



PLANNING AND EVALUATION SERVICE

**COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL ASSISTANCE
CENTERS PROGRAM:
FINAL REPORT ON THE EVALUATION**

**VOLUME II: CASE STUDIES OF CENTER SERVICES TO
STATE AND LOCAL SITES AND CASE STUDIES OF
COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES**

2000



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY

Doc. #2000-20

This report was prepared for the U.S. Department of Education under Contract Number 94053001. The views expressed herein are those of the contractor. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education is intended or should be inferred.

U.S. Department of Education

Richard W. Riley
Secretary

Office of the Under Secretary

Judith A. Winston
Under Secretary

Planning and Evaluation Service

Alan L. Ginsburg
Director

Elementary and Secondary Education Division

Ricky T. Takai
Director

September 2000

This report is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, Planning and Evaluation Service, Elementary and Secondary Education Division, *Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers: Final Report on the Evaluation. Volume II: Case Studies of Center Services to State and Local Sites and Case Studies of Collaborative Activities*, Washington, D.C., 20202.

To order copies of this report, write:

ED Pubs
Education Publications Center
U. S. Department of Education
P. O. Box 1398
Jessup, MD 20794-1398;

via fax, dial (301) 470-1244;

or via electronic mail, send your request to: edpubs@inet.ed.gov.

You may also call toll-free: 1-877-433-7827 (1-877-4-ED-PUBS). If 877 service is not yet available in your area, call 1-800-872-5327 (1-800-USA-LEARN); Those who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) or a teletypewriter (TTY), should call 1-800-437-0833.

To order online, point your Internet browser to: www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html.

This report is also available on the Department's Web site at: www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/.

On request, this publication is available in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette. For more information, please contact the Department's Alternate Format Center (202) 260-9895 or (202) 205-8113.

**COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL ASSISTANCE CENTERS PROGRAM:
FINAL REPORT ON THE EVALUATION**

**Volume II: Case Studies of Center Services to State and Local Sites
and Case Studies of Collaborative Activities**

Policy Studies Associates
Washington, D.C.

Prepared for:

U.S. Department of Education
Office of the Under Secretary

2000

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed to the development of the case studies in this volume of the report. We would like to thank the staff in our case study sites who hosted our visits, participated in in-depth interviews, and reviewed early drafts of these case studies. We would also like to thank the Comprehensive Center staff who helped identify case study sites and participated in interviews themselves. Without the cooperation of all these professionals, this volume would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank the following current and former colleagues who conducted site visits and drafted these profiles:

Anne M. Castle	Mari Parker
Lara Fabiano	Ellen M. Pechman
M. Bruce Haslam	Derek L. Riley
David Kauffman	Michael C. Rubenstein
Catherine T. Kelliher	Karen P. Walking Eagle
Mary S. Leighton	Jessica K. Wodatch
Dan Odenwald	Catherine Zudack

Catherine Kelliher, David Kauffman, and Dwayne Smith edited this volume of the report. Benjamin Lagueruela and Kimberly Thomas provided valuable production support.

Catherine T. Kelliher
Katrina G. Laguarda

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
CONTENTS.....	v
THE COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL ASSISTANCE CENTER PROGRAM AT A GLANCE	vii
OVERVIEW: CASE STUDIES OF COMPREHENSIVE CENTER SERVICES TO STATES AND LOCAL SITES	1
Comprehensive Center Services to States	
Hawaii	5
Maryland	17
Massachusetts	29
Mississippi	39
New Mexico.....	49
New York.....	59
Texas.....	69
Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites	
Cognitively Guided Instruction.....	81
Kingston Unified School District.....	95
Mountainview School District	107
North Carolina ESL Clusters	119
The Reading Success Network in San Bernardino and Orange Counties, California....	133
Richmond Elementary School	147
Riverside Public Schools	161
Snowbank School District	171
OVERVIEW: CASE STUDIES OF COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES BETWEEN AND AMONG COMPREHENSIVE CENTERS AND OTHER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS.....	185
Civil Rights Project.....	189
Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program	193
Data Strategies Initiative.....	199
Reading Success Network.....	203
Self-Assessment Guide for Excellent Services (SAGES) for Children and Youth in Homeless Situations.....	207
Services to Rural Areas in Comprehensive Center Region IX	211
Services to the Pacific Region	215
Superintendents’ Policy Institute	219

The Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers Program at a Glance

The Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers help states, school districts, and schools meet the educational needs of children served under ESEA. As of September 2000, 15 regional centers are being operated under cooperative agreements by the following grantees. Telephone numbers and Web addresses follow their names and locations.

Region I (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont): New England Comprehensive Assistance Center, Education Development Center, Inc., Newton, Mass., (800) 332-0226, <http://www.edc.org/NECAC/>.

Region II (New York): New York Technical Assistance Center, the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University, New York, N.Y., (800) 4NYU-224 or (212) 998-5100, <http://www.nyu.edu/education/metrocenter/nytac/nytac.html>.

Region III (Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania): Region III Comprehensive Center at the George Washington University, Center for Equity and Excellence in Education, George Washington University, Arlington, Va., (800) 925-3223 or (703) 528-3588, <http://r3cc.ceee.gwu.edu>.

Region IV (Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia): Region IV Comprehensive Center at AEL, Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc., Arlington, Va., (800) 755-3277, <http://www.ael.org/cac/>.

Region V (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi): Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Metairie, La., (504) 838-6861 or (800) 644-8671, <http://www.sedl.org/secac/welcome.html>.

Region VI (Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin): Region VI Comprehensive Assistance Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wis., (888) 862-7763 or (608) 263-4220, <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/>.

Region VII (Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma): Region VII Comprehensive Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Okla., (800) 228-1766 or (405) 325-1729, <http://region7.ou.edu>.

Region VIII (Texas): STAR (Support for Texas Academic Renewal) Center, Intercultural Development Research Association, San Antonio, Tex., (888) FYI-STAR, <http://www.starcenter.org/>.

Region IX (Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah): Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center, New Mexico Highlands University, Rio Rancho, N.Mex., (505) 891-6111, <http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/swcc/>.

Region X (Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming): Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Comprehensive Center, Region X, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Ore., (503) 275-9500, <http://www.nwrac.org>.

Region XI (Northern California): Region XI Comprehensive Assistance Center, WestEd, San Francisco, Calif., (800) 645-3276, <http://www.wested.org/cc/>.

Region XII (Southern California): Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, Calif., (562) 922-6343, <http://sccac.lacoe.edu>.

Region XIII (Alaska): Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center, Southeast Regional Resource Center, Juneau, Alaska, (888) 43-AKRAC or (907) 586-6806, <http://www.akrac.k12.ak.us>.

Region XIV (Florida, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands): Region XIV Comprehensive Center, Educational Testing Service, Tampa, Fla., (800) 756-9003, <http://www.ets.org/ccxiv>.

Region XV (Hawaii, American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Republic of Palau): Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, Honolulu, Hawaii, (808) 441-1300, <http://www.prel.org>.

OVERVIEW: CASE STUDIES OF COMPREHENSIVE CENTER SERVICES TO STATES AND LOCAL SITES

To better understand the nature, intensity, and effects of Comprehensive Center services to customers, Policy Studies Associates, Inc., (PSA) of Washington, D.C., conducted case studies of center services to state and local sites (districts, schools, or groups of schools). PSA selected case study sites from nominations made by PSA staff members, in consultation with Comprehensive Center staff, after the initial phase of site visits to the Comprehensive Centers. For each region, PSA site visitors nominated at least one state and one local site in which the Comprehensive Center had worked intensively and where we might reasonably expect to observe the effects of center services at the time of the data collection. Because we were interested in studying the effects of Comprehensive Center services on individuals and organizations, we limited our sample to those cases where the centers had been working intensively enough and for long enough to produce effects.

From a group of 34 nominations, PSA selected a sample of seven states and six local sites. The sample, which was approved by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), was selected with attention to the following criteria:

- Variation in geographic and demographic characteristics.
- Technical assistance that reflects the key priorities of the Comprehensive Centers program, including enhancing states' and districts' capacities to deliver high-quality technical assistance in support of Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA) programs, and improving student achievement in reading or mathematics.
- For state case studies, variation between multi-state Comprehensive Center regions and single-state regions.
- For local case studies, sites that serve high proportions of poor children.
- Variation in the kinds of services delivered to local sites.
- Variation in the type of customers served.

The seven state case study sites include:

1. **Hawaii:** The Region XV Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center provides services to the Hawaii Department of Education. The assistance can be classified as (1) direct services to teachers, administrators, Title I staff, and state education agency (SEA) staff; (2) research, data, and connection to other organizations, individuals, and resources; and (3) collaboration and consultation regarding the planning and implementation of activities.

2. **Maryland:** The Region III Comprehensive Center organizes its assistance to the Maryland State Department of Education through two state liaisons. Technical assistance activities include training and professional development for school staff and administrators; support to the SEA around grant applications; sponsoring and leading meetings; disseminating research; and developing products and tools to meet specific needs.
3. **Massachusetts:** The Region I New England Comprehensive Assistance Center supports the reform efforts of the Massachusetts Department of Education through strategic assistance in the areas of schoolwide reform, data-driven decision making, and literacy. The state relies on the center to strengthen state processes for carrying out reforms.
4. **Mississippi:** The Region V Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center provides assistance to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and the state's Regional Service Centers (RSCs) through a state liaison with close ties to the SEA. The center's services include activities designed to build the capacity of MDE and RSC staff to deliver technical assistance; consultations; and workshops, trainings, and conferences.
5. **New Mexico:** The Region IX Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center supports the reform agenda of the New Mexico Department of Education and tailors services to best address the state's needs. The center provides services to the state's 11 critically low-performing schools; training to the state's school support teams; and assistance with grant applications.
6. **New York:** The Region II New York Technical Assistance Center organizes its staff around the New York State Department of Education's organization. Three regional teams serve different parts of the state, and one team serves the SEA directly. Center activities include assistance with federal program integration; support to the Title I and Comprehensive School Demonstration Programs; and building state and local capacity for reform.
7. **Texas:** The Region VIII Support for Texas Academic Renewal (STAR) Center provides services to the Texas Education Agency and the SEA's technical assistance arm, the Education Service Centers (ESCs). The center delivers training to ESC, district, and school staff, disseminates research and center products, and collaborates with ESC staff on various projects.

In the case of the six local case study sites, PSA changed the names of districts and schools so that individual respondents could not be identified. The local case study sites include:

1. **Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI):** The Region VI Comprehensive Assistance Center sponsors training institutes in CGI for educators across the country. CGI is a mathematics program based on problem solving for students in grades K-3. The center hosted three five-day institutes between summer 1998 and summer 1999.

2. **Kingston Unified School District:** The Region XI Comprehensive Assistance Center helped the Kingston Unified School District make a districtwide transition to schoolwide programs. The center also offered consultation on federal programs and capacity building and leadership training for school teams and principals.
3. **Mountainview School District:** The Region X Comprehensive Center provided an array of services to this small district located on an Indian reservation. The center's services included assistance in developing a Title I schoolwide program, disaggregating student achievement data, and aligning curriculum with state and local standards.
4. **North Carolina English as a Second Language (ESL) Clusters:** The Region IV Comprehensive Center at the Appalachia Educational Library (AEL) provides services related to ESL instruction to 23 districts in North Carolina. The districts were organized geographically into three clusters. The center organizes its training around the Lab School model.
5. **The Reading Success Network (RSN) in San Bernardino and Orange Counties, California:** The Region XII Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center delivers training related to the RSN through each of its eight partner county offices of education. Approximately 150 to 175 of the 211 schools in the network reside in San Bernardino and Orange Counties.
6. **Richmond Elementary School:** Richmond Elementary School is one of six model schools selected to receive intensive services from the Region XIV Comprehensive Center. The center has helped the school implement its Continuous Progress model, enhance instruction to bilingual and migrant students, and involve teachers in the Reading Success Network sponsored by the Region XIV Comprehensive Center.
7. **Riverside Public Schools:** The Region VII Comprehensive Center worked with Riverside Public Schools to train teams of teachers and administrators from schools with high populations of limited English proficient students in various instructional strategies. The center also facilitated the district's involvement in the Reading Success Network.
8. **Snowbank School District:** The Region XIII Alaska Regional Comprehensive Assistance Center assisted the Snowbank School District in developing Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE). Through AOTE schools form leadership cadres, which set goals for student performance, use data to assess schoolwide progress, and guide the development and adoption of educational programs.

The case studies examine a center's portfolio of products and services to the state or local site and how the center's and site's interactions have progressed over time. PSA site visitors worked with a site contact to identify the parameters of the case and appropriate respondents. In cases where the Comprehensive Center had worked with a large number of schools in a local site or a large number of intermediate agencies at the state level, we selected a sample of schools or agencies on which to focus during the site visit. Once the parameters of the case had been set, PSA worked with the site contact to schedule interviews with both customers and potential customers of the Comprehensive Centers.

During the spring and summer of 1999, PSA conducted two-person visits to each state and local site. Site visitors, guided by case-specific protocols, interviewed a range of individuals in each site with different roles, responsibilities, perspectives, and experiences. Respondents included individuals who received direct services from the center, as well as those who had not had direct contact with the center but who were knowledgeable about their organization's use of external assistance to achieve its reform goals. Finally, PSA interviewed Comprehensive Center staff—either in person or via telephone—who were actively involved in providing services to the site.

The case studies begin by describing state and local contexts for reform, including the site's progress in carrying out Elementary and Secondary Schools Act reforms, and how the center and site established their relationship. In addition to highlighting the center's portfolio of products and services, the case studies explore how center services were planned, the relative benefits of the center compared with other technical assistance providers, and the center's and site's plans for continuing work. The case studies conclude with a discussion of Comprehensive Center effects, including customer satisfaction, increased capacity for technical assistance, increased awareness and understanding of ESEA programs, improved teaching and learning, and barriers to the delivery of high-quality, effective technical assistance.

Comprehensive Center Services to States

Hawaii Department of Education

This case study describes services provided by the Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center to the Hawaii Department of Education (HDOE). In addition to the state of Hawaii, the Pacific Center, located at the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), serves American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. The Pacific Center enjoys a close relationship with PREL, and the two organizations frequently share staff and resources. At HDOE, the Pacific Center and PREL are often referred to interchangeably. The Pacific Center's services to HDOE have been primarily in the areas of Title I, English as a Second Language (ESL), and Even Start.

I. State Context

The state of Hawaii operates its public school system as both a local education agency (LEA) and a state education agency (SEA), distributing public education monies directly to Hawaii's 250 public schools.

The state is divided into seven regional districts—four on Oahu and three that include the islands of Hawaii, Kauai, and Maui. Each district has a superintendent, a school renewal specialist, and several resource teachers. The state's schools face challenges related to a high-poverty and high language-minority student population.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

HDOE's reform agenda revolves primarily around its strategic plan, which resulted from a comprehensive needs assessment conducted in 1998. The plan identifies five priority areas: (1) refining the Hawaii content and performance standards and providing standards-based curricular and instructional support; (2) developing assessment and accountability systems; (3) developing a comprehensive student support system; (4) modernizing administrative support services; and (5) redefining school governance and school structures.

Hawaii's Title I program provides extensive and intensive support to schools and addresses these priority areas through its seven district-based "linkers." The linkers work full-time in the roles of state agent, district Title I program director, and resource teacher and connect the geographic regions with

HDOE. For schools identified in need of assistance, the linkers train, monitor, advise, broker services, and assist with planning, networking, assessment analysis, evaluation, curriculum development, and schoolwide implementation. According to one SEA staff member, “We have worked hard with the Title I schools on assessment. This will be good for standards-based reform in Hawaii because the Title I schools will have already begun thinking seriously about assessment.” In Title I schools implementing Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) models, the linkers work closely with school-based School Support Teams, which oversee school improvement efforts and are composed of the principal, teachers, school renewal specialists, and district resource teachers.

Implementation of ESEA Reforms

SEA staff noted that the reauthorization of ESEA in 1994 had promoted dramatic changes in the state’s implementation of federal programs. Specifically, the state is more concerned with student outcomes and coordinating federal programs than before 1994. According to one staff member,

My job has changed since reauthorization. Before, Title I was more concerned with regulations and processes. We monitored more. Now, we are looking at outcomes. We ask, ‘Are the kids achieving?’ Title I has always been focused on high-poverty [students], but now we are focused on the achievement of high-poverty kids. Now we tie our efforts to standards.

The coordination of federal programs in Hawaii is facilitated by consolidated planning and monitoring, which staff think help promote comprehensive assistance to districts and schools. For example, one staff member pointed to new links between the Title IV program and other federal programs. “In the past, Title IV was isolated, but that changed after we started submitting a consolidated plan. [Title IV] is now more included and integrated with other efforts,” he said. Another added, “Title IV helps kids feel safe in school, both physically and emotionally, and leads to academic success. The emphasis is now more on comprehensive assistance. The state is focused on raising student achievement and on helping teachers teach all kids.”

SEA staff noted that ESEA reforms have forced them to communicate regularly and function cohesively. “Programmatically, we are all on the same wavelength. We share offices and ideas about accountability, standards, and assessments. We all do any monitoring visits as a group,” said one respondent.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's History with the State

The Pacific Center has been involved with the SEA since its inception in 1995 because: (1) Hawaii is the only state in its geographic region; (2) both entities are located in Honolulu; and (3) the state is receptive to help from the center. However, the center also facilitates its relationship with HDOE by assigning one staff member to be the primary service provider and liaison for the state. This individual—a former SEA employee—relies on her contacts to keep abreast of recent decisions and issues, which she does through her attendance at Board of Education and internal department meetings.

In addition, before the formation of the Comprehensive Centers, HDOE worked with RMC Research Corporation—one of the Pacific Center's partners—in RMC's capacity as a federal Title I Technical Assistance Center. As a center partner, RMC continued working closely for two years after the center's inception, at which point the state requested less help, and a full-time center staff became available for Title I assistance.

Planning Services

Center staff are involved in the planning of services to varying degrees, depending on the needs of SEA staff and the nature of the services being provided. In some cases, the center is included from the very beginning—during or following a needs assessment—while in other cases, PREL staff are consulted further along in the planning process to provide feedback and suggestions on workshop agendas and getting products ready for distribution, for example. Respondents from HDOE noted that there was room for improvement in planning, particularly with the Title I program.

One respondent described the process when the Pacific Center is involved in planning from the beginning:

The planning process for PREL activities typically begins with my monthly meetings of district ESL people. During those meetings, I see data indicating particular needs in our program. . . . Especially when the needs involve Pacific Islanders, I will ask for help from PREL. They will come and talk with me and the district personnel and look at the data. After spending some time analyzing the situation, PREL calls to meet with me to discuss their thoughts. During that meeting, they will ask how they can be of help. Then we plan something out, such as last month's video teleconference on ESL issues.

The Pacific Center tailors services to be the most beneficial to the state, particularly when the SEA and the center jointly determine what the center will provide and how it will integrate with the state's reform efforts. As one respondent explained,

The services we receive from PREL are custom made. They don't give us one-shot events from outside. Rather, they sit down and talk with us and school staff to plan. They seek to understand our needs and expectations. . . . [For example], for the middle school that wanted help with their reading program, [a PREL staff member] and I went to the school for planning. The school pulled all the teachers together and arranged the logistics. Then [she] and I went and sat with the principal and others. [She] helped identify what they had in mind, what they needed, their expectations, and so on. Then we all worked together to establish an agenda. The PREL service fits into that agenda.

Several SEA respondents noted that the center typically works directly with school staff when planning its services to schools. Often, center services to schools are coordinated with the state Title I linkers, although other SEA staff members wanted increased communication about service to schools. In response to SEA requests, the center intends to keep interested administrators informed of and involved in school-level service planning.

III. Services to the SEA

Portfolio of Products and Services

Rather than being focused on several large, self-contained projects, center assistance is spread through many events and people. For the most part, assistance revolves around ongoing relationships with individuals at all levels of the educational system, and types of services range from long-term, sustained assistance to financial support to building the state's capacity to deliver technical assistance. Nevertheless, center services can be classified into three areas: (1) direct services to teachers, administrators, Title I linkers, and state administrators; (2) research, data, and connections to other organizations, individuals, and resources; and (3) collaboration and consultation regarding planning and implementation of activities. SEA staff did, however, highlight initiatives in which the center was particularly involved.

ESL/Title VII. The center uses its expertise in Pacific cultures and languages to create useful products, provide consultation, and make presentations for SEA staff. For example, the PREL newsletter, which shares recent research and information about education in the Pacific, is an excellent resource, according to several respondents. PREL has also translated materials for non-English speaking parents related to school enrollment, insurance, emergency information, and school performance. In order to smooth ESL students' transition into the Hawaii educational system, the center sent these materials throughout the Pacific region for families with school-age children moving to the state.

The center has also been directly responsible for building the knowledge and skills of ESL and Title VII practitioners. First, the center planned with the SEA to co-sponsor a teleconference on ESL issues for ESL teachers, specialists, resource teachers, and administrators. The center handled the logistics and convened a panel of outside experts and SEA staff. The teleconference was carried on the University of Hawaii's PBS station so that individuals throughout the region could participate. Second, the center held a work session for 30 resource teachers and specialists on the languages and culture of the Pacific, as well as strategies for working with students from these areas. Third, the center helped sponsor training for district and school staff in Language Assessment Scales (LAS), which measure language proficiency. The center's assistance was grounded in a theoretical understanding that language consists of four components—phonology, lexicon, syntax, and pragmatics—and that open-ended methods are useful for assessing literacy skills. Fourth, the center has given technical assistance to state and local Title VII staff on bilingual issues.

Title I. To foster the implementation of reform at the school level, the center works closely with Title I linkers. In fact, center assistance to schools is typically provided in association with the linkers. The center has sponsored several workshops and training sessions for the linkers and, with the linkers, similar activities for school-level staff. As one linker noted, "Any assistance to schools is seen as a partnership between us and PREL." As a result of their close relationship with the linkers, the center is able to provide informal, quick services, such as gathering information and resources.

The center's work in Title I is based on research and models of effective schoolwide planning. It has also partnered with the linkers to work with Title I schools to implement the Reading Success Network (RSN) and CSRD, both of which have strong research foundations. Moreover, the center, relying particularly on the expertise of RMC staff, has built the capacity of the state to implement Title I schoolwide programs. Although the center worked initially with the state Title I administration to develop a strategic process for implementation, it later shifted its focus to school-level implementation. More recently, the Center helped organize a School Support Team conference, which was led by RMC staff, and a CSRD model showcase.

Even Start. The Pacific Center works with the state's Even Start coordinator to help local Even Start projects conduct their own evaluations using program data and classroom assessments. Through

ongoing consultation with the SEA, the center is helping to institute the new evaluation structure, which requires Even Start teachers to collect, analyze, and write about data from their local programs. Together, the two entities have planned and provided training sessions to teachers to foster a basic understanding of evaluation, data collection, analysis, and report writing. The center also plans to review the local evaluation reports, make recommendations to improve the process, and help draft an action plan for further training.

Facilitative Leadership Workshop. Several individuals highlighted the Facilitative Leadership workshop as being particularly helpful and responsive to a request for assistance in helping schools develop grade-level benchmarks. The workshop provided SEA Title I staff, including the linkers and other resource teachers, the opportunity to improve their ability to present material, train participants, and facilitate change at the school level. Center staff later conducted this workshop for district superintendents, school specialists, and literacy resource teachers as well. Similarly, center staff provided the resource teachers with two workshops and follow-up in needs assessment.

Respecialization in Special Education (RISE). The center provided financial support to HDOE to implement the RISE program, which started in 1990 in response to teacher shortages in special education. The program is being implemented in five training sites on four islands and utilizes video conferencing to overcome geographical barriers. The center's financial assistance enabled resource teachers to travel to other islands to conduct classroom observations, which respondents said helped improve their own teaching and their students' learning.

Goals and Objectives for Continuing Work

The HDOE highly values the center for its expertise, connections, resources, and services, and the SEA would like the center to continue to connect it with events and individuals operating on a national scale. One staff member noted that the center is "aware of regional meetings. Often, we need to go to the mainland to find speakers, but PREL can help with contacting and contracting." Several HDOE staff members hoped the center would better define its scope of work with the SEA. One staffer, who valued center services, sought clarity about the range of services available from the center and the process for requesting and receiving services. Other respondents pointed to specific areas in which they would like PREL to assist them: technology; training on grant writing; implementing programs and developing materials for ESL students; and overall school reform.

The center does not plan to radically change its work with HDOE; however, it does plan to continue working more closely with schools, particularly Title I schools identified as failing to meet adequate yearly progress and those participating in the RSN. Although the center has shifted its emphasis to the school level, it intends to maintain and improve communication with the SEA. According to a center staff member, because of the current needs and context of reform in Hawaii, "There may be some

change in the topics of conversation and focus of our efforts, but we will be continuing our dialogue with the SEA.”

IV. State’s Use of External Assistance

HDOE staff regularly rely on outside expertise, particularly with workshop presentations and consultations. Most commonly, consultants provide assistance around specific products or programs, such as evaluation instruments, curriculum packages, and whole school reform models. For assistance in these areas, the state looks to the Pacific Center, local and national universities, product vendors, the Regional Educational Laboratories, and other educational organizations. For example, the Even Start program is using the Pacific Center for help in training teachers in extracting, compiling, and analyzing data, as well as drafting an action plan based on preliminary evaluation reports.

Department staff also reported needing assistance with academic standards and immigrant culture and language. For standards, the agency has received help from the Council for Basic Education, “a major advisor on our standards project,” reported one respondent. “They have given us technical assistance on our efforts to refine and review our standards. They have a national reputation, as well as broad experience across the nation.” Center and other PREL staff have provided the most assistance regarding immigrant culture and language.

V. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

Generally, respondents were satisfied with the services they received from the Pacific Center. They described center services as being based on the SEA’s needs and aligned with the state’s education agenda. Moreover, SEA staff thought that the center staff were accessible, worked hard to maintain an ongoing relationship with the SEA, provided tailored assistance, and were great cultural resources. “They represent the various cultures of the Pacific in their staffing, knowledge, and connections,” said one staff member. “When we started getting more Pacific Islanders, we requested help from them in understanding how to meet their needs. PREL improved its ability to help with this.” Another added,

PREL has a sense of direction, and they try to accommodate the HDOE. Hawaii is unique in the Pacific. The other entities have dramatically different needs. PREL has balanced their services and tried to focus on Hawaii for the last few years. . . . We will be relying on them as a resource because we have been downsized. They complement our efforts because they have been involved in the development of much of what we do. They are coherent with our agenda and are tuned in with what is happening here. . . . PREL understands the culture of Hawaii education and the HDOE. They are in touch with the school environment and are easy to work with.

A Title I linker also described her satisfaction with the Pacific Center:

I do think [PREL has] helped us build our capacity to help schools and teachers. They helped me better understand schoolwides and how to do needs assessments. PREL staff knows the regional and state agendas and are accessible and comfortable to work with. . . . I have confidence in their abilities. . . . PREL gives follow-up in the way of additional materials and second visits to schools they have worked with. . . . PREL provides high-quality assistance, in that they start by working with a school to know its needs, focus on meeting teacher needs, tie in with the school's direction, emphasize achievement, and have a pulse on what is important.

Another Title I staff said that RMC, as a center partner, was particularly helpful in building the state's capacity to support and administer Title I schoolwide schools. The staff member explained, "We had no schoolwides five years ago. At that point, we needed help. PREL was helpful then, though RMC [as a PREL partner] was more helpful. . . . Our schoolwide planning model is based on RMC's model. Then two years ago we needed help with School Support Teams, so PREL put us in touch with RMC in Denver. They provided a three-day SST training, which PREL helped organize. We organized the system of follow-up. Since then, we took over and don't rely on PREL or RMC in the same way."

Some state-level respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the center's communication about its services to schools, although such service is typically coordinated through a state Title I linker. They indicated that they would like the center to contact their SEA office directly when it is providing services to schools, and more importantly, to develop a plan of service so that they know about services beforehand. Such communication, they said, would help alleviate SEA staff concerns that the center services be strategic and aligned with state efforts. One respondent suggested, "Maybe in the future it would be helpful to have a single PREL person devoted to working on strategizing their service so that it fits with the state plan." It was clear that the SEA values center services, while they also hoped to have more "sustained service" provided by "somebody who can be with us all the time and walk us through [major initiatives]." In particular, Title I staff said they wanted additional assistance and communication regarding efforts related to CSRD, accountability, and school improvement planning.

Increased State Capacity to Deliver High-Quality Technical Assistance

Through its work with the Title I linkers and other Title I SEA staff, the Pacific Center has helped build the state's capacity to implement Title I schoolwide programs. In particular, Title I staff pointed to the Facilitative Leadership workshop as being an example of the center helping the SEA develop the skills and knowledge needed to train school staff.

The center has contributed to the state's capacity and expertise in the education of language-minority students, grant writing, and evaluation as well. "The Languages of the Pacific" workshop, as well as related consultations, have increased the knowledge base within the SEA of Pacific languages and cultures, as well as helped staff be able to identify and address the needs of Pacific entity children. Also, with guidance from the center, the Even Start director redesigned and implemented the local evaluation process.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Respondents found it difficult to cite specific examples of improved teaching and learning that resulted from the center's assistance. However, one SEA staff member said,

It is difficult to connect any technical assistance with learning in the classroom. However, if we believe that high-quality staff development, combined with high expectations, leads to improved teaching and improved learning, then PREL must be seen as instrumental to student achievement. They are providing high-quality staff development and are emphasizing student achievement. All their work is focused on improved teaching and learning.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

Respondents mentioned time constraints imposed on the Pacific Center as being the most significant barrier to the delivery of high-quality technical assistance. Providing sustained and intensive assistance requires a lot of time and resources, and providing such assistance is difficult with the center's small staff. As one respondent explained, "The biggest barrier is that there is not enough time. Basically, the better you are, the more people want you. Also, PREL is spread bigger than just Hawaii so they have other places to work too."

The center's geographical region—spanning an area of the Pacific larger than the continental United States—also limits its ability to deliver high-quality assistance. Travel costs from island to island are high, and many of the islands are small, isolated, and inaccessible, making it difficult to convene many individuals for training activities. Furthermore, the diversity of the center's target audience complicates their technical assistance efforts. The entities have different needs and cultures, and require the center to tailor many of its activities to a unique local context. One respondent noted that the state had to compete for PREL's services because the center was "more concerned with the rest of the Pacific than Hawaii" because there was more need in other areas.

In a more general sense, providing technical assistance in Hawaii is difficult as a result of the many new and complicated skills and knowledge Hawaii educators must learn. One respondent

commented, “The state keeps adding new stuff for educators to deal with. There are many new parts to reform, yet we are not selectively abandoning anything. Thus, the schools are overwhelmed and resistant to technical assistance or starting into new reforms.” This requires a highly strategic and structured approach to delivering technical assistance, which several respondents identified as a shortcoming of the center. One SEA staff member noted that this was due in part to a lack of strategy on the state’s part and that “the new state strategic plan will help focus technical assistance efforts.” A related barrier has been the state’s change in direction under its new superintendent. PREL was well-positioned to help the state implement its earlier reform agenda, and is only now catching up to assist with the implementation of the new strategic plan.

Lastly, fiscal concerns and procurement laws create obstacles in delivering technical assistance in Hawaii. According to one staff member, “In some cases, we have trouble getting technical assistance providers because of local context and procurement laws. We are in an economic depression, which causes the state to be concerned about employees traveling. So there are a lot of hoops for us to jump through to do our job.”

On the plus side, other SEA staff emphasized that assistance from the center is increasing or intensifying, especially in the areas of immigrant students and Even Start. According to one SEA staff member, “I think PREL’s assistance is getting better for us. When we started getting more Pacific Islander immigrants, we requested help from them in understanding how to meet their needs. PREL improved its ability to identify these students’ needs. More and more they’ve been coming to ask questions about what we need.”

Summary

The HDOE enjoys federal program coordination at the state level and participates in consolidated planning and monitoring. A staff member from the Pacific Center serves as the primary service provider and liaison to the state and coordinates center services to the SEA and to schools. However, staff members from the SEA reported that they were sometimes uninformed about center services on the local level. To address this concern, the center plans to build more relationships with schools and to improve its communication with the SEA. In its services to schools, the center often works with and through the state’s own school support staff, known within the state as “Title I linkers.” The Pacific Center’s portfolio of products and services includes initiatives in the following areas: ESL/Title VII, Title I, Even Start, leadership, and special education. The center and SEA staff noted that the center’s services ranged from long-term, sustained assistance to activities designed to deepen the state’s capacity to deliver its own technical assistance. Center staff are particularly valued for their accessibility, cultural resources, knowledge, and connections throughout the Pacific, although some SEA staff members also said that the center helped build their capacities to train school staff.

Comprehensive Center Services to States

Maryland State Department of Education

This case study examines services provided to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) by the Region III Comprehensive Center, located in Arlington, Va. The center designates one to two staff members to serve as state liaisons for each of the six states in its region. Services to the MSDE have focused on Title I, comprehensive school reform, migrant education, Even Start, and safe and drug-free schools.

I. State Context

Reform Goals and Initiatives

In recent years, Maryland has made significant strides in designing, developing, and implementing several major school reform initiatives. Most of the state's efforts have focused on: (1) the development of standards, assessments, and other accountability systems; (2) professional development and capacity building, particularly in low-performing schools; (3) school safety; (4) school, parent, and community collaborations; (5) technology development; and (6) comprehensive school reform.

In the area of accountability, Maryland requires each local education agency (LEA) to develop its own School Accountability Funding for Excellence (SAFE) plan. The plan calls for LEAs to develop a list of needs, strategies for addressing them, and funding sources to carry out these strategies. "In short, we ask the systems to look at their needs first instead of saying, 'Okay, I have this much money. Now what do I do with it?'" explained a MSDE staff member.

MSDE has also instituted two initiatives that address the needs of the state's at-risk population. First, the state education agency (SEA) is developing a statewide academic intervention plan that seeks to help underachieving high school students attain passing grades on new state assessments required for graduation. Second, the state has created a program that targets poor performing schools—called Challenge and RECON Schools—for assistance. Under state law, these schools are required to develop a strategic plan that includes the adoption of a research-based reform model.

MSDE's new Office of Comprehensive Planning and School Support brings all federal and state programs together under a single umbrella. The office is intended to facilitate comprehensive education reform and efforts to garner and combine resources to more effectively

meet the needs of low-performing students. SEA staff report that the reorganization has resulted in an increase in “cross-divisional assistance” within MSDE. The new director of the Office of Comprehensive Planning and School Support has been credited with being “the push” that has encouraged staff to think more comprehensively. He has guided the state’s consolidated planning efforts and fostered a deeper understanding of comprehensive planning at the SEA, LEA, and school levels.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Region III Comprehensive Center assigns two staff members to serve as state liaisons to Maryland. Six other staff members augment the services of the state contacts by providing additional in-depth, ongoing services as needed to MSDE, LEAs, and schools. Sixty percent of Center staff members are involved in direct service to the state of Maryland.

The Center’s History with the State

Shortly after the center was established, the center director arranged a visit with MSDE to introduce her staff and give an overview of the services the center could provide. High-level administrators and representatives from the Title I, II, IV, VI, and Goals 2000 programs attended this initial meeting and highlighted ways in which the center could assist them with federal program implementation. The meeting was arranged by the state and included area chiefs and other administrators, but excluded several program directors. Thus, while those who were involved in the initial meeting and discussions reported that the center established its presence in the state early on, those who had not been present at the meeting said they learned about the center only by chance. For example, while one staff member commented that the center “did an excellent job of getting themselves known,” another said that “it took a long time to find out about [center services].”

MSDE staff members observed that the SEA’s relationship with the center has become less formal and stronger over time, in part because the center is better able to anticipate the state’s needs. According to one respondent,

[Our relationship has] strengthened over time. . . . We know each other on a first-name basis . . . now [the center] sends me information that I have not asked for because they know what I am interested in receiving.

Planning Services

Because MSDE personnel set the Region III Comprehensive Center's agenda for services to the state, the process for organizing technical assistance involves the center responding directly to the SEA's requests for services. The center's approach was to focus on developing relationships with MSDE staff across program areas and on establishing the state's needs and program requirements based on an understanding of the state context. While some SEA staff members view this as a favorable arrangement that accurately reflects the new mission and service delivery paradigm of the centers, others are frustrated by the new approach, which they consider "reactive." Staff members from the center noted that this new service delivery paradigm reflects ED's focus on comprehensive reform, rather than on one-shot programs.

The needs of the state, as well as center services, are reviewed on a regular basis. Typically, after reviewing the services the center has provided in other states as well as in Maryland, the SEA will present its agenda to the center and point out areas where help is needed. Most requests are for intensive, ongoing services but also include discrete tasks—conducting research on a particular topic, facilitating a meeting or conference, or helping SEA staff brainstorm around a particular issue or problem, for example. According to MSDE respondents, the center rarely initiates projects; the center's approach, they said, is to respond to needs identified by the state. One explained that the center makes itself available, "but primarily at our request." Another staff member added, "This SEA was very 'proactive' in defining the role for [the center] based on our needs."

Several SEA staff members expressed frustration with the center's method of planning services and reported that they had difficulty trying to discern "the menu of services" that are available from the Comprehensive Center. For example, one staff member said that in the early stages,

We had high expectations for [the center], but it took us a while to figure out what they could do. . . . Up until now, they have given us what we have asked for, but maybe there are things we have not thought to ask for. . . . When we asked, 'What can you do?' [the center] responded, 'What do you want?'

At the same time, staff described the close, almost personal relationships they have with center staff. One program director said she received a "warm reception" from state liaisons. For some projects, center staff have served as "critical friends" to MSDE and have provided information to the SEA about similar initiatives in other states.

The center noted that services to districts and schools are provided both upon the recommendation of an MSDE staff member and by districts and schools contacting the center directly. In

some cases, districts and schools learned about the center through center staff members' presentations at state training sessions and conferences.

III. Services to the SEA

Portfolio of Products and Services

The Region III Comprehensive Center's portfolio of products and services to MSDE is varied and extensive. Some MSDE respondents reported that center services are aligned with state reform goals and initiatives and that center staff keep abreast of state goals, objectives, and needs by reviewing MSDE documents and attending state planning meetings. According to a MSDE staff member, "if [Center assistance] had not been aligned with our standards, it would not have been helpful . . . and it has been." Because of its "insider-outsider" perspective, the center has been able to contribute to various proposals and reports produced by MSDE. For example, the center helped the SEA critique its State of the State Report, reviewed the state's Strategic Plan, and made recommendations regarding the state's Minority Student Achievement Report. At other times, the center has worked with federal program staff to review grant applications.

In general, SEA staff find the information the center provides grounded in research. One MSDE staff member reported that center staff "were like my own personal research team." While preparing a grant application for districts, the center helped her to develop the evaluation component of the grant and reviewed and provided feedback on other sections of the proposal. In addition, the center has provided this respondent with "technical assistance in how to look at different bodies of research," and she noted that, as a result of this assistance, she is better able to assist local grantees.

Blue Ribbon Schools Project. The Maryland Blue Ribbon-Sister School Project is an initiative that seeks to improve teaching and learning in 10 Title I schools in Maryland. Each Title I school is paired with a successful Blue Ribbon School, and they share information and strategies for conducting internal assessments and improving school climate, curriculum, teaching and learning, and other aspects of school life. The center has contributed to the project by (1) being a partner in program conception and early implementation; (2) training participants in mentoring and strategic planning; (3) developing a needs assessment instrument and an evaluation component for the project; (4) providing professional development to school teams; and (5) offering general guidance and support regarding the implementation of the project via team meetings, conference calls, and site visits.

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program. The Region III Comprehensive Center has worked extensively with MSDE to implement CSRD. In the beginning

stages, center staff offered suggestions to the state regarding its application for CSRSD funds and the development of its RFP for local school districts. According to one staff member, “The center was my sounding board on how to put a good proposal together . . . [the center] offered me feedback.” Subsequently, the center helped SEA staff to fine-tune the selection criteria by helping to develop a scoring rubric that was used to evaluate local applications for CSRSD funds and by training those within the SEA who were responsible for reviewing these applications.

The center also conducted site visits to districts and held meetings for schools applying for CSRSD grants at which they explained the program’s intent, assisted in needs assessment and the model selection process, reviewed the application process, and provided feedback to those schools that had prepared draft applications. One SEA administrator who attended these events found the information center staff imparted and approaches they modeled useful. She explained, “What I learned I have used in technical meetings in other program areas such as adult education and school-to-work . . . [The Center’s work in CSRSD] has brought the need for [improvements in the grants review process] into sharper focus.”

