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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that describes restructuring efforts undertaken by state education agencies (SEAs) are presented in this paper. Data were collected through telephone interviews with SEA officials in 24 states that were actively engaged in restructuring and analysis of SEA documents. Factors that contributed to restructuring included the place of SEA restructuring on the national educational reform agenda, state financial cutbacks, and state involvement in key national school-reform projects. Obstacles to SEA restructuring included "turf" conflicts, entrenched organizational cultures, time constraints, and organized opposition. The respondents offered advice about what their colleagues might expect if they embark upon a major agency reorganization. They mentioned the central role of top leadership in initiating and sustaining restructuring, the importance of communication at all levels, recognition of the business community as a friend, the establishment of ground rules for transition planning teams, and investment in staff development. Respondents raised other issues, such as accountability, the boundaries of local initiatives, the desire for early results, and appropriate staffing of the SEA. Appendices contain a list of participating states, a profile of the state sample, and interview protocols. (LMI)

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RESTRUCTURING STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES:

LEARNING FROM STATE LEADERS

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SERVE REPORT

By Linda J. Nelson

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LEARNING FROM STATE LEADERS**

**By
Linda J. Nelson**

October, 1993

**SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education**

**Affiliated with the
School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro and
Florida State University**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE SERVE LABORATORY	iv
INTRODUCTION	v
FINDINGS	
Nine Common Components of SEA Restructuring	1
Factors that Contribute to SEA Restructuring Efforts	6
Problems Arising in SEA Restructuring Efforts	7
ADVICE FROM STATE LEADERS	10
ISSUES FOR FURTHER STUDY	12
SUMMARY	13
APPENDICES	
Appendix A - Participating States	14
Appendix B - A Profile of the State Sample	15
Appendix C - Interview Protocols	16
REFERENCES	18
SERVE ORDER FORMS	19

ABOUT THE SERVE LABORATORY

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is a coalition of educators, business leaders, governors, and policymakers who are seeking comprehensive and lasting improvement in education in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The name of the Laboratory reflects a commitment to creating a shared vision of the future of education in the Southeast.

The mission of SERVE is to provide leadership, support, and research to assist state and local efforts in improving educational outcomes, especially for at-risk and rural students. Laboratory goals are to address critical issues in the region, work as a catalyst for positive change, serve as a broker of exemplary research and practice, and become an invaluable source of information for individuals working to promote systemic educational improvement.

Collaboration and networking are at the heart of SERVE's mission; the laboratory's structure is itself a model of collaboration. The laboratory has five offices in the region to better serve the needs of state and local education stakeholders. SERVE's Greensboro office manages a variety of research and development projects that meet regional needs for the development of new products, services and information about emerging issues. The Laboratory's information office, affiliated with Florida State University, is located in Tallahassee. Field service offices are located in Atlanta, Greensboro, Tallahassee, Columbia, S.C., and on the campus of Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi. Addresses are provided below.

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INTRODUCTION

Responding to the national consensus that K-12 schooling must be substantially restructured, state education policymakers have, over the past ten years, initiated dramatic changes in school governance, curriculum, student performance standards and assessments, and professional roles of teachers (David, Cohen, Honetschlager, & Traiman, 1990). Some argue that the first phase of school reform was guided by the assumption that excellence could be imposed from the top down (e.g., increased graduation requirements). The term most commonly applied to the second wave of reform is "restructuring;" it is a term that has been used to refer to many ideas and strategies (e.g., school choice, site-based management, student advancement based on demonstrated proficiencies). However, a key idea has been that those closest to a school's program (teachers, parents, students) must have enough control over the organization to engender in them a sense of ownership and commitment to change. As a result, states undergoing restructuring have been challenged to work out new ways of governing that strengthen local initiative and professional capacities.

