THE **SEA** OF THE FUTURE

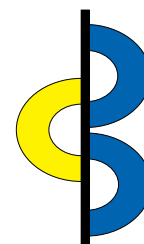## Leveraging Performance Management to Support School Improvement

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Sam Redding, Ed.D.

Building State
Capacity and
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The SEA of the Future

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The SEA of the Future: Leveraging Performance Management to Support School Improvement

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SEAs grew in response to new demands to administer federal programs (Timar, 1997) and, until relatively recently, had few resources to support school improvement (Murphy and Ouijdani, 2011). As a testament to this evolution, federal dollars still fund nearly half of the positions in the SEA. In the 1990s SEAs began to take a more direct role in the school improvement process. Through standards-based reforms, including the use of data, incentives, and other supports, SEAs bolstered the will and capacity of districts and schools to improve student achievement. (See for example, J.L. David's (1994) work on transforming SEAs.) Today, SEAs across the country are poised to take these reforms to the next level with deeper and more sweeping changes.

State education agencies (SEAs) are at an historic crossroads. Federal reform efforts, including the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top grant initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's flexibility program (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), have shifted attention toward the nation's lowest-performing schools and districts. At the same time, state legislatures, governors, advocacy groups, and citizens are calling on SEAs to more forcefully advance the mission of school improvement. In order to meet these new demands, SEAs will need to restructure their work along several fronts, including providing direct support to schools and districts, raising standards and expectations, addressing weaknesses in the teacher and principal labor market, and strengthening connections between early childhood education, K-12, higher education, and careers. They will need to do these things at a time of constrained resources.

In this inaugural essay of The SEA of the Future publication series, from the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center, we describe how the tools of performance management can take SEAs from where they are today to where they need to be. The basic structure of a performance management system is simple:

- Set high performance standards and goals.
- Systematically assess performance and evaluate progress.
- Improve or adapt.

Putting these processes into practice will not be easy. SEAs will have to not just assess performance and incentivize improvement, but also know when their own actions are impeding progress and require evaluation. They will have to assume a more active role in searching for and fostering new ideas, tools, and organizations that can deliver improved performance, value, or both, as well as abandon those approaches or providers that outlived their usefulness. SEAs will no doubt continue to monitor compliance with regulations, as they have traditionally done, but they will need to ensure that actions in the name of compliance work for, not against, performance objectives.

Reimagining the SEA

Performance management is a strategic approach to improvement in which the entire organization shares the same set of objectives. However, the organization assumes that these objectives can be met by a variety of approaches. The performance manager's role is to constantly evaluate the program mix and efficacy

of various approaches scaling up the most effective, mobilizing existing support systems or brokering new supports to help the most promising, and phasing out weak, unsuccessful approaches.[1] An organization using performance management considers unique circumstances and evidence of improvement, as well as absolute performance levels. But in dealing with lower performers it is always driven by the question, "is a different approach likely to lead to better results?" In order to leverage the tools of performance management to support school improvement, SEAs will need to reconceive their diverse and sometimes diffuse activities as a collective enterprise in service of shared strategic objectives. Doing so is likely to require SEAs to draw upon new people, expertise, and organizational capacities. Translating performance management into the context of the SEA will result in:

- Goal-oriented program administration that aligns compliance and school improvement objectives.
- Standards, assessment, and accountability systems that link achievement and financial outcomes.
- Strategies to bolster district capacity to improve weak schools and programs.
- Capacity and will to terminate ineffective programs and intervene directly in persistently low-achieving schools.
- System that facilitates the development, evaluation, and dissemination of new tools and models to support innovation in educational practice.

These areas of work are not new to SEAs, but they often lack the integration that enables the component parts to work together toward similar ends. Organizational silos, a compliance orientation, and routines that emphasize enforcing rules over improving outcomes limit SEAs' effectiveness and reduce their ability to improve learning outcomes for students.

The key changes that need to take place across programmatic areas as SEAs shift toward performance management are shown in Table 1. Traditionally, SEAs focused on federal program administration and compliance monitoring. Financial assessments of programs (services, districts, schools) beyond basic audits were rarely completed. Standardization, via rules and mandates, was deemed the most effective approach toward improving student outcomes. While this work was well-intentioned, it often led to conflicts between stated goals and strategies, as well as an inefficient allocation of resources.[2]

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[1] For a review of how performance management strategies have evolved in public sector organizations, see Heinrich (2003).

[2] See Murphy and Ouijdani (2011) for an accounting of SEA expenditures. For a consideration of how state policies shape opportunities for improvement, see Center for American Progress, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Hess, F.M. (2009).

Table 1. Reimagining the SEA's Work

Function	The Old SEA	The New SEA
Program administration	• Manages programs to ensure state and district spending complies with state and federal regulations	• Manages programs to align compliance and improvement mandates and ensure state and district spending has maximal impact
Standards, assessment, accountability	• Develops performance benchmarks • Establishes high-quality longitudinal data systems for federal reporting • Reports results to parents	• Develops cost and performance benchmarks • Establishes high-quality longitudinal data systems and measurement tools for cost-effectiveness analysis • Compares results across programs, districts, and schools
School and district support	• Relies on districts for school turnaround • Helps districts and schools with federal reporting requirements • Provides uniform systems of support that lack customization • Is accountable to governors, legislators, and voters for program implementation	• Brokers support for school and district staff according to need • Helps districts and schools leverage federal, state, and private resources • Increases flexibility to pursue differentiated approaches to school improvement • Is accountable to districts for support and state for productive use of resources
Intervention	• Offers support in cases of persistent performance failures	• Phases out programs and schools that persistently fail to achieve performance targets and intervenes to provide better programs and options for families
Innovation	• Reduces district innovation by imposing one-size-fits-all requirements for schools • Leaves it to districts to support local innovation in curriculum, teaching, and educational delivery	• Fosters district innovation by providing regulatory and financial flexibility to develop new programs and school models • Incentivizes, evaluates, and disseminates local innovation in curriculum, teaching, and educational delivery

Integrating the tools of performance management changes the nature of an SEA's work. The new SEA assesses productivity—the balance between performance and cost—of services, schools, and districts and uses these assessments to determine which will continue, which will be phased out, and which need improvement. The new SEA brokers differentiated support for districts and schools and minimizes the regulatory burden, so school and district leaders can implement the most promising changes. The new SEA has a clear and transparent process for stepping in with a more direct hand in cases of persistent failure by identifying

new, more effective service providers and providing options for families attending persistently low performing schools. And, the new SEA actively cultivates an environment of discovery and innovation, crafting policies that allow for the development, evaluation, and dissemination of new and more effective tools and practices.