Even Start. The Region III Comprehensive Center helped the state to develop a new Even Start application process that highlighted characteristics of high-quality Even Start programs and the *Even Start Transition Manual*, which is designed to aid local projects shift from federal to local financial support. As part of this effort, the center facilitated meetings of Even Start program directors and documented the information generated from these events. In addition, the center has been instrumental in (1) helping local grantees to develop and improve their Home-School Compacts; (2) providing SEA staff with information on the latest in brain development research; and (3) training Title I Parent Involvement Coordinators. The center will (1) assist the MSDE in developing a proposal for funding to support the National Even Start State Initiative; (2) work with the SEA to identify key people to include in a consortium; and (3) facilitate group discussions and meetings once the initiative gets under way.

Migrant Education. The center worked closely with Maryland’s Migrant Education director to evaluate the effectiveness of the academic component of its migrant program. The result was the creation of a self-assessment tool, which enables teachers and principals to gather data to help them make program improvements. Each year the center trains program staff in the implementation of the assessment and the use of data to identify program strengths and guide program improvement efforts. The center also works with Migrant Education staff to implement the use of portfolios and to develop a writing rubric sensitive to the needs of ESL students.

Title I. By all accounts, the Region III Comprehensive Center has contributed a great deal to the Title I program at the SEA, LEA, and school levels. Center staff attend MSDE’s Title I Administrators’ Meetings, have conducted presentations on schoolwide programs and school reform, developed a scoring rubric for the Title I Distinguished Schools program, and have assisted with consolidated planning efforts. In addition, the center has worked with a sample of low-performing Title I schools in Baltimore and

helped the LEA in that city assemble its consolidated application for Title I, State Compensatory Education, and Targeted Poverty Grants.

Title IV. The center assisted Title IV staff draft the program's request for proposals (RFP), helped the SEA to think about how program funds are spent, delivered presentations on the principles of effectiveness and conducting needs assessments, and assisted to identify Safe and Drug-Free Schools program experts, consultants, and materials for use by the SEA and LEAs to prepare for a state conference. The center also attends the Title IV project directors' biannual meeting and provides local directors with materials for their programs. Despite these contributions, several Title IV staff expressed dissatisfaction with the center's ability to deliver the volume and quality of services that had been available under ED's previous technical assistance system.

Goals and Objectives for Continuing Work

Most MSDE staff members said that they would like the center to continue to provide direct services to districts and schools in the future and increase services to LEAs when opportunities arise. Examples of current center services to LEAs include: (1) assistance to the Baltimore City Public Schools' CSRSD and schoolwide programs and parent involvement efforts; (2) guidance to the Allegheny and Somerset Counties on conducting their SAFE needs assessments; and (3) services to low-performing Prince George's County schools that had adopted CSRSD models.

Two administrators suggested that the state establish better vehicles for communication to encourage districts and schools to contact the center for services; many LEAs, they said, were not aware that they could contact the center directly. Another suggested that the state formulate a plan for the center's contribution to districts and schools. One program director explained, "[In the future], I see the Comprehensive Center providing more direct services to schools and districts as we expand our network of schools that are involved in comprehensive school [reform]." A representative from the Title IV program noted that the center could also help local program directors stay abreast of important developments in the field, including upcoming grants and RFPs.

However, a few SEA staff members thought that the center was not particularly well suited to provide assistance to schools because center staff lack sufficient knowledge of the local context to be effective at the grass-roots level. Nevertheless, the Center reported that several schools have contacted the center directly to request assistance, without using the state to negotiate services.

One MSDE administrator expressed some frustration at the state's inability to adequately coordinate service providers in a manner that would allow the state to take maximum advantage of available resources. Specifically, he expressed an interest in having the Comprehensive Center, Regional

Educational Laboratories, Equity Centers, and Special Education Centers work together to address low achievement among minority students. “The SEA has a problem knitting all these groups together, and the center could help with that. . . . There are lots of resources out there today . . . we need to be more competent in how we use them,” he said. Another respondent suggested that the delivery of high-quality technical assistance could be improved if the Regional Educational Laboratories and Comprehensive Centers worked more closely together. “Our requests should be delivered to both the laboratory and the center . . . it’s a time-saving device and might help to streamline services.” Center staff members noted that they have made repeated efforts to schedule joint meetings and to coordinate technical assistance with the Regional Educational Laboratory serving Maryland.

IV. State’s Use of External Assistance

Typically, the center is one of many sources with which SEA staff consult when they need technical assistance. Several SEA staff reported that, before selecting technical assistance providers to assist them in implementing state reforms or initiatives, they assess the various possibilities in light of the project at hand. As one program director explained, “I do my homework to determine which technical assistance provider is most appropriate. . . . I make logical connections after consulting different Web sites or attending [ED] technical meetings.” Other staff noted that over time they have assembled a network of technical assistance resources that includes, in addition to the Comprehensive Center, individual researchers, Internet sites, universities, professional journals, ED, the Regional Educational Laboratories, professional associations, and other organizations.

In particular, universities provide technical assistance to various departments within the MSDE. For example, the SEA sought assistance from Johns Hopkins University’s reading resource center to help it implement a state reading initiative that seeks to improve reading by translating research into practice. The University of Maryland, which houses one of two national Safe and Drug-Free Schools Centers, has supported the state’s Title IV program by providing research and statistical information on substance abuse and addiction; it has also provided technology training to teachers and district superintendents. The university’s Institute for Continuous Improvement has worked with the state to convene a leadership team to explore ways to design and develop a system of education that features joint accountability between the SEA and LEAs. The state plans to involve the Comprehensive Center in this effort, tapping into the center’s expertise with the CSR program. Similarly, the MSDE turns to the University of North Carolina at Raleigh-Durham’s Center for the Study of Violence for information relevant to school safety. The center’s university-based researchers with renowned expertise in one or more areas were also identified as being particularly helpful to SEA staff.

For assistance with reform initiatives for at-risk students, Maryland has looked to the Regional

Educational Laboratories because, as one state official explained, “[The laboratories] are more appropriate for implementing research-based programs, practices, and models . . . they have a systemic focus.” Other respondents compared the services provided by the laboratories and the Comprehensive Center and noted two distinct differences: (1) the center operates in specific “niches” (for example, implementing CSR or schoolwide programs) while the “the labs are broader” (for example, they address a variety of issues related to the education of both high- and low-performing students); and (2) while the center offers a national perspective and has access to information about reforms on a national scale, the laboratories focus primarily on providing research-related information and assistance.

There are variations among the federal program staff in terms of the extent to which they rely on external assistance. For example, while Title IV staff indicated that ED and the Comprehensive Center provide almost all of their technical assistance, Even Start staff reported that several organizations and technical assistance centers provide assistance to their program. Compared with other sources of external assistance, staff from the Even Start program thought that the center fared quite favorably and that the center’s assistance was “practical and tangible.”

V. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

On the whole, the Region III Comprehensive Center is well respected among MSDE staff, who described Center staff as friendly, approachable, and accessible. One SEA administrator observed that she is in constant communication with the center’s state contact. “I can and do fax her, call her, and beep her,” she explained. Another staff member described her relationship with center staff as “easy,” adding, “It’s like making a phone call to someone I know.” Other staff reported that they felt closer to center staff than to other technical assistance providers; according to one MSDE staff member, the center is able to anticipate “whether I want the quick and dirty information or page after page of details.”

The Region III Comprehensive Center was particularly valued for its unique willingness to tailor services to specific requests and complete a range of tasks—from editing a report to helping organize meetings. One staff member described center services as akin to “one-stop shopping . . . they will help you develop a conference, which other technical assistance providers do not do.”

In addition, SEA staff appreciated greatly the center’s capacity for conducting and disseminating research. According to one respondent, “If [center staff] do not have the information we ask for, they do the research. They don’t just tell us where to go to get it.” Another added that the center acts as “a filter on various research to assist me with my grant writing . . . they serve as an expert clearinghouse.” Other respondents praised the center’s knowledge of research and best practices on the national level and noted

that this information helps the state avoid “tunnel vision.”

Increased State Capacity to Deliver High-Quality Technical Assistance

SEA respondents highlighted several examples of ways in which technical assistance provided by the Region III Comprehensive Center improved their own ability to provide services to districts and schools. Most indicated that they model the same techniques and approaches the center uses with them. According to one administrator, “I have observed the content and process of the center’s training, and I use the very same techniques when I work with schools and school systems.” Another explained that she has asked the center to help her brainstorm around issues and problems and in turn used the same techniques when she is called on to do the same with local school systems. “I use the strategies [the center] uses when I brainstorm with an LEA about a problem they may be having,” she explained.

In addition, based on the center’s work with the state regarding the CSRD program, MSDE revised its application process to incorporate site visits and oral presentations by potential grantees during the decision making process. The center’s contribution included specific questions and probes, which have provided the SEA with valuable information about local management teams and helped facilitate more meaningful dialogue between the SEA and LEAs.

SEA staff concurred that the center’s research-based services have helped expand their own knowledge. For example, the center has been credited with helping to heighten awareness of the importance of research in federal grant-writing and program development. One respondent noted that the center has increased her capacity to help grantees to “embed their projects in research,” and that she now emphasizes the need for grantees to “think about the body of research that [is relevant to] the program for which [they] are applying for funding.”

Improved Teaching and Learning

Although the center has provided services to various districts and schools throughout Maryland, it has focused on building the capacity of and assisting SEA staff at the request of MSDE officials. As a result, the majority of the center’s attention and resources have been concentrated at the SEA level, and there is little evidence of the center’s effects on teaching and learning in districts and schools. According to one MSDE staff member, “The intensity [has not been there] such that I would attribute a school’s success or lack thereof to the center.”

As noted above, SEA staff members disagreed about the appropriate level of focus for the center—SEA or LEA. While some respondents thought that center staff could not be effective at

the school level because they are not “home-grown,” others said that the center “understand[s] our environment of school districts and schools.” One administrator noted that “our Maryland contacts need to be people who know and understand the Maryland system . . . [the center staff] do not know Maryland well enough to be considered a real resource to schools that are struggling.” He suggested that several school systems share this opinion and are therefore reluctant to call on the center for help.

According to MSDE staff, support for center involvement in schools depended on the state’s willingness to develop a plan of action in this area. One person noted,

We want the center to get into schools more. We need to develop a plan to get them to be viewed . . . as a resource. . . . The Center’s technical assistance is a reflection of the state’s competence, not a reflection of how good the center is. . . . The flaw is in our ability to use the services more intelligently and aggressively.

An administrator echoed this thought by saying, “Perhaps we the SEA have not helped our schools to identify needs for which they could get help by meeting with the center.”

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

The center has garnered high customer satisfaction by building strong personal relationships and increasing the capacity of SEA staff to deliver services and provide support to districts and schools. However, changes in the federal technical assistance system and limited understanding among some clients of ways in which services are now provided have led to dissatisfaction in two main areas. First, some SEA staff members recognized that the center was unable to maintain the intensity and scope of program-specific services that were available under the previous system. This shortcoming is due in part to limited resources and in part to a change in the mission and focus of the centers. Second, some SEA respondents were uncomfortable with the new service delivery paradigm, in which the center uses clients’ needs—rather than a “menu of services”—to organize services.

For example, one program director noted that the federal technical assistance centers under the previous system provided detailed, up-front information about the range and intensity of services that were available. However, under the current system:

. . . the information has not trickled down that [the center] is for anyone but Title I. We did not know the center was connected to school reform or to parent involvement. The center never sent us a menu of services. . . . We did not know what they offered.

Another SEA staff member reported that LEAs have many unspoken needs and need guidance from the

center in organizing services. Although the center responded to requests, it could be more “proactive” in helping the SEA to think about “new things,” she said.

Summary

Maryland has instituted several reform initiatives in recent years, many focusing on standards, assessment, and accountability; support to at-risk schools; and comprehensive school reform. The Region III Comprehensive Center assigns two staff members to serve as liaisons to the state, and six other staff members augment the services of the state liaisons. Because MSDE personnel set the center’s agenda for services to the state, the center usually responds directly to the SEA’s requests for services. The center’s portfolio of products and services includes initiatives in the following areas: Blue Ribbon Schools; CSRD; Even Start; Migrant Education; Title I; and Title IV. MSDE staff members said that they would like the center to provide more services to districts and schools in the future and suggested that the state improve its vehicles for communication to encourage districts and schools to contact the center directly. Center staff are valued for their roles as critical friends, accessibility, capacity for conducting and disseminating research, and abilities to tailor services and complete a range of tasks.

Comprehensive Center Services to States

Massachusetts Department of Education

This case study examines services provided by the New England Comprehensive Assistance Center (NECAC) to the Massachusetts Department of Education (MDE). Within the broad scope of center services in a six-state region, direct services to MDE play a relatively small role; however, the center and the state education agency (SEA) collaborate to ensure that the center's work makes a strategic contribution to state education reform efforts. NECAC's services to the state focus primarily in the areas of schoolwide programs, data-driven decision making, and literacy.

I. State Context

Reform Goals and Initiatives

The state enacted major educational reforms through the Education Reform Act of 1993—known locally as “Ed Reform”—whose goals and strategies are closely aligned with those advanced by ESEA. However, SEA respondents were quick to note that the Massachusetts law predates the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA. One program administrator observed that the state and federal laws “are parallel roads in the same direction,” and that what another state might implement under the auspices of ESEA, “we are doing under Ed Reform.” Another respondent echoed this viewpoint: “Our own Ed Reform Act was in place before ESEA was reauthorized. The nice thing is the two meshed very closely in terms of what the intent was. [There are] no glaring inconsistencies.”

At the school level, the Education Reform Act is most visible through the implementation of detailed curriculum frameworks. The frameworks guide student learning and are aligned with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), a high-stakes test of math, language arts, and other core subjects that was administered for the first time in spring 1998. In fall 1999, schools began to carry out school improvement plans, which address school needs that surfaced through data from the first round of MCAS testing. Schools participating in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR/D) Program will use data from the MCAS as one source of information to evaluate their programs.

In addition, SEA staff described their agency as one rich in educational resources, and as especially rich in the leadership and expertise needed to guide reform work. One commented, “In the Chiefs’ [Council of Chief State School Officers] meeting, I find the others don’t have the resources we do.”

Implementation of ESEA Reforms

In particular, SEA respondents pointed to the CSRD and Title I programs as major components of state reform. The MDE also uses a consolidated grant application process, which encourages the integration of federal programs to support federal, state, and local goals.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's History with the State

NECAC's host organization, the Education Development Center (EDC), had established a relationship with MDE before the inception of the Comprehensive Center. Not long after receiving the Comprehensive Center contract, NECAC staff convened meetings in which they brought their prospective clients together, including SEA staff from different programs and different states. The meetings allowed time for cross-program dialogue and generated program-specific discussions during breakout sessions. Although SEA respondents reported that they did not find the cross-program technical assistance as helpful as the program-specific technical assistance they had received in the past, they said they enjoyed the "job-alike" meetings with colleagues from other states. According to one SEA staff member,

By having people from other state departments of education [attend these workshops], EDC gave us an opportunity to realize that we all speak the same language. . . . Through EDC, we get to know some good people.

At the beginning of the grant, NECAC also convened the Deputy Network, which included the Deputy Commissioners from each of the New England states served by the center. This group was intended to provide input on the needs and interests of the center's client states.

The relationship between the center and MDE has evolved over time. Each has developed clearer conceptions of what services the center can and should provide and what services the SEA should seek elsewhere. The center has been unfolding its portfolio of options as it perceives the state to be ready to take advantage of them, beginning with process skill development that can strengthen existing initiatives and then adding substantive programs that can enhance effectiveness. MDE has begun to approach the center with proposals for collaboration on various activities, including work with the Annenberg project in Boston. Together they also successfully recruited a school district for a three-way partnership to pilot the Reading Success Network (RSN) model.

Planning Services

In most cases, NECAC and MDE collaborate in planning services, regardless of whether activities are initiated by the center or the SEA. SEA respondents noted that the center organizes its services around MDE's needs. According to one program director, "They try to find out what our needs are. If it's within their capacity to assist us, they always try to do so. They do have some packaged ideas—things that they feel will be helpful, and that were helpful in the past. If we were to ask for specific things, I think they would try to address them as best they could."

According to center staff members, the center communicates with MDE first at the deputy commissioner level to define major areas of assistance and then works more closely with MDE program staff to follow up on agreements made at the higher level. However, the experiences of some program managers suggest that sometimes MDE program staff are unaware of arrangements that have already been made with the center. Hence MDE is perceived by these members to have been left out of the planning loop, when the real source of difficulty, according to the center, is that plans for service have not been shared across programs. For example, one program administrator complained, "We didn't know anything about facilitation training for principals, but it would have been nice to know ahead [of time]," so that her program could invite additional participants.

SEA respondents added that center staff sometimes invite MDE administrators to participate in activities that have been designed for other purposes but address concerns shared by the SEA as a way of introducing activities or surfacing potential needs.

III. Services to the SEA

Portfolio of Products and Services

NECAC provides a range of services to MDE. Many of the activities are components of a program of events serving the same participants over time. Some activities are one-time events that contribute to ongoing programs sponsored by other agencies. While center services to the state are not extensive, they are strategic as a result of the close collaboration between the two organizations. Although the state relies on the center primarily to strengthen state processes for implementing reform—rather than to strengthen academic content—the state can assume that center services are aligned with state standards when the focus of the assistance pertains to the implementation of the Education Reform Act.

The Schoolwide Congress. The annual Schoolwide Congress brings together school-level teams and state-level facilitators to identify pressing needs and to develop plans to address them. The Congress promotes MDE’s goals for reform by encouraging schools to use data to guide their school improvement efforts. In addition to advancing this “authentic task” approach, the Congress features speaker sessions. For the small-group activities, the center asked states to provide the facilitators, who work with the school teams at the Congress and back at their school site throughout the year. The center provides facilitator training, thus assisting the school-level teams directly and also improving the skills of state staff and building their capacity to help schools.

A program administrator who participated in the Congress as a facilitator described her experience: “The Schoolwide Congress was a great experience for high-poverty schools, [whose staff really appreciated having] three and a half days away with a district-based coach to identify a school issue that needed attention. They met specialists at the Congress and consulted [with them]. They came back and implemented the action plan, sometimes using the services of people they met at the Congress.”

Data Strategies Institutes (DSIs) and Other Assistance in Using Data. The DSIs operate similarly to the Schoolwide Congress. The center invites districts to send teams that explore using data to inform school improvement efforts. Because MDE had already instituted reforms that encouraged schools to engage in data-driven decision making, the center ensured that the institutes were aligned with state efforts. However, an SEA respondent commented that the DSI is different from the state’s program and that it bridged a gap left by MDE, where only a few staff knowledgeable about data-driven decision making were accessible to school people. He said, “[DSI is] really more theoretical in nature. You would learn why it is important to use data . . . the incentives to use data.”

In addition to the institutes, the center works directly with practitioners to teach them how to use data to improve teaching and learning. MDE has had the center provide training in how to use data for program improvement planning to all the CSRD schools, the Title I directors, a network of urban school leaders, and other cohorts around the state. For example, each year MDE sponsors a one-day evaluation workshop for representatives of CSRD schools, which needed assistance to determine the effectiveness of their reform work. The state asked NECAC to send a DSI specialist to help plan the workshop sessions that addressed data use. This specialist also helped MDE design lessons that could help school personnel use MCAS data to plan for the school year.

Literacy. Responding to the state commissioner’s emphasis on literacy, MDE invited the center to collaborate on an early literacy conference targeted to Title I schools in Massachusetts but open to attendees from other states. The conference addressed the findings of the National Research Council’s *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, and it showcased various research-based models. In addition, both the center and the state offer support for schools involved in the RSN.

Goals and Objectives for Continuing Work

In response to inquiries about plans for continuing work with the center, some respondents blurred the distinction between the Comprehensive Center and its host organization, saying that if the Comprehensive Centers ceased to exist, they would still use EDC for many purposes. “We were using them before. We still value their knowledge and capacity,” said one staff member. Specifically, MDE would like to continue to collaborate around the annual Schoolwide Congress and to plan a meeting with CSRD teams to discuss the statewide CSRD evaluation plan, although staff members felt less strongly about continuing with DSI or the RSN.

IV. State’s Use of External Assistance

For content help, MDE staff turn to professional associations, college and university experts, private firms or publishers, and in-house experts. These resources abound in the Boston area, and the SEA is accustomed to using them. Several respondents reported seeking assistance from the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University for assistance that is research-oriented as well as for assistance with CSRD planning and implementation. MDE turns to other sources, including a paid consultant formerly in a leading position at ED, for technical questions related to federal programs.

Generally, MDE staff members do not report looking to center staff for assistance related to academic content, but they nevertheless consider them to be valuable resources, particularly with regard to Title I schoolwide programs and when planning conferences. According to one MDE staff member, center staff “are not content specialists. What they provide are school and district improvement kinds of initiatives. They are supportive of giving the message that we are about helping children to be successful in achieving our standards.” According to Center staff, one reason MDE does not perceive the center as a source of substantive help is that the center found it more effective to focus initially on process skills that did not challenge assumptions about good programming. Having the considerable substantive resources of EDC as a backup, the center staff are in a position to respond to questions about academic content, they attest. However, their strategy for building a partnership with MDE did not include consultation about academic content at the outset.

V. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

Generally, MDE staff said that they appreciated the quality and utility of NECAC's services. Several respondents described center staff members as genial colleagues who appreciated that MDE staff members had many responsibilities and sometimes limited ability to travel. A division director said, "They are very easy people to deal with. . . . They come here and are very considerate of people's time."

Center strengths identified repeatedly by MDE officials include knowledge about education issues, facilitation skills, and a broad range of contacts. Most often, SEA staff members lauded NECAC's expertise with regard to schoolwide programs. In praising facilitation skills, respondents mentioned the center's ability to organize and run meetings and conferences, as well as to train others in facilitation and leadership skills. One respondent noted, "[Ongoing leadership training] has benefited my staff . . . in their ability to plan other meetings. It teaches new skills, how to identify and pay attention." Another added, "They get quality people." When coordinating or planning activities, the center utilizes its extensive network of experts in areas related to the SEA's work.

Other staff members appreciated the fact that NECAC's services were based on research. According to one respondent, "I always appreciate the bibliographic information that [the center] presents in papers and handouts. . . . The [staff members are] very knowledgeable. . . . When they pass out information, there's always the background on where they found it. I call them up for articles and they give them to me."

However, MDE respondents perceived NECAC as having limited technical expertise with which to assist in some areas. For example, a center consultant who presented at the DSI received mixed reviews. According to an SEA official, the center presenter did not have the technical skills in data analysis to assist with the specific applications. He said, "The center could use more technical expertise. The people involved [in DSI] had education experience, but not technical experience. . . . If you don't have technical people at the table [you can't get much done]." Another program administrator noted that much of the technical expertise he needs for his program is available at the SEA and that the center is not prepared to offer him the assistance he needs. One respondent summarized the center's weakness, saying that "EDC is more 'processy.' They don't do details." In light of the center's easy access to the broad and deep resources of EDC, MDE's perceptions of limits may be more a reflection of the center's choice to focus on process initially than on lack of ability to help in other ways.

Increased State Capacity to Deliver High-Quality Technical Assistance

A major thrust of NECAC's service to MDE is facilitation/leadership training designed to build the capacity of SEA staff members. Respondents commented that the training, described as useful and applicable, has led to improved performance among staff members. One director said that she gladly sends her staff to the leadership training and appreciated the center taking the lead in organizing events.

EDC is bringing in nationally known presenters to develop leadership skills in schools, targeting principals. [The center director] invited me to invite my staff as well [so as] to give us a common language . . . the devil is in the details. [For example,] if they didn't notify people and make it easy to register, [a workshop] wouldn't be so good. Someone is paying attention to those details.

MDE staff agreed that the facilitation training also improved their own performance and enhanced their relations with one another and with the school and district educators with whom they work. According to a program administrator, "When they train us and we go out to teachers, we pass that on and that impacts kids. [The center] does direct training and they are good at it, so MCAS scores should go up. I think they have taught me to be a better teacher. I go out and teach adults. I see that as passing on skills that I have learned."

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

The center initially attempted to bring federal program directors together in regular cross-program meetings to break down the walls between them. Later, NECAC developed the Schoolwide Congress, which an SEA program director described as a "much more intensive way" of helping program officials understand the comprehensive nature of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). She explained that the center "provided the opportunity to work with some of these high-poverty schools in a more intense way." In a similar way, meetings among officials from different states in the region promoted better understanding of approaches that had been successful.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Because assistance from NECAC occurs within the context of an ambitious state education reform agenda, it is difficult to assemble evidence of improved teaching and learning in districts and schools that can be credited uniquely to center assistance. One program administrator provided anecdotal evidence of the impact of the Schoolwide Congress: "The Congress experience is excellent. Schools I've worked with have said it had a dramatic impact. Those schools have turned around. They say the

Congress worked.” In the most recent Congress, several schools reported improvements in student achievement that they attribute to their work with the center and other Congress-inspired activities.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

The primary barrier to the delivery of high-quality technical assistance identified by MDE staff is communication between the center and SEA. Although the center has made efforts to establish clear lines of communication, they break down occasionally. As a program administrator described, “There are times when they do things [and do not tell us that they are doing them]. They pulled together a principals’ network, and we didn’t know it was happening until we were invited to come. We deflected our [prior commitments] and went to theirs. But CSRD principals didn’t come. It was advertised as a way for schoolwide programs principals to network. Not all CSRD schools are schoolwide. They did have trouble getting people to attend.” Center staff agree that communications are sometimes problematic, but suggest that the probable cause is the need to rely on formal bureaucratic channels that occasionally get blocked internally.

Center staff have sometimes drawn on the expertise of EDC consultants (among others) in solving problems. The strategy of maintaining a core staff just large enough to allow for a consistent point of contact for each state and contracting with outside consultants for special projects enriched the services the center could offer to MDE, within budget constraints. However, for some MDE staff it also obscured the lines of NECAC’s contractual responsibility. MDE staff members were not clear where the center ends and EDC begins. A program administrator wished for a “full staff list so I didn’t have to go running around asking, ‘Do you know who? . . .’” Another wished for improved communication about EDC activities: “We know five or six individuals from EDC who are working with [MDE] on stuff. What are the other 500 people doing?” Despite efforts to explain, the Center regularly encountered the MDE assumption that EDC experts were generally on call at all times.

One respondent referred to staffing limitations as a barrier to the center providing assistance. Despite its best efforts, with about five full-time employees, NECAC is limited in what it can accomplish, he said.

Summary

Massachusetts’s Education Reform Act of 1993 outlined many reforms that were compatible with the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Despite having a previous relationship with MDE, NECAC had to work with the SEA to develop a clear concept of what services the center could

provide. The center organizes its services around the SEA's needs, and the two organizations collaborate in planning services. NECAC's portfolio of products and services to Massachusetts includes: the Schoolwide Congresses, Data Strategies Institutes, and support in the area of literacy. Activities in these areas focus on strengthening state processes for implementing reform, rather than on academic content. Center staff were valued for their congeniality, knowledge, leadership skills, broad range of contacts, expertise with schoolwide programs, and research-based methods. However, MDE staff recognized that center staff had limited expertise in certain areas and that communication between the center and MDE could be improved.

Comprehensive Center Services to States

Mississippi Department of Education

This case study examines services provided by the Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC) to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and MDE's five Regional Service Centers (RSCs), the state's technical assistance arm. MDE is one of five state education agencies (SEAs) in the center's region. SECAC services to the state concentrate primarily in the areas of school improvement and reading.

I. State Context

Charged in 1997 with providing innovative and comprehensive assistance to districts and schools, the RSCs are located in five congressional districts and housed in regional universities. MDE guides the provision of RSC services through service objectives that are written into annual contracts. Several offices within MDE contribute objectives to the contract, as well as corresponding funds; although the Office of Innovative Support, which oversaw nearly all ESEA programs until 1998, typically contributes more funds than other offices in support of the RSC contracts. Although in most cases the state offers general guidelines for the RSCs' work, it does make specific requests on occasion.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

Mississippi's reform agenda focuses on the implementation of content and performance standards and assessments, as well as accountability measures to ensure changes at the school level. The state has adopted content standards in math, science, language arts, and is currently developing standards for social studies. Performance standards are in the works for English, and in place for biology, algebra, and U.S. history. The state will administer exit exams in all these subjects beginning in 2000. The state assessment system is currently based primarily on norm-reference tests, although it increasingly relies on criterion-referenced tests that are aligned with the standards and a writing assessment. State accountability initiatives, including changes in accreditation procedures, place increased responsibility at the school and district levels. Nevertheless, there are less consequences for low-performing schools than for low-performing districts, for which the state publishes district report cards—Mississippi does not systematically use school report cards, school ratings, or state interventions and sanctions for schools.

Implementation of ESEA Reforms

MDE has taken steps to work across federal programs and has submitted a consolidated application, but MDE staff report that it has not consolidated funds or collaborated extensively. According to state staff, program coordinators may communicate their agendas and activities to colleagues and collaborate on projects, although there is no formal structure for doing so. Recent restructuring of the department may further strain coordination of federal programs at the state level. However, MDE staff said that they often rely on the RSCs to advise districts and schools about opportunities to integrate federal funds. “We don’t really see what’s going on [with ESEA integration at the school level]; if it weren’t for the RSCs, the districts would not receive assistance in integrating,” reported one MDE staff member. However, another staff member said districts would continue to receive assistance integrating and coordinating federal programs, but to a lesser extent.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center’s History with the State

Shortly following the inception of the Comprehensive Centers, SECAC staff met with MDE staff to introduce themselves and propose ways in which the two entities could work. After overcoming some initial skepticism from MDE staff, SECAC staff began providing services to the state, guided by an MDE coordinating committee that ensured the state would be intimately involved in determining SECAC services.

Because the RSCs created a new need for training and technical assistance, the MDE asked that SECAC help it build the capacity of the RSCs to deliver services. In May 1997, RSC and SECAC staff met several times to assess needs and discuss the types of services that would be most appropriate. Together, SECAC, MDE, and the RSCs developed a service delivery plan in Summer 1997. According to the plan, RSC staff would call on SECAC staff to either act as consultants or provide training to RSC clients.

Planning Services

SECAC and MDE have created two structures that encourage ongoing collaboration in planning and designing services: (1) MDE’s Coordinating Committee and (2) a state liaison who works between MDE and SECAC. The Coordinating Committee consists of MDE federal program staff and meets several times a year to identify state technical assistance needs, discuss “hot topics,” and develop a

service delivery plan for the state. According to MDE staff, this plan helps SECAC focus its services on client needs and better integrate Mississippi's needs.

One of SECAC's strategies for promoting a close planning relationship with the states in its region is the designation of a state liaison who is housed in or near each SEA. In Mississippi, the state liaison is a former MDE employee, and she has been able to use her existing contacts and familiarity with the organization to maximize the center's offerings. She attends monthly MDE board meetings, which keep her abreast of the SEA's new directions and initiatives. Both MDE and RSC staff report that the liaison is accessible, responsive to their requests for service, open to new ideas, and easy to work with. As a result, MDE and RSC staff bring requests to the state liaison often and find that Center services are tailored to their needs.

SECAC has known state initiatives from the beginning days. [The state liaison] makes our monthly Board meetings, so she knows everything. She keeps up with us. She's a live wire and is in constant contact with us. If I don't hear from her for a week, that's something. Because she's aware like that, she can organize [services] in the way our state needs.

The state liaison also confers regularly with the RSCs to discuss their service needs and contracts with MDE. Such meetings occur separately, as a group, and at regional RSC conferences sponsored by SECAC. The RSC directors see regional conferences as opportunities to get feedback and new ideas from fellow RSCs, as well as to develop a service plan. The state liaison works with the RSCs to develop a master calendar, which ensures that all RSCs receive an appropriate share of SECAC's time over the coming school year.

The services are tailored. [The state liaison] will tell me what she is doing in other RSCs. We were doing parent involvement, and other RSCs were focusing on early childhood. I told her my needs are different. They are more about discipline, and I needed the cultural diversity piece added in there. She said, 'We can do that.'

[The state liaison] is really the key. She is very knowledgeable. Everyone here knew her. . . . She is competent and everyone trusts her. She never contradicts us as a state. She really works well with people, enhances everyone's opinions, and is an outstanding facilitator.

III. Services to the SEA

Portfolio of Products and Services

SECAC's services to MDE and the RSCs are aligned with state reforms and informed by research. The center has tapped into its own knowledge and resource base to inform the SEA about research related to literacy, the education of at-risk students, and second-language acquisition. Moreover, SECAC's services to Mississippi are ongoing, based on a deep contextual understanding, highly coordinated with state reform efforts, broad in scope, and, at times, highly intensive.

SECAC provides a variety of services in Mississippi to recipients on both the state and local levels. In its efforts to build the capacity of MDE and RSC staff to deliver their own technical assistance, SECAC provides services ranging from ongoing consultations to conferences to impromptu feedback. Much of SECAC's work with districts and schools is facilitated through the RSCs. These activities focused on school improvement strategies, such as conducting needs assessments, using data to inform decisions, and coordinating programs. In addition, the center assists the Title I School Support Teams, which are housed at the RSCs, and encourages networking among RSC staff throughout the state and region.

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) Program. SECAC, MDE, and the Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) Laboratory sponsored a series of events to assist schools in choosing and implementing CSR D models. In June 1998, all three groups cosponsored a two-day institute intended to showcase CSR D models, provide schools in the state with an understanding of the elements of comprehensive school reform, and provide information about the state's application process and selection criteria. SECAC shared responsibility for planning, securing resources, and delivering the institute, which attracted over 500 participants. In June 1999, the collaboration hosted the Intensive Program Evaluation Institute for schools implementing school reform models. All 39 of the state's CSR D schools attended the activity, which sought to improve schools' abilities to evaluate their own programs. SECAC, SERVE, and MDE continue to partner to deliver ongoing CSR D services and will provide a follow-up Leadership Institute in September 1999.

Reading. Using elements of the Comprehensive Centers' Reading Success Network (RSN), SECAC worked intensively with MDE as it developed its own reading program for students in preK-6. The state's reading program—Every Child A Reader—is a response to low standardized test scores and incorporates RSN's data analysis and peer coaching components, the latter of which is informed by Art Costa's cognitive coaching model. According to a MDE reading specialist, "We needed a vehicle for implementing our reading program, and that is where RSN's data analysis and peer coaching helped...RSN fit perfectly for us at just the right time...SECAC's help was crucial in the beginning."

From August to October 1998, MDE and SECAC staff sponsored the first reading initiative workshops for K-3 teachers in six pilot districts. Following the training, MDE and SECAC provided on-site telephone and fax follow-up to district-level peer coaching teams, which consist of teachers and resource staff who meet regularly to discuss diagnosis, intervention, and data analysis. Since then, the legislature has increased funding and 11 new districts will be implementing the state reading initiative. MDE staff reported that SECAC's knowledge of standards-based reform, curriculum, pedagogy, and research were critical to designing and implementing Every Child A Reader. For example, SECAC provided assistance in aligning reading assessments to standards when the state was developing the program. "At the end [of administering student assessments], we analyzed all the assessments and prescribed a reading program for each intervention, aligned to state standards," explained a MDE staff member.

Title IV. SECAC helped sponsor the first statewide Safe and Drug-Free Schools Coordinators meeting. In particular, SECAC brokered the services of several presenters and helped with meeting logistics. On an ongoing basis, SECAC staff help keep MDE informed on recent developments in the Title IV program, such as the Principles of Effectiveness.

Goals and Objectives for Continuing Work

Overwhelmingly, MDE staff said they wanted to maintain their relationship with SECAC and expressed concern about the future of the Comprehensive Centers. MDE staff reported that they depend greatly on SECAC and will continue to use the center's services because: (1) SECAC services are free; (2) there are few other technical assistance providers available in Mississippi; (3) securing services from SECAC is easier than from other providers because MDE and the RSCs can bypass the state's complicated procurement procedures for hiring speakers and consultants; and (4) MDE and RSC staff trust SECAC's services to be relevant and of high quality. Describing SECAC's usefulness to MDE, one staffer said:

Without fail, SECAC has been able to get me help on a whole lot of different issues. Most definitely I would feel an effect from SECAC disappearing. The work would fall right back on [the MDE]. We see SECAC as another arm.

The state liaison described a host of new and continued ways in which SECAC will work in Mississippi. SECAC staff intend to continue facilitating communication between RSCs within Mississippi, as well as throughout the region. Staffers hope the networking will improve RSC planning and services, as well as improve its own assistance to the RSCs. Also, SECAC will follow up on its CSRD showcase with additional training to facilitate the implementation of school reform models, consult with MDE staff, help sponsor conferences and workshops for districts and schools, and work to

implement the state's reading initiative. As further evidence of SECAC's contribution to MDE, another staffer added:

I would like to see SECAC continue as is and would hate to see it being discontinued. I hope the relationship could stay the same. In the future we would like to keep working with the schools and districts as is.

IV. State's Use of External Assistance

Staff from MDE and the RSCs reported that they need external assistance when there is a lack of in-house expertise or resources; although, outside of SECAC and SERVE, staff said that there were relatively few service providers available to them. Overall, MDE relies primarily on SECAC for external assistance, while the RSCs often look to universities, foundations, and nonprofit organizations in addition to SECAC.

Specifically, the center assists the MDE in implementing school reform models and accessing funding and expertise. According to staff from the MDE, SECAC is an attractive technical assistance provider because: (1) the center's services are free; (2) SECAC staff are knowledgeable about state and local reform agendas; (3) SECAC's state liaison understands the inner workings of the MDE and is reliable; (4) the center has expertise in specific topic areas, such as conducting needs assessments, planning and implementing schoolwide programs, choosing CSRD models, developing and implementing state reading initiatives, and building the capacities of the RSCs; and (5) SECAC can help sponsor large events that require considerable planning and coordination. Praising not only SECAC but the state liaison in particular, one MDE staffer reported,

SECAC is very good at pulling disparate groups together and getting them to work together. She [the state liaison] has helped to build relationships with other service center people. She facilitates.

Also, MDE staff look to SERVE for technical assistance related to federal program implementation and school reform models. Because they are the main technical assistance contacts in the state, SECAC and SERVE have formed an informal partnership, particularly around the CSRD program. Attesting to the value of this partnership, another staffer said,

It's been SERVE and SECAC. SERVE and SECAC are the only two [external providers in Mississippi]. Having joint service available has been good.

The RSCs also look to SECAC when they need low-cost assistance, flexible services, and help with oversight, facilitation, and networking, although they often contract with non-SECAC personnel for training and consulting provided to school and district staff. Specifically, SECAC works with the RSCs to recruit high-quality workshop presenters, and facilitates state and regional RSC networking. RSC staff

said they also turn to universities, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and other government agencies for expertise and help in hiring consultants, speakers, and trainers. For example, in the area of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, these experts have included representatives from Jackson State University, the state Attorney General’s office, and DREAM, a local nonprofit organization dedicated to school safety and substance abuse issues. For help with standards and other academic issues, MDE has consulted with master teachers from the Mississippi Council of Teachers of Mathematics; the state’s “Pool of Providers” list, which identifies exemplary educators; and teachers from a local math and science magnet school. One RSC staff member described his RSC’s connection to its host university:

We seek a lot of outside assistance because, though the [state’s] prescription is limiting, there is opportunity to be creative and do other kinds of things. The department’s contract with us is very demanding of personnel, so we need to bring additional people on board to do other things. Sometimes when I need workshops on school safety there are experts right here. There is someone who is in special education and early childhood education right here. I pull those people. The School of Education can be made available. There are six people from the university and they are working with us right now.

V. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

Both MDE and RSC staff described SECAC’s products and services as high quality, tailored to their needs, and useful and relevant to their work. Moreover, staff reported that Center staff were accessible, knowledgeable about federal programs, and able to provide sustained assistance. Particularly, staff spoke highly of the state liaison and her knowledge of state and federal policy. One MDE staff noted that the liaison likely attends more state meetings than most MDE employees. Other staff members added that her absence would limit their ability to serve Mississippi’s children:

We can call on SECAC for expertise. We ask for help and direction when we need it. We would feel an effect if [the state liaison] weren’t there anymore. A lot of burden would be back on us and that would be hard. . . . We have made SECAC what we needed. They have become our arm. I value her [the state liaison’s] efforts to reach out and her expertise. . . . School districts trust [the state liaison] as if she were part of the MDE. They see her help as relevant.

[The state liaison] is always at the [Mississippi] board meetings and is very aware of education at the national level. If we lost her, we would lose important communication about our own state policies. She always knows what is current.

