms and fists can strike or flare out.

Hands

The teacher's hands should be held at the front of the body, between the chest and waistline, with the palms open and facing outward. This gesture is non-aggressive. It also provides the teacher with a means of protecting the vulnerable areas of his body by moving his hands up or down as needed to protect other areas.

Never clench the hands into fists. For one thing, a fist is an aggressive gesture. A fist also increases the teacher's available wrist area, which the student can grab and use to push or pull the teacher.

Hips

A teacher should lower the hips slightly to help stabilize the body and create a lower center of gravity. The lowered hips also provide power and buoyancy to the teacher's movements and help provide additional leverage for the teacher. By lowering the hips, the teacher also becomes a smaller target for the student.

Legs

The teacher should stand with his legs shoulder width apart. One leg should be slightly in back of (but not directly behind) the other. The teacher's knees should be slightly bent. This position provides the teacher with stability, leverage, buoyancy, flexibility, and mobility.

Feet

The teacher's weight should be on the balls of the feet, not back on the heels or flat-footed. This increases the teacher's buoyancy and mobility. If the teacher's weight is back on the heels or he is standing flat-footed, it is easier for the student to push or pull him off balance and more difficult for the teacher to move quickly.

Body Position

The teacher must be sure to stand correctly. If he leans forward, he can be pulled forward by the student; if he sways backward, he can be pushed backward by the student.

The teacher should never give ground or space to the angry or aggressive student; he should stay in close to the student. Giving ground creates space where the distance of a strike or kick can gain momentum. The only reason to move away from the student at all is if the teacher plans to move away from him completely.

The teacher should never turn his back to the student. He should always have a full view of the student. It is best to stand at a 45° angle to the student. This reinforces the non-aggressive aspects of not focusing the teacher's eyes directly on the student's eyes or face; it also makes the teacher's body less vulnerable and less intrusive than in a face-to-face stance with the student.

Dealing With Physical Aggression

The average episode of physically aggressive behavior often ignites with a split-second reaction, lasts for only 30 seconds to a minute, and evolves within a two or three foot space. However, this brief, rapidly occurring event can have a major, long-lasting impact on a number of people. It affects the student who attacks, the teacher who is his target, and any other students, faculty, or staff who are in the vicinity of the attack. Regardless of cause or effect, guilt or innocence, attack or defense, the danger is real and rarely

"sorted out" within the time span of the brief episode. Angry, aggressive, and violent behaviors have an all-too-real potential to endanger lives.

Since such behaviors are not always predicted or expected, how can the teacher best prepare for such an event?

The first line of defense is to attempt to prevent such incidents. Teachers need to learn the signals of a potentially aggressive student. Teachers must also seek to change things about themselves and their behavior so as to lessen the chances of an attack. Teachers need to consult district policy as to their responsibilities in an aggressive and violent situation that resists all of a teacher's efforts to prevent it from occurring.

Finally, the teacher needs to learn proper and effective intervention techniques to use as described in this essay when a student does not respond to the teacher's preventive efforts. The teacher who is comfortable and adept with safe physical intervention SUPPORT techniques and movements can defuse a crisis with minimal disruption and danger. An unprepared teacher can actually make a bad situation worse by reacting in the wrong way.

Spotting the Angry or Aggressive Student

The alert teacher can identify potentially angry or aggressive students by several signals from the student. These indicators of anger or aggression may be the only warning the teacher has of an imminent attack. Knowing what to look for can make the difference between falling victim and taking control.

- The angry or aggressive student demonstrates behaviors and body language that indicate that he is angry or aggressive. The student is most likely unaware that he gives off these signals. However, some behaviors or body language are integral parts of the physical process of anger and aggression; even knowing about them cannot prevent them from being displayed.
- The angry or aggressive student often refuses to look the teacher in the eyes. He focuses on other objects, people, or places; he may also play with nearby objects, such as pencils, staplers, erasers, or books. This behavior is a point of deception intended to draw the teacher's attention and energies toward someone or something else so that the teacher is less focused on the student and his behavior.
- The student's hands will most likely be at or above his chest line. This location is an aggressive position from which the student's arms and hands can easily flare out and flail at the teacher.
- The angry or aggressive student may also lean toward the teacher. If this leaning occurs as an isolated action, it may simply be a demonstration of interest in what the teacher has to say. If it occurs in concert with the other indicators of aggression, it takes on a threatening meaning.
- The angry or aggressive student also needs a greater personal space than usual. In the United States the average comfort zone between persons is about one arm's length. As anger and aggression rise, the need for more space between the student and others increases as well.
- The angry or aggressive student also frequently warns of an attack with bodily changes that he cannot alter or control, no matter how hard he tries. These changes involve the face, voice, skin, and body odors. The teacher should be familiar with these indicators because they are difficult to disguise or hide. The student can force his eyes to focus on the teacher. He can pay attention to what the teacher says. He can place his arms in a non-aggressive position. However, the changes in his face,

voice, skin, and body odor are hard to deny, and they can provide the teacher with some of the most accurate information about the student's emotional state.