The challenge of the future, the democratic challenge par excellence, is to create greater order while exercising less control. . . . States will also need to develop a more broad-based and participatory mechanism of self-monitoring, closely watching the proliferation of new policy rules at the state level as local schools experiment with new organizational forms and practices, to ensure that state standards and assessments do not squash that discretion with even more binding rules of the game. (James, 1991, p. 208)

Many states have taken on this challenge of fostering local improvements through less regulation. They realized that changes in the ways state education agencies (SEAs) carry out their work were needed and they experienced dramatic changes in their organizational structures and basic missions. Kentucky's experience is perhaps most notable. In a 1985 lawsuit filed by 66 school districts, courts declared the state's K-12 educational system unconstitutional, closing down the SEA and paving the way for sweeping changes in state education under the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. A large number of states have shifted emphasis from compliance monitoring to technical assistance and research, a change in agency mission which has significantly altered staff positions in many state organizations. Occasionally, groups outside the SEAs have begun to help the state implement reforms. In Delaware, for example, the institutions of higher education are working closely with the new state superintendent as he re-designs the SEA.

Because state-level changes are relatively new, information about the varied restructuring approaches being taken is limited. This report provides an introduction to SEA restructuring efforts. The discussion that follows is based on extended telephone interviews with SEA officials in 24 states and reviews of SEA documents. The states were selected because they were actively engaged in restructuring. (For more information about their selection, see Appendix A.) Participating in the telephone discussions were ten chief state school officers (CSSOs), eight deputy state superintendents, and six individuals holding director, coordinator, or executive assistant status. Appendix A provides a listing of the participating states. Appendix B presents some descriptive statistics on the sample. Appendix C is a copy of the interview protocol.

By its nature, a descriptive report such as this is limited in applicability due to the subjectivity of personal perspectives. Personal accounts are inevitably based on an individual's relative

experiences in the state agency. A definitive study of SEA restructuring would require longitudinal on-site observations to determine if intended changes were, in fact, institutionalized and realizing intended outcomes. This description of SEA restructuring approaches is intended to provide a preliminary understanding of how states are approaching change at the agency level.

A consistent pattern in SEA restructuring emerges from the discussions with the 24 agency officials. The report describes the key components of agency restructuring common to many of the states surveyed. It is followed by a discussion of general factors that seem to contribute to or impede restructuring efforts. The report concludes with advice from SEA officials based on their experiences and a discussion of issues for future consideration.

Nine Common Components of SEA Restructuring

The following nine components were mentioned in response to a question about the key components of the ongoing restructuring efforts.

- 1. The CSSO has assumed office with an explicit school reform agenda that includes SEA restructuring.**

In 22 of the 24 states surveyed the CSSO is an active proponent of SEA reorganization in some form, while in 14 states the CSSO has taken office with the express intent of restructuring. A CSSO who has been in office one year observed, "I am here because the governor and I agreed that changes were needed at the state level and he thought I was just tough enough—or crazy enough—to carry it off. Right now, I would say the latter description applies." This is not to suggest that SEA restructuring is due solely to the influence of the CSSO irrespective of legislative action taken and/or fiscal shortfalls in state budgets. Virtually all states in the study have experienced one or both in the past five years, some responding to one piece of major legislation and others responding to numerous legislative initiatives. According to one respondent, "the state has had 106 pieces of reform legislation in the past 10 years."

- 2. The governor's office, the SEA, professional associations, institutions of higher education, parent groups, and the business and philanthropic sectors are active partners in support of SEA restructuring.**

With few exceptions, key constituent groups are active supporters of the restructuring process and representatives of these groups are generally included on SEA restructuring planning and implementation teams. As a respondent noted: "This is one of my first experiences with true bipartisanship. Whatever one's political views, we all agree that change in the agency is essential if we expect schools and districts to meet our new outcome standards."

- 3. Substantial assistance is provided from the business community in planning and implementing SEA change.**

The high profile of the business community in state restructuring efforts is a strong theme throughout the interview responses. At least 18 states noted solid business-sector support which took a number of forms. Chief executive officers (CEOs) have donated considerable personal time providing expert advice to CSSOs and SEA restructuring committees. Businesses have funded extensive staff development programs for SEA staff, particularly in aspects of Total Quality Management and strategic planning. Several states noted that private funding has allowed them to conduct three- and four-day training sessions for all SEA staff and for selected district personnel. Businesses have also provided the organizational experts and facilities for training.

4. SEAs have revised their mission and goal statements and are redirecting the SEA focus from regulation to technical assistance.