Why Performance Management?

A performance management system can help the SEA become more intentional about what it does and does not do, how work is done, and when to change course. Performance management does not define goals or identify specific strategies, but it puts in place systems that enable learning and adaptation to drive improvement and the achievement of goals (Garvin, 1999). In organizations working toward multiple objectives, as is the case with SEAs, performance management supports the alignment of work so as to better advance strategic goals.

Performance management is often equated with assessment and reporting. But the continuous improvement promised by performance management can only be achieved if performance data are used to diagnose problems (and opportunities), as well as to make hard choices about whether existing investments are worth continuing, expanding, or terminating altogether.[3]

Performance management systems are built with the understanding that the people closest to a problem are best positioned to solve it and that they need flexibility to seek alternative solutions.[4] The biggest potential gains in productivity and performance will sometimes require disruptive changes, and everyone in the system must be able to explore and share innovation.[5]

Importantly, performance management is not the same as accountability, though holding agents responsible for outcomes is one component of a performance management system. Performance management is not simply about devolution, though autonomy enables learning and adaptation.

Starting the Conversation: The Essays and Authors of The SEA of the Future

Given the SEA's pivotal position and existing capacities, The SEA of the Future series asks how it can more effectively and efficiently achieve its objectives and advance the mission of school improvement. We will address this question in a variety of ways over the course of the next 10 issues of this semi-annual publication, such as:

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[3] See Duck (1993).

[4] This conforms with the notion of "steer, not row" advanced in Osborne & Gaebler (1992). More generally, managerial discretion is often highlighted as a key principle of making performance management work toward organizational objectives (Moynihan, 2006)

[5] For a business analogue see Kim & Mauborgne (2005)

- Exploring productivity—what it is and how to measure it.
- Use of federal resources—including how to make the most of them.
- Strategies to support school improvement—especially how best to utilize internal capacity while leveraging external partners.

These, and many other important topics, will be addressed. The specific topics we consider will be driven in part from what states say they are struggling with, as well as what states at the leading edge of this work are already doing.

This inaugural edition of the series examines how SEAs can better manage their relationships with districts and schools, identifies strategies for aligning resources with goals, and considers how outsiders—governors, legislators, philanthropies and reform advocates—can support the transition. This examination will be done in three essays.

Building a Better System of Support

In this essay, Sam Redding, Ed.D., Director of the Academic Development Institute, considers how SEAs can better align and manage components of their state system of support for schools and districts by strategically mobilizing different tools for different types of problems, including school districts in the process of school improvement, and regularly assessing their own systems to ensure that they are effective.

Doing More with Less: Three Strategies to Improve Resource Alignment

In this essay, Patrick Murphy, Ph.D., and Ashley Jochim, Ph.D., of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, consider the challenges of taking on new tasks in the current resource-constrained environment. They offer three strategies for improving resource alignment in the SEA: 1) increasing resource transparency, 2) searching for flexibility within existing resource allocations, and 3) developing a talent strategy to better utilize existing staff positions.

Where to Start? What Governors, Legislators, and Others Can Do

In this essay, Paul Hill, Ph.D., of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, considers how other state actors can support an SEA's transition toward performance management. He suggests how governors and legislators can advance reform agendas that support the SEA's new work and the role of advocacy groups and philanthropies in expanding their work from the more traditional boundaries of districts to working more directly with SEAs in new areas.

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Building a Better System of Support

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The role of state education agencies (SEAs) in leading change to improve student learning has been evolving over several decades. The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) introduced the "statewide system of support" as a framework for guiding the state's role in district and school oversight and assistance. This definition evolved into the more strategic and comprehensive System of Recognition, Accountability and Support (SRAS), which identifies and coordinates key policy levers states have for supporting low-performing districts and schools (see Table 1).

Managing the SRAS for performance will not be business as usual. States will need to be deliberate in:

- Strategically mobilizing all of their tools, including:
  - Building systemic and local capacity for change;
  - Creating opportunity for local agencies to pursue new strategies;
  - Offering incentives to improve; and
  - Intervening in the hardest cases.
- Differentiating the application of specific tools to deal with schools' and districts' varied performance challenges and trajectories.
- Including school districts as both partners and targets of reform.
- Continually assessing their own efforts and identifying ways to improve their system to more effectively support higher student achievement.

From Compliance to Performance Management in the SRAS

SEAs have been shifting, over the last two decades, from compliance-focused bureaucracies to more agile and proactive agencies that catalyze improvement in districts and schools (Rhim and Redding, 2011). The new SEA:

- Develops college- and career-ready standards and assessments.
- Provides support for effective leadership and instruction, including performance-based staff evaluations.
- Tailors supports to individual district and school needs.
- Develops sophisticated measurement systems to assess student achievement and turnaround strategies for the lowest-achieving schools.

Increasingly, states bring coherence to disparate funding streams and programs, match resources with operational need, and validate regulatory compliance with an eye toward effectiveness. Intentional systems of recognition, accountability, and support replace random acts of technical assistance, scattered programs and projects, and loose affiliations with external partners. States more readily examine student learning data and carefully scrutinize operational effectiveness, including assessing how the daily professional work of adults

is impacting student outcomes. At the same time, successful SEAs evaluate themselves—and their systems of recognition, accountability, and support—using the same rigorous performance metrics and evaluation tools that they apply to districts and schools.

Strategically Mobilizing and Aligning the SRAS to Support Schools and Districts

Even when SEAs repurpose themselves as catalysts for improvement, they still struggle with designing and managing an effective SRAS, one that is responsive and flexible enough to deal with constantly shifting political environments and expectations, and broad enough to incorporate the full scope of the agency's levers for change.