[The state liaison] did a needs assessment workshop that was the best that I have ever seen. She had wonderful handouts . . . she did assessments in Meridian and somewhere else and did a wonderful job. Hers was even better than the one in Washington.

When we started out we did not know what we were doing. [The state liaison] helps me to understand how the other service centers are using their services, which gives me ideas. . . . At first, I did not know what help to ask for and how to plan. When she saw that, she shared [ideas] with me. I have seen a great deal of improvement in what we do.

Increased State Capacity to Deliver High-Quality Technical Assistance

Other staff explained ways in which the center enhanced their work. One reading specialist in MDE said that SECAC's assistance to the SEA in developing the RAISE program was much appreciated. The center improved the program's data analysis and peer coaching components and assisted the SEA implement the program in six pilot districts. Overall, staff were effusive in their praise of the center's efforts:

I think SECAC has made a difference in what we can offer districts. We personally and financially would have to do the job they are doing, which we just can't do. . . . We might be able to employ other consultants, but the service is not as good [as SECAC's].

If you only knew the details and the time and the thinking that SECAC puts into the follow-up activity for the June activity, you couldn't beat them. If you look at the quality of work to facilitate the activities telephone calls, visits, person-person communication, e-mails, it is very intense. The part that makes me really feel good is that SECAC people are comfortable to be with and you also get things accomplished.

MDE and RSC staff also reported that SECAC allows them to "learn by watching" during consultations, workshops, and other events. The center facilitates capacity building among SEA staff by maintaining frequent communication with them and staying abreast of staff needs. Staff appreciate this approach very much:

[The state liaison] is my ideal for state technical assistance. I think most people don't want to admit they don't know something. But I, and others, have learned about Title I and other things from her. Our office is a new office. A lot of people are straight out of the classroom and have very little experience with federal program administration. [The state liaison] happens to have a lot of experience with programs, and we watch her provide training. We learn from watching her.

I have observed [SECAC staff] interacting with workshop participants. The participants get a lot out of it. I get the impression that they are using what they are learning. Teachers and counselors are receiving hands-on materials that are timely. I have kept all my materials from SECAC's meeting in June. [SECAC staff] ask and hear what I need. They are good listeners.

[The state liaison] is a local, so she is easier to contact. We can easily go to her office to pick up resources. . . . I don't have a week go by without being contacted by [her]. She maintains very close contact with the department.

However, SEA staff indicated that the focus of SECAC services to the MDE and RSCs recently shifted from capacity-building exercises toward more training sessions for clients. These respondents noted that they call on SECAC less frequently because they have learned how to do their work:

I moved from innovative support to instructional development. In my first year, I have called [the state liaison] often during the transition but that is done. I really don't call her that frequently now.

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

MDE staff have taken steps to implement some of the key tenets of ESEA as a result of their contact with SECAC. First, although the MDE is integrating federal program coordination and funding, schools and districts are further along in this process. SECAC sponsored activities designed to help schools integrate federal program funds as a means of better assisting disadvantaged children. In so far as ESEA and SECAC are concerned, one MDE staff member said:

We have used SECAC to get the word out to schools about how to get the most for your money. We invite [the state liaison] and RSCs to program meetings [in which we talk about program integration].

Second, MDE staff think they are paying greater attention to the needs of non-English-speaking students. In 1998, SECAC helped the SEA work with a district that was out of compliance with federal regulations protecting ESL students, a small, but increasing population in Mississippi. According to one MDE staff member, greater attention to ESL issues at the state level has engendered more consideration of the social and emotional needs of these students at the district and school levels. Third, SECAC's needs assessment workshops have promoted the use of data to make needs assessment more meaningful and helped to identify teachers' needs for professional development.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Because MDE and RSC staff were most familiar with SECAC services at the state and district levels, they had little evidence that the center's services could be directly attributed to improvements in teaching and learning at the classroom level. Nevertheless, one staff member thought that teaching would improve as a result of SECAC training for district officials in needs assessment. District staff were better able to understand test and survey data and how that data relate to teaching strategies. Overall, MDE staff expected that SECAC assistance was a benefit to the educational system and would ultimately benefit the learning of Mississippi students.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

MDE and RSC staff were satisfied with SECAC services, but could also point to some potential barriers to the delivery of high-quality technical assistance. For instance, MDE staff described challenges in working with the state department of education, particularly in processes related to: (1) service procurement; (2) requests for proposals; and (3) the coordination of many busy people with different priorities. Staff also said that service providers, such as SECAC, may be challenged in working with the MDE when there is a disconnect between the state agenda and district and school needs. Lastly, MDE staff suggested that it is hard for service providers in high demand, such as SECAC's Mississippi liaison, to balance service requests, saying, "Good people get spread too thin."

Summary

Mississippi is taking steps to consolidate federal program administration at the state level, though there is no formal structure for collaborating extensively across programs. A state liaison from SECAC brokers services between the center and MDE and ensures that center services are tailored to state needs.

SECAC organizes many of its services through the state's RSCs. The state liaison works with the RSCs to develop a master calendar to ensure that the RSCs receive an appropriate share of center services. SECAC's portfolio of products and services includes initiatives in the following areas: CSRD, reading, and Title IV. According to MDE staff, the state relies on SECAC because its services are free; because there are few other technical assistance providers available in Mississippi; and because the SEA finds SECAC services to be relevant and of high quality. Center staff were valued for their accessibility, knowledge about federal programs, and ability to provide sustained assistance. MDE staff reported that their capacity had improved because of the center's assistance and that they "learn by watching" SECAC during consultations, workshops, and other events.

Comprehensive Center Services to States

New Mexico Department of Education

This case study examines services provided by the Region IX Comprehensive Center—also known as the Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (SWCC)—to the New Mexico State Department of Education (NMSDE). New Mexico is one of five states in the center’s region, and the Southwest Center focuses its services to the state in the areas of low-performing schools, Title I, standards-based reform, and Indian education.

I. State Context

New Mexico’s relatively small population is spread over many square miles and divided into ethnic subgroups that have very different ways of defining and preserving cultural identity. The most numerous group is Hispanic, although American Indians from a variety of tribes also represent a significant proportion of the population, particularly in rural areas. Accommodating the state’s diverse linguistic and cultural resources poses a challenge to staff from both SWCC and NMSDE, in part because each population group has, over time, developed a different relationship with schools and school systems.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

In 1993, New Mexico’s state board of education introduced a policy framework for educational reform. The following year, the commissioner of education and governor jointly appointed a 32-member New Mexico Education Goals 2000 Panel to oversee the state’s implementation and assessment of school reform plans. The Panel continues to serve as a key guiding force in New Mexico’s reform agenda.

In 1996, the State Board of Education adopted the Standards for Excellence to establish expectations for all New Mexico students attending schools covered by the regulations, provide for implementation of the standards for these students, and establish content standards and benchmarks. To implement the standards, the state requires that each district develop, implement, assess, and evaluate an Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS). The EPSS is a comprehensive, long-range planning, implementation, and evaluation tool that is the roadmap for the district’s efforts to achieve the expectations outlined in the standards. Engaging community stakeholders in creation of viable, effective EPSS that address state standards and reconciling plans for the district and school levels to produce good programs for students has been an ongoing challenge.

By 1998, New Mexico had adopted content standards and benchmarks for nine content areas and aligned the statewide assessment system with these standards. Between 1996 and 1999, the New Mexico accountability system was developed and improved. The accountability system now has four components:

- Standards for Excellence
- Strategies for measuring and reporting progress, including a data system, an assessment system, and accountability reports
- Progress reviews, including accreditation and program/budget reviews, and
- Recognition programs, including monetary awards and publication of the achievements of high-performing and high-improving schools

The state board of education also launched a three-year professional development initiative to ease teachers' transition into a standards-based education system. The state collects data on student assessment results, school safety records, dropout and attendance data, and financial information, which will be available to the public when it publishes its 10th annual accountability report in 2000.

Implementation of ESEA Reforms

NMSDE is working hard to integrate all federal, state, and local initiatives under the umbrella of state reform. For example, all programs are included in schools' and districts' EPSSs, which ensure that all students are being held to the same standards and that program resources are organized accordingly.

Most SEA respondents reported that they have attempted to promote consolidation and integrate planning and resources with other programs, although others were reluctant to embrace federal and state efforts to consolidate and integrate education programs. For example, a Title VII program officer explained that she monitors local implementation of services for children covered by her program by reviewing school plans to determine how, and to what extent, EPSS objectives are connected to bilingual and multi-cultural education. Staff from the technology office report that they provide technical assistance that facilitates the use of technology in various academic program areas, and that they seek to foster collaboration between the technology program and other programs, such as bilingual and Indian education. One official explained that the technology office is "focused on [meeting] content standards and benchmarks and providing learning opportunities" and encourages districts to "merge the[ir] technology plan[s] with EPSS." In addition, the program director for Indian Education stated that she works with all departments to monitor services to American Indian students in public, contract, and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools throughout New Mexico. She pointed out that a concerted effort is being made to

ensure that schools that serve large numbers of American Indian students are involved in the school accreditation process, and that Title VII and Title I funds are available for participating tribes and American Indian parent committees.

II. Establishing the Relationship

SWCC is housed within the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP) at New Mexico Highlands University. Although SWCC is a separate entity within the larger organization, many SWCC staff members are also funded by CESDP to provide technical assistance and other services under other CESDP contracts. Thus, while their tasks and responsibilities under the Comprehensive Center contract and other CESDP contracts are often quite similar, staff are clear that at times they represent SWCC and at other times they represent CESDP. This distinction is not always clear, or important, to service recipients. As one NMSDE staff member observed: “Highlands, CESDP, and [the Comprehensive Center]...their images blend into one.”

The Center’s History with the State

The relationship between the center and NMSDE is facilitated by close relationships among staff from both organizations. Many have known each other personally or have worked together professionally. Staff from NMSDE emphasized frequently the importance of long-term relationships to their work with SWCC. One administrator explained,

In New Mexico, it is very important to have the human relationship, regardless of [the type of] business partnership. Whether there will be the reauthorization of the Comprehensive Centers or not, we want [technical assistance providers who] know our schools, our culture, and so we will be looking for someone quite local. . . . I was more open to working with them because I knew several of the center people. [The assistant director of the center], for instance, was in grad[uate] school with me, and we got talking . . . they came to me to say, ‘What do you think we can do in the partnership?’ I know the work they were doing on standards. Our work on needs assessment was very labor intensive, and we needed them to help.

Other SEA staff also reported that they had prior relationships with center staff. In particular, one praised SWCC’s associate director as being “always good to work with.” This respondent continued, “In New Mexico, if one is in education long enough, we know each other. It’s a little enough state that we just do.” Similarly, describing her relationship with center staff, a federal program officer noted that NMSDE’s relationship with the center is “a partnership . . . it’s a work relationship, but we are friends.” The partnership between the two organizations developed quickly, in part because NMSDE staff were

keenly aware of their needs and knew from prior experience that Center staff had the knowledge and expertise to provide the assistance they required.

NMSDE staff reported that, over time, the most significant change in their relationship with the center has been in the level and focus of service. In the first couple of years after the center was established, the state often requested and received help serving specific schools, districts, or programs. However, as the center's understanding of how to stretch resources to meet state needs efficiently and effectively evolved, the center grew more strategic in its services to the state. Although the center continued to provide some direct services to districts and schools, it also began to shift its services to the state to more often address the needs of consortia or larger groups of customers. If, for example, a state program officer asked the center to provide a parent involvement workshop at a district or school, the center works with the officer to identify the larger audience for such an event and to link it with other state initiatives.

Planning Services

Center staff's knowledge of local context and extensive involvement in New Mexico's education community made the state's needs assessment process relatively straightforward. Once the center was established, staff from both organizations arranged meetings in which they brainstormed about how to most effectively use center resources to serve the state. One program specialist said that center staff met with them, asked about their needs, conducted needs assessments, and provided a variety of workshops. In addition, center staff explained to SEA staff that although it could not provide assistance to individual schools or districts, it could organize and sponsor regional meetings that SEA staff could "help put together."

NMSDE staff selected the areas of Indian education, bilingual education, and Title I schoolwide programs as those in which the state required the most assistance. In addition, the state called on the center to help it support the 11 critically low-performing schools identified by statewide assessments, all of which have heavy concentrations of Limited English Proficient and American Indian students, and about half of which have implemented Title I schoolwide programs.

III. Services to the SEA

Portfolio of Products and Services

The center has fulfilled a variety of tasks for NMSDE, ranging from training for School Support Teams (SSTs) to helping school districts complete funding applications and prepare grant proposals. Through these and other activities, the state looks to the center to help build its capacity to both implement programs and deliver technical assistance. According to one staff member, “The center shares the workload, and they model for us. The result is way more than I could have done by myself. . . . [center staff] are exceptional people. I always look for an opportunity to capitalize on their expertise.”

Because CESDP staff have been involved in the development and implementation of standards in New Mexico since they were adopted, center staff are well-versed in standards-based reforms. In addition, SWCC staff have experience in conducting, accessing, and using research, given the Center’s history as a Title VII evaluation center.

Support to Critically Low Performing Schools. SWCC is the mainstay of technical assistance services to the 11 schools identified by the state’s accountability system as “critically low performing,” and the center’s services to these schools have been intensive. Center staff meet directly with individual school teams to develop and revise EPSS plans and conduct other activities—such as workshops in leadership and comprehensive planning—designed to drive improvement. With assistance from the center, the critically low performing schools also convene meetings with external groups and community partners. The center’s role in this effort is highly valued by the state, which would have difficulty providing technical assistance to such schools given its monitoring role within the accountability system.

Title I. SWCC has provided technical assistance and training to SSTs. According to NMSDE staff, the center’s work with the SSTs has been particularly helpful, because the center has helped the state “to create a new, improved SST cadre [that] is very popular, [and] we are grateful. . . .” Currently, “requests are pouring in” to the SSTs from schools that want and need their help, added an SEA staff member.

Center staff have also assisted the state in preparing and revising a *Title I Schoolwide Program Planning Manual* that is designed to provide guidance to schools implementing schoolwide programs. The document, which uses an accreditation-type rubric, was produced jointly by NMSDE and the center and has been disseminated widely throughout the state.

Standards-based Reform. The state has sought SWCC’s assistance to prepare a primer on standards for dissemination to districts and schools. A NMSDE staff member explained, “Other states

have standards primers. I want something quick and dirty, and [center staff] are working on that for us. They bring in teachers and curriculum experts. . . . We are getting 10,000 [printed]. . . .” With EPSS and standards-based reform at the center of state reform efforts, NMSDE is particularly eager to ensure that language minority students are held to high standards, that they are properly identified and assessed, and that suitable accommodations are made for them.

Indian Education. The state Indian Education director convened a series of meetings, hosted by SWCC, for the BIA officials and superintendents from districts with high concentrations of Indian students. The purpose of the meetings was to improve alignment between the BIA and the state’s accountability systems and discuss ways in which the EPSS could satisfy requirements of both systems. NMSDE staff noted that this alignment was important for Indian students because of the high mobility rates among this population. In this case, the center made its resources and facilities available to the state for pursuing a goal they shared.

Goals and Objectives for Continuing Work

SEA staff discussed the center’s continued role in helping build its capacity to assist schools implementing schoolwide programs. They also pointed out the importance of the center’s role in promoting federal program integration and ensuring that federal programs address the EPSS. According to NMSDE respondents, the center is also valuable in helping the SEA leverage change on a grander scale, rather than to scatter help over a variety of tasks and audiences. With this goal in mind, the center has helped NMSDE staff extend their reach and responsiveness to increasing numbers of clients.

IV. State’s Use of External Assistance

SWCC is typically the primary contact for NMSDE staff who require assistance outside of the SEA. Several interviewees reported that they valued the center’s services because center staff know the territory, are well connected, and have the interpersonal skills and political savvy necessary for successfully interacting with different kinds of people and institutions. They find that center staff are well respected and welcomed in districts around the state and appreciate the center’s ability to maneuver between and among the formal and informal authority structures in the state, while maintaining cordial relationships with key personnel. NMSDE staff stated that they had not found, nor did they expect to find, this combination of qualities in any other technical assistance providers. One explained, “There are other free sources [of technical assistance] that we do not use because what they do is not solid work. I would prefer to use the center more.”

When NMSDE requires services outside of the center’s scope and beyond its capacity, it often purchases technical assistance from CESDP, the center’s host organization. In the past, NMSDE has looked to CESDP to provide services related to the implementation of standards, professional development related to technology, parent involvement, and career preparation.

Other personnel acknowledged that the state requires assistance in several areas and that there are opportunities for technical assistance providers other than the center to make valuable contributions. For example, one respondent suggested that a university or an organization similar to the center and one “that understands [the state’s way of doing business]” take the lead on “a statewide system for the delivery of professional development.”

In addition to the center and CESDP, the state identified Sandia Labs, New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, and the Native American Rights Center as organizations that have provided important assistance in areas such as technology, research and grant writing, parent involvement, and tribal policy issues.

V. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

For the most part, NMSDE staff were satisfied with the quality of services they have received from the center. In particular, SEA respondents have been pleased with the center’s efforts in: (1) helping the state develop standards and assisting districts and teachers to implement them; (2) training personnel to work on school support teams; (3) working intensively with some of the state’s lowest performing schools; and (4) fostering good will and improved communication between NMSDE and local districts with whom relationships have been strained.

NMSDE staff also were respectful of the center’s work—and that of its host organization—and knowledge of local context. Referring to occasions when the SEA contracted services from CESDP, one SEA staff member noted, “I respect the [center] people and would consider them...even [if] the work was outside their scope.” The center’s experience with local populations and programs was particularly valuable to the NMSDE. According to one staff member, “What I am impressed with is what they have already done in rural schools. . . . I know those schools [in terms of how much work was needed], and [the center’s] work has been well received.”

Respondents noted other important strengths of the center. One director observed that center staff successfully attend to both public policy agendas as well as client needs. He appreciated the “honest

working relationship” fostered between the two organizations and the direct manner in which center staff communicate with the state. “We do not have to ‘pussyfoot,’ and that’s amazing in a relationship with a contractor,” she added.

Increased State Capacity to Deliver High-Quality Technical Assistance

An important component of SWCC’s services to the NMSDE is capacity building among SEA staff. According to one staff member, “We brought them [the center] in to help review school improvement plans. Through that process our people have had a chance to watch how it is done. That’s capacity building.” Another added, “A lot of [the center’s] work is about . . . training our staff for effectiveness. They show that they understand the school improvement process. They do good work.”

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

In the view of many, the center has also done a good job of helping the state to coordinate and consolidate programs, despite resistance from some long-term program staff who worried that integration would compromise services to targeted populations. The SEA has looked to SWCC to help foster federal program integration, particularly in the context of EPSS and schoolwide programs.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

SEA respondents discussed one barrier to the center’s ability to provide high-quality technical assistance. They thought that potential service recipients might not be served because the center’s menu of services was not readily available and, as a result, potential customers might not know how to use the center’s services. As one interviewee explained, “I don’t use them as much as I should. . . . I don’t know what is there to be offered.” However, this comment was offered in the context of general satisfaction with the quality and quantity of services that the center was providing—satisfaction that left state clients unwilling to miss any opportunity to take advantage of the center’s knowledge and skills.

Summary

New Mexico’s EPSS seeks to combine federal, state, and local initiatives and organize resources strategically. However, some SEA respondents were reluctant to embrace federal program consolidation. The center and CESDP enjoy a close partnership, buoyed by long-term and prior relationships. The state requested that the center concentrate its efforts in the areas of Indian education, bilingual education, Title I

schoolwide programs, and support to the 11 critically low-performing schools identified by statewide assessments. SWCC staff were valued for their work in helping the state develop and disseminate standards; training personnel to serve on school support teams; serving low-performing schools; and improving communication between the SEA and local districts. Some SEA staff members were concerned that center services might be underused because it did not provide a menu of services.

Comprehensive Center Services to States

New York State Department of Education

This case study examines services provided by Region II Comprehensive Center—also known as the New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC)—to the New York State Department of Education (NYSED), the only state education association (SEA) in the center’s region. NYTAC’s assistance to NYSED has been wide ranging, although it has focused centrally on statewide systemic capacity building through strategic planning with NYSED senior management, support to low-performing districts and schools, support to the state’s Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) Program, and federal program integration and schoolwide programs.

I. State Context

Reform Goals and Initiatives

New York has been reforming its educational system since the mid-1980s. During this period, two energetic commissioners have emphasized standards-aligned teaching and accountability, site-based management, parent and community involvement, technology improvement, and statewide management efficiency. The current commissioner, Richard Mills, came into office in 1995, committed to continuing the standards focus established by his predecessor, Tom Sobol. He has done so by concentrating on improving teaching and learning in the state’s poorest performing schools and districts, focusing especially on the “Big Five” districts—New York, Yonkers, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo. In 1998, Commissioner Mills, with the approval of the State Board of Regents, put in place a three-priority strategic plan that established as its core goal that all students would achieve the state’s ambitious standards through three mechanisms: (1) regularly assessing student progress toward standards; (2) building local capacity; and (3) disseminating assessment results statewide through school report cards. According to a NYTAC staff member, the strength of Commissioner Mills’ agenda is its focus on serving the state’s most at-risk population with a strong, standards-based curriculum. With this agenda, Mills was able to use Title I as the “quiet driver” of reform in New York.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's History with the State

Entrée into the NYSED came easily for NYTAC. Individuals from the Center, NYSED, and participating partner organizations had been long-time collaborators: “We envisioned the state as both a partner and a client,” a NYTAC staff member recalled. The state’s deputy commissioner reported that the partnership concept characterized his experience with the center relationship from the start, and one of his staff members reported that “even before funding came in, they [Center staff] were talking with [our] top managers.”

Planning Services

NYTAC’s work in New York is driven by “systems thinking,” planning that ensures that the various elements of the state education system are strategically coordinated to accomplish the goals set by the State Board of Regents. This systemic approach favors management strategies that promote comprehensive and integrated program changes rather than those that segment programs categorically. NYTAC staff are attentive to how the state’s organizational parts interact and affect one another, and they direct their services to where maximum impact can be achieved. They regard technical assistance to be a scarce resource, which must be strategically dispersed if it is to reach the classrooms and students who would most likely benefit. A center staff member explained the organization’s priority on concentrating its services at management levels:

It is at the state level [where you place your emphasis] . . . if you can go to the state and affect one thing in policy that affects opportunities for kids to get those resources [more effectively] . . . you’ve touched all kids. . . . We battled among ourselves . . . some about [whether to] serve teachers, some argued to serve buildings and others said the state . . . [In the end, however,] it’s a combination of all those pieces.

NYTAC adheres to a systemic approach in providing NYSED services. First, the center organizes its teams to parallel the state’s organization. A NYSED program director observed, “As we organized ourselves, they [center staff] organized themselves the same way. They match our groups for Title I and Title IV, Long Island, and New York City.” Three regional teams, each led by a high-level NYTAC manager, serves different parts of the state, and one team directly serves the SEA. Cross-team coordination and contact with other state networks are standard operating practice. According to center staff, this organizational arrangement enabled the center to coordinate its services so they are consistent with the way the state organizes its own existing technical assistance. Center service delivery teams worked closely with the managers in its Effective Schools Consortium Networks (ESCN), “Touch[ing]

base with every state representative, at every level. . . .” Such a strategic organizational arrangement did not require additional funding, but it was, from the perspective of center staff, a “critical investment.”

Second, the center responds directly to the state’s needs, rather than imposing mandates or a particular agenda. Initially, NYTAC and NYSED established priorities through individual and small group meetings between the team leaders and their major contacts across the state. A SEA respondent described the center’s responsiveness to state needs:

They [NYTAC staff] were especially effective because they did not have a work plan when they came in. They didn’t say we had to work with standards and testing...the mandate. They asked us, ‘What are your needs?’ and we told them. They came back six weeks later with a plan. It’s an annual work plan, which they reviewed with us prior to it being established.

III. Services to the SEA

Portfolio of Products and Services

NYSED turned to the center for assistance in the following key areas: (1) reducing barriers to federal and state program integration; (2) implementing the Title I and Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR/D) programs; and (3) building state and local capacity to reform systemically. According to one SEA respondent, “We needed the help [in capacity building and school improvement], and they were most interested in providing help there. . . . First, they helped with the design of capacity building [statewide], and [then they] worked with specific districts. They started with New York City and branched out. It flowed out from New York City to upstate.”

According to SEA respondents, NYTAC staff are interpreters, facilitators, researchers, and trainers for NYSED programs. Furthermore, they have expertise and insider knowledge about Washington’s expectations and an understanding of how federal laws should be implemented. NYTAC staff fulfill a variety of roles, ranging from convening and taking notes at meetings, helping draft and redraft plans, and working between and among groups with differing and often conflicting perspectives. NYSED staff also recognized center staffs’ skills as negotiators—either among state-level programs or among districts, schools, and the SEA.

Strategic Planning with NYSED Senior Management. NYTAC places a priority on serving the highest management levels both in NYSED and in school districts. The center advises the deputy commissioner’s senior management team and offers regular assistance to key program staff who lead the implementation of ESEA programs and CSR/D. NYSED staff acknowledged that this was not an easy task, because achieving the ESEA reauthorization program integration goals “did not follow a formula”

and some state agency personnel responded dubiously to consolidation proposals, waiting to see if the changes were “here to stay and not going away.”

The deputy commissioner called on NYTAC primarily for “big picture” assistance, ranging in topic areas from assistance in designing the comprehensive plan to responding to civil rights violations and moving Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) into action. In one instance, NYTAC responded to the Board of Regents’ request to the senior management team to redesign the state’s approach to bilingual education. One SEA staff member reported, “They were able to bring in a design to improve bilingual instruction...NYTAC did the work researching it; they contacted national researchers. We were able to avoid a ‘California crisis’ [as a result of their efforts].” Other major areas in which NYTAC helped the state agency’s senior managers included: (1) contributing to the development of and editing the initial IASA consolidated plan; (2) designing, drafting, and implementing the CSRD proposal; (3) convening and leading the CSRD Think Tank; (4) training members of the state’s School Support Team (SST); and (5) developing a comprehensive new approach to training and involving parents in New York City schools.

In addition, center staff developed effective and practical working relationships with NYSED program and division directors. Many NYSED staff valued this high level of services, reporting that answers to their questions were only a telephone call away. According to one NYSED program director, NYTAC “bent over backwards to match our needs and our organizational structure. We ask for face-to-face activities that are labor intensive, sometimes requiring them to reorder resources, but they always provide.”

Support to Districts and Schools. NYTAC helped carry out the Commissioner’s commitment to increasing assistance to school districts with large concentrations of low-achieving students, especially those in the state’s “Big 5” cities—New York City, Yonkers, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse. Each NYTAC regional team customized its services to the regional and district offices. The teams also concentrated their assistance in the areas of schoolwide programs and professional development to enhance teachers’ capacity to implement standards-based reforms and to link poorly performing schools to Title I SSTs and Distinguished Schools and Educators. In many school districts and regions, NYTAC collaborated with NYSED, the state’s ESCNs, and the Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University to offer these services.

NYTAC teams assisted the state’s SSTs and concentrated on using ESEA program resources to reinvigorate assistance to the SURR schools statewide. NYTAC participated in planning meetings and hosted luncheons for SURR principals to learn about new program options and exchange information. In doing so, NYTAC motivated a new level of commitment among these hard-to-reach principals, and encouraged them to accept change initiatives that the state proposed.

In addition to planning and conducting conferences and meetings, NYTAC staff were facilitators and policy advisors to specific school districts. In Buffalo, NYTAC participated in regular policy-setting meetings with the Superintendent's Executive Council and connected district administrators with consultants from the center and the Region II Desegregation Assistance Center. Through these efforts, the center helped Buffalo establish new policies and an organizational plan for moving from court-ordered desegregation to unitary status. To support the Roosevelt (Long Island) School District, which was put under NYSED management in 1996, a NYTAC team also met regularly with the district superintendent and other staff and participated in strategic planning to implement reforms. Among other activities, NYTAC helped Roosevelt school teams learn to disaggregate and use school profile data in planning, complete their CSRD and e-rate applications, and write the district's consolidated plan.

Assistance to New York City's Board of Education occurred in a number of different areas and on different levels. The center offered the district's SURR schools leadership and management training for principals and their assistants. Parents of children in these schools benefited from a series of parent training workshops that developed their leadership, team-building, and conflict resolution skills. Six New York City elementary schools also received training from NYTAC in literacy and reading, with professional development for the teachers and a tutoring program for the students.

CSRD Program. When the CSRD legislation passed, NYTAC assisted state leaders conceptualize and draft their application to Washington and set in place the mechanism for selecting recipients of CSRD grants. They also provided technical assistance to schools in conducting needs assessments and selecting appropriate reform models. NYTAC continues as a resource to the state's Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) and the ESCNs that are working with CSRD schools or potential sites.

This early work led to the development of the CSRD Think Tank, a successful collaboration of technical assistance organizations statewide that are working to ensure CSRD sites have the capacity to successfully carry out their plans. Since 1997, regular Think Tank meetings have convened key education reform leaders on a monthly or bimonthly basis to extend their coordination and to develop evaluation strategies and a Web site that serves CSRD schools statewide. State officials report that the group collaboration, under NYTAC's direction, has increased the overall efficiency and impact of technical assistance services to CSRD programs.

ESEA and Schoolwide Implementation. NYTAC helped establish and facilitate the ESEA/Goals 2000 Internal Task Force, which designed the state's consolidated ESEA plan and collaborated to improve the cross-program coordination proposed in the plan. One of the task force's program directors reported that NYTAC helped develop organizational continuity as the agency sought to consolidate its ESEA programs. Because state program staff faced some internal resistance in

consolidating their programs, they relied on NYTAC to negotiate differences among programs. At the same time, NYTAC staff offered policy research and proposal writing assistance:

NYTAC would come with a bigger picture, helping to knit individual units together when we had meetings. . . . They'd say, 'Think about this,' and 'Make sure you say this. . . .' The problem was that we didn't know what help we needed or how to ask. . . . [NYTAC's partners] managed to find a way to be useful despite the obstacles they encountered organizationally.

NYTAC offered intervention skills institutes to NYSED and ESCN regional staff working with schoolwide transitional programs. The institutes were designed to increase participants' practical knowledge of organizations and systems change. The training used observation and skillful questioning to build groups' capacity to direct their own renewal. According to SEA staff, their challenge was to use the training to learn to "see another way of thinking" and to apply a systems frame of reference to recognize solutions to problems that were not initially apparent.

Parent Involvement Program (PIP). NYTAC's New York City team designed a basic parent training program to help parents become more effective school partners. Through a succession of coordinated meetings, the center helped parents understand and use information effectively so they could be equal contributors to school committees. The PIP program focuses on (1) helping parents make their homes better learning environments; (2) elements of effective schools; (3) standards and their role in the curriculum; (4) strategies for using annual school reports to guide planning; and (5) explaining the process by which schools fall into and are released from SURR schools status. NYTAC also offers Curriculum-based Parent Training that demonstrates the alignment of state and local standards with CSRD models. Parents receive information related to the state's English/Language Arts and Mathematics performance standards, state assessments, and learn about resources they can use at home with their children and with their children's schools.

Support to Migrant and Bilingual Offices. Since 1997, NYSED's Office of Migrant Education and NYTAC have co-sponsored the "ESL and the Migrant Student: Second Language Development Institute," a summer institute dedicated to identifying practical strategies to working with migrant populations. Educators from the state's 12 Migrant Education Centers have attended the training. Varied modules addressed topics on standards-based reform, thematic instruction, learning strategies, parent involvement, cooperative learning, and adapting instruction for diversity. NYTAC also produced a series of fact sheets, by county, that listed available resources and services for migrant children and families.

Roundtable on standards for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. NYTAC organized the New York State Invitational Roundtable on the New Standards and High Stakes Achievement for LEP Students, held in the fall of 1996. More than 120 representatives from schools districts, institutions of higher education, advocacy groups, parents, and students participated in the two-day event. The

roundtable identified key issues related to ensuring LEP students meet the same high standards as other students.

Goals and Objectives for Continuing Work

Both NYTAC and NYSED expect their relationship to continue with few changes, except as modifications in funding or new mandates require. Continuing activities will focus on: (1) collaboration with senior managers; (2) consultation on CSRD and Title I schoolwide programs, including assistance to SSTs; (3) assistance in the area of parent involvement; (4) expanded work in the development of a Web site that serves the area; and (5) the creation of partnerships to improve educators' capacity to use technology more effectively to increase learning. Standards-based reform and systemic change will continue to undergird NYTAC's work.

IV. State's Use of External Assistance

NYSED maintains its own comprehensive technical assistance network, which involves such varied groups as the BOCES, the state's colleges and universities, ESCNs, and private providers. An assistant commissioner coordinates the state's available technical assistance resources and identifies ways to improve their use. NYTAC has helped define the complementary and separate responsibilities of the state's varied technical assistance organizations and universities, clarify roles, identify levels of expertise, and assist clients in determining how and when different kinds of technical assistance resources can be best used. To support this effort, NYTAC developed and disseminated the *Guide to Federal Technical Assistance Providers and Services*. In addition, the center continues to gather more information about specialist providers for CSRD model designs that are not connected to the federal network; this information is disseminated through the CSRD Web site.

In general, NYTAC serves a particular technical assistance niche in New York, offering technical assistance in working with federal programs. The center's specialized services in the federal arena means it is a complementary resource distinct from the services other technical assistance providers offer.

V. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

Most NYSED staff are very satisfied NYTAC customers. In particular, they reported three ways in which center services added value to the SEA: (1) NYTAC's knowledge of systemic planning and its capacity to see and act from an outsider's perspective with an insider's sensitivity and an open mind; (2) NYTAC's capacity as a multi-functional resource, capable of serving several organizational levels simultaneously and effectively, through their staff's knowledge of systems, players, tools, and individuals; and (3) NYTAC's understanding of both the federal and state perspectives and their capacity to help weave these perspectives together in a practical manner. One SEA official described her overall assessment of NYTAC's work, using its assistance on CSRD as an example:

[They] are always out in the front when a new initiative comes in. They set the parameters under which the SEA should be able to think about these things. When CSRD was introduced, for example, we engaged in many conversations about what it meant. What's a program? What do the nine components mean? We were trying to make sense of the time line. They really helped us make critical decisions about how we'd approach the issue of getting out to the schools and districts. They helped provide the structure to make this thing happen at the beginning.

In addition, NYSED staff commented that NYTAC helped negotiate among competing organizational commitments and constituents in districts and within the state agency. One NYSED staff program coordinator who worked on the consolidated ESEA plan observed that NYTAC was instrumental in moving his colleagues through the collaborative process that led to the statewide ESEA plan. "We at NYSED thought we knew what the mission should be, but we couldn't get together among us. We didn't know what we wanted, and I couldn't get the support in our agency. . . ."

Increased State Capacity to Deliver High-Quality Technical Assistance

As a result of NYTAC's work, NYSED staff report a considerable increase in their capacity to offer technical assistance to schools and districts. One program manager noted that "there were things that were new to us that NYTAC helped us with. . . . There wasn't anyone available who would have provided the sustained support."

SEA respondents pointed to several areas where the center's help has been especially instrumental. State officials reported an increase in their ability to more effectively work with district and school staff, using training, technology, and policies that encourage dissemination of new programs and technical skills. They also found the center's contributions to the CSRD program beneficial to the work they do. In particular, the CSRD database and Web site promote collaboration among local CSRD

grantees. The center's training for parents and SSTs and connections to talent, information, and research have assisted SEA staff carry out their own training and disseminate information.

Improved Teaching and Learning

NYSED and NYTAC leaders reported that the center's mission was to influence and redirect policies as a strategy for improving teaching and learning. They suggested that NYTAC has had an impact on teaching and learning through its professional development activities and role in developing the state's CSR program as a model for effective technical assistance practice. One center staff member described such NYTAC activities as conceptualizing and designing the state's CSR proposal, reviewing proposals, and establishing evaluation mechanisms as "things that will have an impact on raising student performance. . . . [Those] are the things [we should be held] accountable for."

NYTAC staff participated in conversations on policy-related issues with different groups from within and outside the state agency. Center staff helped facilitate local boards and site councils, strengthened internal procedures, and demonstrated the natural bridges across once-separated federal programs like Title I and Title VII. A NYSED curriculum director described the changes he had seen in the state's capacity to change teaching and learning:

What does it do for School No. 5? It has developed capacity. We can't say it has affected Ms. Smith's class in the fourth grade. But the collaboration has affected how we work with schools, reporting, funding decisions, and the application. It has led to better coordinated service delivery. Maybe it didn't directly affect teaching and learning, [but] it helped the total picture.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

Barriers to effective technical assistance were related to systemic problems within the state organization or to continuing divisions among the federal and state categorical program offices. Some bilingual, migrant, and smaller federal program staff perceived they were inadequately involved in designing or developing the state's reform agenda. In some instances, state officials candidly acknowledged that the priority in the beginning of consolidation was on clarifying the agenda, not building inclusiveness:

[A few of us] came together with a clear purpose; we knew what we needed. Until we got ourselves organized, we didn't want a cast of thousands [at the table]. Now we know why we exist. We can reach out to other partnerships. At first we were just some people who were comfortable with each other and who were floundering [with new agendas and policies.]

This attitude of a few state staffers may have contributed to continuing “turf” issues. Those less involved in the initial change efforts found it more difficult to redefine their roles and responsibilities to reflect the comprehensive ESEA philosophy.

NYTAC is well aware of the dilemma involved in offering the level of categorical services that its categorical clients want under a comprehensive federal programs approach, and the center staff struggle with how to “respond to two masters:”

That’s the conundrum we face as technical assistance providers: categorical vs. comprehensive assistance. Can you deal with these two pieces simultaneously? The problem is, when you are talking about categorical programs, you’re talking about taking an advocacy and protector role. For 20 years we have conditioned bureaucracies to advocate and protect . . . but comprehensive reform has to have a forward thrust, [and an assurance] that the system is in fact doing the right things vis-a-vis those designated groups.

Summary

New York’s reform agenda focuses on regularly assessing student progress toward standards; building local capacity; and disseminating assessment results statewide through report cards. Imbedded in these reforms is a commitment to serving the state’s at-risk population. To coordinate the delivery of technical assistance, NYTAC’s organization parallels NYSED’s, and the center is organized into three regional teams and one team that directly serves the SEA. NYTAC’s portfolio of products and services includes conducting strategic planning with NYSED senior management; lending support to districts and schools in the state’s five cities with the largest concentrations of low-achieving students; carrying out CSRD programs; supporting ESEA and schoolwide reforms; encouraging parent involvement; and supporting bilingual and migrant education. The center was appreciated for its staff’s knowledge of systemic planning; its outsider’s perspective; its knowledge of systems, players, tools, and individuals; and its understanding of both federal and state perspectives. SEA staff also reported that the center helped build their capacity to provide technical assistance to districts and schools. The barriers the center faced related to systemic problems within the SEA and continuing divisions among the federal and state categorical program offices.

Comprehensive Center Services to States

Texas Education Agency

This case study examines services provided by the Region VIII Comprehensive Center—also known as the Support for Texas Academic Renewal (STAR) Center—to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the single state education agency in the center’s region, and TEA’s system of Education Service Centers (ESCs), which provide technical assistance throughout the state. The STAR Center focuses its technical assistance to the state in technology, the coordination of programs and funding, migrant education, and schoolwide programs.

I. State Context

In 1995, the Texas legislature shifted responsibility for technical assistance from TEA to the state’s 20 ESCs, which are funded and overseen by the state education agency (SEA). Formerly, TEA would handle requests for technical assistance by either directly providing assistance or referring clients to the ESC in their region. Now, ESC staff work directly with the state’s 1,018 districts and 6,507 schools. Each ESC maintains between 30 and 75 staff members, most of whom are former practitioners or administrators, and serves between 12 and 96 districts.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

TEA’s “dual notions of local control and accountability” drive the state education agenda, explained one TEA staff member. The state seeks to reduce procedural barriers to reform and encourages schools and districts to implement integrated, comprehensive programs through the Title I schoolwide option. The federal Ed-Flex program helps to reinforce the state’s reform efforts by enabling the state to grant waivers to campuses above the poverty threshold that are interested in becoming schoolwide programs.