SEAs are lessening the importance put on their traditional regulatory role, focusing attention on educational performance outcomes rather than inputs. In every state surveyed, plans are underway to implement some form of outcomes specification, performance standards, and/or new assessment processes. States are actively removing many formal state regulations for districts and schools and focusing on student outcome expectations for which schools will be held accountable. The regulatory presence has not been totally eliminated, but may be smaller and more sharply focused on fewer key elements of school planning and operation.

The process of developing new mission and goal statements is often an outgrowth of a strategic planning process initiated by the CSSO, the governor, or the state legislature. Strategic planning committees, which generally include representatives of all key education constituencies, have been responsible for substantially redirecting the SEA mission toward providing districts and schools with the assistance necessary to meet new state performance standards. As one respondent described it: "We're out of the business of regulation, with the exception of what the 'feds' require of us. Of course, for some of us, it's more natural to be regulators than helpers, and districts don't really believe us yet. This is a whole new way of working together. It will take time for all of us to get the hang of it." The emphasis on technical assistance often changes the role of SEA staff from specialist to generalist, allowing the SEA to provide districts with one team able to attend to the range of questions that might arise about various discrete programs. As one CSSO observed: "This allows us to combine what in the past might have been several site visits by several different people from all over the agency into one, slightly longer, visit that takes care of all the needed questions and reviews at once. The districts like it because, while they see us less often, when we arrive we can talk about the whole range of problems." An aspect of technical assistance that is relatively new is the SEA need for trained staff and/or access to expert consultants who will be able to work intensively with districts unable to meet new performance criteria.

At least one state mentioned that the shift in focus to technical assistance does not mean that the SEA has increased its capacity in this regard. Rather than delivering more technical assistance, the SEA role may be to provide better leadership and coordination among intermediate agencies and higher education institutions who provide assistance.

5. SEAs generally adopt a flatter organizational chart designed around cross-agency interdisciplinary problem-solving teams.

SEAs are realigning their organizational structures in order to focus resources on their new missions and goals. A majority of respondents described the organizational redesign as “flattening” the SEA by eliminating many upper- and mid-level management positions. South Carolina, typical of states that are reducing decision-making layers, reduced from seven levels to three. This process eliminates several layers of reporting functions and “pushes decision making down in the organization;” a process consistent with the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), which surfaces as a frequently used model for reorganizing. Other TQM language frequently mentioned by respondents includes the notion of a continuously improving organization and gap analysis, a process in which outside experts are brought in to analyze how thoroughly initial restructuring plans have been implemented and whether the changes are realizing intended outcomes. The following two comments are representative of the interviewees’ attitudes about SEA staffing:

[My organization] had whole divisions for every possible special program, and there seemed to be a staff member for every discrete skill you could name. Imagine their delight when I described my vision of generalists who could work with schools and districts on more than one problem at time. . . . Staff reductions and agency reorganization were long overdue.

I felt much better about the changes when I identified six different people [in the SEA] working on parent programs, none of whom worked together or even talked to one another about their work.

In the restructured SEA, cross-agency teams often replace the more traditional line and staff organizational chain of authority. In some agencies, team leadership rotates among staff members, who might hold the position for two years then relinquish the role to another colleague on the team, much like rotating deanships or department chairs in institutions of higher education and high schools. Teams are generally made up of professionals from across the agency who bring to the team a variety of skills and areas of professional expertise.

Many respondents praised the team approach, explaining that the SEA is much less role-bound and much more able to carry out the variety of functions necessary to support school and district needs. Many CSSOs view teaming a considerable benefit as it “promotes a pool of skilled leaders and decision makers” among the majority of staff rather than relegating leadership to a few upper-level managers.

The teams tend to be one of two types: permanent teams assigned to an area of emphasis and organized to share responsibility for the work of the unit or temporary teams formed to address specific problems from the field or in the agency. Agencies employing the temporary team process explain that this arrangement allows them to employ fewer permanent staff by using outside consultants as needed who can bring particular special skills to the problem the team is addressing.

Teams are not universally popular among staff. Staff accustomed to working in divisions designed around their areas of expertise find the teaming concept is difficult to embrace. As one CSSO noted: "Some people see the team concept as a denigration of their specialty, and their responses have been, quite frankly, hateful."