The alert and informed teacher can use his knowledge of these changes to assess a student's emotional state and made decisions regarding proper intervention. Using this knowledge can keep the teacher from overreacting to a non-aggressive situation or being taken by surprise in the event of an attack.

Spotting the Angry or Aggressive Teacher

Many of the same indicators the teacher uses to spot an angry or aggressive student are equally valid when applied to the teacher. A teacher who is unaware of these indicators is much more likely to attract aggressive behaviors from a student because the teacher is also giving off aggressive messages. If a student is prone to angry or aggressive behaviors, he will most likely be sensitive to messages of anger or aggression from the teacher. In fact, these indicators may provide all the reason an angry or aggressive student needs to justify going on the attack. If he perceives that the teacher is in an aroused emotional state, the student may take this as a green light for acting on his own anger and aggression. The teacher who is aware of the indicators of aggression that he can change has a better chance of defusing the student's anger. By giving off deliberately non-aggressive signals, the teacher can potentially lower the student's stress levels and avoid an attack. The teacher's demeanor must be his "message" to the student.

The main behaviors the teacher can change are the same ones over which the student has some control. These include the focus of the teacher's eyes and attention, the location of the teacher's hands and arms, and the teacher's body language. An especially important factor is the degree of closeness which the teacher will tolerate or define as his personal space or comfort zone. The teacher should keep in mind that an angry or aggressive student wants more distance from other people than one who is not angry or aggressive. While the teacher needs to be mindful of the student's personal space needs, one of the key strategies in the protective stance, the guiding movements, and the releases is that the teacher needs to be up close to the student.

Ways the Teacher Can Reduce Student Aggression

Indicators of teacher aggression are physical behaviors that the teacher can change such as the focus of the eyes, the attention to what the student is saying, the leaning of the body, the location of the hands and arms, and the accepted personal space or comfort zone. The teacher can consciously control these behaviors to reduce the student's aggression. In other words, if the teacher does not send out aggressive messages to the student, the student will have less reason to be angry or aggressive. A reduction in the teacher's angry or aggressive signals can result in a similar reduction in the student's anger or aggression. Once again, while both the teacher and the student can control certain signals, neither the teacher nor the student has control over other signals. Therefore, the teacher must maximize the messages he can control to minimize the chance of a confrontation or attack.

"The teacher should always keep in mind that the goal is to utilize the least restrictive means of intervention that will produce the most effective reduction in aggressive behavior."

The teacher should focus his eyes in the area of the student's chest or waistline. By listening to and hearing what the student is really saying, the teacher can give him the attention he needs. Many acts of anger

and aggression originate in the feeling that no one is listening to the student or taking what he has to say seriously. The teacher should not lean toward the student; he should assume the protective stance discussed in the previous section. This stance does not have to be exaggerated or obvious to be effective. The teacher should be sure to have his hands in the area between his chest and waistline, with the hands open and the palms facing outward. This posture is less threatening to the student. It also provides the teacher with a rapid and effective means of protecting his face and lower body from an attack.

It is very important for the teacher to remain alert at all times for a student's potential angry or aggressive behavior. Knowing the indicators of an angry or aggressive student enables the teacher to be prepared for actual aggression before it occurs. The teacher who knows the normal behaviors of a student can detect changes that indicate that the student is reacting to a situation in an unusual manner. Subtle changes, such as a different body or mouth odor, a sweaty upper lip, changes in the voice and its pitch, or the need for increased personal space can provide the alert or informed teacher with invaluable information regarding the student's emotional state. Small changes in the teacher's posture, voice quality, and hand position can reduce the student's perception of a threat from the teacher. Anything that the teacher can do to reduce tension or prevent an aggressive situation from occurring is worthwhile. The teacher should always keep in mind that the goal is to utilize the least restrictive means of intervention that will produce the most effective reduction in aggressive behavior.

Conclusion

The purpose of the article is to share some information about a highly successful program dealing with an important problem not often attended to by service agency staff. It is not the purpose of the article to provide training so elements of the program are provided descriptively rather than in detail.

The program has been thoroughly researched using both quantitative and qualitative studies. Data evaluated was collected from 3,217 participants in safe physical intervention SUPPORT techniques trainings held in 11 states and 23 counties over 15 years, beginning in 1989.