Consistent with the state’s focus on local control and accountability, TEA requires all schools to participate in campuswide improvement planning and site-based decisionmaking. Each campus plan must include objectives for student performance. In exchange for the flexibility afforded to schools and districts, TEA holds local education agencies (LEAs) accountable for student performance through its assessment system, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). TAAS measures student progress in reading and math in grades 3–8 and grade 10 and writing in grades 4, 8, and 10. The state has

established benchmarks for student performance and uses TAAS scores as criteria for rating schools as either “exemplary,” “recognized,” “acceptable,” or “low-performing.”

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center’s History with the State

The three organizations that share responsibility for managing the STAR Center have been involved in education in Texas for many years. Staff at several ESCs noted their prior involvement with the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), which serves as a federal Desegregation Assistance Center and previously served as a federal multifunctional resource center, and with staff from RMC Research Corporation, which previously served as a federal Title I Assistance Center. Staff from TEA reported that they were familiar with Joseph Johnson, the executive director of the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, because he had worked at TEA for many years. Through these connections, the center was able to gain entrée to the SEA and its system of educational service centers with relative ease. One TEA staff member, who said that picking up the telephone to call Joseph Johnson was automatic, reported the following:

Having been in a leadership role in the agency, Joe Johnson already engendered respect and trust. He is the expert of experts, but he is always willing to encourage you to do things in your own way. He doesn’t try to sell you anything; he comes to support. He would never force anything on you. He has no agenda. It’s not power or anything that would drive a wedge, but a constant focus on how this is going to help children.

Though the STAR Center was able to rely on the reputations of its organizational partners, it also worked to establish a rapport with TEA and the ESCs in its new capacity as a Comprehensive Center. The center met with staff from TEA to discuss how the organizations could work together. According to one TEA staff member, the two “had a lot of meetings in the beginning about the role the center would play. [Then] we had meetings with the ESC coordinators about their needs and met with center staff to share those needs with them.” This staff member reported that once the center was informed of the ESCs’ needs, the center took responsibility for addressing those needs and continually assessing new ones. ESC staff confirmed that STAR Center staff attended ESC workshops and conferences and called ESC staff afterwards to discuss working together. As one ESC staff member put it, “We feel free to work with them. We feel like they’re the folks down the road.”

Planning Services

Because the authority for technical assistance was decentralized to the ESCs, TEA asked the STAR Center to focus its efforts on the ESCs. The federal programs director at TEA described the connection between the center and the agency's technical assistance efforts:

I see the STAR Center as helping us help our service centers give better technical assistance. The center's role [is to] help us identify projects and to work with us and with our ESCs on those projects. It's been delicate—the STAR Center has been trying to find its own level. I don't see the STAR Center as the technical assistance provider for the state. The STAR Center should help us do our job better and [help] the ESCs do their job better—not provide services directly to the LEAs.

Most ESC staff work individually with the STAR Center to determine what kinds of services the center can provide. Staffers disagreed about the STAR Center's approach to meeting regional needs. Some ESC staff reported that center staff participated in in-services and distributed surveys to learn more about local needs, while others thought that the center was less flexible in its approach. “When they come to our work sessions, instead of bringing what we asked for, they come in with their own agenda,” said one staff member. Another commented, “I've never gotten a phone call from anybody saying, ‘How can we help you out?’ I feel like the phone calls we get are, ‘We need something from you. We need information.’”

On the other hand, staff from TEA generally have found the center's assistance in line with their needs because the center's approach to planning services was comprehensive. As one staff member recounted, the center's approach was “different from folks who come in and don't stop to ask what we need. It was evident that they had been doing their homework. They were very informed about what we were doing.” Explaining how well aligned the center's services are with TEA's goals, a program director said:

When they came and talked about how they approached technology planning, it wasn't planning for technology, it was planning for achievement and fitting technology into the school plan. They brought the campus team together to plan; they didn't go into a school and say, ‘Here's what you need to do.’ That is the model we want schools to follow. A lot of people who come in tell us what they can give us in terms of technology, but they don't connect it to a broader picture.

III. Services to the SEA

Portfolio of Products and Services

Technology. The STAR Center has been working closely with the technology office at TEA since 1997. Staff from both entities first came into contact at that time to help districts develop technology plans for E-rate applications. Following that work, the center contacted the technology director and scheduled a meeting. According to TEA's technology director, "The center wanted to come in and build a relationship with TEA. We spent about an hour and laid out some plans that we could do together." From the beginning, it was clear to the director that center staff were familiar with TEA's technology approach and that the type of assistance they had to offer would assist the state in meeting its objectives.

At that initial meeting, TEA staff realized how valuable the STAR Center could be to schools and districts around the state. The director linked their Web site to the STAR Center's, planned to interview STAR Center staff about their services and to air the interview via TEA's videoconferencing system, began briefing technology liaisons at ESCs about the work of the center, and referred specific schools to the center for assistance.

Although the technology director wants schools to "take advantage of any resources that can help them with planning," she sees the STAR Center as being particularly helpful in leveraging resources and providing a broad perspective. Explaining what makes the center different than other external sources of technology assistance, she stated,

The unique thing about the center is that they are focused on looking at what the school needs; they're not a silo, they're broad-based. I think you need to have someone who has a niche and someone who can pull the pieces together. I think the center does a good job of pulling the work together. We were surprised with the amount of leveraging they've done. They've used the TEA guidelines rather than reinventing the wheel.

TEA's technology director has been extremely pleased with the services the STAR Center has provided and designated a staff member to serve as a liaison to the center on future activities. According to the director, "I felt that what the center had to offer was significant enough that we needed a person to work directly with them...that way we know we have a direct connection."

Coordinated Funding and Programs. In 1996, TEA designated the ESC Region 2 as the lead center for building capacity among all of the regional service centers on how to assist districts and schools in coordinating funding and programs more efficiently and effectively. From the onset, the ESC Region 2 coordinator of the initiative sought outside assistance and partnerships. Her interest in the STAR Center was further enhanced by the center's publication, *Technical Assistance in Texas: A Guide for Users*

(1996). With collaboration in mind and having had prior experience with RMC Research Corporation from her days as a district administrator, the coordinator set up a meeting with the STAR Center. At this meeting, she and other staff members from ESC Region 2 met with Joseph Johnson and Mary Ragland to develop an action plan. They agreed that the two entities would convene teams of educators from the ESCs and school districts to discuss the potential for coordination among various federal and state programs. The meeting, called the Texas Summit for Coordinating Funding and Innovative Practices, took place in February 1997. Margery Ginsberg, an independent consultant, assisted in the planning and facilitation of the advisory group that participated in the process. Many state agency personnel were members of the advisory group and provided program profile information that was used at the summit.

The STAR Center worked closely with ESC Region 2 and their advisory committee to prepare the background materials needed for the summit and to develop questions they wanted summit participants to answer during discussions facilitated by STAR Center staff, ESC 2 staff, and others. From the activities that took place at the summit, ESC Region 2 and STAR Center staff wrote program summaries and profiles and recorded frequently asked questions. This documentation and other information eventually became the *Resource Guide for Coordinating Funding and Programs*, which was updated based on follow-up discussions with summit participants. The initiative's coordinator explained how the STAR Center better enabled her to make her vision of a resource guide a reality. "I had the idea about developing the guide, but the contents were really refined with the STAR Center and the Texas Education Agency," she said.

Having designed the guide primarily as a resource for the staff of the 20 ESCs, the next step was to provide training related to the guide. To do so, the STAR Center developed the "Show Me the Money Game," a simulation activity in which players work in teams to coordinate funding sources in a budget. STAR Center staff have presented the game at conferences throughout the nation. In December 1997 and February 1998, ESC Region 2 and STAR Center staff collaborated on trainer-of-trainer sessions for approximately 200 ESC staff. The two entities also responded to a TEA staff request to provide state agency staff with similar training. Also, the initiative's coordinator and STAR Center staff have held presentations on the guide at several conferences, and STAR Center staff have incorporated it into the technical assistance they provide to districts and schools throughout the state.

The coordinated funding initiative is currently in its third year and, according to the coordinator from ESC Region 2, state funding has been diminished somewhat. As a result, she is unable to dedicate as much time to training ESC staff and producing materials on coordinated funding or to collaborate as much on activities with the STAR Center. However, the coordinator explained that she has come to depend on the STAR Center for filling in the gaps, stating, "Even though I can't do [everything], I know [the work is] getting done." Given the financial uncertainty surrounding the coordinated funding initiative, the coordinator was not sure of her goals for working with the STAR Center in the future.

Migrant Education. IDRA, the fiscal agent of the STAR Center, has a long history of working

with districts in ESC Region 1, which has the highest migrant population in Texas. When the proposal for the STAR Center was being developed, IDRA asked ESC Region 1 to be an institutional partner. As an institutional partner, ESC Region 1 receives direct funding from the center for projects related to migrant education. ESC Region 1 accepted the request and has since worked most closely with the STAR Center on building the state’s capacity for serving migrant students by developing guides and holding trainer-of-trainer sessions for migrant staff in the state’s 20 ESCs. In addition, STAR Center staff provide support to ESC Region 1 on the Reading Success Network (RSN) initiative being implemented in Region 1’s Edinburg district. According to ESC staff, “For RSN, they met with us first, coached us, and gave us direction and guidance before we started working with the district.”

As an institutional partner, ESC Region 1 has a very proactive relationship with the STAR Center. With the migrant work, in particular, an ESC 1 staff member approached the STAR Center about her interest in developing a manual that would feature successful practices for the education of migrant students. In response, the STAR Center funded the development of the *Graduation Enhancement for Migrant Students (GEMS)* manual. An ESC 1 staff member spearheaded the project and worked with a group of practitioners to see it through its development. While ESC 1 staff took the lead on the project, STAR Center staff assisted them in the conceptualization and planning of the manual. ESC Region 1 and STAR Center staff have disseminated the manual statewide and provided training on it to ESC migrant staff across the state. ESC Region 1 also contracted with the STAR Center to develop *Literacy Across the Curriculum*. With the STAR Center’s financial resources, ESC 1 was able to hire classroom teachers to develop and pilot the lessons. The ESC Region 1 director said that he and the STAR Center were working on plans for continuing their work together on migrant issues.

Facilitating Schoolwide Reform. In both ESC Region 13 and 20, STAR Center staff collaborated with ESC staff to offer schoolwide institutes. The institutes, which were aimed at building school improvement teams’ capacities to implement and evaluate schoolwide reform efforts, took place in the fall of 1997 and served staff—including administrators, teachers, and parents—from 20 to 30 different school districts. According to one ESC staff member, a STAR Center staff person worked with the ESCs on planning and conducting the institute as well as providing follow-up to institute participants. In addition, TEA and ESC staff members commented on the usefulness of the STAR Center’s schoolwide toolkit, *A Toolkit for Assessing and Revising the Integrated Campus Improvement and Title I Schoolwide Plan*. One TEA staff member explained how this document was an excellent resource that she shared with districts and schools. “One particular document that’s been very helpful to us is the schoolwide toolkit. The center gave us permission to use it and disseminate that information,” she explained.

Goals and Objectives for Continuing Work

Most respondents had not given much thought to their objectives for continued work with the center. Because they rely on the center to fill holes as they emerge, many staff members could not foresee how the center would be involved in their future efforts. Seemingly, the state, and most of the ESCs, use the services of technical assistance providers, including the STAR Center, when they do not have the capacity on their own staff; it is a reactive, rather than proactive, model. However, one ESC staff member noted, “My goal is to stay on good terms with the center so that we can always rely on them. They have never told me, ‘No.’”

However, staff from ESC Region 1 developed long-term objectives for working with the center and discussed plans for further work. As one ESC staff member noted, “One thing we really appreciate is that when the center works with us on an initiative, they don’t ever let us go. It’s a constant communication. It’s a continual process, not a one-time activity for them.”

IV. State’s Use of External Assistance

TEA and ESC staff place the STAR Center among their first choices when it comes to accessing research and examples of best practices, but they typically look elsewhere for assistance with legal matters or for program-specific information. For TEA staff, ED is a primary source for information on legal concerns. Similarly, for ESC staff, the state agency is a main reference point. Both TEA and ESC staff rely on national and state organizations for program-specific information and value these organizations because they provide “the real pulse about what’s happening in the [education] community,” according to one TEA staff member.

However, TEA staff also identified evaluation as an area of need, both within the agency and among districts. One staff member said that districts need help in meeting the requirements of Texas’ accountability system. “Program evaluation is where districts need more information. They also need help with formative assessments. TEA is always wanting to know how particular services have impacted the student performance of particular students. Many districts are implementing many, many different things but don’t know how to tie them to their comprehensive assessment,” she explained.

V. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

Staff at TEA and the ESCs speak highly of center staff and the work they do across the board. They noted that center staff care about the work they do, provide comprehensive, research-based assistance, and are approachable and accommodating. About the center, one TEA staffer said, “I feel like they care about what they’re doing and really want to provide quality assistance.” Another noted, “It appeared to me that every single one of them was interested in digging down to figure out how we could all work together to help kids.” Others noted that “their workshops are quality workshops.” This same staff member applauded the center’s inclination to work collaboratively. According to a TEA staff member,

At the leadership level, what you experience with the center is more of an intangible. The intangible that they offer is just knowing that there is such a strong body of knowledge and expertise there that you know you can rely on. I have confidence in the center and if staff members are using them, there’s no question that whatever support they’re getting is going to be appropriate and given from someone who has good knowledge, both in theory and in practice. It’s the peace of mind, knowing that I trust these people.

This same staff member later added that the quality of the research done by the STAR Center has changed her perception of what the Comprehensive Centers have to offer. She stated:

This is probably more personal, but I always think of SEDL [Southwest Educational Development Laboratory] for research. Given the quality of the work of the research that [the STAR Center] did on Title I [Successful Schools Study], that’s not necessarily my thinking anymore. Before I had dealings with the center there may have been a clear line where SEDL would be research and the center would be technical assistance.

An ESC staff member also expressed her satisfaction with the research that the STAR Center offers, stating, “I access the STAR Center’s Web site. I see them as being extremely well respected with research. Research that they’ve done has been a real help, particularly the Successful Schools Study. . . . I see their research as something I want to access.”

In the numerous interviews we conducted at TEA and the ESCs, only two people expressed dissatisfaction with the center’s work. These ESC staff members thought that the center acted as a competitor to the ESCs, rather than as a collaborator, and criticized the center for taking exclusive credit for products and services that were jointly developed by the two entities. They noted that the center has, on occasion, worked directly with districts without notifying the appropriate ESC in advance.

ESC staff suggested ways that the relationship with the center could be improved. Expressing her

interest in working more collaboratively with the center, one ESC staffer discussed the need for more communication between the center and the ESCs. She stated, “Another problem is probably the vehicle for the center to communicate with service centers in terms of who is doing what in the schools that the ESCs serve, so that we can support what the center is doing and come in on the next page.” Several ESC staffers said that they were not aware of the different services that the center had to offer and that it would be helpful for them to see the center’s strategic plan.

Increased State Capacity to Deliver High-Quality Technical Assistance

TEA’s technology director spoke highly of her office’s experiences with the STAR Center and explained how the center fills in gaps caused by the state’s limited resources by providing high-quality technical assistance aligned with the state’s reform efforts. The director noted, “I know that the STAR Center is out there doing the things we can’t do. I know that we can refer to them. We put the STAR Center out there as a resource. . . . We want to learn how the service centers can leverage and build on STAR Center services.” The director went on to explain why she believes that services provided by the STAR Center have contributed to improvement in schools and districts. “The quality of technology plans is much improved from what they used to be,” she said, “and I would attribute a lot of that to the STAR Center. We see a [greater] focus on school improvement, particularly for schools that were low-performing or that have a large number of disadvantaged students.”

Several ESC staff explained how their contact with the STAR Center, be it a long-term, intensive relationship with the center or their use of a STAR publication or attendance at a workshop, contributed to their own professional development. ESC staff talked about this gain in knowledge as something that better prepared them to work with the districts and schools they serve. For example, an ESC Region 1 staffer who works with a district on the RSN said that watching STAR Center staff lead the coaching session in Edinburg gave her a chance to “learn the process” and prepare herself to later present it to teachers. Another ESC staff member noted that working with the center made staff at her ESC realize they shouldn’t plan in “absentia of our clients.” Moreover, the ESC staffer from Region 2 who worked closely with the center on coordinated funding said that some ESCs are using the guide as a model for coordination within their organizations.

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

TEA staff seem to have little need for assistance in becoming aware of and understanding ESEA programs. However, they have worked with the center on ways the state can use waivers from ED under the Ed-Flex program, mainly because Joseph Johnson is the chair of the state Ed-Flex committee. According to TEA staff, Joseph Johnson serves as their expert on Ed-Flex; among other things, he has

assisted in integrating Ed-Flex into campuswide planning.

Among ESC staff and district and school staff, the *Resource Guide for Coordinated Funding and Programs*, jointly developed by the center and ESC Region 2, has deepened their understanding of consolidation and coordination of ESEA programs. A TEA staffer noted that the guide is easy to understand. An ESC staff member said, “The center helped me and other people to understand coordinated funding. I got a lot of assistance in getting the big picture.”

ESC staff described the center’s assistance as comprehensive and indicated that the ESCs have moved toward this approach in the technical assistance that they provide to districts and schools. “I think a lot of what the center does is comprehensive assistance. . . . [For example], there are pieces of the center’s work that my Title II people tie into, even though they weren’t developed for Title II,” said one staff member. Another explained how the center and the ESCs have moved toward a more comprehensive approach to technical assistance, stating, “In the beginning, I think the center was very boxed into pieces. We were looking at very isolated pockets of need, but as they’ve grown and we’ve grown, we’ve moved into a more comprehensive approach.”

Improved Teaching and Learning

Though TEA and ESC staff thought that the work of the center was quite effective, most did not attempt to link the quality of the center’s technical assistance to changes in the classroom. Most TEA and ESC staff have limited contact with classrooms, and the lion’s share of the center’s work with the state is directed at the administration of programs.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

While generally pleased with the STAR Center’s services to the ESCs, ESC staff identified three barriers to the delivery of high-quality technical assistance faced by the center. First, the number of staff at the STAR Center is small, which hinders access to center services for ESC staff and limits the center’s reach throughout the state. One staff member noted that “not every ESC is familiar with the STAR Center.” Second, the STAR Center is unable to participate in sufficient long-term and advanced planning because of its fiscal uncertainty. Finally, a lack of communication between the center and the ESCs often leads to a duplication of efforts. As one ESC staff member explained, “Another problem is the vehicle to communicate with the service centers in terms of who is doing what in the schools that we serve. [Communication needs to be improved] so that we can support what they’re doing and come in on the next page.”

Summary

Education reform in Texas is guided by the dual notions of local control and accountability, and the state's campus improvement plans are consistent with these notions. The STAR Center enjoyed previous relationships with the organizations that make up the center, although it had to establish a rapport with the state's ESCs. TEA staff members reported that center services were aligned with state goals. The center's portfolio of products and services includes initiatives in the following areas: technology, consolidated funding and programs, migrant education, and schoolwide programs. The STAR Center was appreciated for its research-based services and products and assistance in helping ESC staff better serve districts and schools. However, some ESC staff suggested that communication between the ESCs and the center could be improved.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

Cognitively Guided Instruction

Overview

The Region VI Comprehensive Assistance Center (the center), housed in the Wisconsin Center for Education Reform (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, offers training institutes for Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) to educators from around the country. CGI is a mathematics program based on problem solving for students in K–3. Developed by Thomas Carpenter and Elizabeth Fennema at the University of Wisconsin beginning in the mid-1980s, CGI helps teachers understand student cognitive processes in order to tailor instruction. It relies heavily on teachers' knowledge of developmental stages and individual assessment, as well as group learning, manipulatives, and language-based activities. The program relies on the academic research of its developers, who have tested CGI nationwide and are often cited in education research literature. Thus far, the center has hosted three five-day CGI institutes—two introductory and one advanced. Educators from outside the center's region participated in the institutes, which was a result of the center promoting CGI nationally and having open spots available.

This case study examines the CGI services provided by the center. It is based on interviews of participants, most of whom attended the previous summer's initial institute, and observations. We interviewed 13 teachers, three of whom we also observed in the classroom using CGI. Additionally, we observed the center's advanced, or follow-up, CGI training, during which most interviews for the case study took place.

I. Local Context

Participants at the first CGI institute came from seven districts across the country. Although most of the 60 participants in the first initial institute in summer 1998 came from two states within the center region, Michigan and North Dakota, others came from California, Texas, and Alaska. Approximately 20 of these participants returned for the follow-up, advanced institute a year later in summer 1999. At the time of our visit, it was yet unknown how many districts would participate in the second initial institute, though three districts intended to send large teams of 10 or more. The characteristics of participant school districts varied considerably, though they all were seeking ways to improve math instruction.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

Although most respondents could not clearly identify formal district goals, they generally said that their districts strive to improve student achievement in math. This heightened interest in math is often driven by state reform and accountability related to math performance on state assessments. In some cases, districts were making substantial changes to improve math achievement. For example, in 1999 Lansing, Michigan, adopted a new elementary math curriculum developed by the Technical Education Resource Center called *Investigations*. The principal in one of the Lansing schools visited explained that though reading was the school's first priority, math was also a priority since the school scored below its target on the state assessment. In other cases, districts were not implementing broad math initiatives or making dramatic changes, yet still wanted to support efforts to improve teaching and learning in math. Participants from the California district, which has prioritized reading, reported that less attention was being paid to math. Until recently, the Alaska district did not have a district math curriculum, so each elementary school chose its own math program.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's Relationship with the Participants

Generally, the center did not make direct contact with the participants in order to establish a relationship. Instead, the center sent flyers about the CGI institute to state and district personnel, particularly those associated with federal programs, with requests that they help disseminate the information to schools. It also sent targeted mailings to schools participating in federal programs. As it does for many activities it sponsors, the center disseminated information more directly when it had a close relationship with a school or was conducting a different activity. In general, it markets itself at its own events. However, CGI participants most often heard about the institute through district staff, peers, or by flyers forwarded by the district and posted on a faculty bulletin board.

CGI is the primary reason why these participants entered into the relationship with the center, which was previously unknown to most of them. In many cases, participants were interested because they recognized the CGI name from publications or involvement with professional associations. They had heard that it was well researched and was a promising program for improving student achievement. In one of the districts, several teachers had received initial training in CGI from University of Wisconsin-Madison trainers unassociated with the center, thus sparking the interest of their colleagues. Overall, the participants' relationships with the center grew out of an interest in the CGI program and were facilitated through district dissemination of institute information.

In six districts, one teacher who was committed to CGI coordinated and promoted the district team's participation in the institutes. This individual maintained contact with the center about the institute, helped build interest in participating, and worked with the district to arrange expense reimbursement.

Because the relationship began with, and consisted mostly of, the summer institutes, it has not changed over the course of the first year. During the week-long institutes, the relationship was intense, personal, and focused. Between the initial institute in 1998 and the advanced institute in 1999, however, participants said there had been little interaction with the center. Nevertheless, participants expressed that the center was accessible for questions throughout the year. Also, center staff added that they made a two-day visit to four districts.

Planning Services

At the school or district level, CGI is an example of a solution looking for a problem. CGI fits well with the center's mission to provide services that have an impact on student learning, particularly those that target teachers. The center believes that CGI leads to fundamental changes in how teachers teach math, as well as increases in student achievement. But, participation in the CGI institutes is through self-selection, with the center marketing the services within and beyond Region VI. Districts or schools with self-identified needs in mathematics apply to participate in the CGI training.

For the most part, planning the CGI institutes was the responsibility of the center and the institute presenters. No survey respondents indicated that they were involved in selecting the content, designing the format, or selecting the presenters. Consistent with what participants referred to as a "constructivist approach," there was some ongoing flexibility in the schedule and topics addressed during the institute. The institute facilitators were open to changes and solicited requests throughout each day.

The center did not formally tailor its services at the institute itself to respond to local context, though it facilitated dialogue that addressed the local differences. In fact, because participants came from a variety of localities, it would be difficult to tailor the services to any one context.

III. Services to the Local Site

Portfolio of Products and Services

Although the center provides other services, this case study specifically focuses on CGI training. Thus far, the center has hosted an initial institute in summer 1998, a follow-up institute in June 1999, and a second initial institute in August 1999. The institutes were facilitated by one of the original developers of CGI, a frequent CGI trainer, and a respected practicing teacher researcher. Because the institutes were envisioned as training of trainer activities, the center required participants to attend as members of teams, consisting of at least two teachers and someone whose job involves the professional development of elementary math teachers. The training itself was free for participants, including those from outside the district's region. They or their districts were, however, required to contribute money for food and materials, as well as cover their own travel and lodging costs.

According to center staff and participants, the initial institutes offered an introduction to CGI, while the follow-up institute provided more intensive exposure to the CGI philosophy and how to become a CGI workshop leader. The original CGI developers led the institutes, which incorporated group work, role-playing, discussion, and individual work. Institute materials included manuals outlining CGI principles, theory, and practice and videos illustrating examples of CGI applications in actual activities.

When asked to describe CGI, nearly all respondents began by defining it as “a philosophy,” rather than “a program” or “set of strategies.” It promotes a change in how teachers think of teaching and learning—a change that may take a long time and lots of reflection. According to participants, CGI is based, in part, on the ideas of social constructivism: Students possess knowledge and are capable of metacognition, and teachers are responsible for drawing out that knowledge while facilitating social learning and the “making of meaning.” It is “very child-centered” and “takes the fear out of mathematics.”

On the other hand, CGI is also a highly structured program with a clear grounding in cognitive science. The program provides teachers with a framework to understand different types of word problems, their semantic structure and difficulty, and strategies used to solve them. Furthermore, CGI helps teachers use its developmental sequence of problem solving strategies to appropriately assess and challenge each of their students. As a center staff asserted, CGI is “not some sort of fad” that reflects educational rhetoric instead of rigorous research; it consists of an organized system that is consistently tested and tweaked according to accepted knowledge of how children learn mathematics.

Observations of three classrooms in one school provide a snapshot of how CGI may be implemented, though teachers may interpret and implement it in various ways. For the most part, the teachers used CGI similarly. Students have math journals in which they solve, and explain how they solved, word problems that are based on real life and relevant situations. In time, the teacher asks a student to explain their answer orally. During an explanation, the teacher probes the student, involves other students in clarifying the explanation, and notes what problem solving strategy was used to what effect. She may then ask other students to share their solutions, which often result in the same answer via a different approach. At this point, the teacher has control over structuring the responses into a learning experience for all. Afterwards, the teacher asks another question, or even has a student do so.

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to the Site

Alignment with state and local standards. Participants suggested that CGI provided important assistance in teaching state and local standards, though some indicated that the program was not entirely aligned with their standards-related needs. All respondents said CGI would help students with problem solving on the various state assessments; however, several were concerned about objectives that are not addressed by CGI. One teacher said, “CGI addresses the MEAP [the Michigan state assessment], particularly the mathematical reasoning parts. However, fact fluency is still an issue.” A second teacher, who is responsible for helping teachers understand California’s standards, also expressed concern about fact fluency. A third explained that fact fluency is important because “the state won’t let students take as much time as they need on tests. This is a reality that we can’t ignore.” However, center staffers assert that research indicates that CGI students and non-CGI students have performed equally well on basic math facts.

Another teacher, who is a moving force for CGI in her district, said, “CGI on its own doesn’t address shapes, time, measurement with rulers, patterning, and so on. It is not hard to balance CGI with other instruction, but you can’t just not address this stuff. It would be a disservice to the student.” Generally, participants advocated balancing CGI with other instructional strategies and priorities, as well as adapting CGI when necessary. They all were vocal supporters of CGI who wanted to use all available tools to improve student achievement.

Research-based theoretical framework. Education experts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison developed, and are developing, CGI based on many years of research. In the mid-1980s, they began to study teachers’ knowledge of the development of students’ mathematical thinking, as well as how that knowledge affects their instructional decisions. The researchers compared their findings with validated research on the development of children’s thinking and concluded that teachers did not make

instructional decisions based on children's thinking, even though teachers generally have a fragmented, intuitive understanding of it. Thus, the researchers designed CGI in order to help teachers relate instructional decisions to children's thinking. Since CGI's beginnings, additional studies have shown that increasing teacher understanding of children's thinking positively affects teachers' classroom practices and student achievement in the areas, for instance, of reasoning and fact fluency. The original CGI designers, as well as their colleagues, continue to research this area and revise the program based on their findings.

Scope, intensity, and duration. Many participants considered an intensive five-day institute a necessity for CGI. "Just the way it has been presented has been a big boon," said a teacher. "In a full week you really get to know it, inside and out. You are ready to do it in the classroom. It's exciting." Participants said that the five days were well spent and necessary to delve as deeply into the program as is required for understanding.

However, because CGI requires a "new way of thinking about math instruction," some teachers describe learning how to use it as a complicated and drawn-out process—one that would benefit from follow-up. Adopting CGI takes a lot of practice and reflection, and demands that teachers assume a new role as facilitator. Overwhelmingly, participants voiced the importance of having some kind of follow-up support during the school year, saying, "Follow-up is crucial" and "I can't wait a year to find out what I am doing wrong." Several commented that they had hoped for and expected more support than they received. They envisioned a range of activities, such as a mid-year workshop, periodic listserv dialogue, and site visits that were focused on their needs. Few participants received substantive center follow-up support after the initial institute, though some had contact via telephone or e-mail. Some of those who were visited by center staff said that it was focused on collecting student achievement information, not providing support; and the follow-up support others received via telephone or e-mail was not conducive to guiding improvement.

Although the center hopes to become a trainer of trainers, several participants said they were not yet prepared to train others in CGI. Most participants said the follow-up training would help them serve as CGI resources in their district, but several had concerns about conducting workshops, particularly a five-day institute, on their own. This was expected by the developers of CGI, who designed the program so teachers would first practice and come to understand it in their classroom, then begin participating as trainers. The center expects that as the first cohort of participants become more comfortable using CGI, more will be comfortable as trainers. Nevertheless, a teacher from Alaska had plans to train other teachers in shorter workshops in 1999-2000, and two teachers joined the training team for the summer 1999 initial institute. Furthermore, the center intends to support the "seeding of the CGI institutes" in up to three districts that are interested in making CGI a district-based initiative.

Utility. The center provides CGI training only to districts and teachers who actively choose to attend. These self-selected participants generally anticipated that CGI would be useful and intended to use what they learn back at their schools. Interview respondents indicated that CGI did prove to address their needs, which is a primary reason they returned for the advanced institute.

Capacity building. The center envisions its CGI services as a training of trainer model wherein participants will become trainers by developing deep knowledge of the program and observing the institute presenters. Both Center staff and participants expressed their intentions of increasing efforts to build local capacity to maintain CGI implementation. For example, the Center required districts to send teams of staff and teachers, in hopes that participants would sustain and expand CGI efforts at home. However, the CGI training has not yet been designed to train participants to become trainers or to help participants to create implementation plans for their own districts. For the most part, the center designed the initial institute as an intensive introduction to CGI. Even at the advanced training, there was not explicit training in how to plan and conduct a CGI workshop.

However, there has recently been some interest, and activity, in building district capacity for CGI. Center staff brought three advanced institute participants back in August 1999 to help with the next initial institute as trainers in training. This may be a great benefit to the returning participants' two districts, especially if they assume roles as district CGI trainers. Additionally, two Michigan districts will be holding their own CGI institutes in upcoming years.

Other Sources of Assistance

Several participants reported other sources of CGI assistance, as well as other types of professional development in math. A teacher in California attended a workshop on a program similar to CGI at a local university. After the workshop, a trainer visited her on-site every three to five weeks to assess her progress toward program implementation. After her district had already decided to investigate CGI, she learned of a similar math program based in California called REACH. However, the district intends to follow through on its investment in CGI. Other teachers received instructional support from their regions' Comprehensive Centers. For instance, a teacher from Alaska attended a CGI *Math Their Way* workshop facilitated by AKRAC, the Region XIII Comprehensive Center. AKRAC provided frequent follow-up support, and during the summer workshop participants met to discuss implementation issues during the school year. "Networking across states was incredibly valuable," the teacher said. "It was a great incentive for teachers." AKRAC also provided them with resources on providing in-service training to math and science teachers.

Participants agreed, however, that the CGI training from the center was superior to CGI training they could receive elsewhere. The institute presenters had developed CGI and knew it better than anyone. As one respondent expressed, the participants were getting it “straight from the horse’s mouth.” Additionally, one presenter was a teacher who has been using CGI for some time, which participants said increased the relevance and credibility of the center’s training activities.

Plans for Continuing Assistance

Nearly all participants who attended the advanced institute wanted to continue working with the center. Across the board, participants hoped to receive some follow-up support from the center during the upcoming year. The participants who came from outside the region did not expect to receive on-site follow-up support, but hoped to maintain e-mail communication with the center, receive newsletters or information about current research, and network with their CGI colleagues.

Many of those within the center’s region hoped to at least receive visits, while participants from two districts spoke of more extensive plans. Participants from Dearborn and Lansing School Districts in Michigan intend to implement a CGI program in their districts, including institutes in Summer 2000 and 2001, respectively. To implement such a program, district staff members hope for center assistance in planning, networking, accessing resources, consulting, and brokering services. In the meantime, both districts sent about 12 people to the initial training in Madison in Summer 1999.

Staff from Dearborn School District in Michigan also have high hopes of teaching their colleagues about CGI. Again, one teacher said, “If we really want to implement CGI in Dearborn, it must include a full week straight through at each building. Then, we would have networking at each grade level so there is a lot of follow-up. To get this going, we will need some visitation from the center.” The district staff see the center as having the expertise in organizing a program and delivering the services. Like Lansing, Dearborn also sent a substantial group to the Summer 1999 initial training.

Several districts sent large groups of teachers to the 1999 initial institute, a move that indicates their commitment and a likelihood of sustained CGI activity. Fargo, Dearborn, and Lansing all sent about 12 teachers. Minneapolis and Janesville, Wisconsin, both sent six participants. Also, a district in Texas that sent 8 teachers and the district’s math director plans to use CGI in all 25 elementary schools and eventually have a total of 30 teachers trained. Furthermore, a teacher from a California district said they might invite a University of Wisconsin-Madison trainer to assist them in their first attempt at workshops.

IV. Effects

Overall, participants regarded CGI services as high quality and well worth their time; however, many expected more contact from the center after the institutes. Dissemination throughout participating districts has been limited. In their own classrooms, participants self-reported positive changes in teaching and learning, but there has been no systematic evaluation as of yet.

Customer Satisfaction

Participants voiced strong praise for the CGI institutes. In interviews, teachers described the format of the institute as beneficial, calling it “open,” “comfortable,” “full of modeling,” “based on discussion,” “constructivist,” “realistic,” “flexible,” and full of “active participation.” One participant explained, “Their strengths are in their materials, texts, and training techniques. We have the opportunity to talk and learn from each other, which is crucial in really understanding CGI.”

Primary among the strengths of the institute identified by participants was the quality of the training group, which included an original developer of CGI and a respected teacher researcher. According to one participant, “It’s wonderful to hear it from the authors. You get little nuances that other trainers might not present. [One trainer], he knows it so well that he makes you think all the time.” Another participant explained that “having a teacher as one of the trainers is crucial. The research is incredibly important, but must also have a practitioner perspective.”

Participants said the institutes provided accessibility to their colleagues, yet they wanted further assistance in setting up and maintaining networks to be used throughout the year. According to one participant, “It would be ideal if we knew who in our district uses CGI to form a network. Right now there is no one coordinating this. Without an organized network, the district won’t be as compelled to support our release time. Though they are far away, the center might be able to help us get a network going.” Another added that “it is not just important, it is necessary to network on CGI. This is how we can share resources and organize follow-up activities.” Conceptions of this network ranged from building level to district level to across regions, and two teachers suggested that such a network would be best if they could connect specifically with grade-level counterparts. The e-mail listserv or an on-line chat room could serve this purpose.

The greatest weakness identified by participants was the low level of follow-up support provided by the Center. Nearly all interview respondents made statements emphasizing the importance of follow-

up support and hoped to receive more in the future. They “don’t want to be left dangling.” According to one, “We have gotten zero follow-up, but have hopes for this year. The center could help. . . . We just can’t wait a whole year to get feedback on what we are doing. . . .” Many people wanted a mid-year training, perhaps a one-day workshop around January. Several teachers also thought that periodic site visits would be particularly beneficial, though they may be logistically difficult for the center to conduct. The site visits could be used for observation, feedback, group discussion, workshops, and data collection. Two participants wanted more communication via a newsletter that included research, lessons learned by other teachers, network information, resources, and event information.

Overall customer satisfaction is evidenced by the plans of several participants’ districts to expand their involvement with the center’s CGI training. For example, as part of their plan to develop local CGI programs, Lansing School District and Dearborn School District planned to hold an institute in Michigan with the help of center or WCER consultants. The Lansing program would also include district-wide follow-up meetings, perhaps monthly, and ongoing school or teaching team meetings, for which district staff plan to rely on the center’s assistance in planning, networking, accessing resources, consulting, and brokering services.

Districts outside the region may also call on the center for additional assistance. For instance, AKRAC, Alaska’s Regional Comprehensive Center, has expressed interest in a CGI institute. Center staff said they would be willing to provide assistance and consultation as needed. Similarly, the participants from California hope to scale up the CGI program in their district. Though support may be available from former CGI researchers now located in California, the center suspects it will provide guidance as requested.

Increased Capacity to Deliver Technical Assistance to Schools

Districts have not yet had the capacity to deliver training or assistance in CGI to teachers. For the most part, participants have not trained their colleagues in CGI. Participants who did share CGI with their colleagues characterized the training as informal and consisting of “a 15-minute summary at a faculty meeting” and isolated observation. “We’ve been observed by other teachers,” a teacher said, “but it needs to be more, a lot more.” It is likely that more follow-up support would have benefited local efforts to replicate CGI.

However, the participating districts are still at the early stages of involvement with CGI, and there is evidence that they will soon be more able to train and support new CGI teachers. Several districts have sent substantial numbers of teachers to CGI institutes and expressed interest in starting their own district

CGI programs. Staff from these districts are working to secure commitment from central office and hope to solicit assistance from the Comprehensive Center, which has reciprocated with interest. If current plans are successful, the center will have helped two districts create their own CGI training and support programs.

Improved Teaching and Learning

During the 1998-99 school year, districts participating in the initial training implemented CGI with varying degrees of intensity. Some teachers used CGI exclusively and did not use a standard math textbook, while others used CGI as an added instructional method. Also, as noted above, CGI has not been replicated to a great extent throughout the participants' districts. Participating teachers, however, report important changes in their own classrooms.

Teachers said that their practice had changed as a result of the initial CGI institute. During interviews, many respondents said their "approach" to teaching changed and became more aligned with the "CGI philosophy." Teachers said they now "meet students where they are coming from" and construct activities that are more "real" and relevant to the students' experiences. They described being better able to tailor instruction as a result of better understanding cognitive processes. Specific changes reported by participating teachers included greater use of groupwork, manipulatives, mathematics journals, written and oral story problems and solutions, probing questions, and group discussions. Some also described relying less on the math textbook.

Teachers also reported improvements in student social and academic behavior that they attributed to CGI. They generally agreed that CGI encourages students to actively participate in and take more responsibility for their learning. "It encourages children to justify their thought sequences," said one teacher, and another concurred, "They must solve and articulate their solutions." Another teacher explained that students are willing to take these risks because "CGI continually builds upon their strengths. We meet the child where they are developmentally. . . . It minimizes the 'I can't' beliefs and takes the fear out of math." One said, "CGI builds respect of others and confidence in yourself. It has affected the classroom community. Students listen to each other's ideas and understand the differences in how others learn." In general, teachers who used CGI in their classrooms said that their students enjoy and engage in CGI math instruction more than they do other math. This contributes to an improvement in student achievement and classroom community, reasons enough to continue teaching CGI. Several teachers agreed that "CGI fosters excitement in children and keeps their morale up. It motivates them."

There has been some empirical data on the effects of CGI on student achievement. The center collected pre- and post-test data in fall 1998 and spring 1999, comparing achievement of CGI and non-CGI instructed first-, second-, and third-graders. At all three grades, the CGI students performed better than their counterparts by between .33 and .66 of a standard of deviation.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

Though it was able to deliver high-quality institutes, the center met some barriers in delivering follow-up. The primary barriers were geographical. Nearly all participants in the initial institute were located far from the center. Even participants from within the service area of Region VI were spread from the Dakotas to Michigan. As a result, Center staff can not provide on-site assistance without air travel and a significant time investment. Furthermore, the participants were often not concentrated geographically, so a trip to one site would serve only a handful of participants. Visiting a substantial number of participants would require that the center staff travel to the location of each small district group or organize a larger meeting where teachers would need to travel some distance.