6. Agencies generally appoint a cross-agency transition team to plan and implement a restructured organizational plan.

A common component of many of the restructuring SEAs is the transition team. The team is usually made up of representatives from all parts of the agency with authority to oversee the implementation of restructuring. Generally, the transition team has support staff assigned to it so that meeting notes and records are kept systematically and follow-up on team decisions can be tracked. Tasks of these teams include helping new groups within the SEA rewrite their mission statements and goals to be consistent with the new statewide directions; deciding how staff reassignments in the new organizational structure will be made; and bringing to the attention of the CSSO unanticipated consequences of new operating procedures.

7. From the outset of the decision to restructure, CSSOs mount intensive communication initiatives with key constituencies to explain the "whys" and "hows" of the restructuring process.

Newer CSSOs, who took office with a high profile public commitment to restructuring, noted the importance of communicating the philosophy and purpose for restructuring "broadly and deeply" to all key education constituents. As one noted: "I hit the ground fast to build a community of understanding of what we hoped to accomplish . . . talking with everyone from teachers, principals, and CEOs to the Kiwanis Club and ladies' auxiliaries." Another superintendent noted the importance of maintaining "a direct line to teachers because, ultimately, they will be the transmitters of change, and I want them to hear my explanation of the 'hows' and 'whys' of restructuring."

This kind of communication requires a considerable investment of CSSO time: "I spent 14-hour days twice a week to make sure I got to each district to get the message across," noted one CSSO. Said another, "If I want districts to be partners with us, I have to show that I am willing to be an equal partner—going to them for information just as I hope they will eventually come to me."

Not all respondents felt that broad communication about changes in the SEA were needed. Some respondents felt attention should focus on the substance of the K-12 reform rather than SEA reorganization to support reform. This view tends to be more representative of respondents in states where the CSSO has been in place for three or more years.

8. Staff development and retraining are essential for employees to carry out their new roles and responsibilities in the restructured SEA.

Staff development is an important component of the restructuring process. It is intended to help staff understand and adapt to the new roles and functions in the restructured SEA. One SEA official noted: "We have to change the entire organizational culture of the SEA to support the team approach." Most other respondents agreed that the challenge of changing organizational culture and training staff to understand the importance of that change is a priority for staff development. This is particularly true for staff assigned to new problem-solving teams.

In many states, the process involves training for "everyone in the building from secretaries and receptionists to the superintendent." Managing change, principles of TQM, strategic planning, and understanding organizational culture and climate were the most frequently mentioned topics for staff development. Private-sector contributions may fund all or part of SEA retraining efforts and provide staff experts to conduct the training.

9. SEAs generally did not receive new monies for restructuring but rather redirected existing resources.

SEAs generally have not received new funds for agency restructuring. Instead, they have redirected existing funds to support new programs and teaming structures. Several respondents described the resource redistribution in terms of "abandonment"—the process of eliminating some long-standing SEA functions in order to maximize resources for new state priorities. "To the consternation of some and the relief of many," a respondent observed, "SEAs are successfully abandoning functions like drivers' education and transportation," which are moved to other government agencies. By redirecting funds, reducing personnel costs, eliminating programs as needed, and receiving private sector contributions for retraining, SEAs have been able to make substantial organizational changes without new monies.

The team approach to problem-solving also helps maximize resources. Where once an individual might be expected to work in only one specialty area, team generalists now provide assistance to districts on a wide range of issues. This allows the SEA to collapse what in the past might have been several on-site visits to monitor various discrete programs into one slightly longer and more com-

prehensive meeting at which a range of issues are discussed. "I can do more for a district with one well-prepared team rather than six or seven separate specialist visits," noted a CSSO.

These components are not the only features of SEA restructuring, but they represent common threads throughout the 24-state sample. Obviously, a given state restructuring effort varies as the process adapts to the specific state context.

Factors that Contribute to SEA Restructuring Efforts

In the 24 sample states, there are common factors that have helped to promote restructuring of the SEAs:

▼ **Restructuring at all levels currently holds a prominent place on the national education policy agenda.**

The education community has, over the past ten years, accepted the fact that school restructuring is both needed and inevitable. Whether through court decisions, major legislation, governor's initiatives, or public-private sector blue-ribbon panel recommendations, local school systems have worked to make significant changes in both the content and processes of schooling. National attempts to develop new education goals, curricular standards, assessment options, and teacher licensure changes have established a clear climate for change in education.