An effective SRAS rests upon a coherent framework that includes five levers for change (see Table 1) described by Rhim, Hassel, and Redding (2008) as:

1. **Opportunities** for improvement by reducing regulatory burdens and encouraging innovation.
2. **Incentives** (positive and negative) for districts and schools to take the reins in their own improvement.
3. **Systemic capacity** development, including data and planning systems and policies that promote the supply of high-quality leaders and teachers.
4. **Local capacity** to identify gaps in operational effectiveness and professional practice in districts and schools, and provide supports to address them.
5. **Interventions** that direct the most aggressive turnaround tools toward the most persistently low-achieving schools and districts.

These levers work in concert to provide a rising tide that gently lifts most boats and more dramatically lifts others; the power of these levers is far greater than the sum of their individual parts. A strong SRAS exercises all five levers of change in a systematic and balanced manner, with careful attention to the status and growth of performance indicators.

A key challenge in many states—stemming from weak authority, capacity, or both—is the over-reliance on one lever to the detriment of the others. For example, applying incentives to schools and districts may not catalyze improvement if weak teacher and leadership preparation programs in universities stem the supply of high quality human capital necessary for school turnaround. Similarly, restrictions on the use of funds may limit the strategies districts use to turnaround low performing schools.

Table 1. SEA Levers for Change

Lever for Change	Examples
Opportunity	• Routine scrutiny of state regulations to make them less burdensome • Policies to encourage new starts (e.g., charter schools) • Policies to encourage innovative schools, programs, and practices
Incentives	• Public disclosure of school performance • Recognition and rewards for individual, district, and school achievements
Systemic capacity	• Statewide data systems • Web-based planning and implementation tools • Pipelines for leaders and teachers • More effective credentialing requirements • Alternate routes to certification
Local capacity	• Consultation to diagnosis deficits in capacity and practice • Training and coaching for district administrators and instructional staff
Intervention	• Recovery districts • State takeover • Staff replacement • Turnaround models • External partners • School closure

Further complicating matters, responsibility for the SRAS often spans multiple divisions across the SEA and relies on different statutory authorities and regulatory powers. In some states, the SRAS may be pigeonholed within the Title I office, with little integration with other offices that impact school improvement. The SEA may view the SRAS as simply a vehicle for technical assistance to low-achieving schools and not consider the state policies and regulations that may be burdensome to districts and schools embarked upon focused improvement efforts.

These factors make strategic alignment difficult but not impossible. As a startng point, SEAs need to condeptualize, position, and promote their SRAS as a real system that works to coherently support schools and districts, rather than as a set of isolated parts moving independently. And, like any system, an SRAS needs a manager—an individual or team that ensures its continued usefulness to the SEA's strategic objectives related to student achievement.

Differentiating the SRAS

In differentiating its recognition, accountability, and support, the SRAS varies the opportunity, capacity-building supports, incentives, and interventions according to the needs of each district and school. Typically, high-capacity districts and schools respond well to incentives and greater opportunity, such as the autonomy to innovate. While these same levers may be applied in varying degrees

to stimulate improvement in low-performing districts and schools, they often need help developing capacity, including talent, professional practice, and operational effectiveness.

States are moving toward systems of support that vary the type, intensity, and duration of assistance for districts and schools along two metrics. First, they differentiate based on the current level of performance as measured by disaggregated student learning outcomes, especially scores on state assessments and graduation rates. Second, they consider the demonstrated capacity for change and operational strengths and weaknesses as determined by student learning data and patterns of operational practice, particularly in leadership, curriculum, and instruction.

States are making greater use of student learning outcomes to classify all the schools in a state along a continuum, from those that are consistent high-performers to those that are persistent low performers despite repeated interventions and thus candidates for closure. For schools and districts on a satisfactory trajectory of continuous improvement, the state may provide an improvement plan, based on the needs identified by district and school improvement teams. For schools and districts in need of rapid improvement, the state may recommend or require interventions, including those consistent with turnaround principles. Schools in need of rapid improvement may require more guidance in diagnosing current practice and planning reforms. This guidance can be provided by the state, district, or external partners.

Just as the SEA differentiates its supports and interventions based on an assessment of districts' and schools' capacity for change, performance, and operational and professional practice, it differentiates the allocation of its resources to achieve the greatest impact in the districts and schools with the greatest need for improvement. This targeted resource allocation is often met with political resistance from communities receiving less support than their lower-performing neighbors. An argument can also be made that focusing resources too sharply on the lowest-performing districts and schools while neglecting those with marginally better performance only results in more districts and schools falling into distress. Thus, there is an opportunity cost in how resources are allocated and in how supports and interventions are differentiated.

Interventions

SEAs, with encouragement and funding from the U.S. Department of Education, are targeting persistently low-achieving schools for interventions when less intensive improvement efforts have been unsuccessful. The intervention strategies include:

- **Transformation**—Replacement of the principal, rigorous staff evaluation, and significant reforms.

- **Turnaround**—Transformation strategies plus significant staff replacement.
- **Restart**—Charter schools and external management.
- **Closure**—Assignment of students to higher-performing schools.

The possibility of a state-initiated intervention can act as an incentive for districts and schools to conscientiously engage in substantial improvement, but it also provides a fail safe for the state, as well as students and parents, for those schools that fail to improve despite concerted effort.

State interventions differ in their reliance on turnaround partners. In a district-managed turnaround, the district is the primary partner, working to replace staff and develop a turnaround strategy within the basic confines of local governance, including collective bargaining agreements and district-provided supports. In a state-managed turnaround, the state may bypass the district and take over management of the school directly, via a state-sponsored district or, more commonly, contracts with charter management organizations or other operators to manage the school.[1] In a third variation, the SEA and school district may assume shared responsibility for the design of the intervention.

Recovery school districts place persistently low-achieving schools in a state-managed district with intensive turnaround requirements, including changes in personnel and substantial scrutiny of operations. As states such as Louisiana, Illinois, Tennessee, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Michigan gain experience with their recovery districts and similar interventions, more will be known about the effects on the districts from which the schools are removed; the ability of the state to build the capacity of the districts so that more schools do not fall into disrepair; the effective use of external providers; and policies through which the state can remove the school from the recovery district.