There are also several barriers to classroom implementation of CGI. One barrier to implementation is class size, which is a crucial factor in teaching CGI math. Although teachers described ways to modify CGI for large classes, they agreed that “small class size makes a big difference with CGI because of its individual focus.” It is difficult to sit great numbers of children around a common table, let alone tailor instructional strategies and questions for each child. Overall, the teachers participating in the CGI institutes had small classes; several had class sizes of 16 or less, and most had classes smaller than 22.

Inadequate resources also present a barrier to implementation. CGI typically requires manipulatives for every participating child, otherwise teachers must significantly adapt their instruction. All of the observed classrooms had manipulatives available, and most teachers who were interviewed described using manipulatives. However, many also said that they do not have enough manipulatives for their entire class or have bought them with their own money. On the other hand, center staff point out that inexpensive objects, such as paperclips, can be used as manipulatives, which, in the end, CGI does not necessarily require.

Summary

The center's CGI program helps teachers understand student cognitive processes to tailor their instruction. CGI institutes—held in summer 1998, June 1999, and August 1999—were led by the original developers of CGI, a CGI trainer, and a respected practicing teacher-researcher. While CGI is defined as a philosophy, it is also a highly structured program with a clear grounding in cognitive science. Although some participating teachers expressed concern that CGI did not adequately address mathematics fact fluency, which is required as part of state assessments, nearly all wanted to continue working with the center to implement CGI and to receive follow-up assistance throughout the school year. Participants were pleased with the content and quality of the CGI institutes but said that they would like additional assistance in setting up and maintaining networks throughout the school year. CGI was envisioned as a trainer-of-trainer program; however, district teams report that they do not yet have the capacity to train other teachers. As a result of CGI, teachers reported changes in their practices—including greater use of groupwork, manipulatives, mathematics journals, and story problems—and improvements in students' academic and social behavior as well.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

Kingston Unified School District, Calif.

Overview

The 1990s have been a period of significant transition in the Kingston Unified School District (KUSD), because of substantial demographic and economic changes. These changes initially limited local educators' focus on the opportunities for program coordination offered by the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). At a state-sponsored meeting in 1996, district personnel learned of the availability of WestEd's Comprehensive Center to help schools make the transition to schoolwide programs.

This case study describes the collaboration between WestEd and KUSD schools during the 1997-99 period, during which WestEd's services supported the districtwide transition to schoolwide programming. WestEd offered services to KUSD on several levels simultaneously, focusing first on schools eligible to become schoolwide participants. They also offered consultation on federal programs and capacity building to district leaders and other schools, as time permitted. For eight schools, WestEd customized a leadership training program to introduce the concepts of schoolwide planning and assisted in plan development. Paralleling the schoolwide sessions, WestEd offered sessions on leading schoolwide change for principals and district leaders. WestEd also helped five several schools use their schoolwide plans to complete the state's mandated Program Quality Review (PQR).

Researchers for this case study visited both WestEd and KUSD. In KUSD, they interviewed the superintendent, an associate superintendent, the director of special programs, a classified personnel officer, a bilingual education coordinator, a health services coordinator, and the director of instructional services. At the school level, interviewers spoke with principals and schoolwide planning teams, including teachers, counselors, and librarians, at seven elementary schools and one middle school. WestEd trainers who worked with this process were interviewed as well.

I. Local Context

New challenges, caused by significant demographic and economic changes, confronted the KUSD at the same time that ESEA programs encouraged new opportunities for flexibility. The closing in the early 1990s of Fort Ord, an established and sizeable U.S. Military Reservation located in the center of Kingston, combined with increasing urbanization, placed significant budget and organizational pressures

on the school district. Reductions in the availability of federal Impact Aid generated by Fort Ord employees, whose children attended Kingston schools, drastically cut the resources available to support these changes. Furthermore, during this period, the district's student body continued a shift, begun in the mid-1980s, from being largely white, Korean, and Vietnamese to a more diverse international mix of students who speak 44 different languages. By the end of the 1990s, the once small, economically stable, city district had broadened its boundaries to serve the urban working class and rural communities of Marnia, Presidio, Sand City, Seaside, DelRey Oaks, and Kingston City, and several unincorporated areas with large concentrations of poor families.

In 1999, KUSD served approximately 12,000 students in grades preK-12. Almost 50 percent of its students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch; almost 20 percent are limited English proficient. In 1998, 60 percent of the population consisted of students of color, including Hispanics (27 percent), African Americans (15 percent), Asians (9 percent), Filipinos (6 percent), Pacific Islanders (3 percent), and American Indians (less than 1 percent). The district has 16 elementary, 4 middle, 2 comprehensive high schools, and 1 alternative school. It also has two district-sponsored child care centers. In an effort to offer wide ranging educational and support services, the district provides educational programs to school age, preschool, and adult learners.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

Strategic planners in KUSD responded to districtwide changes by adopting a standards-based curriculum that placed greater emphasis on literacy and students' writing and on preparing all teachers to become skillful assessors of student work. They sought and identified an increasingly diverse teaching and administrative staff to lead their schools, especially those with multi-language and multi-cultural student populations. Districtwide, staff development emphasized renewing educators' knowledge of strategies for working with students from a wide range of nationalities and concentrated on upgrading the communication and leadership skills of both district managers and teachers. Annually, the superintendent and the school board reassess the district's goals and revise or set new ones, as appropriate. For the 1998-99 school year, KUSD learning goals and objectives focused on: implementing new K-8 literacy and 9-12 grade social studies programs, including aligning newly adopted curriculum in these areas to the state's standards; evaluating the high school program to develop more demanding graduation requirements and school-to-work programs; and expanding developmentally responsive programs for struggling students. The district also continued to redesign curriculum and instruction to better integrate problem solving, student motivation, and life-long learning strategies into all state-mandated programs.

Progress in Implementing ESEA Reforms

In response to the reauthorization of ESEA, the district submitted a consolidated plan that encouraged program coordination, but not consolidation. Local officials noted that because federal resources other than Impact Aid represent only about 7 percent of the district's budget, local priorities, not federal or state policy, drive strategic planning. One administrator explained, "We're more district-focused than federally focused. There is less a categorical emphasis. . . . Categorical funding is not leading reform or change, the superintendent's and [the Board's] leadership is." In addition, central office downsizing that occurred during the same period as the ESEA reauthorization reduced the number of central staff available to help schools understand new program requirements and opportunities.

School-based change in Kingston is school site-driven, and district officials indicated that schools in the early 1990s were so involved with community and student population shifts that, until WestEd began to work within KUSD, there were few changes in the district's approach to implementing ESEA programs.

Customers' Purposes for Seeking External Assistance

Although ESEA resources were not combined at the district level, once principals showed interest in combining federal funds in their schools, the district office turned to WestEd to help the schools make the transition. One principal reported, "WestEd and schoolwides came together. One of our schools had gone through the planning [initially] and I was thrilled with the idea of . . . Title I funding being used to integrate rather than isolate."

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's Relationship with the District

At the suggestion of the Kingston federal programs coordinator, one of the district's elementary principals attended a state meeting on funding options for bilingual programs at which WestEd was making a presentation. Once this principal learned that WestEd could customize a program for Kingston schools, she reported the information to the district's special programs coordinator who, in turn, convened a small group of central office administrators to discuss inviting WestEd's assistance. The initial planning group included the district's federal programs coordinator, an associate superintendent, the director of assessment, and interested principals of Title I schools. The principal who initiated the meeting reported that "after the initial meeting, [district staff] felt that all the schools could really benefit from this [assistance]. . . . We spent a lot of time discussing what our needs were. It moved away a little from my original expectations [for assistance specifically in the area of literacy] because of the group's [varied] needs and our decision to narrow down the focus to one that helps all schools."

District officials recognized the assistance WestEd offered the schools as vital to the redesign of their Title I programs to prepare them for making a transition to becoming schoolwides. In their view, WestEd was providing services the district's own top staff did not have time to offer. Moreover, one of the school team members said that WestEd brought to the process a certain amount of "outsider cachet" that was beneficial. According to a principal, "In our Title I principals' meetings we had been talking a long time about schoolwides . . . and when [the district's special programs coordinator] brought WestEd in, we said 'good.' It was good to have schools working together, elementary schools together." The associate superintendent added, "And the price [no cost] was right!"

Planning Services

WestEd staff and the local planning team jointly chose the content of the workshops. The first institutes began in Spring 1997 and continued through the 1997-98 school year. In its consultations with KUSD, WestEd used a wide range of off-the-shelf research papers, training tools, and schoolwide planning documents. The staff worked initially from a planning matrix, developed in consultation with the KUSD federal programs coordinator and representative Title I principals. Their preparation for each institute session combined participants' formal and informal evaluations to determine the materials to use in follow-up sessions. A WestEd trainer explained her typical planning procedure as follows:

After the first session [of an institute] the school said, 'It's not for us,' we're really small, etc. We convinced them to stay on [with the process], and they turned around over the year. It's an example of where we all modify our basic structure based on the participants. We tell participants 'this is a rough sketch of the year,' but we've added days, and at the end of each session we debrief based on the event and our observations. Then we handle the specifics of the next session.

Kingston participants confirmed that the WestEd training staff routinely reviewed, evaluated, and planned the next steps collaboratively with district leaders. After each session, WestEd submitted to their district and school contacts written summaries of information, draft plans and materials, and confirmations of the next actions planned. This feedback generated trust and admiration for their staff members and admiration for their written skills and for their practical knowledge of federal law and research. Many KUSD staff said that they learned worthwhile lessons from their WestEd interactions, not just about schoolwides, but also about group process skills and about creative and effective ways of using data to drive planning and instruction. Once WestEd finished helping the Kingston Title I schools write their schoolwide plans, they made themselves available to schools that needed help completing the state-required PQR process.

III. Services to the Local Site

Portfolio of Products and Services

WestEd customized an array of its research-based training tools and publications to provide multi-session institutes and on-site consultation with three different foci:

Schoolwide program planning. Supporting schoolwide program planning and implementation was the major thrust of the center’s work in Kingston, the “beta” site for training WestEd later conducted in more than 250 intensive schoolwide northern California institutes. The resources for these institutes came from the center’s first major product, *Schoolwide Reform: A New Outlook*. With these materials, WestEd trainers argued for schoolwide reform, laid out alternative strategies for schools to use to initiate change, and provided practical planning guidelines and tools.

The Kingston institutes involved school teams of principals, parents, and teachers working under WestEd’s direction at meetings held between four and eight times during the school year for half- or full-day sessions. Each session involved a presentation about federal policy and requirements and helped schools figure out how to mesh their priority programs with the federal requirements to service their particular students. Leaders allocated significant time for team planning; determining data collection procedures; and drafting plans that would be discussed in between sessions. Other topics addressed were needs assessment, team building, disaggregation and analysis of data, plan writing, and obstacles to implementation. Between sessions, WestEd staff served as co-writers and researchers, as necessary, helping sites articulate and refine their emerging plans. They also offered on-site or telephone individual or small-group consultations, as the school teams required. In addition, the WestEd staff suggested additional research-based print, video, or Web site resources available from the center and other technical assistance providers. To strengthen parent involvement in schoolwide program planning, the center also developed and translated into five languages information for parents about their role in schoolwide planning.

Principal institutes. The principal institutes emerged after WestEd saw that both school teams and their principals would benefit from additional assistance in learning to work effectively with the site-based planning teams. According to one WestEd staffer, WestEd “worked with principals, as we worked with their school teams. [Our purpose] was to create a safe environment, to focus on the principal’s development and what they, as leaders, face [when schools undergo significant change.]” The institutes involved five customized sessions in which the principals of participating schools gathered to discuss the challenges they faced and resolved issues that emerged during their teams’ planning activities. These sessions focused on: (1) broad issues of whole-school reform and the planning and implementation options in schoolwide planning; (2) reasons to become a schoolwide program (including requirements and

key components); (3) needs assessment strategies; (4) needs-based data analysis; and (5) needs assessment findings and schoolwide plan writing.

This additional time with the WestEd consultants helped principals anticipate problems that might occur as their teams began each activity and prepared to keep their teams focused. “What we got,” one principal explained, “was the modeling of the process. We spread out the needs assessment, and they gave us a matrix for gathering data from multiple sources, and we could take that back to the staff.” The meetings created a forum in which principals exchanged ideas among themselves about how to ensure the smooth unfolding of the planning. “They gave us information, allowed for questions, and allowed us to discuss how things related to our particular schools.” Several principals pointed out that these specialized sessions “kept us on track” and “gave us an overview”; one person said:

WestEd helped us work through ways to figure out how staff could contribute to the school . . . helped us collaborate. . . . Really working together and saying that these are consultants who guide us and give us ideas that back up objectives, helps staff to know we’re on right track. [It’s usually] so difficult for site administrators to stay up on laws. I think for me, it was ‘thank God I have some help.’ Support in that area was really critical to me, since I was starting a new school in a new district with new programs that weren’t real popular in the community. WestEd confirmed and validated [my efforts].

California program quality review planning. Once the schoolwide institutes ended and schools wrote their schoolwide plans, schools undergoing the California PQR were eligible to continue to work individually with WestEd staff to rework their schoolwide plan into a PQR plan. The five schools that were in the PQR cycle continued with this next planning stage. The procedures followed the approach described above for the schoolwide institutes, but WestEd designed additional surveys and in-depth data analysis tools to meet the detailed PQR specifications. PQR planning went beyond the data collection processes required by ESEA and focused on strategies for analyzing a wider array of evidence about teaching practice and student performance that enabled schools to implement the emerging California standards-based accountability model. These sessions typically involved school teams closely examining the evidence they gathered for their schoolwide plan on student achievement, community needs, and school environment and adding information that PQR required. One principal explained that, in the PQR planning, “I’ve worked closely with [a WestEd consultant]. . . . He has been invaluable in helping me analyze the data and collapse it into the state format”; another said, “We were able to look at these [schoolwide] data and to choose things to focus on for PQR.” A principal who was inexperienced with the PQR process especially appreciated that the consultant “was there to sign off [on our plan].”

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to the Site

Alignment with state and local standards. WestEd grounds all of its work in data-based planning and standards-based reform. “I see the mission and bottom line of school reform as student

achievement, [achieved] through the schoolwide concept and the legislation. That’s been our focus and our starting point for rollout,” a center staffer explained. As a result, WestEd consultants, as a group, are knowledgeable about concepts of standards-driven systemic reform, and they are skillful users of group process and organizational development tools. Their extensive knowledge of federal and state laws enables them to help local staff articulate plans in the required federal or state language. A WestEd staff member explained that she often served as an interpreter and writer: “They know what they want, but they don’t often know how to put it in simple language that achieves the goals of the law. We can help them do that.”

Research-based theoretical framework. WestEd’s products and training tools are grounded in the school and organizational change literature of the past two decades. They have been developed, over many years, piloted out in varied contexts, and revised or updated as needed. Based on its own and others’ research, the WestEd tools have proven to be successful resources for whole school reform, data-based planning strategies, and client-centered capacity building. At each institute session, the staff distributes materials that encouraged participants to search on line for specific research; they directed principals and teams individually toward the books, Web sites, and research evidence that were applicable to their school. “I would consistently ask for any research they had that would help us. We made sure that as we wrote our plan it was really research-based,” a principal reported.

Scope, intensity, and duration. WestEd offered intense assistance to Kingston for two years, and, during a third year, the assistance was less intensive. Once they completed the formal schoolwide and PQR institutes, the staff continued to work directly with individual school teams and with principals, as the planning context warranted. All the schools that initiated schoolwide and PQR planning completed their plans.

Utility. KUSD enthusiastically reported that the center’s assistance was pivotal in helping them complete effective schoolwide plans that also met the federal mandates. Reflecting the views of many principals and school teams, one school-level educator explained their reliance on WestEd: “We needed them so that when we wrote [the plan], it was in the proper government format. . . . Without WestEd telling us what to do, we wouldn’t know which direction to go. We needed the guidance.” Another principal said:

It took about a year [to complete our schoolwide plan]. The fact that we had someone keeping us on task to get us done really kept us moving. I will recommend to the new principal [at her school] that at the end of the year we need to go back and look at the data to see if we accomplished any of our goals and objectives.

Other Sources of Assistance

Staff in KUSD are not extensive users of external technical assistance; they are confident that they possess the internal expertise necessary for adequate content-development support. They do, however, rely on outside assistance, usually from the SEA, to clarify the rules and regulations underlying federal or state program applications. The superintendent said, “We use our federal congressman’s and senator’s and our state legislators’ offices to try and clarify things we’re not clear about. . . . We’ve learned to go to the top.” The district’s special programs coordinator responded similarly: “One of the best places for information for me has been CASFEP [the California Association of State and Federal Programs] and Mary Jean [LeTendre].”

KUSD staff identified WestEd as a primary source of support for federal programs, but most said that they did not ask them for much curriculum assistance, largely because that was not WestEd’s focus or, in their view, its area of expertise. One principal said, “I was disappointed with their expertise in curriculum.” Professional networks provide rich resources in the areas of curriculum and instruction; school and district staff regularly attend national and state professional meetings; and many participate in the state’s role-identification groups (finance, personnel, federal programs, content-focused).

Principals and their school planning teams have the latitude to decide the curriculum and instructional assistance they need at the school site. One school’s principal reported that he learned “from someone in the [district’s] bilingual department that there was this program called Success for All (SFA),” and, on his own initiative, he pursued his questions about its appropriateness for his school. Later, this principal also worked independently to bring SFA technical assistance trainers to his school. According to one principal, others said that they first look internally for information and assistance. “I haven’t needed to look [elsewhere] . . . because [our program coordinator] knows everything.” Another principal was satisfied that the KUSD federal program staff met her technical assistance needs with the “binders and materials” that come her way routinely. A teacher from one of the school planning teams explained, “We check with our district office first, then with the county. Our principal is also very knowledgeable and she shares what she knows.”

Despite these prevailing attitudes of the KUSD staff, a principal new to the district detected the flaw in this informal system. She found she had to press the central office staff hard to gain the assistance she needed to better serve the large number of LEP students in her school. “My major challenge was in implementing a biliteracy school in a community that had not had positive support from the district before. . . . The school just didn’t have any research-based information . . . on how children learn a second language, and the district did not have an ESL program; math materials were all in English.” Once she took the initiative to clarify her needs, in time, several district leaders “really understood” her frustrations and they “got additional support for us” both from WestEd and from state and regional networks.

Plans for Continuing Assistance

WestEd worked actively with KUSD for more than two years. As schools completed their schoolwide plans and their PQR processes, they had less and less contact with WestEd, except for those that continued to work with WestEd to complete their PQR plans. District and school site staff say that although they were interested in continuing to work with WestEd, they did not see an immediate need. There were practical obstacles, as well. Some perceived the center staff to be “too busy” to continue assisting them; others were unclear about whether they had district approval to seek assistance; in still other instances, competing priorities for principals’, teachers’, and leaders’ attention diverted teams from the issues they addressed under WestEd’s tutelage.

IV. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

The center’s high level of expertise about schoolwide programs, data-based planning, and group process made their work in KUSD especially effective. One top KUSD staff member with many years of experience in external technical assistance said that WestEd was unique, simply because “their services are consistent and excellent.” He and his KUSD colleagues said that WestEd’s strength was in their capacity to serve as communicators and collaborators. They provided a wide array of practical resources and a structure for completing schoolwide plans. One teacher appreciated that “they gave us survey samples, a whole binder. It was wonderful because they gave us the step-by-step of how to do it; they gave us information on effective services.”

According to KUSD district and school leaders, WestEd provided them with new levels of understanding and skill about data-based planning and research-based, schoolwide programs. Many leaders and teachers reported that they completed the year-long process with enhanced skills in working with groups, using data to plan, and “thinking in new ways” about their own teaching. One principal explained:

We’ve done a lot in the past year of getting people thinking about some of the things that will be more effective. [One of our third-grade teachers] has incorporated a lot of strategies into her teaching. Part of the change was doing needs assessment. In the past, these teachers weren’t doing much assessment. We didn’t know how low these kids were compared to other schools. . . . The staff development that came as a result of all of the needs assessment and all of the planning was phenomenal. We had nine, two-hour professional development sessions, which came out of the issues that came up in the needs assessment. As a result, I see much more interest in assessment than there ever was before.

On the whole KUSD reported that WestEd was an invaluable resource for them, but participants variously lauded and critiqued the components of their assistance. For some, information was overwhelming: “It was like an avalanche of information”; for others, the training moved too slowly: “They spoon-fed us each meeting,” said a team member from one school. Another educator from the same school said, “It was the whole thing about having to take a whole year for this process, that [suggested] you weren’t capable of making this plan in less than a year.” Still another school wanted more information that addressed their specific needs: “The biggest problem we had is that we are a middle school and most of the program examples were designed around elementary school sites.” Finally, a principal measured WestEd against the yardstick of prior experience and was appreciative: “I can give you a comparison of [doing schoolwide planning with and without outside assistance] because I had been in another school and we went schoolwide without technical assistance. Doing it with WestEd, the clarity, the ease, the lessening of stress, that was a big difference.”

Increased Capacity to Deliver Technical Assistance to Schools

The fact that schools completed and implemented schoolwide plans and reported that they were implementing the programs they framed under WestEd’s direction is a strong indicator that school and districtwide capacity increased as a result of schools’ work with WestEd. The middle school principal described the lessons learned this way:

We’re looking continually at our plan. We decided we needed to collaborate more. How are we monitoring growth and how is it going to translate into further support where it is working and less where it is not working? We’ve been able to develop some relationships with the county about where to go. . . . The whole process opened up the dialogue [among us]. It gives us documentation to get something approved that we know we buy into. This is a planned program and every year it’s going to be reevaluated. . . . [Teachers’] organizational skills really need to be top-notch [and the training] process helped.

Most school teams offered similar assessments of the strengths of the training experience, indicating they got what they expected from the year-long work and they were ready to work on their own, integrating their new skills and knowledge: “They’re organized. You come back from meetings with them with a direction. It was really powerful. We thought it really pulled the staff together and it had a direction of where we are heading.”

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

The center’s work increased knowledge of how ESEA programs can be combined at the site level among district-level officials, principals, and school leadership teams. Under WestEd’s direction, all eligible KUSD Title I schools have become schoolwide programs. Although bilingual and ESL programs

remain in separate funding streams, the services sponsored by federal, state, and local programs are integrated within schools. There was widespread enthusiasm for the shift to schoolwide programming.

We felt we needed to do more than targeted assistance because we were not reaching all kids with our funds, and we were told we could go schoolwide. I had heard from someone in the bilingual department that there was this program called Success for All. I told the staff about it, and I took the whole staff to see a school in Modesto. We even went a second time to look at a couple of bilingual schools. We did that and then we had a staff vote and we got the blessings of the district and we were able to implement the program this year. It started from knowing we had the opportunity to use all our categorical funds toward restructuring.

Nevertheless, there was some resistance to too much tinkering with the non-Title I title categories, such as the bilingual/ESL programs, and with Title IV and Title VI, in part because these programs are regarded by the central staff as the only resources available centrally to support specific activities. Few in the district fully understood ESEA's flexibility and the options available locally to make a case for how a district or school might reframe the agenda as presented by "the state." For example, one top administrator was highly critical of ESEA for what was perceived to be a "new state expectation" that they will give up "multiple measures" accountability in lieu of "one number" accountability. Staff didn't really assess whether they had some flexibility implementing this requirement or where the new mandate was coming from, although they didn't like it.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning were not the primary outcome of this process, but many pointed to the spin-off effects on teaching and learning, including improved faculty collaboration, more focused programs, and an increased use of responsive strategies. Reviews were mixed, however. One principal stated, "They really helped us in writing our plan and collecting our data, [but] it didn't make an impact as far as teaching." Another commented, "Validation from WestEd helped energize teachers to put things to work in their classrooms." The associate superintendent pointed out, "You can see clearly that we've had tremendous changes for the better in teaching and learning, but I think it's too difficult to say that it's because of federal dollars." Specific changes he mentioned included increased responsiveness to the diverse student body, upgrading the literacy program, more active and involving teaching and learning, and increasing students' writing proficiency.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

KUSD personnel mentioned few explicit barriers to quality services, but they did mention some of the inherent limitations of distance and time: "The biggest barrier this year in working with WestEd through the PQR process is simply the fact that they were in San Francisco and it was hard to make schedules work." Another barrier was a lack of clarity regarding WestEd's continuing role in the district.

One principal yearned for continuing assistance but was unclear about what would continue to be available to him: “We need to have an understanding that we can continue this consultation at anytime. What we didn’t know is if there is a timeline, and if it stops now. . . .”

The importance of the personal talent of the technical assistance provider cannot be overlooked. At WestEd, there are many well-liked staff, but not everyone fits KUSD’s needs. Several people—not many—noticed that it took WestEd a few sessions to settle on a consistent staff to work with them. Also, during the later phases, when the usual service providers were not available, their stand-ins were not as well liked as they were: “When we did our final completion report for PQR, it was the first time I laid eyes on the guy and he knew nothing about the school. He really had not had the background and if we would have had the same person all along, it would have been more efficient.”

Summary

WestEd provided assistance to KUSD to help the district make the transition to Title I schoolwide programs. The major thrust of the center’s work in Kingston were workshops for Title I school teams to help them write schoolwide plans, and the center relied on its own products and materials to conduct the training. WestEd also held institutes for principals to help them work effectively with schoolwide planning teams and worked individually with schools undergoing the PQR process to rework their schoolwide plans into PQR plans. The district relied heavily on WestEd’s assistance and praised the quality of the center’s services, with many participants noting that they were prepared to carry out what they learned. Under WestEd’s direction, all eligible Title I schools in the district became schoolwide programs.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

Mountainview School District, Wyoming

Overview

The Mountainview School District, which consists of one K-8 school, is one of three “partnership sites” served by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory’s (NWREL’s) Comprehensive Center, Region X. These three partnership sites receive an array of services from NWREL’s Comprehensive Center under memorandums of understanding that are negotiated at the beginning of each school year. In exchange for the Comprehensive Center’s services, these sites help contribute to the center’s understanding of what it takes to implement effective schoolwide programs in high-poverty schools and schools that serve high proportions of special populations.

Since the 1996-97 school year, NWREL’s Comprehensive Center has worked with the Mountainview School District on several programmatic initiatives, including: (1) developing and implementing a Title I schoolwide program, (2) preparing for the state’s accreditation review, (3) building staff members’ skill in disaggregating and interpreting student achievement data, and (4) aligning curriculum and assessments with state and local standards.

Data collection for this case study consisted of a two-day visit to the Mountainview School District. Site visitors interviewed the district superintendent, the school principal, five teachers, a tribal elder, and Comprehensive Center staff members who have worked with the school.

I. Local Context

The Mountainview School District, consisting of a single K-8 school, is located on an Indian reservation in central Wyoming. Mountainview’s enrollment of 350 students is 98% Native American. More than 90 percent of Mountainview’s students are eligible for free- and reduced-price lunches. Poverty on the reservation is very high, with 85 percent of reservation families unemployed. Attendance and enrollment varies due to the mobility of families working in the casinos of adjoining states. The largest employer on the reservation is the Mountainview School, which employs 48 uncertified Native American support staff and teaching aides and 32 certified teachers, all of whom are white and live off of the reservation. Because of the lack of

economic opportunity on the reservation, both school staff and parents observed that middle school students' motivation to stay in school and to work hard on their studies is often low.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

In the mid-1990's, the Mountainview School experienced considerable administrative turmoil, running through three different principals in three years. During that time, instructional programs were adopted and dropped in quick succession, applications for federal funding (including Indian Education, Title II, and Title IV) were allowed to lapse, the school failed to prepare for its state accreditation review, leaving it in real danger of losing its accreditation, and staff morale fell. At the time of its first contact with the Comprehensive Center, according to teachers, the Mountainview School was in administrative disarray and in serious need of outside help.

In the fall of 1997, one year after the Comprehensive Center began working with the Mountainview School, the district hired a new superintendent and principal, who have brought some measure of stability to the school's leadership. Priorities in the first year for the new superintendent included: (1) improving operations in the school business office, (2) renewing applications for federal grants, including Title II, Title IV, and Indian Education, (3) renovating the school's Cultural Center and establishing a tribal language program, and (4) restoring staff morale. Only in the second year have the superintendent and principal been able to devote serious attention to improving curriculum and instruction in the school. As the superintendent summed it up, "We needed housekeeping, housecleaning, and then playing catch up."

Customers' Purposes for Seeking External Assistance

Four teachers that assumed responsibility for developing the school improvement plan required by the state's accreditation process sought help from the Comprehensive Center because they believed they had nowhere else to turn. According to these teachers, the plan was due at the end of the school year and the school's superintendent at the time had no interest in seeing that the plan was completed; the principal had no experience in writing a plan. According to the school's Title I coordinator, the Comprehensive Center promised to be the only source of available practical support:

We contacted the Northwest laboratory [as the Comprehensive Center is known at Mountainview School] They were the only place to turn. The state did not have the

people at the time. [My colleagues] and I were involved in Title I and we had been around the state so we had gotten to know the people.

The Mountainview School has continued its relationship with NWREL's Comprehensive Center over time because it continues to see the center as the only available source of much-needed outside assistance. Accountability pressures continue to drive the school's requests for assistance; at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year, Mountainview's middle school was identified for Title I program improvement, and revamping curriculum and instruction at the middle school became an important focus of the center's work at Mountainview. In addition, both the superintendent and principal maintained that the center's help is valuable because they have almost no other options:

We don't have any support. There is one university and no funding so the university is virtually non-existent as far as assistance [for us]. The state does one-time conferences. We have identified a mentor for Title I schoolwide. This person deals with schoolwide issues like how to do consolidated plans but not about other issues.

If we were a normal school with everything in place, it would not be as critical, but we have problems even if accreditation is done. We need input and I am excited that the Center can help us see what we need to continue.

Finally, the superintendent commented that the fact that the center's services are free for the school is an important consideration for the school.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's Relationship with the Site

The Mountainview Title I coordinator and a colleague first made contact with NWREL's Comprehensive Center at a presentation made to low-performing schools by the center's state liaison for Wyoming. The Wyoming state education agency organized this presentation for schools that it had identified as potential partnership sites. The Mountainview teachers were impressed with the personal skills of the center staff member and, with her encouragement, applied to the SEA to become a partnership site. The Mountainview teachers summed up their reasons for pursuing a relationship with the Comprehensive Center in this way:

[The center liaison] was backed by a good enough size organization and backed by the state...and we were finally going to be "not just us" [if we involved her].

Planning Services

Since the 1996-97 school year, when the Comprehensive Center first began work in Mountainview, the district has worked with three different center staff members as their primary technical assistance provider (these changes in staffing were due to turnover in staff at the Comprehensive Center). Each year, the district and Comprehensive Center liaison plan services based on the district's most immediate needs. For example, in the first year of the center's work with Mountainview, Mountainview teachers decided to prepare a Title I schoolwide program plan that would also serve as the school improvement plan required by the state's accreditation process, which was due to the state at the end of that school year. Work on this plan drove all of the center's interactions with the school. Similarly, the middle school's identification for Title I program improvement in 1998-99 has prompted much of the center's work with the district in the last year to focus on improving curriculum, assessment, and instruction at the middle school.

Other services provided by the center have been planned to capitalize on the particular expertise of the center staff members working with the school. For example, the center's specialist on Indian education and community involvement provided assistance on involving reservation parents in the school; another staff member with particular expertise in resiliency has offered a series of workshops on that topic. Another strong focus of the center's work with the school, developing the capacity to disaggregate data, was identified by the Comprehensive Center as it reviewed needs across its three partnership sites.

III. Services to the Local Site

Portfolio of Products and Services

Development of a Title I schoolwide program plan. With just a few months left before the school's accreditation application was due to the state, the first phase of Mountainview School's relationship with the Comprehensive Center began with the development of a Title I schoolwide plan that would double as a school improvement plan required for the accreditation process. According to teachers who worked on the plan, the Comprehensive Center liaison visited the school three or four times over the course of the spring of 1997; the focus of every visit became a portion of the school improvement plan.

According to school staff members, the Comprehensive Center started by working with teachers to examine content standards, curriculum, assessments, and student data in a

comprehensive way. The center liaison worked with teachers to identify goals for the plan; teachers recalled that in the beginning of the development process they came up with goals but found that they were too broad and “not student-centered in the right way.” In addition, the Comprehensive Center liaison helped teachers to understand the student performance data they had on hand, make spreadsheets from existing data, and analyze student performance. According to these teachers, “We would still be working on [the schoolwide plan] if we were left alone.” One teacher summed up the center’s contribution in this way:

We brought out our little plans and they would immediately help us rearrange some cart before horse stuff. . . . We set up goals for the big goals, and in between we would work with them by e-mail, fax and then some. They organized us, clarified us, and kept us on track. We did not have the leadership and the [Comprehensive Center] gave us that leadership.

Increasing parent involvement. During the first and second year of the Comprehensive Center’s work with Mountainview, a specialist in Indian education and parent involvement visited the school several times to help staff develop strategies for reaching out to parents on the reservation. Teachers recall that this center staff member conducted a door-to-door survey of parents, and presented the results of that survey in an inservice session with Mountainview faculty. In fall 1998, the center’s Indian education/parent involvement specialist visited the school twice, once to make a three-day presentation to staff on parental training ideas, and once to consult with the superintendent on parent involvement and student discipline.

Other workshops. The center’s second year of work with Mountainview included workshops on various topics which received mixed reviews from staff. These included: (1) a workshop on resiliency (October, 1997); (2) a workshop on curriculum standards (November, 1997); and (3) a series of workshops on integrating Indian culture into the curriculum (January 1998 -March 1998).

Data profiling. In summer 1998 the Comprehensive Center sponsored an institute in Portland for all three of its partnership sites. The focus of this five-day workshop was on building the capacity of school staff to analyze and interpret student achievement data. Staff members from Mountainview took their reading and math scores to Portland and learned how to use Excel to generate charts, how to disaggregate numbers, and how to report results in a school report card. Center staff provided consultation with individual districts and followed up with consultation throughout the following school year. In addition, center staff members analyzed data on behalf of the partnership sites, and traveled to the school to provide consultation on reporting.

With the Comprehensive Center’s help, the Mountainview School District has produced a

detailed school report card complete with graphics that shows the district's performance on the SAT-9 for 4th grade and 8th grade, key district demographics, and the results of a student and parent survey.

Aligning curriculum and assessments with local standards. Much of the Comprehensive Center's work with the Mountainview School in the third year of their partnership focused on aligning curriculum and assessments with local standards. In 1998-99, the district was in the process of aligning the district standards to the state's 4th and 8th grade standards, and developing new assessments as required by the state. In addition to using standardized norm-referenced tests (including the SAT-9 and the Terra Nova), the district was developing a local criterion referenced test for grades 3 and 6. After a year of "house-keeping", according to the district superintendent, "We are more involved with curriculum and setting our standards, and getting standards put down and working together among grade levels at scope and sequencing."

In 1998-99, the center's services have focused on improving curriculum, instruction, and student achievement at the middle school, which had been identified for Title I program improvement at the beginning of the school year (at the time of this study's site visit the district was appealing the identification but preparing to implement a school improvement plan nevertheless). The district began work with a new Comprehensive Center staff member late in 1998. This staff member had been a principal, and as a result spent much of his time consulting with the Mountainview principal on strategies for school improvement. Throughout the spring of 1999, this liaison visited the school monthly, consulting with the principal and teachers on various activities related to curriculum and instruction at the middle school. As one Mountainview teacher described it:

[Our new center liaison] came on board and he is magnificent. Our middle school grades were consistently low. The middle school teachers were resistant to change yet the principal had reasons for them to change. [The center liaison] and he are joined at the hip. [The liaison] is helping them with change.

At the time of our visit, the liaison's work with the middle school had focused especially on the adoption of "Six-Trait Writing," a scoring rubric and assessment tool that can guide writing instruction. Mountainview teachers learned about the tool at a workshop in Casper and with the center's support and encouragement decided to begin using it schoolwide.

In addition, the Comprehensive Center liaison has been working with Mountainview staff on assembling an "assessment matrix" that they can use to align their instruction with new, higher-stakes tests. In the coming year, Mountainview administrators and teachers anticipated

that new state testing requirements would be a major area of concern for the school. According to the district superintendent:

Next year is a high stakes year and it's going to hurt the rural community. If the kids don't do well on the standardized test, they are seen as stupid. We could even get the "it's the reservation so what do you expect" and "the kids aren't here so we can't teach them" treatment, even from staff. . . . The [Comprehensive Center] is the one that will help us make the change [in attitudes].

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to the Site

Alignment with local standards. Most of the Comprehensive Center's work with the Mountainview School District, from the development of the Title I schoolwide program plan in 1996-97 to their work on curriculum and instruction in 1998-99, has focused specifically on the alignment of curriculum and assessments with the state's standards for student performance.

Research-based theoretical framework. Teachers and administrators at Mountainview praised the Comprehensive Center for the access it provides to information about educational research and school improvement. One of the center's most important functions in this regard has been to synthesize relevant research for the district, in order to address specific questions or needs. For example, the center summarized relevant research on the effects of school uniforms for the superintendent, who needed to make a presentation on the subject to the school board. As two Mountainview staff members summed up the center's role:

There was a lot of documentation and research that we could check out that the center brought in A third party saying this is how things are done was good.

We don't have a lot of resources. Research-based data is important because there is a feeling out there that this is [Mountainview] and research does not reach us because we are unique even from research of other reservations. . . . That is why the center is important. Next year there will be a focus on middle school and we will need to verify that we are doing as well as we can and change things that are less effective.

Scope, intensity, and duration. As a partnership site, the Mountainview School District has enjoyed a high volume of services from the Comprehensive Center over a period of three years. During periods of peak activity (for example, during the development of the Title I schoolwide program plan) center staff members visited the school monthly, and communicated by telephone, email, and fax much more frequently. In addition, the Comprehensive Center hosted week-long summer institutes for all of its partnership sites in 1997, 1998, and 1999.

The Comprehensive Center has been intensely involved in the first phase of school

improvement at Mountainview--developing an improvement plan. During this phase, Mountainview staff members noted that the center's assistance exceeded their expectations for scope, intensity, and duration. Mountainview is just beginning to implement improvement activities for the teaching of math, reading, and writing, however. Plans are in place for professional development, but do not involve the Comprehensive Center as heavily.

Utility. Teachers agreed that the technical assistance provided by their liaison during the first year of their work with the center, as they were preparing for state accreditation, was extremely useful. Most Mountainview staff members reported that the information provided in workshops and other assistance activities during the second year of the partnership, however, was too superficial and too theoretical to be of much practical use.

Capacity-building. Both administrators and teachers at Mountainview commented on the importance of building teacher leadership at the school because teachers tend to stay at the school longer than administrators. Some of the teachers we interviewed credit the Comprehensive Center with helping them develop the skills to plan and implement school improvement efforts. As part of the accreditation process, Mountainview staff formed a number of committees to address issues related to curriculum, assessment, staff development, school improvement, the middle school, school board policy, and the budget. These committees have now been operating for more than two years; teachers maintained that their leadership would provide stability and continuity to the school even when administrators turned over.

Both administrators and teachers we interviewed reported that the center's training on analyzing and reporting on data had provided them with valuable skills that they would continue to use in the future to produce an annual school report card.

IV. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

In general, Mountainview School District teachers and administrators believe that the Comprehensive Center has provided them with valuable assistance over the course of their three-year partnership. Mountainview staff members believe that some providers have been more helpful and more effective than others, however. The teachers who were involved in writing the school improvement plan in 1996-97 praised their first center liaison for her practical and timely help; they insisted that they could not have completed the plan without her assistance. Similarly,

Mountainview teachers and administrators expressed strong satisfaction with their current liaison, who was providing valuable consultation and advice on issues related to curriculum and instruction at the middle school level.

By contrast, teachers complained that some of the workshops and other services provided by the site's second liaison were too superficial and not practical enough to be of much use. Teachers who complained about services during this period were careful to point out that services had improved in the third year of the partnership, however. Typical teacher comments about the second year of services included:

I have not felt their workshops were really valuable until last summer. We always felt like this is not what we need right now. I don't know why that was--probably because it wasn't concrete help.

I felt like we were not getting what was promised for a long time . . . They could not get to the nitty-gritty stuff like: Where do we go now? How do we do it now? It was all too general. We have come a long way but what's different about [our current liaison] is that he is interested in what this school's needs are now. He comes in and says, "This is a program we can offer you." I see that in the last three years the service is getting better.