The recent call for more systemic reform has highlighted the responsibilities of educators at the top of the educational system to provide explicit guidelines for curriculum content, student performance standards, assessment approaches, and governing authority (Smith & O'Day, 1991). SEAs "were bound to come under fire," noted a respondent who commented on the "ripple effect" of restructuring. He was describing the response throughout the system once an individual school is expected to restructure. "It's like concentric circles. If a school changes, a district must change. The SEA is next, and we are seeing just that—states realizing that if schools are behaving differently, so, too, should the SEA."

In addition, many of the states surveyed in this report are heavily represented in national school reform projects, in particular, the New Standards Project of the Learning Research Development Center and the National Center on Education and the Economy, the National Science Foundation/Statewide Systemic Initiative program, and RE:Learning. These groups advocate similar, systemic approaches to restructuring. It is likely that this coherence in reform strategies across national networks accounts for some of the similarity in restructuring approaches in the sample states, most of which are connected directly or indirectly to one or more of these national reform programs.

- ▼ **State financial cutbacks have made downsizing of SEAs a necessity and have forced SEAs to be creative in redesigning staffing assignments to carry out agency work.**

The shortage of funds in many states has made restructuring a virtual necessity. "We simply don't have the people to do what we used to do," noted one CSSO. "I could view it either as my worst nightmare or an opportunity. Of course, a year and a half into restructuring, I realize it was both, but reorganizing was the only sensible choice." Fiscal shortfalls have resulted in staff reductions, the abandonment of some SEA programs, and, in states that view the cutbacks as an opportunity, substantial organizational redesign.

- ▼ **SEAs have recruited politically savvy leaders who understand the political arena and are able to negotiate effectively with the governor's office and the legislature.**

Many agency officials who were interviewed noted the importance of their CSSO's (or other top agency official's) prior experience in the legislature, governor's office, or other highly political position in the success of the restructuring effort. These respondents viewed their SEA leaders as having established reputations as successful negotiators of the political scene. These leaders often have held prior elective office or have worked closely with the policy staff of elected officials. Therefore, their proposals for reform are perceived by state policy makers as credible and politically viable. As one official commented: "Our CSSO came with prior experience in the legislature, and it has helped immeasurably as we have had to work through new funding mechanisms, new structures, and new personnel procedures."

Problems Arising in SEA Restructuring Efforts

When offered a chance to talk about who or what represented barriers to restructuring in their respective states, respondents described broad support for—or at least acceptance of—state-level changes. However, a few difficulties were mentioned. The following factors accounted for the majority of the responses.

- ▼ **Turf: Upper-level SEA managers are reluctant to relinquish power and prestige.**

Individuals who have reached upper management positions do not like to relinquish authority and often seek to subvert restructuring by canceling meetings, postponing decisions, and other active or passive resistance. Generally, CSSOs have addressed this problem by staffing restructuring transition teams with employees "further down in the organization" who "do the work anyway and should help us determine how to make changes."

- ▼ **Organizational culture: Changing long-established norms and belief systems in entrenched SEA organizations is extremely difficult.**

The problem of how to change the organizational culture of an SEA is not unique to education organizations, nor is it easy to solve. As one respondent explained: "Somehow we have to get people to understand that organizational culture is 'us.' We are the ones who

do the changing. It's not something an outside expert can do for us." Most staff retraining programs include one or more sessions on organizational culture and climate, but respondents were not confident that the changes would be institutionalized easily or quickly.

- ▼ **Time: SEA officials and their public and private supporters must have a shared understanding of how much time it takes to make substantive organizational change.**

The time it takes to make organizational change and questions about how to pace the changes are difficulties experienced in every state. Recommendations about time requirements run the gamut from "Make change fast and furiously, then learn to live with it after the fact," to "We try to allow people enough time to adjust to the first round of changes before hitting them with the next—more drastic—set of changes."