One thing is certain—changes in personnel and governing status will only be effective if they impact the proximal influences on student learning (Wang, Haertel, and Walberg, 1997). Those influences include:

- Internal decision-making processes must be nimble and based on sound and rigorous data.
- Instructional planning and delivery must comport with effective practice;
- Student learning time must increase.
- Teacher collaborative planning must increase in time and rigor.

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[1] Another approach, most clearly articulated in Colorado, focuses the state's turnaround efforts at the district level and includes authority to reconstitute the district if performance challenges persist over five years. While it is yet to be seen how this novel use of state oversight authority plays out, it has the potential to be more impactful by focusing more explicitly on district leadership—or lack thereof—as a lever for school improvement.

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- Supports for students' academic, social, and emotional learning must be strengthened.
- Family engagement must be improved.
- Intervention must result in dramatically reformed professional practice.

The Role of Local School Districts

School districts are both the targets of the state's system of recognition, accountability, and support, and partners in implementation. Just as a state may incentivize constructive change by rewarding success and providing consequences for failure, so can a district. States provide greater opportunity for change by removing regulatory barriers, granting more local autonomy, and encouraging innovation; districts can do the same for their schools. States enhance the supply of leaders and teachers, and so can districts, especially by moving high-quality, motivated personnel into the schools that need them most. States provide rich and accessible data systems and planning processes, and so can districts. Just as states differentiate supports to efficiently address district operational deficits, districts can approach school improvement in the same manner.

Effective state systems include the district as a central player in the improvement of its schools and give due attention to building the district's capacity to do its part. This requires district capacity at three levels:

1. Operational effectiveness of the central office and board in taking care of district functions.
2. Infrastructure for school leadership, teaching, and learning.
3. Support for the improvement of individual schools (Lane, 2009).

The state builds school district capacity for improvement by providing supports at all three of the district levels. Especially, the state ensures that the district applies its own differentiated supports for schools, including turnaround strategies and, in extreme cases, procedures for closure. When the state intervenes or provides support directly to a school, it includes the district as an integral participant, thus modeling an appropriate district role and building district capacity for school improvement.

The advantage of SRAS focusing on districts rather than schools is that state resources are more sufficient for the scope of turnaround work. Likewise, school improvement is more likely to be sustained if key elements of improvement are embedded in district policy and the district provides ongoing monitoring and support. One danger of a district-only focus is that resources, supports, and interventions may not be adequately targeted to the schools in greatest need of improvement or may not reach the school level with the necessary focus and power to effect change. Another pitfall is that some districts do not have the capacity to do the work. A balanced approach, tailored to the state's context and engaging the district with its schools, seems to be the most appropriate.

Evaluating and Improving the SRAS

The Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center) has developed a rubrics-based process for evaluating and improving the SEA's Differentiated System of Recognition Accountability and Support. This document, called the SRAS Performance Management Rubric (SRAS Rubric)—along with technical assistance from the BSCP Center and additional resources at www.bscpcenter.org—enable an SEA to assess its system of support and to develop, implement, and monitor plans for improvement. The SRAS Rubric is based on the authors' previous work with statewide systems of support, including the Academy of Pacesetting States, and reflects lessons learned in this work, as well as changes in federal guidance and state programs.[2]

The BSCP Center works with Regional Comprehensive Centers as partners to provide a technical assistance process for an SEA as it introduces a performance management mindset and methods to its SRAS. The challenge for SEAs has been to achieve a high level of sustainable implementation often in a climate of declining state resources and political change. The challenge for the BSCP Center and the Regional Comprehensive Centers is to help SEAs gain traction and achieve sustainable implementation that produces results.

The SRAS Rubric is not a compliance monitoring process, a rating system, or a means of comparing one state system with another. Rather, the state's profile produced from using the rubric informs an SEA's immediate planning process by determining which indicators have priority and are manageable.

Each SEA brings its own structure, tradition, and history to the task of improving education. The SRAS Performance Management Rubric does not present a model for a system to support schools, but provides a framework within which many different strategies may fulfill the same purpose.

The BSCP Center has adapted Academic Development Institute's Indistar® web-based planning and implementation tool for use by SEA teams with the SRAS Performance Management Rubric. This new system, called IndiSEA™, facilitates states' movement beyond initial evaluation toward construction of a more effective SRAS.

Conclusion

A strong state system of recognition, accountability, and support will prune away ineffective programs, policies, and regulations, and create effective initiatives to spur district and school improvement. States adopting a systems approach to school improvement align their organizations, resources, and staff to fulfill their new performance-driven missions. These structural alterations are a rudimentary form of performance management. The next step is fine-tuning the SRAS processes and system components in response to operational and outcome data.

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[2] See, for instance, Kerins, Perlman, & Redding (2009); Redding & Walberg, (2008).

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Doing More with Less: Three Strategies for Improved Resource Alignment

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Doing More with Less: Three Strategies for Improved Resource Alignment

In a perfect world resources would be abundant and flexible. As those who work in state education agencies (SEAs) know all too well, neither of those adjectives applies to their institutions. State legislators have historically (and notoriously) been reluctant to support positions in the SEA, and years of recession-driven cuts have only made resources tighter.

Despite these constraints, SEAs are being asked to advance ambitious reform initiatives in an effort to significantly improve student achievement. For example:

- The U.S. Department of Education granted 34 states flexibility in the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), simultaneously freeing them from some accountability provisions while committing them to a wide range of new reform mandates.

- Forty-five states (and the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity) are implementing Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012), which require changes in instructional materials, professional development, assessments, and accountability systems.

- Twenty-five states are piloting or implementing new teacher evaluation protocols, often in a highly charged political environment (Donaldson, 2012).

At the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE), we spent the past two years talking to state chiefs and their staffs and collecting data on the activities of SEAs. As part of this work, we analyzed budget documents for 17 SEAs, uncovering a variety of patterns in terms of how states allocate resources and approach the work of performance management. This essay reports on some of these findings and their implications for SEAs seeking to implement ambitious reform agendas without significant new resource investments.