The site views the Comprehensive Center as providing a unique service. School personnel say that the state does not have the people or the time to provide the same level of service. The administration and staff recognize that their needs are unique and that few places would take interest in them or have the capacity and experience to help them.

So could we have called ED? Would they have understood us as well and talked to us day and night like the center, I don't know. I know we can't get [adequate assistance] from the state. We were under the gun. We had five years [to deliver our school improvement plan for accreditation], we were in our fifth year, and we were desperate.

Mountainview administrators see their current Comprehensive Center liaison as very responsive to their needs. The principal mentioned several times that he has asked for a service and that overnight, the center had been able to respond and provide the information in a flyer format that could be copied as is and sent home with the students, or copied and used in a meeting. This fast response, according to administrators, is one of the most valuable qualities of the center:

They seem to be very accommodating. Right service at the right time, coincidental or not, very timely.

As the Mountainview principal summed it up:

Why is the center so helpful? [The person] they sent was originally a principal...he comes from a real research background too...when he talks about programs he talks about programs that work with a good track record. The other thing is that Center advice comes from a point of view of experience and they understand where we are trying to go. [The person's] experience allows us to step back from our situation. . . . He is prompt and timely and when he hears we need something, he knows where we are at, and the information he gives us is right on in a way that I can just copy it and send it out to the staff.

Both staff and administration acknowledge that the Center Partnership allowed high quality technical assistance to reach the reservation school, which is too often bypassed.

There is not much out there for at-risk schools like us. The state has neglected reservations Reservations need support and for that the [Comprehensive Center] is needed.

They motivated us. I doubt that we could have done that alone if we weren't boosted into it. Everyone wants to say if its not broke don't fix it, but they told us this is what you can do and so we did it. They also give a lot of feedback.

Compared to the help that the SEA gives, the school administrators see the Comprehensive Center services as individualized and tailored to the needs of the school. Center TA is more in-depth and substantive than what the SEA can provide.

The state is trying to reach everyone in a shot gun approach but the Center was specific in how they help us. The Center's help is integral compared to state department help. But we have to recognize that they are coming from two different purposes. (Administrators)

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

Mountainview staff credit the development and implementation of the Title I schoolwide program plan entirely to the assistance of the Comprehensive Center. Beyond the implementation of the Title I schoolwide program, however, the center's work has not focused on the implementation of ESEA programs.

Increased in Parent Involvement

Mountainview staff members reported that the Comprehensive Center's efforts to increase parent involvement have not been particularly successful in reaching the core of the community.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Both teachers and administrators see some level of positive change in the classroom since the center's involvement.

The center has coaxed us into being uniform across the board with our curriculum and with accreditation. They said it was better to be. Math scores came up tremendously from the year before, and our program changed.

The center has done a great job . . . focusing more on changes in the classroom. . . . The matrix for assessment change is what will help teachers disaggregate data and document change in the classroom. We are excited about that.

What's different with center services? Good question! I'm always doing new things, but I don't know if it was because of the center. Maybe profiling [schools to best target resources] would not have happened without the center.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

The barriers that keep the center from providing effective assistance that almost all the informants mentioned were time and distance. The informants were quick to qualify that the center makes an effort to visit as often as it can.

The administrators included lack of research on reservations as a barrier to effective, high-quality assistance. The superintendent said, "We are isolated here like an island . . . we are our own unique environment . . . we need a touch with reality."

Summary

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) Comprehensive Center in Region X provided an array of services to Mountainview School District, a small (one K-8 school serving 350 students), remote school district located on an Indian reservation and serving a high

proportion of Native American students. The center began its work with the district at a time when the district was in considerable administrative disarray, having allowed applications for federal funding to lapse and failing to prepare for its state accreditation. Since the 1996-97 school year, NWREL's Comprehensive Center has helped Mountainview School District: (1) develop and implement a Title I schoolwide program, (2) prepare for the state's accreditation review, (3) build staff members' skills in disaggregating and interpreting student achievement data, and (4) align curriculum and assessments with state and local standards. Mountainview teachers and administrators expressed strong satisfaction with their center liaisons, both past and present. School personnel explain that the state does not have the people, time, or expertise to provide the same level of service as the center. In addition, the responsiveness of the center to Mountainview's requests for services and information is among the center's most valuable qualities.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

North Carolina ESL Clusters

Overview

Several local school districts in North Carolina have recently experienced rapid growth in their limited English proficient (LEP) populations. In addition, three school districts had been identified by ED's Office for Civil Rights as being out of compliance with civil rights laws governing the education of LEP students. In response to requests for assistance in adapting local practice to better serve the changed populations, the Region IV Comprehensive Center, through a subcontract to ESCORT, began providing services related to English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to 23 local school districts in North Carolina organized geographically into three clusters, two with seven districts each and the third with nine districts. ESCORT was one of the three migrant education resource centers under ED's previous technical assistance system, originally known as the Eastern Stream Center or Resources and Training. ESCORT is currently a partner in the Region IV Comprehensive Center and in several other centers on the eastern seaboard. The centerpiece of the center services to the clusters is the Lab School model, which presents theory, models the use of specific strategies, provides opportunities for application and experimentation, and offers follow-up support. This case study examines the services provided to two of the participating districts, Tyson County Public Schools and Gardner County Public Schools.

For this case study, researchers visited Tyson County and Gardner County. Data collection included interviews with personnel from both districts and five schools, including two ESL coordinators, eight teachers, three principals, and a counselor. Additional interviews included a state ESL administrator, a service provider at ESCORT, and the ESL coordinator from an additional district.

I. Local Context

Interest in external assistance regarding ESL instruction among participating districts has been shaped by the changing demographics and by changes in state policy. The number of LEP students in the counties that make up the ESL clusters has grown at a rapid pace. For instance, the number of LEP students in Tyson County, now between 300 and 400, has doubled in the past six years. In Gardner County, for example, the migrant population has changed from overwhelmingly African-American to about 95 percent Hispanic, creating a greater need for ESL services. The mobility of these students has changed as well. Previously, their families came as migrant workers and they only spent part of the year

in the school district. Now, more families are settling into the community permanently, creating a greater demand for services.

Meanwhile, the North Carolina legislature voted in 1995 to reduce the size of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and devolve many of its responsibilities, including professional development, to the local districts. As a result, the ESL office at DPI has dramatically scaled down its professional development and technical assistance activities and focused most of its attention on curriculum development for ESL programs.

In addition to the devolution of professional development funding to the local districts, state requirements for testing LEP students have played an important role in generating local requests for technical assistance. North Carolina has instituted new statewide testing based on the state's content and performance standards: end-of-year testing in the elementary grades and end-of-course testing for the secondary grades. The state requires that any LEP student who has attended school in a particular school district for more than two years and has achieved Level Two on a five-point English proficiency scale must take the tests, which are administered only in English. Efforts are under way to extend the exemption time to at least three years, and the state legislature adopted a waiver process for LEP and exceptional children, which allows portfolio assessments. However, the message to local districts is clear: They are responsible for ensuring that their LEP students learn the content that is reflected on the state tests.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

Educators in Gardner County and Tyson County wish to improve the ability of classroom teachers to develop and implement lessons that meet the needs of both English proficient students and LEP students in their classrooms. In both districts, LEP students spend the bulk of their time in regular classrooms, but are pulled out of class as often as every day for about 45 minutes for ESL instruction. With LEP students spending most of their time with classroom teachers, teachers recognize the importance of learning instructional strategies that work well with all students in the inclusive classroom. As the Gardner County ESL coordinator told us, "We have fine ESL teachers, but they can't do it all."

Specific needs and objectives differ in the two counties. In Tyson County, the center is focusing most of its efforts and resources on two "focus schools," which have the highest number of LEP students in the county. According to the ESL coordinator in that district, the focus school approach can have effects beyond the first two schools because it "allows us to identify the things that work that we can replicate in other schools." The two focus schools have asked the center to provide assistance in different

areas of concern. One school has given priority to increasing parent involvement and identifying the needs of exceptional children, whereas the other has focused on helping school personnel to understand cultural differences in order to improve instruction.

By contrast, Gardner County has concentrated most of its efforts on preparing ESL teachers across the district to serve as in-school resources to regular classroom teachers. Most of the training opportunities related to ESL instruction have involved the ESL teachers. They are then expected to work with their colleagues in regular classrooms on developing curricula and instructional strategies that meet the needs of both LEP and English-speaking students. “If you prepare the ESL staff and put that support in place, the next step is the classroom teacher,” a member of ESCORT explained.

Although both counties have made some effort to involve parents of LEP students in their children’s education, the two want to do more. In Gardner County, all migrant and ESL program staff spend a great deal of time communicating with parents about school issues. Each school is responsible for meeting with parents of ESL students to explain grade-level curriculum requirements and local and state standards and expectations. The language barrier is a major obstacle to communicating with parents because most teachers and administrators do not speak Spanish, though many schools have on staff at least one Spanish speaker who attends parent-teacher conferences and who translates notes from school to home. In Tyson County, one of the focus schools has made parent contact a priority. The school held a special bilingual meeting just for parents of ESL students to discuss testing issues, promotions, end of grade testing, and other educational issues. The school also encouraged parents of K-3 ESL students to read with their children and gave each family a book at the end of the year.

Progress in Implementing ESEA Reforms

In Gardner County, the ESL Coordinator has used resources for the education of both migrant and LEP students in order to improve service delivery to overlapping populations. “As we began to build the ESL component, we split-funded a lot of our staff,” she told us. Thus, many ESL teachers who are funded at about 20 percent by funds for migrant education handle all instructional responsibilities. Other staff are supported entirely by funds for migrant education, and they are responsible for other components of the program, particularly parental support. The coordinator worked with her staff to develop migrant eligibility and LEP proficiency tests and questionnaires. In her district, teachers identify other needs students may have, such as health and transportation, that her office can address with migrant support funds.

Customers’ Purposes for Seeking External Assistance

According to district administrators in both districts, classroom teachers are not familiar with the cultural norms and values that their LEP students bring to the classroom and that may affect their learning habits. Increased awareness of those norms, the administrators believe, will make it easier for teachers to understand those students, communicate with them, and use instructional strategies to which the students will respond. Moreover, the teachers lack awareness of instructional strategies that they can use to teach content to classes that include a mixture of students who are proficient in English and others who have limited proficiency in English. As a result, many LEP students are relegated to the back of the classroom while the rest of the class learns social studies, reading, math, and other subjects. Administrators in both districts are eager to introduce classroom teachers to strategies—such as the use of graphic organizers and cooperative learning—that benefit all students in their classrooms, regardless of their proficiency in English.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center’s Relationship with the Districts

The ESL clusters began with a telephone call to ESCORT from a rural North Carolina county ESL coordinator, who requested assistance for classroom teachers who were experiencing rapid growth in the numbers of LEP students in their classrooms. Following the center’s policy of maximizing its effectiveness by providing assistance to groups of clients in the same region, the ESCORT staff member called the ESL office at the state DPI to inquire whether there were other districts that would benefit from the assistance that had been requested. DPI identified 23 districts—including Tyson and Gardner Counties—concentrated in three clusters that were experiencing similar growth in the number of LEP students in their schools. ESCORT then contacted the ESL coordinators in each of those districts and offered them the opportunity to attend a planning meeting that included other districts in their cluster. The purpose of that meeting was to develop a plan for providing technical assistance to the districts in each cluster.

About 15 to 20 percent of ESCORT’s subcontract with the Region IV Comprehensive Center is spent on the clusters. Most of its work occurred up front, establishing the relationships and developing assistance plans for each cluster.

ESCORT’s prior relationships with counties facilitated membership recruitment in the clusters. At least two of the counties currently in the clusters had received technical assistance from the center

through ESCORT on issues related to migrant education before the clusters formed. In both of those counties, the ESL coordinator also directs the district's migrant education program, and had learned of the center's services during migrant conferences or meetings. One district had obtained a publication prepared jointly by the Region IV and Region XIV Comprehensive Centers called *Help! They Don't Speak English*, which provides teachers of LEP students with research-based, practical information on recommended instructional and assessment strategies and resources. These districts joined their respective clusters after receiving the initial telephone calls from ESCORT.

Planning Services

When ESCORT contacted each of the districts in the three clusters, it proposed that all ESL coordinators in each cluster meet as a group with ESCORT staff to discuss their technical assistance needs. "They're very good about asking us what we need," commented one ESL coordinator. Annual planning meetings continue to be held in each region, where an informal needs assessment is conducted. Based on the feedback from the ESL coordinators, the center staff adjusts its activities in each cluster. The biggest difference can be seen in the different designs of the Lab Schools. Otherwise, they do workshops on topics requested by each cluster. One ESL coordinator indicated, "Communication [with ESCORT] is really good. They are in continuous contact through e-mail, and they'll call you back within 24 hours. They are very quick to respond to questions and issues. If they can't answer the question, they'll find someone who can."

The center issued a notice to all of the counties that it was searching for "focus schools," schools with extensive need for technical assistance that were prepared to receive intensive help. At the center's invitation, Tyson County selected its two focus schools because of their high concentrations of LEP students, but that was not the only reason. One center staff member reported that those two schools also had the leadership and the core group of teachers who were ready to begin changing classroom instruction. "Even if other schools are more needy, if they're not ready, it's a waste of our time," he said. In Tyson County, one staff member from ESCORT served as a primary resource. She visited the site and worked with them to develop a strategy over a nearly two-year period. The ESL coordinator said, "She listened to our concerns and really got a flavor for the schools' situation. We identified needs and she identified strategies and resources to meet those needs." The ESL coordinator in Gardner County preferred to take a countywide approach, so she decided not to nominate any focus schools.

III. Services to the Local Site

Portfolio of Products and Services

Lab School. The centerpiece of the center's work in the clusters is the Lab School model, which presents theory, models the use of specific strategies, provides opportunities for application and experimentation, and offers follow-up support. Only two Lab Schools were held throughout the three clusters in 1999, one in Tyson County and one in Gardner County. The Lab Schools were cluster-wide events, and all of the districts in the two clusters were invited to send teachers to the Lab Schools. The Lab School model was based on an approach that North Carolina used to provide training at a summer retreat for teachers.

The Lab Schools in Tyson County followed the basic model, which consists of five days of morning instruction for teachers during the summer, followed by afternoon sessions that enabled them to apply what they had learned. During the morning sessions, ESCORT staff and consultants worked with about 25 teachers who had volunteered from the two ESL "focus schools" in the district. The first phase consisted of "consciousness raising," during which the presenters introduced teachers to the culture of the LEP children, who were primarily Mexican American. The presenters also provided an overview of the theory of language acquisition as a lead-in to offering suggestions about appropriate instructional strategies in classrooms with both LEP and English proficient students. A specific strategy suggested by the presenters was to present abstract concepts in concrete ways that minimize language barriers, such as through art, visual aids, and manipulatives, so that "concepts come to life for the children." Presenters also encouraged teachers to allow literate LEP students to write in their native language when they first arrive in their classrooms and to assign them reading partners to help them learn to read in English. Teachers were given opportunities to observe lessons that used these strategies and to devise lessons that applied these concepts.

During the afternoon sessions, the teachers practiced their lessons in summer school classrooms with student populations that resembled their own. Their peers observed these lessons and provided feedback at the end. The final phase of the Lab School consisted of classroom visits during the school year by one of the Lab School presenters. The visitor conducted a single observation of each Lab School teacher using the strategies they learned during the summer and offered feedback following the observation.

The eastern cluster deviated from the basic Lab School model in order to make use of local expertise. The Lab School operated in conjunction with Gardner County's regular Summer Academy program. Participants split into three groups: The elementary and secondary groups consisted of 23

regular classroom teachers, most of whom came from neighboring counties, while the advanced group included 5 of the 11 ESL teachers from Gardner County. The elementary and secondary groups had the same morning training sessions as teachers in Tyson County, but they practiced their lessons in the Summer Academy ESL classes. The role of the advanced group was to model effective lessons in the regular Summer Academy classes, with the other Lab School teachers observing how they integrated content into the ESL lesson. At the end of the Lab School, the three groups met to debrief about what they observed and learned from the training and the practice teaching. ESL teachers wrote down and presented their thoughts about the role of classroom teachers in working with ESL students, and classroom teachers wrote down and presented their thoughts about the role of ESL teachers, which led to an in-depth discussion involving all participants. This approach fit the district's desire to have the ESL teachers serve as instructional resources to regular classroom teachers in their schools. However, most of the classroom teachers who participated in the Lab School were from other counties in the cluster; future plans include having more classroom teachers from Gardner County participate in the Lab Schools each summer. Follow-up with participating teachers did not occur in this county because classroom visits for all of the participating teachers could not be arranged for the same date.

Workshops. In response to requests from staff and administrators in both counties, the center also provided several half-day and full-day workshops on selected topics during the school year. Because most teachers in these districts have not had any exposure to Mexican culture, the most common topics addressed in these workshops were cultural differences between Mexican and American children for the purpose of encouraging teachers to be open-minded and respectful of some of different norms they will encounter in their students. The workshops addressed such issues as family structure, the importance and meaning of the multiple names that Mexican children might have, and different attitudes and reactions to authority figures. Recently, an ESCORT staff member provided a well-received, three-hour workshop on methods of assessing whether LEP students have learning disabilities in addition to their limited English proficiency. Teachers had reported having trouble determining whether a struggling LEP student was struggling only because of the language barrier or because he or she also had a learning disability. The workshop presented teachers with a case study of a child and walked them through the process of determining whether or not the child had a learning disability.

Parental Involvement Strategy. In Tyson County, the center helped the ESL coordinator develop a comprehensive strategy for involving parents of LEP students in their children's education. The initiative stemmed from one principal's concern that Mexican families were taking long trips back to Mexico during the holidays, causing their children to miss a lot of school. She wanted to find a way to communicate the importance of attending school regularly to the parents, and staff helped her develop a strategy that is now being replicated throughout the county. center staff also arranged for an evening meeting with parents that included free food, baby-sitting services, and door prizes. About 25 parents

attended the meeting, during which ESCORT staff served as translators. The school is also going to offer Saturday classes to parents in which they can learn English using computer software in the school's computer lab. Next year, every school in the county that enrolls LEP students will hold three or four parent meetings at different times during the year. ESCORT staff are also helping the county establish linkages with the clergy from the local Catholic Church and with employers who hire many of the Mexican families in the county.

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to the Site

Alignment with state and local standards. The purpose of the center's activity in these clusters is to improve the capacity of classroom teachers to enable LEP students to achieve state content and performance standards. To date, the assistance provided has focused on instructional strategies that cut across content areas, but there are plans to provide additional assistance to ESL teachers in Gardner County on incorporating social studies, sciences, and language arts content into their ESL instruction. One kindergarten teacher observed that repetition and making concepts concrete, a central focus of many of the workshops available to teachers, is always good for young children.

Research-based theoretical framework. Most ESCORT staff and the consultants they hire have strong backgrounds in research on language acquisition and curriculum theory. Several consultants are faculty members at Hunter College in New York City. All of their work draws from the latest research, with a particular focus on how teachers can draw from that research to address their concerns in the classroom. The content of the Lab School morning sessions and several of the shorter workshops are grounded in research on language acquisition among students with limited English proficiency. The focus on providing hands-on, concrete learning opportunities in classrooms is based mainly on this research. One teacher commented that the presenters at the summer Lab School offered statistics demonstrating that students learn more effectively with hands-on strategies.

Scope, intensity, and duration. School and district personnel generally believe that the ESL cluster services are of sufficient scope, intensity, and duration to guide improvement efforts. According to one ESL coordinator, the center's assistance is "continuous; it's always there." Even when not conducting workshops or Lab Schools, its staff is available for consultation or to refer district staff to other resources, often ESL administrators in other counties. "[ESCORT] can usually find someone I can talk to," a coordinator explained. Teachers praised the thoroughness and long duration of the Lab School. According to one, "Usually a workshop is half a day or a day," but the Lab School gave her the opportunity to absorb and apply a lot of information. Another said that the Lab School design compared

favorably with half-day workshops, in which “you might learn some stuff but you don’t have time to get down to it.”

Some participants, however, believe the services should be expanded. A principal at one of the focus schools in Tyson County requested more follow-up opportunities for teachers, and less time between the initial Lab School session and the follow-up. Other participants expressed the desire to attend the Lab School sessions every year to reinforce and expand their skills, but there are competing needs of other schools in the district.

Utility. Gardner County and Tyson County schools use the services provided by the center in their school improvement efforts. Teachers in both districts participate in the Lab Schools, workshops, and parent involvement activities. In Gardner County, however, the focus on building the capacity of ESL teachers means that classroom teachers still have not received very much assistance in integrating their LEP students into their lessons. ESCORT staff attribute this limitation to the district, however. As one staff member explained, “If the district has a different model, it’s not my job to go in and tell them they’re wrong. My job is to help them with their plan.”

Capacity building. The center intends its services to build the capacity of local staff to identify and solve problems on their own. Gardner County’s goal is to build the capacity of ESL and mainstream teachers to better serve LEP students. The Tyson County focus schools are intended to serve as laboratories to develop and test appropriate models.

Other Sources of Assistance

Outside of the services offered by the center, these districts cite few other sources of assistance available to them. Teachers in Tyson County have participated in the University of North Carolina’s World View program, which provides symposiums on Mexican culture and sponsors week-long trips to Mexico. Teachers and administrators praised the program for helping teachers understand the cultural differences between themselves and many of their Mexican students. The county also has access to a regional education organization that conducts research and provides technical assistance to support continuous school improvement, but the services offered do not meet the county’s needs. A vertical team of Gardner County educators participated in a 10-day study abroad program in Mexico. The migrant/ESL office and local education foundation raised funds to send a five-person delegation back to conduct follow-up activities.

The state no longer provides workshops or technical assistance for professional development at the local level, and state staff complimented the center's service model as being more in depth and comprehensive than they could have provided. ESCORT tailored their training and technical assistance to the counties and expanded on original concerns of changing student demographics to provide more broad-based instructional strategies, as well as increasing understanding and support to LEP students in their districts.

Plans for Continuing Assistance

ESL coordinators in these districts want to expand their involvement with the center, increasing the number of classroom teachers who attend the summer Lab School sessions and the shorter workshops offered during the year. They believe it is important for teachers to gain a better understanding of the LEP students in their classroom and to learn ways to challenge them academically. One coordinator wants the center to provide her with more assistance in developing the district's ESL plan and in providing leadership to schools that are trying to reform their instruction to better serve LEP students.

One district administrator is looking forward to the center's and ESCORT's continued involvement in helping her provide leadership in schools that need to make adjustments to the influx of LEP students. That includes helping her make necessary changes to the district's ESL program plan, replicating effective workshops (notably one on identifying learning disabilities in LEP children), and turning more attention to middle schools with LEP students. According to this administrator, middle schools present a unique challenge because parents of LEP students often complain that their children won't speak Spanish to them at home, and teachers complain that they won't speak English in the classroom. She said that both teachers and parents need coping strategies, and better communication among students, parents, and teachers.

IV. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

All the respondents in both counties, including state, district, and school administrators and classroom and ESL teachers, gave glowing reviews to the assistance they received from the center and ESCORT. The assistance was, according to these respondents, timely, relevant, and practical. According to one state administrator, "If we had dreamed this (the ESL clusters) up ourselves, we would not have done as good a job. . . . We did not foresee the need for planning that [ESCORT] did."

Local, district, and school staff identified two major strengths of the technical assistance efforts. The first is the expertise of the staff who led the Lab Schools and workshops for teachers. The three ESCORT staff members involved with the clusters all have extensive classroom and administrative experience and a combined total of more than 20 years of experience providing technical assistance. The center also brought in numerous consultants to lead the Lab Schools and provide workshops in the clusters, including a professor from Hunter College in New York City with a strong background in research on language development and experience translating that research into classroom activities; a district ESL coordinator from North Carolina with expertise in developing learning activities for multilingual classrooms; and a staff member from the Southeastern Equity Center in Miami, who is familiar with federal laws and regulations governing ESL instruction. According to most respondents, such expertise is not readily available in most of the counties in the clusters.

The second strength is the center's responsiveness to local concerns and interests. According to one state administrator, the center's staff has been so thorough in assessing local needs during their annual planning meetings and through ongoing communication with ESL coordinators that "they know more about what's going on than we do." District and school staff echoed that sentiment in reporting that the services addressed their immediate and long-term agendas and needs. One ESCORT staff member explained the organization's emphasis on collaborative planning this way: "If you don't listen to what they need, then it isn't going to work. It won't stick." The center has been responsive to complaints as well. According to one coordinator, "When I have expressed my concerns [about a consultant or presenter], I have not had to deal with that person again."

Perhaps the best indication of customers' satisfaction with the center's and ESCORT's services in Gardner and Tyson Counties, however, is their plans to expand their work during the next school year. Administrators in both counties plan to expand the number of teachers who receive ESCORT training, as well as consult with center staff in the design of districtwide ESL services.

Increased Capacity to Deliver Technical Assistance to Schools

District ESL coordinators throughout the clusters are developing leadership skills. According to one ESCORT staff member, "Capacity building starts to take place naturally" as members of the clusters spend more time together and share their experiences. ESL coordinators in one of the clusters continue to meet on their own 3 to 4 times a year to discuss common concerns and strategies. ESL coordinators in another cluster have banded together to lobby for attention at the state level: Said one coordinator, "We finally got into the Governor's budget this year." Explained one district ESL coordinator, "It really

pleases me, if Region IV were to disappear in a puff of smoke, there would still be something there. . . . They create autonomy rather than dependence.”

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

Increasing awareness or understanding of ESEA programs was not the focus of the assistance from the center. The district administrators appear already to be pretty well connected and well versed in federal program requirements.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Teachers reported changing their instructional strategies in response to the training they have received. One said she is “more aware of making sure that things I present make sense” to all of her students, including the LEP students. For instance, when using pictures to teach beginning sounds, she tries to use objects that all of her students will be familiar with. She noted, for instance, that “a” doesn’t mean apple for a non-English speaker. Another teacher said that she learned to be more active in her classroom because motion is a form of communication that is not restricted by language. An ESL teacher said that the assistance she has received helped her develop content-based lesson plans for her ESL classes. A district administrator said that the assistance is “helping [teachers] understand the learning needs of ESL kids.” Moreover, they recognize now that the instructional guidance they are receiving is appropriate not only for their LEP students, but for all of their students. One teacher commented, “Some of the things you learn you can apply to other kids.” An ESL teacher expressed his conviction that “there’s no such thing as ESL teaching. It’s just teaching.” He added that the training he had completed helped him with his teaching.

Gardner County has achieved limited success in its efforts to build the capacity of ESL teachers to serve as resources to classroom teachers serving LEP students. During the first Lab School, the ESL teachers fulfilled that role, conducting demonstration lessons for classroom teachers and providing feedback to the classroom teachers on the lessons they designed. Beyond the Lab School, however, the necessary mechanisms, such as shared planning time and release time, are not yet in place to allow them to provide ongoing assistance to classroom teachers. However, some ESL and classroom teachers make efforts to plan together and work as a team to meet the needs of LEP students.

In Tyson County, other schools have begun to take an interest in programs incubated within the focus schools. One of the focus schools launched a thoughtful approach to reaching out and meeting

parents of LEP students, and teachers say they have a better understanding of the cultural and emotional needs of their students. This emphasis on parent involvement is spreading to all of the schools in the district, and should improve school-parent communication. Other schools are interested in copying the special meeting for ESL parents on educational issues, in reaching out to ESL parents for regular parent-teacher organization meetings, and expanding their supply of bilingual materials for children and parents to use at home together. The other Tyson ESL focus school concentrated on increasing understanding of the LEP students' culture, and interest in participating in the World View program is also spreading to other schools in the district.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

Respondents in North Carolina identified their limited access to the center's services as the major barrier to the delivery of high-quality, effective technical assistance. They would like more teachers to participate in the services that ESCORT provides, and some of the teachers would like to attend the summer Lab Schools every year instead of rotating different teachers through them. With limited time and the center's commitments in other states, the assistance has reached only a limited audience.

ESCORT staff identified another barrier: district readiness for change. "Being ready for change is not a straight line, it's a critical mass," one staff member said. Many districts lack that critical mass, which is often generated by a handful of teachers in a school and their principal getting fed up with the status quo. Without that readiness, he added, many districts do not benefit from the assistance that the centers can provide.

Summary

The Region IV Comprehensive Center, relying heavily on the expertise of its partner, ESCORT, provided assistance related to ESL instruction to 23 districts, organized into three clusters, in North Carolina. In Tyson County, the center has directed its efforts toward two focus schools that have the highest number of LEP students in the county. In contrast, Gardner County concentrated its efforts on preparing ESL teachers to serve as in-school resources to classroom teachers. The centerpiece of the center's assistance is the Lab School model, which presents theory, models the use of specific strategies, provides opportunities for application and experimentation, and offers follow-up support. In 1999, the center sponsored two Lab Schools for participation across all three clusters, as well as a series of workshops on cultural differences between Mexican and U.S. students. Some of the districts hope to use the center in the future to develop district ESL plans, to carry out effective workshops, and to serve

additional middle schools. Center assistance was praised for being timely, relevant, and practical, and center staff were appreciated for their expertise and attention to local needs and interests.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

The Reading Success Network in San Bernardino and Orange Counties, Calif.

Overview

The Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center (SCCAC) launched the Reading Success Network (RSN) in 1996 as one of its four core initiatives.¹ The goal of the RSN is to improve student achievement in reading in grades K-3 by developing a cadre of school-level coaches to support classroom teachers' efforts to improve instruction.² In the words of one SCCAC staff member, "The real challenge for the RSN is to help schools develop an infrastructure to support principals, coaches, and teachers to facilitate change in practices." The RSN services are targeted to these coaches or, more recently, to small teams from individual schools.

The RSN is not an intervention; instead, it represents a set of strategies and ideas that coaches and teachers can choose to incorporate as part of their instructional repertoires. Coaches may be regular classroom teachers or school-based literacy coordinators with few classroom responsibilities. Training and technical assistance offered by SCCAC through the RSN include the following five components:

- ***Diagnosis of reading skills.*** RSN trains coaches in the use of assessment tools such as alternate ranking, alphabet and sound recognition, and phoneme awareness.
- ***Intervention strategies.*** RSN trains coaches to help teachers plan intervention strategies aligned with reading assessment tools for students in grades K-3.
- ***Data analysis to inform instruction.*** RSN trains coaches to help teachers examine demographic, process, and outcome data for instructional decision making.
- ***Coaching for results.*** RSN coaches learn how to "coach" classroom teachers by establishing trust, being an active listener, asking effective questions, and conducting group discussions.

¹ In late 1998, the entire Comprehensive Center network adopted the RSN as a network-wide initiative. The RSN was originally developed in Southern California by SCCAC.

² Subsequent to our data collection, SCCAC staff reported that the Center is responding to requests from the field to expand the RSN to include grades 4-6.

- **Support network.** RSN supports meetings for coaches to (1) exchange information about reading programs, activities, research-based models; (2) model and practice skills with one another; and (3) share products and assessments.

In addition, the SCCAC and its partner county offices of education disseminate a variety of materials and information about current practice and upcoming literacy-related activities and initiatives through the RSN.³ Typically, RSN training activities take place in regional locations or a county building. According to SCCAC staff, the SCCAC is responsible for designing the initial training series, and RSN coaches and principals have a say in selecting the topics and issues addressed in network and principals' meetings.

SCCAC designed the RSN in cooperation with staff from the eight counties in its region. According to SCCAC reports from Summer 1999, the RSN now includes 329 active coaches from 211 schools throughout the eight counties.

For this case study, SCCAC staff recommended that Policy Studies Associates (PSA) visit schools in San Bernardino and Orange Counties. In these two counties PSA interviewed staff in the county offices of education, three school districts, and five schools. At each school, PSA interviewed at least one RSN coach, the principal or assistant principal, and a group of K-3 teachers. PSA also reviewed training materials and other documents related to the RSN.

I. State and Local Context

Reading is a priority in the state of California. In addition, during the past decade the reading wars have raged between advocates of the whole language approach and advocates of phonics. Only in the past few years have people been able to come to some agreement around approaches that blend both sets of strategies. According to Los Angeles County Office of Education staff and staff at the SCCAC, the RSN evolved from the reading debates as a practical approach to helping teachers in the lower elementary grades improve their skills at teaching reading and improving student reading skills. As one county office staff member commented, "The RSN includes the strengths of both of these approaches and gives teachers a good set of tools to choose from."

Many of the key features of the RSN were modeled on the San Bernardino Early Literacy Training program (SanBELT), which was intended to support improved instruction in reading and writing

³ The SCCAC is organized as a partnership of the eight Southern California county offices of education. These agencies provide various training and other support services to the school districts in their respective counties. Hence, the SCCAC takes full advantage of the existing service and dissemination networks and uses its resources to leverage existing resources in the county offices.

in the county's schools. SanBELT was developed by the Deputy Superintendent in the San Bernardino County Office of Education. She also serves as a member of the SCCAC's RSN Committee, which is one of the four committees that plan and oversee major center initiatives. According to SCCAC staff, one of the early tasks of the RSN Committee was to extend the SanBELT model by developing the data analysis, coaching, and intervention strategies included in RSN training and other activities.

In addition to state and local emphasis on improving reading achievement, it is important to note that California's class-size reduction statutes were aimed at decreasing the student-teacher ratio in the lower elementary grades to create an immediate need for a large number of new teachers. Because of these class size reduction initiatives, the schools PSA visited employ a significant number of uncertified and provisional teachers as well as a number of teachers who are actually serving as interns. In these schools, professional development and other support activities, particularly those that help interns and new teachers develop basic classroom instructional skills, assume particular importance.

II. Establishing the RSN in Southern California

Role of the Comprehensive Center

The RSN Committee of the SCCAC, which comprises SCCAC staff and language arts consultants from each of the eight county offices of education, has overall responsibility for the RSN and, as noted above, played a significant role in the early design of the initiative. SCCAC staff note that the RSN Committee "meets to share successful strategies for supporting the work of RSN coaches and principals; writes and develops training and networking materials and continuously works to deepen the implementation of RSN training components." In addition, staff report that the RSN materials "are now cross-referenced to the California state curriculum frameworks and content standards." Finally, the RSN committee meets several times a year to plan future activities.

In the context of the RSN, the SCCAC does not build relationships with individual schools, and in general, the teachers with whom PSA spoke knew little, if anything, about the center. SCCAC staff and county office staff agree that this is how it should be. School staff are most likely to see the county offices of education as the source of the training and materials they receive through the RSN. This view is completely consistent with the overall organization of the center, which, as noted above, is a collaboration among the county offices of education in Southern California. As one county office staff member explained: "When we first started working with the center, the county superintendents wanted people to see themselves receiving seamless services. We have been successful. People don't recognize the center by name."

Role of the County Offices of Education

The county offices of education have basic responsibility for RSN activities in their counties and exercise considerable latitude in how they invest center resources, including funds, training materials, and SCCAC expertise, in the RSN. For example, in the 1998-99 school year, at the time of the site visit, RSN participants in San Bernardino had just completed an extensive institute that focused on writing as a component of literacy. Participants in Orange County reported that their training had focused on reading. These differences may be accounted for by the preferences and needs of the schools and districts in each of the partner county offices of education.

Recruiting Districts and Schools

The San Bernardino County Office of Education and the Orange County County Office of Education recruited local sites (districts and their schools) differently. San Bernardino County brought together district representatives for a three-day event to discuss how to merge the county's former reading initiative, SanBELT, with RSN. It was assumed that that RSN would institutionalize SanBELT by: (1) providing diversified training opportunities for administrators and classroom teachers; (2) facilitating peer coaching at the district and school level; and (3) valuing literacy teachers at the school level. In Orange County, district administrators met with the county office staff member responsible for working with the RSN in the county to learn about the components of the program, the resources available, networking opportunities, and the application process. In other words, the "thrust came from the county," noted one district representative. In her view, the county role in organizing the RSN is not "to push [RSN] as a program," but to "use the center's resources [which the center makes available to the county offices of education] to leverage other resources to provide the kind of scaffolding needed to deliver resources" to schools. This, in turn, helped districts and schools "to establish higher levels of trust with [county offices of education]."

In general, the county offices of education invite schools that are dedicated to improving reading instruction to submit an application for inclusion in the network. The counties seek schools that serve large numbers of poor students and schools that operate Title I schoolwide programs. According to center materials, schools demonstrate their capacity to implement RSN by completing an application process, which requires schools to carry out the following:

- Identify an RSN school team, including the principal, selected literacy coach (a classroom teacher or literacy coordinator), a classroom teacher, and a parent or parent coordinator;
- Complete a site process data sheet describing the school's schoolwide and classroom intervention strategies, assessment indicators, grade levels, and expectations of RSN;

- Include a copy of the School's Accountability Report card and the school's Reading/Literacy Component Plan; and
- Demonstrate school and district commitment by providing a statement of school and district support.

Each school is encouraged to recruit two to four staff members to be trained as RSN coaches. According to a SCCAC staff member, the inclusion of school teams in the network is an important change in the structure of the RSN:

We've shifted from a single coach per site to a team of coaches per site, depending on the size of the school. This represents an important shift because it signals a greater commitment and involvement by a school from the beginning. Previously, coaches and principals attended these activities and the coaches then worked alone in their schools.

Participating Schools

According to data provided by the SCCAC, there are 211 schools with 329 coaches actively involved in the RSN in the eight counties. The center counts a school as active if the RSN coaches attend the RSN training and at least two network meetings a year. County office of education staff in San Bernardino and Orange Counties reported a total of somewhere between 150 and 175 schools in the network in these two counties. They also estimated that between a quarter and third of these schools could be considered actively engaged in the network.

According to data provided by the center, the majority of RSN schools are Title I schools, with more than half of the RSN schools enrolling student populations in which 50 percent or more of the students are poor. In addition, half of the RSN schools serve student populations in which a quarter or more of the children have been designated as students with limited English proficiency. The RSN is targeted to high-poverty and low-performing schools. One of the eight counties makes this a formal requirement for participating in the RSN.

In two of the five schools visited in late Spring 1999, teachers reported that they had begun their participation in the RSN six to eight weeks before the visit. Teachers in two San Bernardino County schools reported much longer engagement in training, but were not aware of when SanBELT had ended and RSN had begun. The RSN is designed as an annual sequence that includes training to induct people into the network. Further, according to SCCAC staff, most schools join the network at the beginning of the school year. At the same time, the reported differences in participation suggest that, for at least some of the participants, the RSN is more of a menu of activities and services.

III. RSN Activities

Portfolio of Products and Services

RSN training and support activities are designed to help coaches and principals work with teachers to improve students' reading and literacy skills and to bolster teacher training and professional development in reading. The key RSN components are as follows:

- ***Diagnosis of reading skills.*** This initial stage introduces coaches to multiple reading assessments, including alternate ranking, alphabet and sound recognition, and phoneme awareness. The primary focus is to train coaches on how to use assessment tools, when to use assessments tools, and how to share information with teachers.
- ***Intervention strategies.*** This component models a process for coaches to use with teachers in thinking about intervention strategies aligned with reading assessment tools for students in grades K-3. Intervention strategies include organizing one-on-one, collecting diagnostic information frequently, reading instruction five to three times a week, and providing tutorial help. The RSN framework combines whole language and phonics approaches to reading instruction.
- ***Data analysis to inform instruction.*** During this phase, coaches learn how to help teachers use demographic, process, and outcome data for instructional decision making. For example, they are trained to encourage teachers to use achievement data to select appropriate intervention strategies by focusing them on such questions as: "Which students' needs are being met? Which students are having problems?"
- ***Coaching for results.*** Coaches and teachers work together to agree on ways for: (1) collecting data to inform instruction; (2) selecting assessment and intervention strategies to improve student learning; and (3) providing teachers with tools and skills to become effective reading teachers. Moreover, coaches learn how to create a "learning community" with classroom teachers by establishing trust, being an active listener, asking effective questions, and conducting group discussions.
- ***Support network.*** This component focuses on building ongoing "systems of support" for coaches through follow-up meetings and professional development opportunities. The emphasis is on providing a venue for coaches to: (1) exchange information about reading programs, activities, research-based models; (2) model and practice skills with one another; and (3) share products and assessments.

According to center staff, the standard portfolio of RSN training and services includes: (1) an initial training series, (2) ongoing coaches' meetings, and (3) principals' meetings. SCCAC staff say that for schools and coaches to be considered active members of the network, participation in the initial training is "not elective . . . however, [participation] in follow-up services and network meetings is elective."