A copy of the study or further information about the program can be obtained from the author. Helping teachers deal with angry and aggressive students in an inclusive classroom has proven very helpful to school districts in our area and the program may well respond to an unmet need in other service agency environments.

References

Bickel, R., Howley, C., & Maynard, A. (2003) "No Child Left Behind" in poor Appalachian school districts: Confronting contextual factors in the modern world. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 9: 321-340.

Gates, F., Boyter, G., Walker, J., & Hill, H. (1998) School as community: A better way for addressing school violence. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 17: 3-4 and 39-47.

Moyes, R., & Moreno, S. (2001) *Incorporating social goals in the classroom*. New York: Taylor & Francis:

National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) *A nation at risk*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office,

Roberts, A. (2004) *Juvenile justice sourcebook*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schmalleger, F. (2002) *Criminal justice today*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

Smith, T. (2003) *Prevention and management of aggressive behaviors*. Huntington, WV: Chapman Printing.

Smith, T. (2000) *De-Escalating the physically aggressive student*. Huntington, WV: Chapman Printing.

Smith, T. (1999) *Physical intervention support techniques*. Huntington, WV: Chapman Printing.

Stroman, D. (2003) *The disability rights movement: From deinstitutionalization to self-determination*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Terry L. Smith, Ed.D., is Director of Special Education at the Regional Educational Service Agency, II in Huntington, West Virginia. He can be reached by phone at 304-529-6205, extension 21, by fax at 304-529-6209, and by email at trslsmith@access.k12.wv.us.

Helping Teachers Teach Through County-wide Training

by
Sarah Zablotsky

With a flash of red and a puff of smoke, the jack-o-lantern belched fire and sulfur.

The room was darkened when the carved pumpkin briefly came to life, as Mt. Lebanon chemistry teacher Nicole Fajtak snapped a photo to record the moment.

The flaming pumpkin was just one creative example of a science lab experiment that can spark a student's interest in the sciences. Throughout their hour and a half afternoon workshop, Fajtak and fellow chemistry teacher Susan Gillette Meer demonstrated a variety of unique techniques teachers can use to enliven their lessons while graphically illustrating the connection between the "real world" and chemistry class. The flaming pumpkin illustrates the relationship between oxidation and reduction.

"What we're really teaching is better problem solving. If kids can think through a problem logically, then we've really obtained our goal," Gillette Meer said.

Meer's workshop was just one of 565 sessions at the first County-wide Professional Development Day, held on Monday, October 10, 2005. Organized by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU), an education service agency, the conference was attended by 7,832 teachers from 41 school districts and held at 34 sites throughout Allegheny County. Several non-profit organizations such as the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium, and the Pittsburgh Opera were also involved. The purpose: to give educators an opportunity cross district boundaries and to learn from each other.

The professional development day was the idea of superintendents from the suburban school districts in Allegheny County. In 2004, these education leaders formed an affiliation dedicated to the improvement of academic achievement of all schools throughout the county. This group effort is known as the Building On Student Success initiative. The superintendents have made it their goal to meet federal benchmarks of the No Child Left Behind Act four years ahead of schedule. To accomplish this, members of the initiative agreed to conduct county-wide professional development days in 2005, 2006 and 2007. To offset the cost of the County-wide Professional Development Day, the superintendents of the Building On Student Success initiative secured a total of $100,000 from four regional foundations. Each school district contributed $11 for every teacher who attended.

In southwestern Pennsylvania, the concept of cross-county participation in a professional development is radical. Under the commonwealth's school code, Pennsylvania is divided into 501 school districts, 43 of which are located in Allegheny County. The AIU, the largest of 29 educational service agencies created by the state legislature in 1971, provides a myriad of managerial, training and professional development services to the 41 suburban school districts that participated in the day.

An umbrella organization for over 120 community and district-based programs, the AIU had the resources and personnel to organize this huge day-long event, larger than some national conferences, from the ground up in less than six months. The education service agency coordinated all aspects of the day including community participation, transportation, lunch service, computerized registration, media coverage, satellite feeds of the keynote speaker, distribution of conference packets, approval of workshops, collection of district participation fees and accreditation of Act 48 credits. In addition to the event itself, the AIU held a press conference to announce its plans and hosted a VIP breakfast the morning of the development day.

A single school district in Allegheny County, or even a group of districts, would not have been able to organize this event. Pittsburgh is a working class town nestled on hills and separated by rivers. Despite a labyrinth of highways, bridges and tunnels, Pittsburghers still cling to their traditions and tend not to venture outside of their own neighborhoods. School district administrators tend to believe that theirs is a unique set of challenges. Districts, which have an average student population of 3,053, rarely co-operate or share resources. The fact that 41 of the 42 suburban school districts within the county participated in the service was surprising and a feat in itself.