Very few of these reforms are accompanied by additional resources.[1] As a result, SEAs must be strategic and, at times, creative, in how they go about meeting these new demands. This is what we call the "productivity challenge," because in the absence of new funds, improved performance can only be attained through changes in how the SEA manages its existing resource set.

Better utilizing existing resources is easier said than done. Our research[2] on SEAs revealed three key leverage points SEAs can use to better align resources and build upon their existing assets to operate more strategically. These include improving resource transparency, seeking flexibility, and reimagining talent and talent pipelines. These approaches are neither exhaustive of what SEAs

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[1] This is especially true for states that committed to ambitious reform agendas as part of unsuccessful efforts to win implementation dollars though the federal Race to the Top grant program.

[2] CRPE research on SEAs has been supported by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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will need to accomplish nor novel to the work of SEAs.   Nonetheless, they are important tools for addressing the productivity challenge and worth utilizing more consistently than has been typical in SEAs.

We do not offer a set of step-by-step instructions or roadmap for reform because we do not have one. Rather, the intent here is to provide a framework for thinking about resources within the SEA and to offer examples of choices some states have made in this regard. In the future, as part of our work with the Department of Education's Building State Capacity and Productivity Center, we will document the experiences of states as they seek to align resources to better service their new reform agendas. Those lessons should prove useful as SEAs continue to develop their capacity to manage performance and improve outcomes for students.

Improving Resource Transparency

Aligning resources towards strategic objectives can only be accomplished if existing resource investments are identified. States routinely generate and publicly release expenditures on K-12 educational programs. Yet, few SEAs systematically identify the share of resources devoted to administering programs (that is, netted out of dollars passed through to schools and districts). Even fewer SEAs publicly report those figures.[3]

This is not the result of an intentional effort to conceal information; in most cases, the SEA is simply following reporting mandates. State legislatures and budget offices typically focus their reporting and analysis requirements on broader K-12 budgets, which make up a much larger share of the state's budget and are of greater interest to policymakers. But, just because external reporting requirements are driven by such constraints does not mean that internal agency analysis must be so as well.

An accounting of how agencies target resources across reform areas can reveal inconsistencies between reform intentions and resource allocations. To determine how well resources aligned with reform objectives, we analyzed staffing data for eight states to assess how SEAs allocated one, particularly important, type of resource across different domains of work.

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[3] See, for example, Center for American Progress & Education Resource Strategies (2009).

[3] Over the course of two projects, we examined the budget documents of 17 states. Of those, program-level information for how personnel and administrative expenses were being allocated within the SEA could be found on only two departments' web pages. Often, some of these data were gleaned from the state budget office submissions, but in most cases, central budget process information offered little insight into the programmatic spread of resources. Even SEA fiscal officers contacted directly did not have the information readily at hand, and in two cases lacked a formal staffing table. We are not alone in identifying a lack of fiscal transparency; see Brown, Hess, Lautzenheister, & Owen (2011).

The results are informative. On average, the set of eight states assigned just under 16 percent of personnel positions to functions related to the prime mission of the new SEA: improving the performance of districts and schools (Figure 1). This includes divisions responsible for designing and administering assessments, establishing and monitoring accountability standards, and providing support to low-performing schools—functions that are central to managing teacher quality, school accountability, and turnaround and are prominently featured in Race to the Top and flexibility plans. That 16 percent figure represents about twice as many positions as are allocated to overseeing school nutrition programs but about one-third the resources dedicated to departmental administration.

Figure 1. Distribution of SEA Positions by Function, Eight States (FY2010)
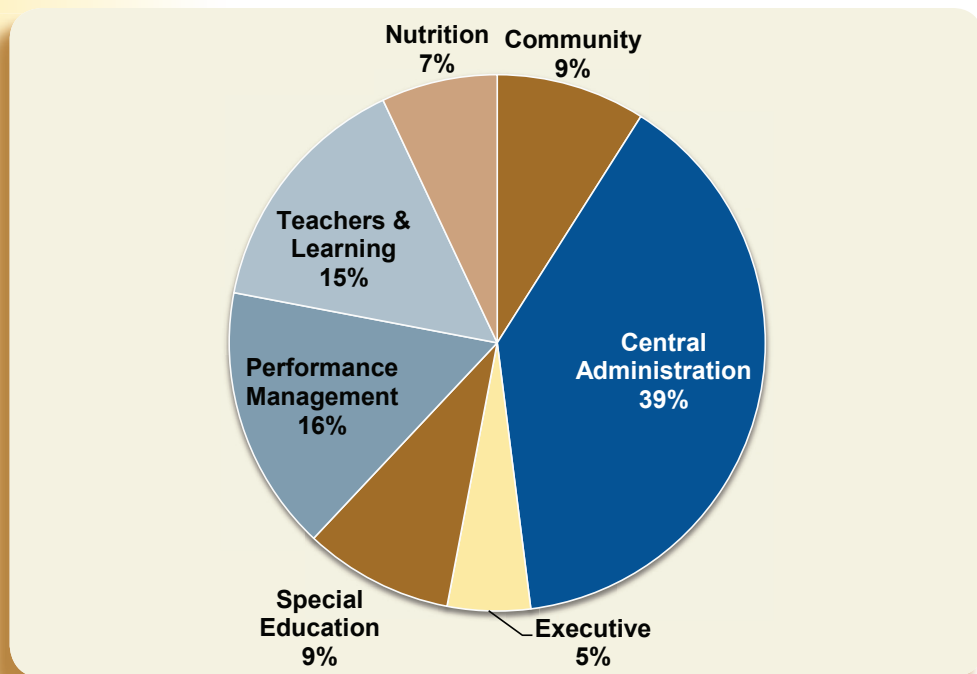
Disaggregating the data into sub-functions further reveals the potential strategic tradeoffs across areas of SEA work and how investments in one area can limit investments in another. Figure 2 considers two types of performance management positions across states, assessment and improvement. The assessment sub-function typically consists of the design and administration of assessments, data collection, and data analysis associated with accountability. School improvement personnel include those who directly assist low-performing districts and schools to build capacity.