Respondents generally agree that issues about timing are bound to arise during the course of restructuring and can only be resolved in the context of the particular state organization. There is little agreement about how much time is "a long time" or "too quick." One respondent might consider six months of planning "too long," while another finds three years "about as fast as possible." Regarding time, however, one CSSO's comment sums up the concern: "Regardless of what we want to happen, we need to be able to respond to our districts next year or we'll simply be irrelevant."

- ▼ **State personnel policies: State personnel policies can limit the SEA's freedom in filling vacant positions.**

In a few states that made sweeping personnel changes, the personnel rules governing all state workers have sometimes impeded the SEA's efforts to replace staff. While an individual might be laid off from an SEA, he or she might still be eligible to remain on a statewide list of employees for priority hiring. As one respondent commented, "We have all but stopped hiring because now all those people that we laid off are back at the top of the eligibility lists. We are trying to find a way around the problem, but so far we haven't discovered one."

- ▼ **Organized opposition: An organized movement to reject efforts at specifying outcomes has proven tenacious and troubling for many SEAs.**

Eleven state respondents spoke at length and with concern about what appears to be a well-organized movement by certain groups to oppose state efforts to adopt curriculum content standards and assessments. The state leaders were aware of similar pressures on colleagues in states not included in the sample. The opposing groups appear to think that schools will impose a set of values on students that are contrary to individual family religious beliefs or that students, by learning higher order thinking skills, will then assume "they can think for themselves and not listen to parents."

These groups are using a range of strategies to demonstrate opposition to restructuring programs. These include letter writing campaigns against specific programs targeted at individuals at the state, district, and school levels who are advocates for reform as well

as organized political campaigns to win seats on school boards for their supporters.

Several SEA leaders noted that the structure and content of the mailed literature was so similar throughout the state and from state to state that it is possible that only one or two sources could be responsible for the dissemination. (Mailing addresses from Orange County, California, and Lynchburg, Virginia, were cited frequently by respondents.) States facing this resistance find the best response is direct appeal to individuals in the community. "Some pastors who have lobbied against [our program] have sent me letters of apology once they hear me explain what the program is really intended to do. The problem is, the literature they receive from these groups is slick, convincing, and completely wrong."

ADVICE FROM STATE LEADERS



Given an opportunity to offer colleagues advice about restructuring based on their experiences, respondents provided the following as important for restructuring to be successful.

Leadership at the top: The CSSO must have a clear vision, set priorities, be prepared to take risks and handle resistance, stay the course, and realize that, in the end, he or she might not achieve everything. The CSSO's ability to articulate and support the SEA's effort to restructure is essential if change is to become "more than a paper reorganization."

Communication: The CSSO must be willing to involve people from all levels of the system, build partnerships, and communicate frequently with those involved. CSSOs "should invite people to ask hard questions" and "assume personal responsibility for communicating the new vision both internally and to the larger public." They should also listen for good ideas and encourage brainstorming of divergent solutions.

Boundaries: Another recommendation was to establish clear boundaries and ground rules for the restructuring transition team at the outset. Make it explicit who makes the final decisions, and have the transition team report back routinely. It may be helpful to have a member of the team act as a reporter of the team's activities and write articles about the process.

Models of new organizational norms: Other advice was to ensure that the leadership understands that their language and actions are models for the new way of working. As one respondent noted: "Be careful of the remarks you make. Every word and deed needs to be viewed as supportive of the change. If the CSSO doesn't do this, it isn't likely anyone else will, either." Investment in ongoing staff development may be critical if these new organizational norms are to be institutionalized.

Business community assistance: Another piece of advice is to recognize the business community as the friend that it is—or can be. Ask local CEOs for input, advice, and resources, but also be sure that they understand the differences as well as the similarities between educational organizations and for-profit businesses.

Informed policymakers: Some respondents discussed the need to keep both the state board and key legislators informed about how restructuring efforts are progressing. Their support should not be taken for granted. As one respondent advises: "A little time spent up front talking about changes is much easier and less bruising than the possible public upbraiding that can occur if a legislator or board member feels he or she was left out of the information pipeline."

Local context: Others advised that state technical assistance providers must learn how to provide assistance to local schools and districts that fits their particular local context. The ability to advocate for schools and adapt state approaches to local needs requires staff development for many SEA staff whose responsibilities

have changed from that of a specialist to a generalist who can provide assistance on a whole range of problems.