"The fact that 41 of the 42 suburban school districts within the county participated in the service was surprising and a feat in itself"

George Wilson, superintendent of the Mt. Lebanon School District, said he was supportive of the day because it involved peer education.

"In my opinion, one of the best professional development methods is teachers teaching teachers," he said.

The Mt. Lebanon School District typically devotes eight and a half days in a school year to professional development, a practice, says Wilson, that allows teachers to be informed about the latest developments in education.

"I think it's important to devote some resources to help teachers stay current in their field. They need to stay updated," he said.

The County-wide Professional Development Day served to expand the variety and depth of training already available at the district level. With 34 different workshop locations across the county, teachers had the opportunity to learn from each other, an overall goal several districts have gradually been implementing. Although the AIU offers Act 48 courses and other specialized instructional sessions, the service agency cannot usually guarantee a classroom teacher's exposure to instructors from other school districts. From its inception, the County-wide Professional Development Day was designed to acquaint teachers with each other in an environment that fostered peer interaction.

Under the dimmed lights of Mt. Lebanon high school's music technology room, band director Doug Reichenfeld demonstrated the latest version of Sonar, a music software program that allows the user to create and sequence tracks of a song. Combined with the options of one of the department's Triton keyboard, music

teachers have a new tool to fill open spots of sound during a performance. With a simple click of the mouse, sound effects can be added, making it possible for any student to compose an original score.

"I think it has a very important place in music education," Reichenfeld said.

In the afternoon, teachers were given a chance to experiment with the district's music technology.

In addition to collaboration, the purpose of the day was to create relationships between teachers from different school districts that will continue throughout the school term. John Esaias, coordinator of the County-wide Professional Development Day for the AIU, said one of the goals of the day was to create lasting learning communities between teachers with similar responsibilities and interests.

"Each district has experienced experts. We just need to start sharing what we know with each other," Esaias said.

In an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the day, surveys were administered to all participants, with questions regarding satisfaction and usefulness. Of the 6,465 educators who completed evaluations, 93 percent saw that planning and preparation was evident and 86 percent were satisfied with the quality of the overall event. Additionally, 81 percent indicated that they would like the professional development day to be an annual occurrence, and 83 percent of respondents characterized the event as motivational in nature. Since there were only minor technical and logistical glitches at last year's event, the 2006 development day, scheduled for October 9, will follow the same schedule, but will be held at different school districts. Teachers will start to register in September.

The AIU was successful in assisting districts meet their educational and professional development goals while fostering inter-district communication and relationship building. As a result of their experiences at the County-wide Professional Development Day, several districts have recruited workshop leaders, especially those with expertise teaching reading, to train their staffs about the techniques demonstrated during the one day session.

In Mt. Lebanon School District, high school physics teachers Andrew Haberberger and Ivan Ober hosted a physics lab workshop where instructors could discuss experiments and ideas for innovative classroom activities. Ober said Mt. Lebanon is different from many districts because it has five physics teachers teaching 20 physics sessions of varying degrees of difficulty.

"Most (physics teachers) are the alone in their districts, so we thought this would be a good opportunity for everyone to talk about what they are doing, pull out some equipment and get some ideas," he said.

At the district's Lincoln Elementary, teachers were able to take advantage of an afternoon workshop to discuss individual lessons in core subjects. Christine Snyder, who has been teaching for 33 years, was one of the five instructors on the third grade team that coordinated social studies, science, reading and writing lessons. She said teachers throughout the county need to constantly communicate to ensure that all classrooms are progressing at the same rate.

"We want to make sure we are on the same page," she said.

Sarah Zablotsky is a communications specialist for the Allegheny Intermediate Unit in Homestead, Pennsylvania. She may be reached by phone at 412-394-3472, by fax at 412-394-5969, and by e-mail at sarah.zablotsky@aiu3.net.

Perspectives Credits

Editorial Board

AESA thanks our corporate partner for their support of *Perspectives* and their commitment to AESA's Foundation and business partnerships.

LAUREATE EDUCATION, INC.

AESA extends special thanks to the staff of the Oakland Schools Intermediate School District in Waterford, Michigan, for their invaluable assistance in producing this twelfth issue of Perspectives!

Perspectives order form

Additional copies of this or previous editions of *Perspectives* may be purchased for $6 each plus $3.50 for postage and handling per order. AESA accepts prepaid orders only, by check or money order. Please include number desired of each issue, name of recipient and shipping address.

Send your request to:

Association of Educational Services Agencies
801 North Quincy Street, Suite 750
Arlington, VA 22203-1730
703-875-0739 Phone
703-807-1849 Fax
btalbott@aesa.us

Invitation to Authors

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

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