As a general rule, states devote fewer staff to improvement functions compared to assessment functions. In Texas, for example, four and one-half times as many staff work on assessment as work on improvement. The greater investment in

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assessment may be driven by historical expenditure patterns (i.e., states have been investing in assessment for longer) or cost drivers unique to individual states (e.g., the costs of contracting for, and customizing, assessments).

Figure 2. Share of SEA Performance Management Positions by Funtion (FY2010)
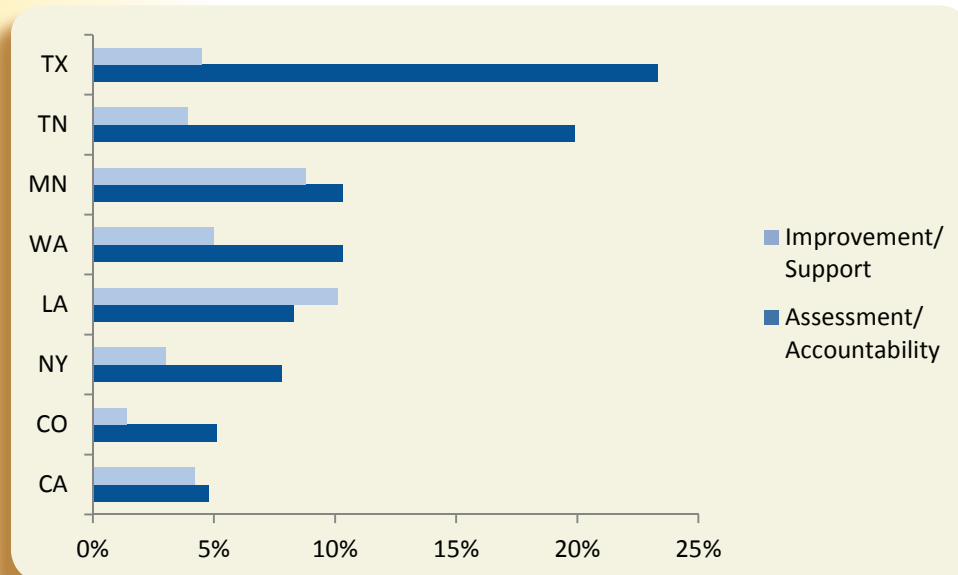
Whatever the driver of different expenditure patterns, these analyses raise an obvious question: Is a given resource commitment enough to support the goals of the SEA? The answer depends on the state's strategy for improving student outcomes. For example, if the SEA is going to play a direct role in the improvement of individual schools—as with Louisiana's Recovery School District—then it may require a considerable staffing commitment. On the other hand, if the state takes a more hands-off approach, leaving more of the implementation work to districts or external contractors, as has been the case in several other states, then the SEA may not need to commit as many staff to these efforts. As a result, before an SEA can begin to think about how to reallocate resources, the department must first know whether their existing resource allocations are aligned with their strategic plan.

Seeking Resource Flexibility

If resources are not aligned towards strategic objectives, then SEAs will likely need to repurpose existing resources. Unfortunately, a funding structure in which federal dollars underwrite the costs of many of the salaries in a department can limit resource flexibility. Based on an analysis of the staffing commitments of seven states, we found that the federal government supports between 37 percent and 52 percent of SEA positions (Murphy and Ouijdani, 2011).

However, the reach of federal restrictions on resources is not evenly distributed across programs. Federal support is concentrated in a few specific areas.

As Figure 3 suggests, although federal funds can account for nearly 100 percent of positions in the offices responsible for special education and nutrition, federally-funded positions represent a smaller share in other parts of the department. Unless SEAs themselves, or their state legislators, tied their hands with mandates on state funding, SEAs presumably have greater flexibility to shift and repurpose resources in these other program areas.

Figure 3. Share of Federally Funded Positions by Function (FY2010 state budgets)
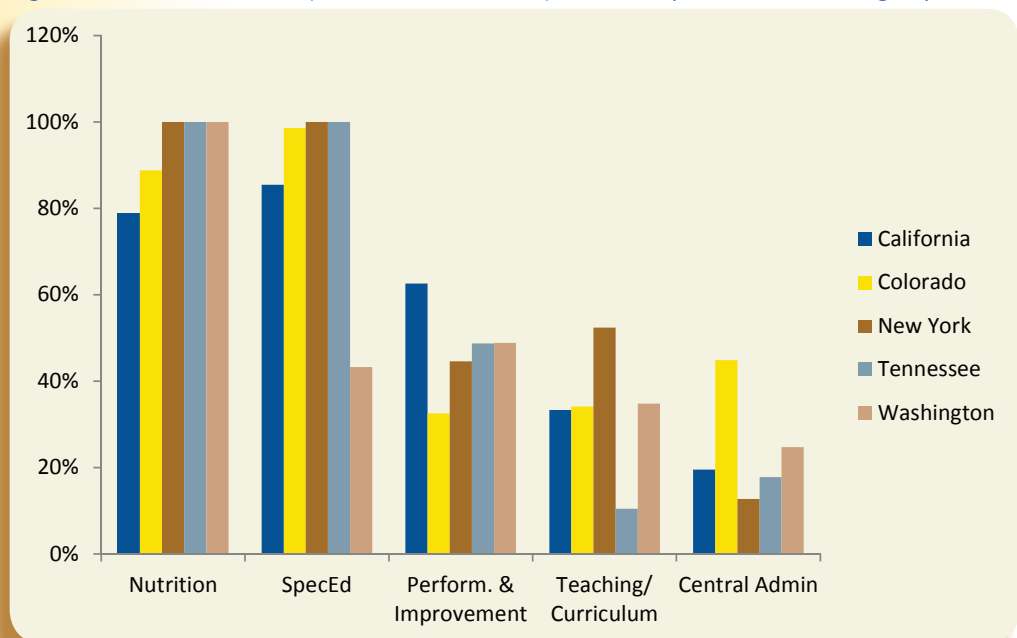
Even within the restricted federal programs, some states have begun to explore how resources, such as federal Title I funds, could bolster SEAs' capacity to support school and district improvement. The Louisiana Department of Education, for example, is considering using a portion of its Title I administrative set-aside to underwrite the cost of its district support networks, while maintaining its capacity to ensure compliance with federal requirements. To accomplish this, the department cross-trained its compliance and support personnel on a variety of programs, rather than limiting them to only one. The notion is that a single point-of-contact can provide support to a district on several different aspects of school improvement, with a share of that individual's salary being covered by federal Title I dollars.