Evaluation: Respondents mentioned that no matter how good an idea is, it should be piloted first and monitored so that strengths and weaknesses can be identified. There is no single correct model for the restructuring process.

Stamina and humor: Other comments were that no matter what model is tried, restructuring can be exhausting as well as exhilarating. Leaders are advised to be flexible, patient, vigilant, and to not forget to celebrate successes.

Old dogs and new tricks: One last piece of advice is not to assume that length of tenure in a leadership position is antithetical to change. One CSSO had been in office for more than 15 years and still initiated change successfully: "I wanted to leave a legacy, and what better one than to leave a streamlined agency that is ready to do the work needed for the next generation of schools."

ISSUES FOR FURTHER STUDY



Accountability: The shift to establishing school performance criteria is too new for SEAs to know how they might intervene if large numbers of districts are unable or unwilling to meet these standards. Some respondents discussed the possibility of a new growth field of private contractors who could intervene with failing schools. Kentucky, New Jersey, and several other states provide models for intervention with districts that do not reach standards. There is language in many of the state restructuring mandates defining what the SEA must do with districts that do not improve. However, the long-term educational and legal consequences of widespread use of the takeover practice is very uncertain.

Local initiative: A number of SEAs noted with some frustration that districts and schools “are still asking the state to tell them what to do.” Few states have been tested by the other extreme—districts that actively and creatively exercise their new freedom to make substantially different choices about how to meet performance criteria.

Results versus time for learning: Broad-based support for restructuring, especially from the business community, is based on the assumption that substantive changes will occur, and soon. Tensions are likely to occur between educators needing time to pilot new ways of supporting schools—presumably abandoning approaches that prove not to have worked—and political supporters who are likely to assume the change was the right one and should be realizing benefits.

Professional staffing of the SEA: As the state agencies’ roles change, the kind of professional skills needed is uncertain. It is unclear whether the emphasis on applying business principles to education will mean shifting expectations about the appropriate professional preparation of state superintendents. Will they operate more like CEOs, CSSOs, or a combination of the two? What kinds of professional preparation will best prepare state superintendents to lead restructured state agencies? A similar question may apply to SEA professional staff; what new kinds of skills are needed to staff the restructured agency?

SUMMARY



Interest in state education agency restructuring is strong. In every state which provided information for this report, SEA restructuring changes are being made, some as part of a planned restructuring effort, others as a result of fiscal cutbacks that necessitate reorganization. In spite of inevitable variations to accommodate individual states, a number of components of SEA restructuring are common across the states.

Factors that contribute to restructuring include the place of SEA restructuring on the national educational reform agenda, state financial cutbacks, and involvement in key national school reform projects. In SEAs, upper- and middle-level managers' reluctance to relinquish power and prestige, the significant efforts involved in changing organizational culture, time constraints, conflicting state personnel policies, and resistance from certain political groups were mentioned as factors that impede SEA restructuring.

The respondents offered advice for colleagues about what they might expect if they embark upon a major agency reorganization. They mentioned the central role of top leadership in initiating and sustaining restructuring, the importance of communication at all levels, recognition of the business community as a friend, the establishment of ground rules for transition planning teams, and investment in staff development. Discussions with respondents also raised a number of issues for consideration concerning accountability leading to state intervention in local operations, the boundaries of local initiatives, the desire for results too soon, and appropriate staffing of the SEA given the technical assistance orientation. In spite of the uncertainties of SEA restructuring, this report shows that many state education agencies are developing new ways of organizing to support local schools and districts.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATING STATES

The 24 states selected for this report were identified through a literature review and conversations with a number of education experts. States included were named by three or more individuals and/or in print materials as actively engaged in SEA restructuring. This report does not intend to represent the 24 states selected for analysis as the only ones undertaking state agency restructuring.

Individuals from the following organizations suggested states that were likely to be undertaking a form of agency restructuring: Brown University School of Education, the Center of Organization and Restructuring of Schools, the Center for Policy Research in Education, the Education Commission of the States, the Morrison Institute, the National Alliance for Business, the National Center on Education and the Economy, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the Panasonic Foundation, and representatives from the SERVE Board of Directors.