The initial training series includes:

- Overviews—A team from each new RSN school receives a day-long introduction to the RSN.
- Data analysis—This segment focuses on helping participants review and understand the meaning of disaggregated data on student reading achievement.
- Diagnosis and assessment—Coaches are trained to use of *Taking a Reading* (a diagnostic tool kit provided by the RSN) instruments. The training emphasizes how to use the tools, when to use the tools, and how to share the information with the teachers at their schools. The training addresses the needs of English-only students and students with limited English proficiency.
- Intervention strategies—Coaches experience a process that they can use to involve teachers in brainstorming to form effective intervention strategies related to data derived from the assessment process.
- Coaching—Participants learn about peer coaching and cognitive coaching as strategies for working with their colleagues to more effectively diagnose student reading problems, develop solutions to these problems, and engage in the professional study and learning necessary to sustain the classroom improvements.

Ongoing coaches' contact meetings are convened by the county offices of education and SCCAC staff about every six to eight weeks. The general purpose of these sessions is to review new research and instructional strategies and to provide updates on reading and related issues in the counties and at the state level. These sessions allow coaches and others to discuss which strategies have worked and which have not and to review the reasons why. Each year, the topics of these meetings are tailored to the needs and interests of the county RSN networks.

Principal meetings, also convened by the county office staff who work on the RSN, provide forums for principals to discuss their questions and concerns about reading instruction and related professional development activities. These meetings also serve as study groups in which principals can discuss current books and broad issues related to school reform.

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to RSN Participants

Alignment with standards. As mentioned above, the RSN emerged out of serious concerns about reading, particularly in the early grades. This is consistent with state and local perspectives on reading instruction as well as teacher training and professional development in this area. Echoing the comments from a number of people with whom PSA spoke, a literacy instructor from San Bernardino said, “RSN facilitates uniformity in reading instruction across counties and the state.” Stated differently, the center’s “eight-county partnership” is a venue for county offices of education to be apprised of state initiatives, and to exchange information and resources.

At the local level, for example, San Bernardino County’s reading initiative, SanBELT, was “morphed into RSN,” said one vice principal. County administrators assumed that RSN would institutionalize SanBELT by: (1) providing diversified training opportunities for administrators and classroom teachers; (2) facilitating peer coaching at the district and school level; and (3) valuing literacy teachers at the school level. One Orange County principal explained that “RSN fits well with the district’s philosophy on how to use data to drive curriculum [and] reinforces [teachers’] pre-existing skills [for example, collecting and using data to modify curriculum]. This is particularly helpful in English language development, a schoolwide focus.”

Principals and school district staff whom PSA interviewed consistently reported that “RSN training and materials are consistent with what we are trying to do in our schools. These things fit in very well and they help us accomplish our tasks.” In PSA’s view, these comments underscore the SCCAC’s claim that “the RSN is not an intervention. [Rather], it provides a set of strategies to improve reading instruction.”

Theoretical framework and research base. The RSN is firmly grounded in two areas of research. The first area is reading and reading instruction. RSN materials and training draws heavily on this research and, as noted above, combines attention to phonics and the whole language approach. The second area is coaching—peer coaching and cognitive coaching—as a strategy for facilitating individual professional learning and development. In addition to its reliance on research, the RSN depends heavily on “expert” practitioners in data analysis, intervention strategies, assessment tools, and instructional goals. It is important note that these “experts” are not always center staff. The county offices of education assume some responsibility for identifying presenters and trainers.

All interviewees at the school level (RSN coaches and classroom teachers) remarked positively about the RSN training. As voiced by one RSN coach and agreed by all, the “RSN network has provided quality research and presenters.” It is a system of support that helps “administrators and teachers to stay on the cutting edge,” commented another RSN coach.

Scope, intensity, and duration of the assistance. As is sometimes the case with ongoing training and technical assistance activities, it is important to distinguish between activities and services provided and actual participation. Based on interviews with principals and teachers in the five schools, participation in these activities is uneven. (In several cases, schools were new to the RSN and teachers had not had the opportunity to participate in the complete set of activities.)

The people interviewed generally thought that the amount of training and other support available through the RSN was adequate. Several people did indicate, however, that they would like to see RSN training and activities extended to include the upper elementary and middle grades. (As we noted above, the RSN is being modified to include grades 4-6.)

Utility. Based on our interviews with teachers and principals, schools use the RSN training in three ways. First, the RSN coaches and teachers who participated in the training activities report using many of the strategies that they learned or read about in the RSN materials in their classrooms. In addition, newer participants also said that they were looking forward to trying some of the ideas and strategies that they had learned about. Second, the RSN coaches report using the coaching strategies they learned to help other teachers address issues and problems in reading instruction. Third, RSN coaches report using the coaching strategies to work more generally as mentors to new or inexperienced teachers. Two of the principals saw this as particularly important in their schools because of the large number of uncertified and provisional teachers as well as the number of teachers who are actually serving as interns. It is important to note that California's class-size reduction statutes were aimed at decreasing the student teacher ratio in the lower elementary grades, creating an immediate need for large number of new teachers.

Capacity building. The RSN is intended to build school-level capacity to diagnose problems in reading instruction and identify and implement solutions to these problems. Despite this goal, the absence of school-level follow-up and support means that, in the end, the success of the RSN will depend on the willingness of school staffs and their leaders to persist in using the RSN strategies to improve reading outcomes for all children. As one Orange County principal stated, "A program is only effective if it continues without me. My job is to shore up resources to help new teachers. The [RSN] tool kit provides assessments and prescriptions to do so." More important, though, according to this principal, are the coaches. "The cognitive coaching piece would be lost if coaches left. This underscores the need for training more coaches and continuing the cycle of training."

Other Sources of Assistance

When PSA asked respondents about the advantages of the RSN over other kinds of training and dissemination, they said that the RSN package of services and materials is comprehensive and that the overall quality is better than what they usually see. For most of the people interviewed, a key indicator of the quality of the materials and services that they receive is that they are practical. For them, the materials and training they receive through the RSN have immediate applicability in their schools and classrooms.

Plans for Continuing Assistance

The teachers and principals interviewed all said that their school goals include improving instruction and student outcomes in reading and writing. Because these respondents have a fundamentally instrumental view of the RSN activities and services and because they value the activities and services, they will likely continue their participation as long as it suits them and as long as the RSN continues to operate.

From the SCCAC perspective, continued support for the RSN meets the needs of the eight partner county offices of education. In our view, the challenge in the future will be for the RSN to continue to provide high-quality services to participants who have been in the network for a year or more, while at the same time providing the initial cycle of services to new participants.

IV. Effects

SCCAC staff report that they conduct ongoing formative evaluations of RSN implementation, which they use to modify training activities to meet the needs of the RSN coaches, their principals, and their students. According to the center:

The program is evaluated annually, and all coaches are asked to keep journals in which they log their coaching activity. In addition to coaches' journals, an annual survey tracks RSN implementation at the site level, materials used, kinds of support provided to others, and training/contact meetings attended. . . . We have learned that this is a schoolwide effort that requires a system of support that includes all members of the school.

Early data from the center's external evaluation suggest that while the RSN activities get positive assessments from participants, the number of schools in which the coaches have assumed significant roles is rather small.

Customer Satisfaction

Everyone interviewed gave the RSN high marks for practicality and utility. As one principal put it, “RSN gives us the tools to accept responsibility [for improving literacy instruction].” A second principal suggested that “RSN serves as an impetus for institutionalizing analysis, reflection, and change.” Finally, a county office staff member asserted that “RSN provides a structure to institutionalize change.”

A number of respondents singled out the coaching training as especially helpful. For them, this training equips administrators and classroom teachers to become “solution-oriented, rather than problem-oriented,” in addressing problems in reading instruction. Reiterating this sentiment, one classroom teacher noted and all agreed that “RSN is not a program, but a process to find best practices to help our schools and teachers do our best.” “RSN is a network to access tools,” said another teacher. “RSN is a strong network that provides teachers and administrators to stay on the cutting edge,” confirmed another.

In short, interviewees agreed that RSN is an excellent resource to guide and inform reading instruction through staff development opportunities and access to available resources. Likewise, RSN builds on individuals’ existing skills by “changing perspectives and opening people’s minds” to teaching differently.

Increased Capacity to Deliver Technical Assistance to Schools

The goal of the RSN is to increase school-level capacity to improve reading instruction and student outcomes by training a cadre of coaches who can work effectively with K-3 teachers. The RSN does not focus on district capacity issues, except insofar as it contributes to capacity in individual schools.

Improved Teaching and Learning

When PSA asked teachers and principals how RSN contributes to their work, they say that it provides a wealth of information about data analysis, effective practice, assessment, and coaching. Based on interviews with teachers, the news about specific impact and effects of the RSN on classroom varies. Teachers in the other three schools reported trying a number of the strategies that they had learned about through the RSN, either from training activities or from the materials that they received. Teachers and principals in these three schools report increased attention to analysis of student data to inform instructional planning and say that RSN training in this area has been especially helpful to them. In Orange County, a district administrator observed that “before, teachers’ feet were in cement . . . they would give tests, but never looked at the results.” According to this administrator and two school

principals, “Teachers [now] recognize the power of data and assessments.” As noted above, teachers in two of the schools had only recently begun their participation in the RSN. They were excited about what they had heard and learned but also said that there hadn’t been much time to really try things in their classrooms. In one school, the teachers reported that they were still practicing some of the coaching strategies on one another and were waiting until the new (1999-2000) school year to try them out on other teachers. Much of this variation may be attributable to the variations in the amount and duration of participation in the RSN.

In one school, the principal, the coaches, and several new teachers extol the benefits of the coaching strategies. New teachers who had been “coached” reported that the coaching had helped them through a difficult first year of teaching. As one of these teachers explained, the coaches “don’t tell us what to do. They help us figure it out for ourselves, but they also support us and don’t let us make big mistakes.” According to the coaches, the teachers, and the principal, this approach resulted in the new teachers developing poise and confidence in their classrooms as well as the ability to reflect on what they were doing and figure out ways to do it better.

In the end, our respondents consistently pointed out that the RSN is an excellent resource to guide and inform reading instruction through staff development opportunities and access to available resources, according to all interviewees. Likewise, RSN builds on individuals’ existing skills by “changing perspectives and opening people’s minds” to teaching differently. For them, the RSN provides good ideas to review and consider for their own schools and classrooms. It does not *prescribe* specific strategies, but it does encourage a perspective that emphasizes learning from student data and other data and using these data-based observations and insights to inform choices from a broad range of strategies to improve performance.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

The RSN is primarily a training and dissemination activity. The SCCAC and its partner county offices of education provide and facilitate a variety of activities for coaches and other members of school staffs, and they disseminate a variety of supporting materials. The only discernable limit on this strategy is the capacity of the SCCAC and the county offices of education to continue to provide training and materials to current participants while at the same time increasing the number of new schools in the network. Alternatively, augmenting the RSN training with more direct over-the-shoulder assistance to schools or even to district staff to increase their capacity to work with schools would represent a major change and one that is almost certainly impossible under current resource levels.

An important strategic issue for the future of the RSN concerns the selection of coaches. According to the general design of the RSN strategy, schools are invited to designate their strongest

reading teacher as a coach. In practice, the results of this selection process are uneven. As we learned during our visit, some coaches are California mentor teachers who are responsible for assisting other teachers and who are typically highly skilled teachers in their own right as well as effective mentors. In one school—a district professional development school—the RSN participants were new teachers who were very uncertain about the prospects of working with their colleagues and had not yet received any training in coaching strategies. In another school, the coaches were literacy lead teachers who welcomed the coaching training and said they had been able to apply some of the skills with their colleagues. In a fourth school—a school that was just a year old at the time of the site visit—the coaches had been selected from the ranks of classroom teachers with the expectation from the principal that they would assume some leadership for instructional programs in the school. As noted above, this group anticipated using their coaching skills with other teachers for the first time in the 1999-2000 school year. These differences in skills, experience, and perspectives suggest that some variation—perhaps a significant amount—in how these individuals work with their colleagues, what they actually focus on, and how effective they are is almost certain.

Summary

The Reading Success Network is a set of strategies and ideas that coaches and teachers can use to improve reading instruction for students in grades K-3. SCCAC works through its eight partner county offices of education to deliver RSN training to coaches and to disseminate RSN materials. The center does not establish relationships with individual schools; rather, the schools perceive the source of their assistance to be the county offices of education. Among the eight counties, 211 schools with 329 coaches are actively involved in the RSN, and the vast majority of these schools are high-poverty and low-performing. The center's portfolio of services regarding RSN includes an initial training series and meetings with coaches and principals. According to respondents, RSN received high marks for its practicality as well as for the model's coaching component.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

Richmond Elementary School, Florida

Overview

As one strategy for organizing and delivering services, the Region XIV Comprehensive Center at Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Tampa chose six “model schools” in Florida to receive intensive services. These schools enroll high proportions of students who live in poverty, speak English with limited proficiency, move often with their families for seasonal farm work, and scored low on the statewide test. Richmond Elementary School, one of the six model schools, is located in an area known as the “strawberry capital of the world.” It serves from 700 to 900 students (depending on the season) in grades pre K-5 and in a program for students with special needs. From a pool of schools suggested by the Florida State Department of Education on the basis of their high risk factors and low performance on accountability measures, center staff identified Richmond as a school ready to engage in a partnership designed to improve achievement through comprehensive reform.

For the past three years, the Region XIV Comprehensive Center has worked with Richmond on several different initiatives designed to address student needs. Sponsored by the center, about one-third of Richmond teachers participate in the Continuous Progress Initiative disseminated by the Anchin Center at the University of South Florida (USF). Center staff also helped make the migrant program more effective, worked to improve the skills of teachers and teaching assistants in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, engaged volunteers from USF in tutoring for the America Reads Challenge, launched teacher-led study groups that investigate topics relevant to instruction, and involved teachers in the Reading Success Network (RSN).

Data collection for this case study consisted of a two-day site visit, which included individual and group interviews with about 10 Richmond teachers and administrators, classroom observations, and tours of the school designed to demonstrate features of different instructional programs.

I. Local Context

Richmond Elementary School is located in a rural area outside the suburban fringe of a big city. As one teacher explained, “Ours is a very rural community, with lots of trailer parks, lots of farms, very spread out. People move when the rent is due. Only 5 percent of our kids walk to school.” The school

enrolls about 900 students, of whom almost 80 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and almost half have limited proficiency in English. The children represent farm owners and migrant families, who account for the school's 70 percent annual mobility rate. Richmond has the highest student attendance rate in the county despite its transient student population, according to the principal. Richmond's staff speak of successful efforts to keep migrant families enrolled for longer periods in order to reduce academic losses for their children.

In addition to the regular elementary program for grades K-5, the school offers Head Start classes for three- and four-year-olds, a separate special education program for severely handicapped students, a health clinic, and a family resource center. Despite the presence of these comprehensive programs and all the children and adults they involve, the campus is spacious and clean, characterized by pleasant order and productive activity. The one-story buildings include open space and conventional teaching areas clustered around grassy courtyards that are linked by sidewalks.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

Richmond's staff defines their major goal simply: to improve students' academic achievement. Key strategies include building a productive school climate, using enriched academic units as the basis for instruction, and encouraging more meaningful parent involvement. Their approach includes improving capacity to serve students who are learning English as a second language, adapting instruction to accommodate variation in students' readiness to learn content within grade levels, and aligning curriculum more closely with Florida's Sunshine State Standards.

The school is most concerned about enhancing educational services for its highly mobile migrant population, which is generally poor and limited in English proficiency. The school offers ESL instruction and has only modest capacity for bilingual instruction. Because many students' families are in distress for one reason or another, the school also has a Head Start program, a clinic, and support services for parents.

Progress in Implementing ESEA Reforms

According to a district federal program officer, under the provisions of Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), Richmond's long-time concern for the whole child is finally able to be expressed in instructional programs. Over the years, the staff experienced unusually low turnover and close relationships with parents. Under the old rules prior to 1994, however, Richmond operated targeted assistance programs that served migrant students, those with limited English proficiency, those with

special needs, and those whose reading scores were below a certain percentile (often as low as the 15th) with separately operated and funded programs. The federal program director commented that it seemed at times as if programs competed for custody of students to maintain funding. The system did not serve all children well, nor did it reflect Richmond's comprehensive concern with students' welfare, although scores for students who did participate reflected improvement. Under the new rules of IASA, the programs of instruction are coordinated and blended so that every child who needs support receives it, and the most vulnerable students are not routinely pulled out for special help. "We had proven we could spend money" with separate targeted programs, he said, but he felt that the old top-down management strategy was not best for students. "The new program is child-centered. Richmond has a great link with parents. It's a caring community of staff and students. Richmond is able to take advantage of the new law to its fullest extent."

The center did not create Richmond's caring community spirit nor was it responsible for taking the initiative in program coordination. When it came into its partnership with Richmond, the center built on the school's existing strengths and helped weave together programs to provide more effective support.

Customers' Purposes for Seeking External Assistance

The center initially approached Richmond as part of its plan to concentrate its limited resources on a few schools. Although the school did not solicit the center's assistance, it happily accepted it when offered. Richmond's assistant principal reports that the school has since asked the center for help in raising the school's scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), the new state assessment tied to the Sunshine State Standards. Each year, the state raises the performance standards at each grade level, making it more difficult for students to meet state standards. The school wants to avoid designation as a "critically low" school under the state's accountability system because that status would eventually make Richmond subject to state takeover, and its students could be given vouchers to attend private schools if their parents choose.

A major concern for the school is preparing its migrant and ESL students to take the FCAT. "The problem," according to the counselor, "is that everyone has to take the FCAT. It doesn't matter who you are. A newly arrived child from Mexico has to take it. We're not on a level playing field. Our kids lead difficult lives. It's hard to get a migrant kid to explain in English how he did a math problem." According to the principal, "Given the center's resources, we look to them to help us with our bilingual and migrant populations. After all, [those populations are] 53 percent of who we are." Another major concern is reducing the student retention rate, especially in the first grade, where most retention occurs.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's Relationship with the Site

Working with a handful of “model” schools was a feature of Region XIV Comprehensive Center’s original proposal to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Once established, the center negotiated with the state of Florida to identify a pool of candidate schools and then investigated those to see which were best prepared to join in a partnership. Richmond was on the state’s list of high-need, low-performing schools. The center held forums in three locations in the state and invited 15 schools that were recommended for the program. At the forums, center staff explained what kinds of help they could offer; interested schools could then request a site visit by a center team charged with making the final selection of six schools. A center staff member explained, “Our goal was to match our expertise in these areas with the schools that could benefit from such expertise.”

During the site visits, the team interviewed the principal, looking for evidence of a positive leadership style that could sustain optimism during the improvement process. They also spoke with parents and teachers to ascertain their interest in having the center’s help and to identify community institutions that might be willing to join the partnership. Based on the center’s assessment of Richmond’s readiness for relatively intensive technical assistance, in October 1996 the center invited the school to enter into partnership. The school accepted. “From the very start, they told us they weren’t offering us money,” commented the principal. “I said, ‘If not money, tell us what else you can get for us.’” The nature and range of services to the school have developed over the period of their collaboration in response to perceptions of need.

From the beginning, the center contact person made herself welcome at the school, and over time the school developed a relationship with the center based on the belief that it is a full-service partner, an especially helpful member of its professional “family.” “We built a relationship with the center . . . and that relationship has evolved over time,” noted the principal. “Now, we feel like the center is a part of us.”

Planning Services

In December 1996, shortly after selecting Richmond as a model school, center staff met with the school’s leadership team—a group of staff members chosen by the school to share governance responsibilities—to establish a plan for its assistance to the school. According to a teacher at Richmond,

“The whole first meeting spent with the center was simply a time for us to narrow our goals.” The principal added, “The leadership team’s goals are what the center based its involvement on. The center asked us what we wanted, and we told them. The school dictated the terms of service.” The early conversations helped the leadership team determine what early focuses for their reform work might lay the best foundations for change and how the center’s resources could support their work in school improvement. Migrant services and help for students with limited English proficiency were high on the priority list.

In general, a designated contact from the center works with the school leadership team and/or the principal to identify needs that the center can address. The same person—one of the center’s two ESCORT staffers—has performed this role from the start. However, other center staff and some outside consultants can and do work with the school when their expertise can help solve a problem. In addition to planning for the year’s activities, the center and school staff meet regularly to respond to new challenges or to adjust existing plans. Although the arrangement with Richmond is particularly flexible because of the proximity of the school to the center’s Tampa office, it is typical of the center’s arrangements with the other model schools in Florida. That is, the schools work with center staff to identify needs and the resources to meet them, and then the center assembles the materials and experiences necessary and/or links the school with other agencies that can help. Access to the specialized “tool kits” of the center’s partner organizations—including the second language expertise of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and the migrant education resources of ESCORT at the State University of New York at Oneonta—enables staff to respond quickly and effectively to needs experienced by Richmond.

The center has involved Richmond staff in a variety of activities, some drawn from the center’s portfolio, and others secured especially for Richmond at the school’s request. For example, the Richmond school participates in the Continuous Progress Initiative sponsored by the Anchin Center at USF, which is an agency partner of the center, and in the RSN, which is a programmatic activity of the center. The center has also provided training and sent Richmond staff to training events conducted by other agencies in the areas of bilingual education and teaching English as a second language, extended learning time, school climate enhancement, leadership, and migrant education. The center’s core staff was chosen for ability to provide coverage for the typical challenges posed by the region’s student population: a need to learn English and high rates of migrancy and poverty. Similarly, its portfolio of standard offerings reflects familiarity with the kinds of assistance requests that are typical in the region.

One particularly good example of adaptation of center strengths to school needs, in the view of school staff, was in the area of ESL. Although the Richmond staff included trained ESL teachers and paraprofessionals, they were not experiencing the success they expected. Center staff were well equipped to provide routine professional development in ESL instruction, but this appeared to demand advanced

training. The center specialist who responded to the school's request first visited the school and interviewed the staff. She discovered that their needs were twofold: to upgrade skills and to improve communications between certified and support staff. With the help of her colleagues at CAL, she developed a skills curriculum appropriate to push the development of experienced staff. She also worked with the lead ESL teacher specialist to resolve the communications problems between the certified and support staff. While these interventions were well within the span of the Center's reach, they were not ready-made, but had to be adapted to the conditions at Richmond. This instance also highlights how the center and its clients benefit from the partnership among organizations that provide core staff.

III. Services to the Local Site

Portfolio of Products and Services

Continuous Progress and other Model Schools Activities. In addition to participating in the Model Schools project, Richmond Elementary elected to send teacher volunteers to learn the Continuous Progress (CP) model promoted by USF's Anchin Center. Teams of teachers either share students or "loop" with them for a period of years, offering instruction in core subjects at various skill levels to cross-age groups. The key to the CP team structure is flexible grouping patterns. A whole group may consist of children in second and third grades, but teachers are free to form smaller groups that are designed for individualized attention, instruction, and review.

The Comprehensive Center underwrote the cost of the training sessions for teachers from the model schools through its contract with the Anchin Center. Only teachers who want to implement this model attend training, and they form a "school within the school." The CP initiative involves a variety of schools from across the state, so Richmond's participation ensures its membership in a learning community with diverse resources and experiences but a common interest in meeting Florida's Sunshine State Standards. The Anchin Center occasionally holds cluster meetings of CP teachers in the area.

The CP teams at Richmond have begun looping their fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. The principal believes that it is better to allow teachers to work with the same students over a multi-year period because that establishes a continuity of care and teaching that is especially important for migrant students. Language arts teachers teach the 4th grade in the morning and the 5th grade in the afternoon, while math/science teachers keep the opposite schedule. This arrangement can provide extra stability for students who move often, but return at regular intervals over a period of a year.

According to Richmond's counselor, teachers have formed two CP teams that serve about a third of Richmond's students. The remaining two-thirds of the students are taught in traditional, self-contained classrooms. Asked if the CP structure would expand to all classrooms, one teacher responded, "We don't know. Some kids need closed spaces." Likewise, some teachers prefer self-contained, single-grade classrooms. Richmond's physical plant easily accommodates both models; some of the small buildings on campus have an open space design well suited to CP, while others are more traditional. Staff and student assignment to CP clusters are voluntary and flexible.

The center also sponsors other activities for participating model schools. Three years ago, the center held its first Model Schools Institute, to which it invited the entire staff of all six model schools to get total faculty commitment to the project. Following that first institute, the center conducted institutes for leadership teams from the six schools. There, teachers and administrators received both theory and practical applications on using standards-based instruction that they shared back in their schools. As a result of these institutes, teachers reported developing instructional units that reflect the state's content standards. One teacher developed units on citizenship and health, and another developed one on money and business. "The standards used to be disconnected, but the standards training from the center taught us how to fit it all together and make it make sense," a teacher said, "I love teaching this way." Another teacher added that "the [center-sponsored] training was one of the few times we've had continuity. The same experts came back to teach us at follow-up institutes. It made me feel like I was part of a huge system of educators; it made me feel important."

Migrant Education. Richmond sits in the center of Florida's strawberry-growing industry. Within the past five or six years, migrant families have begun settling in the area rather than moving at the end of the picking season. School staff believe that this is due in part to the welcoming atmosphere and academic focus provided by the school. With the assistance of the center's ESCORT team members, the school tries to provide migrant families with services that they may not find at schools with smaller migrant populations. School staff help them find access to doctors, legal aid, and Spanish-speaking social workers. The school is aided in its efforts by the fact that some of its teachers used to be migrant workers. One of the school's most successful efforts has been promoting good attendance through parent education and outreach to families of absent children.

America Reads. The center introduced Richmond to the America Reads program. Center staff arranged for high school migrant students who were attending a summer institute at USF to tutor students at Richmond during the summer. The tutors help reduce class size, which can be as high as 20 students, during the school's summer program. With the tutors' assistance, the America Reads program provides more individual attention to participating students. The program expanded during the regular school year to include after-school tutoring by formerly migrant students who attend USF. Since the school instituted

after-school tutoring, fewer students have been held back.

Study Groups. With the center's ongoing support, Richmond teachers formed several study groups that meet regularly to discuss issues related to teaching and learning. Before forming the groups, the leadership team attended a Model Schools Institute to learn the purpose of the groups and strategies for making them productive. Each group, consisting of no more than six members, chooses a particular topic as the group's focus, such as unit development; strategies for the state assessment, FCAT; conflict resolution; technology; mathematics models; and brain-based learning. The groups conduct their own research and share materials and best practices with their fellow teachers. The school uses Title I funding to pay for substitutes, which allows each group to meet once every two weeks. The district is awarding professional development points for recertification to the participants in the study groups. The school's proposal specifies that between meetings, teachers must experiment with new strategies based on the group's research and then report on their experiences to their group members. According to one teacher, "The study group concept may ripple out to the district. Other schools are watching us, and the district is looking at different ways of doing professional development." Center staff attend study group meetings, but Richmond faculty facilitate the meetings themselves, sometimes relying on the center staff members for material help, such as copies of research articles related to the topic of discussion.

ESL and Bilingual Training. The center has conducted extensive ESL training for all Richmond teachers. The school's one ESL teacher supervises the work of all 15 ESL aides, who work in classrooms under the direction of the classroom teacher. Under Florida law, all classroom teachers must complete a specified number of hours of training on ESL instruction. The center offered two initial training sessions and follow-up sessions for classroom teachers on instructional strategies that are effective with students who have limited proficiency in English. The teachers found the strategies, which include modeling and repetition, to be so effective that they began using those strategies with all of their children. The principal was grateful that an outside authority was able to "come in and say things that weren't so easy for the teachers to hear, but she could say it without fear because she was an outsider."

In addition, the center arranged a series of training sessions for the ESL aides. The sessions focused on math, writing, personality conflict management, and on the research basis for ESL instruction. According to ESL staff, the training for the aides was very helpful because it promoted development of strategies for effective collaboration with classroom teachers. Some aides work with up to three teachers, and the aides are often concerned with whether teachers are allowing them to spend enough time with ESL students. The principal noted that "aides feel more valued because they got their own training, which was directly tailored to them and for them. . . . We discovered how useful it was to train our aides."

RSN. The RSN is in its first year at Richmond. Four teachers from Richmond went to USF for 18 hours of training in six sessions stretching from September through November of 1998 and an additional seven meetings of two hours each scheduled monthly through May 1999. They worked closely with a linguist on the components of teaching reading, including phonemic awareness, running records, and guided reading. They then returned to Richmond and held training sessions for the rest of the teachers on their team. According to one teacher who attended the USF training, “We worked as a team to make instruction better. The training helped teachers learn to work with children with reading problems. Sometimes, in a group, you only hear the strongest readers. The kids who are struggling mask their trouble by echoing the strong readers. The RSN training helped us with our low-performing kids.”

Parent Involvement. As a strategy for helping parents with limited English proficiency to reinforce education in the home, Richmond requested that the center develop a video in Spanish that demonstrates to parents how to read and share books with their children. Center staff will produce a similar video in English. The schools uses the videos as part of its parent training.

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to the Site

Alignment with state and local standards. Among the learning opportunities offered to all model schools was participation in ongoing institutes conducted two or three times yearly. These institutes focused on developing instructional units that address state standards. Teachers reported great interest in and satisfaction with the institutes, which prompted Richmond teachers to start reorganizing instruction so that it more directly led to progress relative to state standards. Other initiatives, such as America Reads, ESL training, and the RSN, are offered in ways that show their relevance to state standards in literacy.

Research-based theoretical framework. The center’s training on continuous progress emerged from research conducted at USF by the team that developed the CP model. The reading and LEP programs seem to reflect as much attention to research as the situation will bear. That is, center staff are very careful to tailor assistance to existing faculty strengths and limitations, pushing at their growing edge, but not too fast nor too far. Center staff express respect for a faculty’s right to make its own choices, for example, about how best to teach ESL, but they also challenge mistaken assumptions and exert steady pressure to move toward what center staff identify as more effective strategies. The center staff members ask one another and outside experts for help when they receive requests for assistance in an area that is not part of their repertoire.

Scope, intensity, and duration. The CP program at Richmond has given teachers strategies for

developing integrated instructional units. It has also helped them make decisions about grouping students to maximize the effectiveness of classroom instruction. The center's training on teacher study groups should have a lasting effect on teachers' professional growth, because it focuses their attention on issues of great relevance to their immediate challenges and on resources to help them meet those challenges. For the past two summers, the principal has attended a Leadership Academy for Principals in St. Petersburg, through her relationship with both the Comprehensive Center (which paid for the experience) and the Anchin Center. The Academy focused on the need for educators to have high expectations for every single child, the principal explained, adding, "This is the type of thing that is helpful." Both teachers and administrators report that the range and amount of training are a rich resource for their work.

Utility. About one-third of Richmond's teachers have joined CP teams that are implementing innovative teaching arrangements and instructional units tied to state standards. Virtually all teachers engaged in conversation (about half the faculty) commented appreciatively on the versatility of center staff, the diversity of resources, and the overall helpfulness of the partnership to the teachers' work with children. "The center helps us get our new ideas and initiatives off the ground," said one faculty leader. "The center gives us mounds of resources to take home with us," said a teacher. "The [Sunshine State] Standards used to be disconnected, but the standards training from the center taught us how to do it, how to fit it all together and make it make sense," a third staff member commented.

Capacity building. The center has also contributed to institutional capacity. Leadership training for administrators has helped them become more effective in their own work and learn from colleagues around the state during the Model Schools Institutes, they said. Teachers have also learned how to implement a complex instructional model, adapt curriculum to address state standards, and serve migrant students and students with limited English proficiency more skillfully, according to their testimony about center effects. They also learned presentation and facilitation skills that enabled them to share the content from the institutes with the rest of the faculty. Through the center, Richmond has also learned about grant opportunities and other technical assistance providers that can support its improvement efforts. "The center helps us get our new ideas and initiatives off the ground," the school's counselor noted. "[It] provided us with access to other technical assistance people." Through study groups and the RSN training-of-trainers, teachers are developing greater expertise and skills.

Other Sources of Assistance

School staff identify only the center and their school district central office as sources of assistance. Of the two, school staff members agreed that the center was more useful. According to Richmond's principal, the school district assists the school with testing and evaluation issues, "but as far

as looking out specifically for Richmond, the center has been our champion.” She reports that the school also relies on the center more than the district office to get information about categorical programs. Additionally, the center informs the school of grant opportunities before the district releases the information. The school views the center as the source of everything needed to run a good program, beyond the routine curriculum and assessment help they get from the district.

Through the center, school staff say they have gotten more savvy about where to look for other types of resources. Richmond receives extensive financial assistance from local donors and business partners, including numerous mini-grants from a local education foundation. “Those little grants can really open up some doors,” the principal stressed. “For example, some of our teachers have instituted a reading program whereby they take their students to the local Barnes and Noble and allow the students to pick out one book, which the grant money pays for. The kids get to buy their own books, and most of them have never even set foot in a bookstore before.”

IV. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

Richmond staff are very pleased with the assistance they receive from the center. They are especially grateful for help in establishing school improvement goals and accessing grant and training opportunities. According to the principal, “The center has been a true resource. . . . It took us a while to talk with the center about what we wanted, but we used our conversation with the center to clarify our thinking. It afforded us the opportunity to have [the center] send us stuff about grants and to help us work with our migrant kids.” The school’s counselor reinforced the principal’s observation: “[The center] helps us brainstorm about what services Richmond may want or need. I joked that the center knew everything or, more realistically, could find out where to get information they didn’t have.” She described the center’s school contact as “the best listener on the face of the earth. That’s the skill these people at the center need. They listen to all of us; they’re interested in us. Whoever sent [the center’s school contact] is a genius.” Richmond’s assistant principal was most impressed with the center’s efficient use of resources. “The center may not have a lot of money,” he noted, “but they know what they’re doing with what they do have.”

School staff had nothing bad to say about the center. They had yet to discover an issue that the center’s school contact could not help them with—some thought she personally was an expert while others recognized that she was just resourceful in finding the expertise they needed. The school staff mentioned their appreciation of three aspects of center help: direct, “off the shelf” services especially

relevant to the school's needs, such as the America Reads Challenge; made-to-order assistance such as the ESL assistance; and networking or connection to outside resources, such as the Continuous Progress Initiative.

School staff expected that center assistance will be ongoing, although there was evidence that center staff members were turning over management of certain activities to the school and were withdrawing from other activities as the school developed independent connections directly with different service providers.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Teachers' comments suggest that their experiences with center activities have improved teaching. One teacher claimed that the center has helped teachers focus more on incorporating the state's standards into their teaching, particularly through the integrated units they are developing. "In the past, it used to be that teachers would teach entire six-week units without even touching on standards; that doesn't happen anymore," she reported. "The standards are there to help us focus on what needs to be learned." Another teacher expounded on that observation: "I have had to examine the standards for 4th graders, then develop units for them based on those standards. The tricky part is developing interesting and fun units in a way that addresses the standards. We don't rely on textbooks alone anymore. I've worked at night with my teaching partner to develop a Revolutionary War unit, where we taught the kids note-taking strategies [part of the standards]. We also asked them to write a book about the war." Another teacher added that her work on new units has made her feel more confident as a teacher.

Academic achievement as measured by the Florida state tests has increased over the years that Richmond and the center have worked as a team. Because the state changed tests, only two years of comparable data are available. These data show that Richmond increased its performance in all three areas tested: reading, mathematics, and writing. Florida schools were graded for the first time this year, and Richmond earned a C. Few Title I schools earned so high a grade. While it is difficult to attribute improved student achievement directly to the center's contributions, the principal credited the center nonetheless. The center measured school success against the leadership team's four goals: improving achievement, building a productive school climate, providing enriched academic units, and encouraging more meaningful parent involvement. The assistant principal said that the school can make a connection between the center's work and these goals:

Can we tie school improvement with [Comprehensive Center] involvement? Well, if we look at the leadership team's indicators of success, then yes. Has the school increased meaningful parent

involvement? Yes. Has the school produced a healthy school climate? The surveys tell us yes. . . .
Has all of this helped us? Yes.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

Impediments to effective technical assistance did not arise from limitations of talent or commitment so much as from logistical constraints. Richmond's principal identified logistical concerns as the greatest barrier to the center's work at the school. "The greatest difficulty [with getting the center ESL expert back] is scheduling. We have to conduct that training during the day, and the aides are on an hourly schedule. Most work seven and a half hours per day. . . . Transportation was a problem with the America Reads program. It was difficult getting the county to help us out. And getting the USF tutors to Richmond was nearly impossible because many of them didn't have their own transportation. We needed to use a bus. That was the biggest problem: getting the USF students to our school. It's hard to get here because we're in the middle of nowhere."

Summary

Richmond Elementary School is one of six model schools served by the Region XIV Comprehensive Center. Targeted by the state's accountability system as a school in need of assistance, Richmond sought the center's assistance in raising test scores on the FCAT, especially among ESL and migrant students, after the center contacted the school initially. A designated contact from the center works with the school's leadership team to identify needs the center can address. The center's portfolio of services includes assistance with the implementation of the Continuous Progress model; activities to improve instruction for ESL and migrant students; the recruitment of America Reads tutors to work with elementary students during the summer and after school; assistance forming study groups for teachers; support for the RSN; and the creation of an instructional video for helping parents with limited English proficiency read with their children. Richmond staff praised the center for its off-the-shelf services, made-to-order assistance, and networking connections, and noted that the center has helped teachers focus on incorporating the state's standards into their teaching.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

Riverside Public Schools

The Riverside Public Schools has experienced steady growth in the population of limited English proficient (LEP) students in recent years. In response to requests for assistance from the district, the Region VII Comprehensive Center developed a “Learning Facilitator’s Academy,” intended for teams from schools with relatively high proportions of LEP students. The Learning Facilitator’s Academy consists of a series of weekend sessions to help schools pursue schoolwide improvement in teaching and learning for all students. In addition, the center has introduced the district to the Reading Success Network (RSN). This case study examines the services provided by the Region VII Comprehensive Center to the Riverside Public Schools.

Data collection for this case study consisted of a two-day visit to the Riverside Public Schools. Site visitors interviewed the district’s director of the office of bilingual education and English as a second language programs, a bilingual education specialist in that office, and curriculum specialists in the district’s curriculum office. They also visited four schools that sent teams to the Learning Facilitator’s Academy. At each school, site visitors interviewed the principal, members of the team that attended the Learning Facilitator’s Academy, and a small group of teachers who did not attend the academy, in order to trace the dissemination of information and ideas within the school. Finally, site visitors interviewed the Comprehensive Center staff member responsible for designing the Learning Facilitator’s Academy.

I. Local Context

The Riverside school district serves over 45,000 students in 108 schools. Riverside is one of two districts in the state that has experienced steady growth in its immigrant population, resulting in an influx of non-English speakers in local schools. Students in the district speak 37 different languages. Many students come from Bosnia, Vietnam, Somalia, Kurdistan, and Iraq, but the ethnic composition of the immigrant population changes often, making it impractical for English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual programs to target single language groups.

The district uses an ESL pullout model, wherein LEP students attend ESL classes for no more than three periods per day, depending on need and proficiency level. They are immersed in regular classrooms for the remainder of the day. In some schools, ESL teachers also visit regular education classrooms to work with LEP students. The schools with the highest concentrations of LEP students each

host at least one ESL center with a dedicated ESL teacher. There are a total of 21 ESL centers in 10 elementary schools, five middle schools and two high schools. Some schools without ESL centers may have an ESL teacher if they have more than 10 LEP students. In schools with neither an ESL center nor an ESL teacher, the Title I teacher works with LEP students.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

The district hopes to improve student achievement, particularly for LEP students, as measured by state performance tests. Strategies to achieve this objective include seeking innovative teaching practices and enhancing professional development programs to help teachers address the diverse needs of students. School officials also intend to increase collaboration schoolwide and to support content-based instruction for LEP students.

In 1999, the district launched an initiative to provide additional resources to schools at risk. Forty schools, including two visited for this case study, received between \$70,000 and \$100,000 for the 1999-2000 school year to develop or purchase a reform model and implement it. To address the needs of LEP students, the district began a bilingual reform initiative designed to promote more effective teaching and to improve student performance using content-based instruction in math, science, and social studies.

Progress in Implementing ESEA Reforms

All of the schools visited for this case study were in the first year of implementing a Title I schoolwide plan. School-level changes include adding content-specific teachers in response to student performance on the state assessment, updating technology to improve reading instruction, recruiting parent liaisons to increase parental involvement and improve attendance, and arranging regular meetings between Title I teachers and classroom teachers to align instruction with the state assessment.