Louisiana is not alone in these changes. A recent review of 10 SEAs' organizational charts reveals better integration across divisions responsible for compliance and school improvement. As little as two years ago, such a review would find that school support personnel were located in one division and the Title I administrators in another. Most states, via formal or informal reorganizations, now better integrate these staff so they can work collaboratively on supporting the school improvement function of SEAs.

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Of course, some federal funds are dedicated to supporting school improvement. Washington was one of several states examined that dedicated federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) money to support functions. The SIG funds represent an attractive resource to build SEA capacity for school improvement. The fact that the SIG program may sunset, however, makes sustainability difficult.

Reimagining Talent and Talent Pipelines

The above discussion of aligning resources treats positions and staff within the SEA as interchangeable. In reality, shifting individuals from one position to another is much easier said than done. The tasks and skill set necessary to monitor implementation of a federal grant program, for example, are likely to be significantly different than those required to build turnaround capacity within a district. A recent examination of eight states' school improvement strategies identified finding enough of the right people to do the work as the states' greatest challenge (Murphy and Rainey, 2012).

Given the outsized role compliance monitoring traditionally played in SEAs, it's unlikely that many existing staff could be easily repurposed to serve the new roles SEAs are taking on in the current reform environment. The experience of one state administrator in charge of special education programs exemplifies the problem. She determined that she needed only about 20 percent of the positions in the division to keep up with the program's reporting requirements. In theory, she could free up the other 80 percent of the staff members to work directly with districts in support of improving special education outcomes for students. Unfortunately, those employees had little experience or training in providing that type of support.

The state chiefs in our study used three general approaches to build a cadre of people to support their SEA's work.

1. **Direct hiring**—Filling positions with new individuals from outside the SEA.
2. **Contracting out**—Purchasing expertise from external vendors, including districts.
3. **Growing your own**—Reassigning existing employees.

The most direct approach to addressing human capital needs is to simply add new hires to do the work. Ideally, these positions could be defined with duties and qualifications aligned to the needs of the state's strategic plan for education. When Brenda Cassellius became Minnesota's education commissioner, the SEA had a relatively large number of funded but unfilled positions. Her predecessor froze hiring in response to the fiscal crisis. The bad news was that she had fewer people on board to do the work of the agency. The good news was that she could restructure some of those open positions to better suit her plans. Since the shifts involved titles of positions as opposed to individual persons, she encountered less internal resistance than she otherwise might have.

Recruiting permanent staff can bump up against the constraints of state civil service requirements. As a consequence, the hiring process can be lengthy and salary structures may not be competitive. Contracting responsibilities out to private vendors, or through temporary transfers from districts, offers one way to avoid cumbersome hiring processes while bolstering the SEA's internal capacity to do new work. States such as Kentucky and North Carolina use a relatively large number of contractors to form the backbone of the support the SEA provides to schools and districts for improvement. Lillian Lowery, the state superintendent in Maryland, has plans to temporarily reassign district staff to support struggling districts and schools, rather than rely on permanent new hires.

In most cases, using contractors and temporary transfers can bolster talent more quickly than relying on full-time state employees, and these hiring strategies can shift more quickly in response to new reforms. As well, SEAs can seek out and draw upon a broader pool of talent than is typically available in the existing agency hierarchy. Talent pipelines such as Teach for America, Strategic Data Project Fellows, and Broad Residents can provide SEAs with less traditional candidates with different skill sets to engage in new types of work.

SEAs, like most government agencies, have historically relied on a grow-your-own strategy, in which talent is developed internally and career ladders make new work attractive. The advantage of relying on internal pipelines is that managers can cultivate the specific types of expertise they require. This approach can continue to be an important part of the talent strategy, given a strong pipeline. After all, leaders in human resource management in the private sector are increasingly relying on internal hires and promotions (Schawbel, 2012).

While the research on developing and managing talent pipelines in SEAs is in its infancy, recent evidence from districts suggests that talent management is crosscutting work that must extend well beyond the work of the human resource department to be considered through the lens of strategy and performance management (Campbell and DeArmond, 2011). It is likely that SEAs will need to draw upon all possible approaches to make the most of their staff resources. This might include hiring people for new strategic initiatives, drawing upon contractors for specialty skills or short-term technical assistance projects, and growing existing employees for areas of work that are already well-developed.

Looking Forward

Doing more with less is the reality in many SEAs, and it will not be easy. But by using the strategies described here, SEAs can begin to realign their resources so that they are used with maximal impact. Over the next year, the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center will do its part to provide state leaders with more comprehensive tools and strategies to continue to confront the productivity challenge.

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The SEA of the Future

Where to Start? What Governors, Legislators, and Others Can Do

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Other essays in this series sketch a new and more productive future for state education agencies (SEAs), and provide important ideas for state superintendents and senior staff. SEAs, however, were not built to manage performance and cannot easily adapt to this new role. State superintendents can adopt performance-based strategies and lead change, but they cannot transform their agencies as deeply as required without help from the outside.

This essay is for those who work outside of SEAs—governors, state legislators, philanthropies, and reform advocates—who would like to support them in this transformation. This essay asks and answers—What can they do to help define a new performance-oriented mission for the SEA, help state superintendents build the staff and analytic capacities their agencies will need, and remove barriers to necessary change?

Implications for Governors

Governors can, and should, use the bully pulpit to make school performance improvement a top priority for state government and put pressure on legislative committees and incumbents in the SEA. The new SEA requires a certain kind of state superintendent. The governor can help ensure the right person gets the job, by promoting a candidate who embraces the idea of performance management, is committed to innovation, and, does not define the job as protecting the existing K-12 system. Where the constitution provides for direct appointment of the superintendent, this is simple. But even in states with elected superintendents, governors can recruit good candidates, who might not have thought of running, and provide them public support to reduce the risk of a political split.