List of states

Alabama	Iowa	North Carolina
Arizona	Kansas	Ohio
Arkansas	Kentucky	Oklahoma
Colorado	Maine	Pennsylvania
Delaware	Minnesota	South Carolina
Florida	Mississippi	Texas
Georgia	New Jersey	Vermont
Illinois	New Mexico	Virginia

APPENDIX B: A PROFILE OF THE STATE SAMPLE

The majority of states in the sample have relatively new chief state school officers (CSSO). While their terms in office range from 8 months to 24 years, the median is 3 years in office, and 78 percent have held office for 3 1/2 years or less. Of the CSSOs in the sample, 35 percent were appointed by the governor, 46 percent were appointed by the state board of education, and 19 percent were elected.

The governors of the states are also relatively new. Fifty-six percent were first elected to office in either 1990 or 1991. Of the state school boards in the sample, 78 percent were appointed by the governor and 11 percent were elected.

Finally, 69 percent of states in this sample are active participants in one or more national school reform programs. Forty-six percent of the sample states participate in the New Standards Project co-sponsored by the Learning Research Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh and the National Center on Education and the Economy. Fifty percent are recipients of National Science Foundation Statewide Systemic Initiative (SSI) Grants, and 30 percent are RE:Learning states. One-third participate in both New Standards and SSI programs, and four states participate in New Standards, SSI and Re:Learning. Four states receive support for restructuring reform from the Panasonic Foundation. In at least six states, the National Alliance for Business is providing technical assistance to state leaders in aspects of Total Quality Management and strategic planning.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Hello, my name is _____. I am calling to keep our appointment to talk about (name of states)'s state-level restructuring effort. As you may recall from our initial letter to you, SERVE, the regional laboratory that serves the southeastern United States, has commissioned a report describing how state education agencies are restructuring. It is intended to provide a broad audience of education leaders and policymakers with a clearer understanding of the range and depth of state agency changes now underway nationwide. Your state was recommended by several education leaders as one which should be included in such a report.

The purpose of our interview today is to learn about changes at the state level in (name of state) from your perspective. Because the report will provide an overview of state efforts, the particulars about (name of state) that we discuss today will be held in strict confidence. You (or your State Superintendent if the interview is with a designee) will receive a copy of the draft report for review prior to final publication.

As you know, the impetus for state agency restructuring varies from state to state, ranging from new legislation, court decisions, governor initiatives and new public/private sector coalitions—involving various business, university, parent and professional association groups—as well as state education agency leadership.

What was the impetus for (name of state)'s restructuring effort and when did change begin to get underway in (name of state)?

Changes being made in state agencies under the restructuring umbrella vary widely: new authority structures, new funding arrangements, new organizational arrangements within the department or that link state agencies to public/private sector oversight committees, and new accountability systems that significantly change state-district-school relationships.

Could you describe the key components of (name of state)'s restructuring efforts and any new roles or staffing changes that are a result of the changes?

Do the restructuring changes mean that (name of state)'s educational mission has changed? In what ways?

The availability of resources—particularly in the form of funds, expert staff and advisors, and time—can make or break a restructuring effort. Some states have earmarked existing resources to initiate change, some have access to new resources, and others have begun to restructure as a result of serious funding constraints and staffing cutbacks.

Where did (name of state) find the resources to initiate restructuring, and how will the issue of available resources affect the process now underway?

Virtually any change of such a magnitude generates supporters and blockers among educators, politicians and professional and community groups.

Who have been (name of state)'s restructuring supporters and blockers, and why do you think they have given or withheld support?

How have you communicated the state-level changes to districts and schools, and when do you expect to see an impact of the state-level changes on districts and schools?

What have you learned about the amount of time necessary to restructure at the state level?

What advice do you have for other state agency leaders who are considering a restructuring effort similar to the one you have undertaken?

Are there aspects of restructuring that we haven't touched on that you think are important for an understanding of what's happening in (name of state)?

Finally, are there other key individuals in (name of state) who you feel we might talk with to get another perspective on restructuring in your state?

I have no further questions for you. Do you have any questions of me?

As I mentioned, we'll be completing a draft before the school year begins. If you have questions in the meantime, you might call our Project Director, Linda Nelson at (617) 423-1444.

Thank you very much for your time and insights.

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