Whether the state superintendent is an appointee or elected, the governor should offer to collaborate on strengthening the state agency and revising its mission, and should support the chief when he/she takes the initiative to hold districts accountable for performance. Other efforts the governor could promote or lead include:

- Negotiate new flexibility for the SEA's use of federal administrative funds with the U.S. Department of Education
- Sponsor legislation to reform school finance so that all funds follow children to the school they attend. Such a move provides districts with the flexibility to use funds as they see fit and eliminates the SEA's obligation to monitor spending and implementation of categorical programs.
- Craft a budget that fully funds a statewide longitudinal student data system that tracks outcomes, school and program enrollment, and spending, and provides for the recruitment of top-level technical staff, at salaries competitive with industry and universities.

- Sponsor legislation to eliminate independent licensing boards and other commissions that impose restrictive requirements that are based on collective bargaining, not on proven links to student learning.
- Sponsor legislation to give the state superintendent authority to sanction negligent school districts, by decommissioning them, replacing them, or splitting them up, and by seizing control of the lowest-performing schools and chartering them out to new providers.

Some of these actions are under the governor's personal control; others involve leadership on legislation. The latter actions, including budget priorities and program consolidation, might require the governor to build new alliances with pro-reform legislators, and in some cases to bypass the legislature's traditional leaders of education policy, who might resist the state's transition to performance management.

Implications for Legislators

Without new legislative authority and targeted appropriations, state superintendents can go only so far. Transformation of the SEA's mission and capacities will require new legal authorities and new funding, as well as the abandonment of some traditional programs and forms of expenditure.

Actual performance management reform is likely to result in some constituent complaints, especially when reform involves strong pressure on districts that do not address the needs of large numbers of children; seizure and chartering out of consistently low-performing schools; and other changes in school districts. How legislators respond to this criticism—whether they support complainants automatically, or look carefully into cases before judging the agency—can sustain or impede reform.

Actions legislators can take to strengthen an SEA's capacity to manage performance include:

- Collaborate with the governor on initiatives to consolidate programs and revise the state school finance system so that funds can follow children to the schools they attend.
- Allow state superintendents to transform their agencies, reorganizing their agency and using existing money to hire staff whose skills are consistent with the new mission, even if it means increasing salaries for certain agency employees.
- Fully fund development of statewide longitudinal databases and analytical capacity. States vary in how much they have invested in data systems, but even those with good data are just starting to figure out how to use them.
- Let go of funding for unique home-district projects, which, though often well-intentioned, further dilute the pool of available resources.

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Some legislative leaders will find existing education committees are likely to resist change given that they once sponsored the diverse programs that now need consolidation or change. These committees might need to be bypassed, in favor of broader economic development committees that are naturally concerned with K-12 performance, or merged into such committees. Committees should be structured to focus on performance oversight, not provider groups or programs for different categories of students.

Implications for Philanthropies

Foundations interested in K-12 education have understandably focused their giving on districts and schools. After all, that is where the students are. It is easy to see how school improvement, new schools (including charters), teacher training, new instructional methods, and new district investments could improve student outcomes.

The adoption of performance management, however, reflects hard lessons about the need for attentive public oversight and aggressive action on behalf of children whose schools and districts are not serving them well. Some philanthropies have invested in strengthening this function at the district level, but none have done so for state agencies. Though philanthropies rightly resist paying for continuing costs, they could make huge contributions to an SEA's capacity by:

- Subsidizing development of new state performance databases and analytical capacities—
  - Grants could help state superintendents get work started even as they are making the case to legislators for greater authority and funding.
  - Alternatively, grants to state universities for data system development and analysis can help bypass state civil service and pay limitations, and bring on top talent quickly.
- Supporting development of new model state statutes strengthening SEA missions, authority, and staffing, and establishing new state authority to decommission or sanction negligent districts.
- Helping document the trials and triumphs of SEAs on the leading edge of reform—Some states are further down the road toward transforming their SEAs, and the lessons gleaned from them could prove invaluable, answering:
  - What capacities are needed?
  - What problems arise?
  - What strategies have led to improved student learning?
  - What must a state do to be prepared if it reassigns responsibility for a school or district?
- Sponsoring national training and networking programs for new and aspiring state superintendents and senior state agency staff.

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By themselves, these investments will not transform state agencies; but, they can greatly accelerate problem-solving and capacity-building in the neglected area of state leadership.

Implications for Advocacy Groups

A growing national network of state-based policy reform organizations, typified by Connecticut's ConnCAN and Kentucky's Pritchard Committee, is pressing for performance management and school innovation. These groups, like the major philanthropies, have focused on state legislation that supports local- and school-based reforms, including charter schools. Until recently, SEAs have been off their radar, but it is now clear that smart, aggressive SEAs can be vital allies. State advocacy groups can help state superintendents and SEAs develop their capacity for performance management by:

- Pressing governors to play the roles described above.
- Advocating for enactment of model state statutes redefining SEA roles and state budgets that enable greater flexibility in use of resources and staff, including salaries.
- Educating legislators and legislative candidates about the need for changes in state agency roles and capacities.
- Pushing governors to take the aggressive steps necessary to prioritize performance management and innovation, including appointing assertive and reform-minded state superintendents.
- Supporting state superintendents and SEAs when they take needed but controversial actions and pressing other reform-oriented officials to act boldly and not to temporize or backslide.
- Working with elected officials and SEAs to build a broad base of support for reform among parents and the general public.

Conclusion

Only state superintendents can do the day-to-day work of transforming their agencies into performance managers. But other parties can make the difference between a lonely and possibly futile individual effort and a well-integrated movement. Governors and other key actors must not just pay attention to what their SEAs do but also take action to improve them. They should not mistake the absence of controversy for success or assume, as perhaps once was the case, that the SEA is so benighted it can not play a key role in ensuring student success.

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