Customers' Purposes for Seeking External Assistance

At the time of her first contact with the Region VII Comprehensive Center, the district's ESL/bilingual programs director reported that she needed access to bilingual education expertise that was unavailable from the state education department and local colleges and universities. According to her, the state effectively ignores ESL and bilingual education programs because they significantly affect only two

districts in the state. The federally-funded Multifunctional Resource Centers, which had filled much of the need for technical assistance in bilingual education before 1994, no longer existed.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's Relationship with the District

The district's ESL/bilingual programs director wanted to work with the center from its inception in 1996 and reported that she requested services several times, without a response from the center. At the time, the Region VII Comprehensive Center was not fully staffed and was undergoing a change in leadership. The following year, the center hosted a regional meeting to introduce itself and to assess local needs. The ESL/bilingual programs director requested services at that time, speaking directly to the center director. Meanwhile, as part of its mission to provide comprehensive services to districts, the center sought to involve the Riverside Public Schools superintendent in a district needs assessment. When the superintendent did not respond to the center's efforts to initiate contact, the center agreed to bypass the superintendent and to work directly with the ESL/bilingual programs director and her supervisor, the Title I coordinator.

Since that initial contact, the ESL/bilingual programs director has developed an ongoing relationship with the center. Other Riverside Public Schools district supervisors became aware of center services through this relationship. The district has since expanded its work with the center to include RSN.

Planning Services

District staff members in the office of bilingual education and English as a second language programs worked closely with the center to plan the center's services to the district. Before approaching the center for assistance, district staff already had specific goals in mind for training based on their understanding of teachers' needs and their philosophy for professional development. The bilingual project coordinator and the ESL/bilingual programs director identified local needs through observation of ESL and bilingual teachers and by attending planning sessions between district staff and regular classroom teachers. Teachers identified several areas to include in training sessions: strengthening content areas, increasing cultural understanding, illustrating second language acquisition, improving instructional strategies, and encouraging schoolwide collaboration.

The ESL/bilingual programs director chose schools with high concentrations of LEP students to participate in center activities. The principals in the selected schools had some discretion in selecting teams of teachers as long as the teams included an ESL teacher, Title I teacher, regular classroom teacher, and the instructional coordinator. Several teachers said their principal used classroom observations to identify those teachers who would benefit most from center services.

Given the locally-identified needs and target audience, center staff assisted in planning the format of the training and in identifying appropriate presenters. They visited the district three times for planning meetings with the ESL/bilingual programs director, the bilingual project coordinator, and others.

III. Services to the Local Site

Portfolio of Products and Services

Learning Facilitator's Academy. The center's major service to Riverside Public Schools was to assist in designing the Learning Facilitator's Academy, which was intended to move the district toward more inclusive, schoolwide reform efforts that bring together all programs, including bilingual and ESL, Title I, and gifted and talented education. Participating schools sent cross-disciplinary teams consisting of five to seven members, including usually the principal, the ESL teacher, the Title I teacher, a regular classroom teacher, and the instructional coordinator. After each session, the teams were expected to replicate the training at their own schools.

The first Learning Facilitator's Academy was held in the fall of 1998 and included six six-hour workshop sessions held on a series of Saturdays over several months. Twelve schools participated. The second Learning Facilitator's Academy took place in the spring of 1999, with the center playing a more limited role. The model remained the same, but the district ESL/bilingual director contracted with presenters directly, rather than going through the center. This second academy included only three sessions and eight new schools.

Learning Facilitator's Academy sessions focused on the change process, team building, student learning styles, using data to inform instruction, curriculum alignment, and instructional strategies. Participants reported that specific topics within the sessions included schoolwide collaboration, cultural diversity, multiple intelligences, language acquisition, and ESL instruction. Session activities consisted primarily of presentations, interactive discussions, and team activities.

The Learning Facilitator's Academy was designed to promote instructional strategies that benefit all children, but that are particularly beneficial for the growing LEP population in Riverside. Accordingly, presenters stressed how cooperative learning, hands-on activities, and manipulatives can be used to reach all children. They also suggested that teachers incorporate learning centers as primary instructional tools, rather than as supplements to traditional practice. Presenters underscored the importance of non-verbal communication, such as hand signals, eye contact, pointing, and touching, particularly for LEP students. They suggested games that make learning less language dependent.

Reading Success Network. At the time of the site visit to Riverside for this case study, the center had also introduced senior district administrators in the office of curriculum to the Reading Success Network, an initiative sponsored by all 15 Comprehensive Centers designed to promote grade level reading skills in every child by the third grade. RSN includes strategies to teach reading in content areas and a component to develop coaches within each school to support implementation. Two district staff attended a one-day general session in Chicago, and three supervisors attended a five-day training session in February 1999, three days of which were devoted to RSN. At the time of the site visit, these supervisors planned to train teachers and administrators from about 20 schools. The center planned to send representatives to assist in the presentation. During the 1999-2000 school year, the center provided additional districtwide training and technical assistance related to the RSN.

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to the Site

Alignment with state and local standards. Although the instructional strategies presented at the Learning Facilitator's Academy were not explicitly designed to address state and local standards, some respondents described how the training has helped them to address state standards. The principal of a middle school observed that the active learning strategies demonstrated at the Learning Facilitator's Academy aligned with the state's movement toward a performance-based assessment. An elementary school principal incorporated multiple learning styles and cognitive functioning into teacher lesson plan reporting forms, which he uses to determine whether or not teachers are meeting state standards of instruction, which require opportunities for active learning and critical thinking.

Research-based theoretical framework. The Learning Facilitator's Academy was grounded in research-based theory on systemic change. Preparation for the academy included defining expected outcomes, planning for content delivery, and designing follow-up mechanisms. In the sessions, presenters offered instructional strategies based on the theory of multiple intelligences. Participants observed that the language acquisition session also represented well-known research. In addition, at least one session included theory on the change process itself.

Scope, intensity, and duration. The Learning Facilitator's Academy covered a variety of topics, ranging from classroom instructional techniques to schoolwide collaboration designed to support school improvement. The sessions occurred on multiple days for six hours, giving participants more in-depth exposure to concepts and more practice with supporting activities. Teams presented Learning Facilitator's Academy information to their entire faculty, strengthening their team-building efforts and increasing their understanding of the material.

The center provided contact information to the participants to allow for follow-up assistance; however, none of them used it. "I wouldn't feel uncomfortable [contacting them]," said one school principal, "I just didn't feel the need." Another principal said she didn't know about the range of services available from the center.

Utility. At least two of the four schools visited for this case study used elements of the Learning Facilitator's Academy in their schoolwide improvement efforts, while one did not. At one elementary school, Learning Facilitator's Academy participants became leaders on a schoolwide team to develop their Title I plan. They used activities from the Learning Facilitator's Academy to successfully collaborate and make decisions. At another elementary school, the principal used team building from Learning Facilitator's Academy to involve all faculty in several schoolwide projects. They formed committees to develop the school's improvement plan and the Title I schoolwide plan, and to prepare for an audit related to the state's improvement plan. A teacher at the school said that Learning Facilitator's Academy participants became especially active and effective in these efforts. They acted as facilitators among teachers and supported the principal's leadership agenda. However, not all schools incorporated the strategies presented at the academy into improving building level collaboration. One elementary school principal said that crisis management and dealing with the state's improvement plan requirements took precedence.

Participants also described using what they learned about active learning techniques, cultural understanding, and learning styles in their classrooms and schools.

Capacity building. The center approaches capacity building with the Learning Facilitator's Academy in three ways. First, at the district level, it seeks to build the district's capacity to organize similar professional development activities. For the second Learning Facilitator's Academy, the center stepped back while the district contracted with various presenters. The ESL/bilingual director acknowledged that the Learning Facilitator's Academy supported ongoing professional development efforts but did not eliminate the need for future outside assistance. Second, at the school level, the Learning Facilitator's Academy teaches school-level teams process skills related to change and collaboration so that schools can develop and implement their own schoolwide change efforts.

Respondents from some schools reported that the Learning Facilitator's Academy enhanced their ability to work together as a team with the intent of building their capacity for problem solving and decision making. A few schools demonstrated this capacity through their schoolwide planning efforts. Third, again at the school level, the Learning Facilitator's Academy provides important content related to instructional techniques and cultural understanding that school teams can then impart to their colleagues.

IV. Effects

Customer Satisfaction

Respondents generally praised the center for its work with the Riverside Public Schools. They reported that the center provides high-quality training and technical assistance that the district could not otherwise afford. The ESL/bilingual programs director said that the center offers bilingual expertise that is not available locally, and that it helps to meet the training needs in her district that she cannot satisfy herself because there are limits to the amount of time she can spend in direct training. The ESL/bilingual programs director and supervisors described center staff as willing to listen to their needs and to accommodate them.

Overall, participants rated the Learning Facilitator's Academy highly. One principal said, "The sessions were well thought out and well executed." Another said, "The team of presenters was excellent, and the materials were relevant and timely." The presenters made themselves accessible during the Learning Facilitator's Academy and provided contact information to participants following the workshop. Several participants also commented on the utility of the training. One teacher said, "You really used it right away." They also appreciated the quality of reference materials provided and the interactive style of the presentation. "It wasn't all lectures," one teacher said. "They had lots of activities that allowed us to participate and get involved." Furthermore, participants liked the opportunity to attend the workshops as a team, with the principal and teachers from various grades and content areas.

However, some participants expressed dissatisfaction with the Learning Facilitator's Academy. One teacher wanted the academy to concentrate more on working with LEP students. A few participants said the materials were good but provided no information that was new to them. One teacher wanted more follow-up contact following Learning Facilitator's Academy, including information packets.

Both the ESL/bilingual programs director and district supervisors praised the RSN. Though their district had provided training in literacy to teachers, they did not have a mechanism to measure the effectiveness of their efforts. They pointed to the RSN's coaching piece, which will allow them to gather feedback after teachers are trained. Satisfaction with the RSN is high enough that the district plans to

continue its involvement with the center on RSN-related activities. For example, the district planned to develop a week-long training session for elementary schools where center staff will assist in training and provide ongoing support.

Improved Teaching and Learning

Although the district has not formally evaluated the impact of center services on teaching and learning, several participants reported anecdotal evidence. Teachers at one school reported that the instructional strategies they had learned for working with LEP students had helped those students progress from failing in their regular classes to earning passing grades. One teacher reported that even the slowest learners were making progress. Furthermore, teachers across schools reported that LEP students participated in regular classroom activities more often after they implemented Learning Facilitator's Academy strategies. "Now, I am able to work with them," said one teacher. Also, many regular classroom teachers reported that the academy's strategies benefited all students, not just LEP students.

Learning Facilitator's Academy participants also described changes in their teaching. For example, many teachers reported using more cooperative learning techniques. "The techniques allow me to be more flexible," said a teacher at an international magnet school. "I love cooperative learning now that I see the kids need to interact." Teachers also reported that they had begun placing students in multicultural groups to allow for peer to peer coaching. Teachers reported that the Learning Facilitator's Academy introduced active learning strategies that appeal to students with various learning styles. "I've gone to hands-on in math, in everything really," said one teacher at a magnet elementary school. Other teachers reported using learning stations, manipulatives, singing, and visuals, in addition to traditional classroom activities. One teacher said taking Learning Facilitator's Academy strategies back into her classroom was exciting: "You see complacency among teachers, but active learning . . . it's not just 90 minutes of lecture . . . it forces you to be organized. You've got to be ready to roll." One principal reported that the academy had influenced teachers who did not attend the Learning Facilitators Academy, but who received encouragement from the example set by those who did. "I am seeing cooperative learning in some classrooms where I wouldn't have thought to see it," said one principal. "Seeing that other teachers have done it and advocate it, it allows them [traditional teachers] to be brave."

Participants reported that the Learning Facilitator's Academy also increased teachers' awareness of cultural differences. Participants said that this improved their ability to understand behavior that interfered with classroom activities. For example, one student from Ethiopia frequently fought with his fellow students. His teacher discovered that he didn't understand the cultural norm of "teasing" in America.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

At the time of the site visit conducted for this case study, the only barrier to the center's technical assistance identified by respondents was the initial lack of contact with the superintendent's office. This limited the center's ability to assess needs districtwide and to respond to requests from other district officials. In the 1999-2000 school year, as the district became increasingly involved in the Reading Success Network, communication and coordination with the superintendent's office improved considerably, according to the Comprehensive Center.

In spring 1999, schools possessed varying degrees of readiness to use technical assistance provided by the center through the Learning Facilitator's Academy. At one school, change in leadership and a focus on crisis management precluded the implementation of many components of the Learning Facilitator's Academy.

Summary

The Region VII Comprehensive Center provided assistance to the Riverside Public Schools related to the instruction of LEP students and literacy development for students in selected schools. The centerpieces of the center's assistance were the Learning Facilitator's Academy and RSN. The academy served teams of teachers and administrators from schools with high concentrations of LEP students. These teams then replicated the training in their own schools. Through RSN, the center arranged for district staff to attend training sessions. Despite some early communication problems between the district and the center, district respondents valued the center for its expertise in ESL/bilingual education, high-quality presenters, and useful materials. They also noted that center services resulted in improved instructional strategies and understanding of cultural differences.

Comprehensive Center Services to Local Sites

Snowbank School District, Alaska

Overview

Recently, education for many Alaska Native children was essentially unrelated to their language, culture, and life in the village, where productivity and often survival itself depended as much on subsistence skills as on reading, writing, and arithmetic. Student achievement, levels of participation, and parent-community involvement in education were low in village schools. Teacher turnover was extraordinarily high. Although located physically within a tight-knit, geographically isolated community, the village elementary school functioned as a foreign country run by strangers, who were usually well-meaning but unfamiliar with local customs, expectations, and language.

The Snowbank School District was one of several districts that sought to transform local schools into responsive and culturally relevant places for their children. With assistance first from the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) and later from the Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (AKRAC or the center), the district ran Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) program, which helps schools to form school leadership cadres including the principal, faculty representatives, community leaders, and elders.⁴ The cadres set goals for student outcomes, gather data to assess progress toward those outcomes, and guide the development and adoption of educational programs.

This case study examines services provided by the center to the Snowbank School District, focusing primarily on the implications of these services for the operations in a single school within the district, the Seaside School, the only school in its village. Researchers visited the Snowbank central office and the school. Data collection at the district office included interviews with the district AOTE supervisor, the district superintendent, and two program directors. At Seaside School, researchers interviewed community members, teachers, the principal, and other school staff members. In addition, they interviewed several AKRAC staff members and staff members from NWREL.

⁴ Respondents did not offer a precise definition of the term “elder.” Operationally, it seems to be defined as “an adult with enough wisdom that others solicit and accept his or her advice.”

I. Local Context

Approximately 3,400 students attend Snowbank's 26 schools in 23 communities stretching across a vast expanse of Alaska. Because no towns are connected by road in this part of Alaska, travel between the central office and the schools is usually done by plane, although it may also be done in some cases by snow machine in winter or boat in summer. More than 92 percent of the district's students are Yup'ik Eskimo. Title I participation is substantial in Snowbank, with schools reporting participation in the free and reduced-price lunch program in a range from 74 to 100 percent. More than 20 percent of certified staff are Alaska Natives, due to intensive recruitment and a career ladder program for bilingual teaching assistants launched by Snowbank in 1989.

Seaside School, located about 80 miles from the district office in a village with more than 300 residents, serves approximately 100 students in grades K-12, almost all of whom receive free and reduced-price lunches. All the students at the school are Alaska Natives. There are about 10 teachers and several other support staff members.

Reform Goals and Initiatives

AOTE is the primary framework for district reform in Snowbank. "Our commitment to AOTE is substantial," reported the district AOTE coordinator. "It's one of the top budget priorities. Money will be expended in accordance with AOTE priorities."

The stated mission of the Snowbank School District is "to ensure bilingual, culturally appropriate and effective education for all students, thereby providing them with the opportunity to be responsible, productive citizens." The district AOTE student learning goals adopted in April 1998 make similar reference to local culture: "Cooperatively and individually, students will demonstrate civic and personal responsibility [and] . . . effective communication; . . . value culture, environment, self, and others; be problem solvers in a changing world; [and] learn and understand Yup'ik/Cup'ik culture, traditions, beliefs, and ways of knowing."⁵ The district has funded its own Yup'ik/English bilingual program for more than 20 years, publishing an extensive collection of bilingual literacy materials based on elders' stories and other lore, as well as translations of basic texts.

Measurable goals set by the district emphasize academic achievement: By 2001, "Eighty percent of graduates will read at the college entrance level; . . . 50 percent of . . . graduates will enter post

⁵ *Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat: The School of The People of Quinhagak*, by Carol Barnhardt, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1998, p. 11.

secondary institutions of their choice and be able to function at the freshman level; ... [and] the dropout rate will be less than 1 percent.”

Progress in Implementing ESEA Reforms

Unlike many districts in the “lower 48” states, Snowbank improved services to its low-performing, disadvantaged students by moving away from schoolwide projects and toward targeted assistance, while consolidating some funds to provide widely needed services, such as professional development. Virtually every school is, and was, eligible to adopt a schoolwide project model, but, according to the district officer responsible for federal programs, staff turnover is so high that too few of the people who spent the first year designing a schoolwide model were around the second to implement it. Initially, the district, which has an overall poverty rate of 70 percent, concentrated its Title I funds in schools with poverty rates of 90 percent or higher. After realizing that the planning seldom led to programs that worked in those schools, the district took another tack: concentrating resources on strategies that combined professional development with targeted services. The district now employs eight Itinerant Literacy Leaders (ILLs), each of whom serves three or four schools a year, in weeklong monthly visits. The ILLs offer direct supplementary instruction to targeted students, meet with other staff to teach new knowledge and skills, and coach teachers to mastery. The district reports that it is able to serve many more students and that schools are very positive about the change.

In addition, the district uses state and federal funds (including Title II) to do satellite broadcasts of professional development workshops that run two to three hours for each of eight shows. These lessons focus on strategies to link writing with assessment, a districtwide initiative. Follow-up interactive Internet sessions allow participants to extend their skill in applying this strategy in their own classrooms.

Customers’ Purposes for Seeking External Assistance

At the time of its first contact with the AOTE initiative, the Snowbank District was interested in developing new leadership structures in its schools for several reasons. Over the previous decade, staff had become increasingly concerned about low levels of student achievement in the face of diminishing opportunities for subsistence fishing and hunting as a way of life. The state had mandated and funded K-12 schools in all Alaskan villages (allowing students to attend high school in their home village, rather than moving away). The district was struggling with high turnover rates among staff, which made it difficult to implement teacher-led school improvement efforts. Finally, the district had tried to disseminate a strategic planning process for use in setting goals for improvement at the school level but

had met with limited success. AOTE appeared to be a feasible strategy for developing some school improvement goals and plans that would be carried out by the village community, and not simply by the school staff.

II. Establishing the Relationship

The Center's Relationship with the District

The center gained entree to the district by connecting to the existing AOTE initiative and through prior professional relationships among staff. The NWREL began the first wave of AOTE training in 1992, conducting sessions for two districts. Snowbank was one of three districts that joined the second wave of implementation in 1995.⁶ Before adopting AOTE, the district had been working with a strategic planning model, but encountered resistance from the community, according to a district representative: “It just wasn’t going quite right.” The center became involved in 1996 when two new AKRAC staff members made AOTE a centerpiece of their portfolio of services and joined NWREL’s training team in the district. They already knew of NWREL’s work with AOTE in the district because NWREL had been a long-term partner of theirs in Alaska school improvement activities. Furthermore, the district already knew of the two from other encounters related to school improvement.

The two center staff members observed and worked alongside NWREL experts until they were able to take over training themselves. Once their period of training apprenticeship was over, the center trainers accepted the invitation from Snowbank’s superintendent to bring AOTE to all the schools in the district. Seaside School joined the AOTE movement in 1996. In the 1998-99 school year, most of the remaining Snowbank schools joined. In all, 42 village schools in 11 districts participated in AOTE training and implementation during the three waves.⁷ AKRAC is now training schools in a fourth wave.

The Snowbank School District initially decided to work with the center because it is one of the sole providers of AOTE training and its services are free. AOTE helps the district to achieve its overall goals, which include culture- and community-specific adaptations that unite the purposes of school and village. The center also provides free training to improve school and family capacity in literacy, an important district goal.

⁶ Several other districts joined the AOTE movement in the third (1996) and fourth (1998) waves.

Planning Services

Initially, the center's process of identifying district needs consisted simply of joining the ongoing effort of NWREL to provide AOTE training. Snowbank had already identified AOTE as the leadership framework for district reform efforts. As literacy emerged as a central focus of district work, the center offered support in that area as well.

In regards to AOTE, the district chose which schools to target. Starting with a core group of schools in 1995, the training has since expanded in successive years to include all Snowbank schools. The assistant to the district superintendent defined the categories of people to be included in each school's team, and each school chose its own team members. The selection of Seaside School in 1996 was seen by the school staff as fortuitous because it coincided with the school's preparation for state accreditation review. Because effective schools research underlies both AOTE and the state accreditation process, AOTE offered a particularly apt framework for the work of preparing for review.

The district has considerable input in designing the content and delivery of center services. The nature of AOTE allows it to be shaped by the local context, within the general structure of the model. According to the AOTE coordinator, "Sometimes I just tell [an AKRAC trainer] exactly what I want." For example, the district coordinator has modified the basic AOTE formula for the numbers and types of representatives from each school community on an AOTE team; she has asked an AKRAC trainer to adapt her training for the specific individuals she has recruited. Individual schools do not have the same level of influence over content and delivery of services. Although the Seaside School staff praised the training, some observed that it is not focused specifically on their school, and others did not feel that it is readily available.

III. Services to the Local Site

Portfolio of Products and Services

AOTE. AOTE is a process in which a school leadership cadre is formed of the principal, faculty representatives, and community leaders and elders. This cadre identifies valued student outcomes through a series of community-wide meetings, gathers data to assess progress toward these outcomes, and guides adoption and development of educational programs designed to achieve these outcomes.

⁷ *Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat: The School of The People of Quinhagak*, by Carol Barnhardt, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1998, p. 8.

AOTE is an adaptation of Onward to Excellence, a program developed by NWREL to help schools implement effective schools strategies. Where faculty membership is stable, the training necessary to become adept in these strategies and maintain progress toward goal attainment increases school capacity over time. However, in Alaska, community isolation and small size, rugged living conditions, and cultural differences between faculty and local residents are associated with extremely high faculty turnover—as high as 50 percent annually in some schools. With that rate of turnover, investments in faculty development do not provide long-term benefits for students. Through AOTE, the work of establishing goals, measuring progress, and providing educational leadership is done by a stable group of interested parties, drawing on formal and informal sources of authority that span the village and school. The AOTE approach makes the school an integral part of the village rather than an invasive force.

The transformation of the original school-based Onward to Excellence model into community-based AOTE was funded in 1991 by a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust to the Alaska Staff Development Network and the NWREL.⁸ AOTE emerged with four defining principles:

- *Focus on student learning.* Parents, elders, students, and school staff collaborate in determining what student learning is most important.
- *Everyone must be committed.* Schools and communities collaborate over learning, with the support of the district office.
- *Everyone will learn together.* The process of improvement generates learning for adults as well as children. Local values and research jointly inform decisions.
- *Learning success will be measured.* Standardized tests will be supplemented by other assessments, as necessary, to ensure progress.

The purpose of the new model was to make “local heritage, language, culture, and native ways of knowing . . . legitimate parts of formal education” and to view them “as strengths to build a curriculum on.”⁹ School and community were to learn how to be accountable to each other in more intimate and practical ways than was typically the case in rural Alaska.

The center sponsors AOTE training in Snowbank twice a year at a central site. The district brings in the leadership team from each school for a several-day training session led by center staff or staff from NWREL contracted by the center. The district AOTE coordinator, who reports directly to the superintendent, provides follow-up services. She may consult with the center when questions arise.

⁸ Summarized from *Creating Partnerships to Help Alaska Native Students Succeed in Two Worlds: Study of Alaska Rural Systemic Reform*, by James W. Kushman with the Alaska Case Studies Team; paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Montreal, April 1999 pp. 5-7.

⁹ *Ibid*, page 9.

Basic Literacy Strategies Institute. In addition to their work with AOTE, center staff worked all year with the Snowbank School District on the coordination of their Basic Literacy Strategies Institute, which was co-taught by district experts and center staff, offering a total of eight days of literacy training. Center staff also trained reading tutors for four days in the spring and five days in June after school got out. The tutoring and literacy training were offered centrally at the district central offices and locally at school sites.

Quality of the Technical Assistance Provided to the Site

Alignment with standards. AOTE is a process for working collaboratively to develop school programs that use local culture and resources to achieve academic goals. AOTE goals are set locally, not imposed by the model, so schools and districts can choose how to address local and state standards.

The center describes one part of its work as showing districts how local content and ways of knowing are tied to state standards. The district has organized a summer institute to embed more local literacy and culture in the regular curriculum. Teachers and elders spend several weeks together recording traditional lore and developing related learning objectives and curriculum materials.

Theoretical framework and research base. AOTE is based on early effective schools programs developed by the NWREL. It is well adapted to the Alaskan context generally and Snowbank especially. Meaningful community involvement is an important component of AOTE. AOTE's reliance on power-sharing and joint development of the educational vision among school staff, parents, and Alaska Native community nurtures the kind of contact that not only builds bridges but also promotes the mutual adaptation viewed as central to making village schools effective.

The tutoring and literacy programs are based on principles advocated by the International Reading Association and the National Research Council, as elucidated in *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*.

Scope, intensity, and duration of assistance. The district requested that the center sponsor AOTE training twice a year at a central location in the Snowbank District, apparently believing that degree of training to be sufficient. The several-day training sessions stimulate the development of a school-based cadre of collaborators and supports the habit of working together. The district then takes responsibility for follow-up assistance to schools, attempting to provide the intensity necessary to ensure effective adoption. For example, the district AOTE coordinator visits schools and meets with teams. Not

everyone agrees that the extent of services is sufficient, however. According to the Seaside School principal, “One weakness is that we need more ongoing training.”

Utility. In the Snowbank District, AOTE is viewed as the heart of reform. Major decisions are framed in terms of their relevance to AOTE goals and approaches. The present Snowbank superintendent was a strong AOTE proponent as a village school principal, and he has made it the cornerstone of all district programming. The school principal at Seaside School reported that her end-of-year report—like reports from all Snowbank schools—must be framed by the AOTE goals for that year. AOTE is now embedded in the administrative procedures.

At the Seaside School, school/community collaboration was a way of life explicitly anchored in AOTE. Villagers were in and out of school all day long during our visit. Teachers consulted with them about activities undertaken in the classroom at the request of the community. The people who attended an after-school meeting to discuss implementing a newly funded 21st Century schools project are the same people who come to AOTE meetings. Their conversations served to indicate that they stood on equal footing with school staff in planning this new initiative. Indeed, the initiative was predicated on the desire to use after-school time for students to learn, use, record, and disseminate traditional Yup’ik ways of knowing and doing, and capturing the experience with state of the art technology.

Professionals in the district office who arrange for and assist with the tutoring and literacy training described center staff as “good at adapting” program elements to local contexts and generally very competent in their work. Of particular interest is a focus on storytelling as a form of communication well suited to bringing in village elders to share knowledge and skills while advancing students’ overall verbal skill.

Capacity building. Building local capacity is a central goal of AOTE. At the school level, it teaches a process for identifying and solving problems collaboratively. At the district level, an AOTE coordinator develops the capacity to support schools with the implementation of the program.

Other Sources of Assistance

The district looks externally for various types of assistance, including support for bilingual and bicultural programs, professional development related to those programs, and career ladder activities. In addition to the Comprehensive Center, Snowbank receives technical assistance from the Southeast [Alaska] Regional Resource Center (AKRAC’s parent organization), the Special Education Services Agency in Anchorage, the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (which

has a staff member stationed in Bethel), and the Alaska Native Knowledge Network. The district considers the Alaska Department of Education (ADE) to be a resource, but ADE has no budget for travel, making its usefulness limited in the district's view. ADE was formerly a resource for bilingual/ESL program development, but the district does not believe it still has that capability. The person at ADE who used to be so helpful in that arena is now at AKRAC, where he continues to be an asset.

The district uses center staff for training in AOTE, literacy, and tutoring. Along with NWREL staff members, who often work under contract for the center, AKRAC is the only available provider of AOTE training, and its services are free. Two center staff members are now qualified to train in AOTE. The center has also recently hired a staff member who is highly regarded in literacy training, and the district makes good use of her services. A fourth staff member has been disseminating the Reading Success Network (RSN) program and also trains reading tutors; his services are highly valued by the district.

Like many other districts, budget limitations restrict Snowbank's choices of technical assistance to those that it both needs and can afford. The fact that center services are free is a key incentive to choose AKRAC when it can do what is needed. Beyond that consideration, however, district staff familiar with center services and personnel affirm that they are of good quality. One recommendation of AKRAC as a service provider, in the district's view, is its employment of people respected already for their professional knowledge and skill. One district staff member, when asked whom she called for technical assistance said, "We call people we know."

Plans for Continuing Assistance

The district expects to continue using center trainers to advance and fine-tune its AOTE process and continue upgrading its tutoring and literacy programs.

IV. Effects

District and school staff report overwhelming satisfaction with AOTE and offer much anecdotal evidence of its effects. In addition to AOTE training, the center appears to provide services that have a positive effect on the Snowbank District, despite limitations imposed by limited time and resources.

Customer Satisfaction

The district staff in Snowbank express high regard for center services and staff. They are especially pleased with the recent literacy training, which represents a new direction with respect to its partnership with AKRAC. According to a district staff member, the chief strength of the center is its staff: “They are good people; I can get what I need.” The center staff succeeds in engaging the district, school, and community members. In praise of one AOTE trainer, a district staff member explained, “[The trainer] can really fire people up, talk to them, get them to say what they think. He can sit and let them think. Respect for the wait period is important. It takes people a while to figure out what they might say and how they would say it.” This is partly because Yup’ik people tend to be more reserved in conversation than the non-Native trainers, explained the staff member, and silences are understood to be opportunities for reflection. Accommodating this style is crucial for success in training.

One weakness identified by Snowbank is the Center’s current lack of expertise in Indian Education. A Center Indian Education specialist held in high regard by the district has taken a new job. At least for the time being, her slot has been filled with a literacy specialist because the slot needed to be filled, but Snowbank finds the resulting absence of expertise in Indian Education to be problematic.

At the local level, staff and community members at Seaside School give high praise to the AOTE program, but appear to view the Center staff as somewhat incidental to the school’s efforts. Beyond the members of the AOTE team, who attend training twice a year, few people at Seaside have had contact with the center and its services. Though some might interpret this as a lack of involvement, the center appears to provide the level of services needed for the school. Perhaps one of the strengths of the center’s work in this area was their ability to recognize an effective reform process and allow the participants to own the process.

A village elder who heads the AOTE team told this story about the school’s first encounter with AOTE:

I first heard about AOTE in 1995-96. I was selected to attend training as a villager. . . . We learned how to involve the school and the community in the curriculum and what should be taught. They taught us how to run meetings: how to set up meetings, how to get parents, village leaders, and elders involved. When they presented that lesson, it was nothing new. We have been doing this for a long time. In Yup’ik, the whole community is involved in educating the child. The parents, elders—all oversee what the child does. The difference [with AOTE] is that you write it down. . . . We’ve had a little trouble getting the community involved because they want to do it their way. But I think AOTE is good. Teachers have seen improvement in students in creative writing and computer skills. . . . AOTE is something good that has happened in Alaska; it involves the whole community.

The staff at Seaside echoed the elder's opinion: "Nothing," they said, "has been as consistently successful as AOTE at capturing the community's spirit."

Increased Capacity to Deliver Technical Assistance to Schools

The center provides AOTE training twice each year as requested by the district, but follow-up support for implementation comes from the district AOTE coordinator. She explained her role as expanding and refining AOTE with whatever help from the original trainers that she needs. Trainers at the center and NWREL expressed confidence in the ability of the district AOTE coordinator to identify and solve problems unassisted, although they expressed willingness to help if needed.

Increased Awareness and Understanding of ESEA Programs

A district director with broad program responsibilities said that AOTE pulls all the federal programs together, except for Johnson-O'Malley and Indian Education. Reliance on AOTE as the tool for vision-setting seems to be part of an approach that views the whole child and the whole school as the focus of district work. According to the superintendent, AOTE "offers a districtwide umbrella for all our grants." The district recently received \$1.2 million in 21st Century School grants, including one for almost \$200,000 for Seaside, and those proposals were all organized around AOTE goals. Villagers in Seaside developed the proposal, which called for keeping the school open during the summer and after school for a variety of technology-oriented activities that combined traditional and modern knowledge and skills.

The center also provides services directly related to ESEA programs. According to the district AOTE coordinator, many Alaskan districts are out of compliance with regulations from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights because they are unaware of the law. The center is sponsoring and Snowbank is hosting a workshop on this subject. The AOTE coordinator commented that "there's no [technical assistance] available [in this area] from the state. Only [a staff member] at AKRAC can help."

Improved Teaching and Learning

Seaside School staff believe that AOTE has a positive impact on the school. As a result of AOTE discussions, the school has adopted the practice of using student-led conferences to review quarterly

progress. Students invite their parents to school, where they both meet individually with the teacher to review report cards and portfolios of work. The student leads the event, relying on the teacher only for help. As one parent said, this form of “communication keeps hope alive. I can talk to the teacher and make suggestions. It seems like kids are really open. You can see that difference.” The school’s AOTE focus last year was on communication; this year it is on careers. A teacher explained that she now tries to include in lessons the kinds of adult work where the content would be applied. Another teacher added that in a recent lesson, using traditional technology, he showed the children how the math he was teaching applied to his hobby of making kayaks. Other teachers commented that they appreciated having freedom to meet the AOTE goals according to their own instructional styles and subjects. Last year, for example, parents expressed an interest in improving students’ public speaking skills, and teachers found ways to do that to enhance both English and Yup’ik language fluency.

The village council leader said he had noticed an improvement in parent involvement since the initiation of AOTE, and the AOTE leader agreed. One village elder commented that she had received a letter of recognition “from Juneau” on a presentation she made at a professional meeting. A parent pointed out that she herself sees the elders more often. The AOTE team chooses certain elders to come for breakfast and storytelling on Wednesdays, and parents stay to participate in the partner reading that follows. Every week children spend 20 minutes with an adult or older student doing shared reading activities. The community health aide spoke of her appreciation that she could now call the school up to collaborate in solving a family’s health related problems and arrange for the public safety officer to offer lessons related to risks in subsistence activities, such as knife handling, gun safety, and ice safety.

Parent involvement has made it possible to hold students to higher academic standards, said one teacher. “Parents constantly said, ‘We want our kids to be college capable,’ [but putting that in place was a challenge.] Several years ago only two kids were into algebra. Now all are, and some students are even ready for calculus. In some villages, if you push kids too hard, you’ll push them into another school. Here [parents] want you to push—and you can’t do that without parent support. The cycle of communication allows it to happen.”

The school secretary claimed that AOTE has reduced tardiness and absenteeism: “Now parents call when kids are late or sick. I don’t get any more calls about ‘I don’t like the teacher (or principal).’ Parents know how to go through channels. There’s a complaint procedure and people use it.” Prior to AOTE, the secretary said, parents did not call to let the school know if students were going to be late or absent, and they did call to complain about what they perceived as unfair treatment of their children by teachers. Now communication between school and home is very open. Parents more strongly encourage school attendance and call to report changes because they believe that faculty notice and care about students’ well-being and they take their issues directly to teachers, confident of being able to resolve

them.

Other Effects

Given its emphasis on community involvement, it is not surprising that AOTE has effects that extend beyond the school. According to one AOTE trainer, the program has been a stimulus in some villages to work on alcohol abuse among adults. One commonly chosen AOTE goal is to teach students to behave with self-respect and responsibility. As the leadership teams discussed how to teach this and measure its development, they sometimes realized that substance abuse and associated dysfunction among adults set a poor example. In some instances, the leadership teams embraced the goals as a village. In at least one village, a decrease in substance abuse in the general population followed. In addition, some leadership teams in Native corporations have also adopted the AOTE process as a way of doing business.

Barriers to the Delivery of High-Quality, Effective Technical Assistance

One barrier to the delivery of technical assistance is the perennial shortage of time and resources. The Snowbank District is one of two dozen far-flung rural districts; it alone has more than 20 village sites, and all the other rural districts are similarly remote and isolated. The center has about five full-time equivalent staff members. While staff are fairly versatile, there are limits to the time they have available and the scope of their expertise.

Summary

With assistance from AKRAC, the Snowbank School District ran AOTE, which helps schools form leadership cadres including the principal, faculty representatives, community leaders, and elders. The center sponsors AOTE training in Snowbank twice a year, which is attended by leadership teams from each of the district's 26 schools. A district AOTE coordinator provides follow-up services and consults with the center when needs arise. In addition, the center works with district personnel to hold the Basic Literacy Strategies Institute and to train reading tutors. Center staff were praised for their ability to accommodate local customs and engage district, school, and community members in school reform. However, the district noted that the center lacked adequate expertise in Indian Education. Local respondents reported positive effects of center services, in such areas as parental involvement, tardiness, and absenteeism.

OVERVIEW: CASE STUDIES OF COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES BETWEEN AND AMONG COMPREHENSIVE CENTERS AND OTHER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS

Title XIII of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) states that the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers are required to "coordinate services, work cooperatively, and regularly share information with, the regional educational laboratories, the Eisenhower regional consortium . . . research and development centers, State literacy centers . . . and other entities engaged in research, development, dissemination, and technical assistance activities which are supported by the [U.S. Department of Education] as part of a Federal technical assistance system . . ." *Pub. L. No. 103-382, 13001 108 Stat. 3876 (1994).*

In an effort to understand and clearly document the ways in which the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers have fulfilled this mandate, PSA invited center directors to nominate some of their best examples of specific collaborative activities for in-depth study. Nine collaborative activities were initially selected for analysis; however, one was eliminated because the staff member who had been the primary contact no longer works for the center and, as a result, that particular collaboration has effectively ceased.

The eight nominated activities are quite diverse. In some instances clients have received assistance on a specific problem or narrow range of issues for many years, while other nominated activities illustrate collaborative relationships in which the centers address a wide range of topics and client concerns.

The eight selected collaborations are the following:

1. **Civil Rights Project:** The Region IV Comprehensive Center at AEL, ED's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), and the Southeast Equity Center, a desegregation technical assistance center in Miami, Fla., are collaborating to assist school districts in North Carolina comply with civil rights laws regarding the education of limited English proficient (LEP) students. OCR initiated the collaboration in an effort to bring the resources of all three organizations to bear on the districts' legal and educational problems. The center and the Desegregation Assistance Center possess a great deal of knowledge and expertise in designing and developing educational programs for LEP students, and in providing training and professional development to help teachers meet these students' academic needs more effectively. This kind of educational support, coupled with legal guidance from OCR, has been invaluable to the resource-strapped, noncompliant school districts.

2. **Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program:** Since 1996 all of the centers have provided technical assistance related to the implementation of CSRD

in their respective regions. As part of our study of collaboration, we examined the CSRD-related activities of four centers: (1) the New York Technical Assistance Center, (2) the Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center, (3) the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Comprehensive Center, and (4) the Region XIV Comprehensive Center. Each of the selected centers described CSRD as an important priority. They also reported that they were engaged in productive collaborations with partner organizations such as regional labs, state education agencies (SEA), and local organizations to provide information and support to schools and districts implementing the CSRD program and reform models. Together with their partners, the centers: (1) host model showcases to introduce the CSRD program and reform models to local education agencies (LEA); (2) sponsor conferences that address CSRD implementation and evaluation issues; (3) assist SEA personnel in completing their applications for CSRD funding; (4) review CSRD subgrantee applications and help SEA staff to identify and select the most promising applicants; and (5) provide materials and training to CSRD subgrantees.

3. Data Strategies Initiative (DSI): The New England Comprehensive Assistance Center joined with the Eisenhower Regional Alliance for Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education Reform (the Regional Alliance), and the Northeast Regional Resource Center (NERRC), in a collaborative effort to assist LEAs and SEAs improve their accountability systems. As members of the New England Technical Assistance Collaborative (NETAC), the three federally funded technical assistance providers meet regularly to combine their expertise and resources, share information, and coordinate technical assistance to states, districts, and schools.

4. Reading Success Network: The purpose of the Reading Success Network (RSN) is to improve reading achievement among students in grades 1–3 by developing a national network of trainers of teacher-coaches who support classroom teachers' efforts to provide powerful instruction in reading. RSN includes five key components: (1) diagnosis of reading skills; (2) intervention strategies; (3) data analysis to inform instruction; (4) coaching for results; and (5) a support network. All 15 Comprehensive Centers have participated in RSN training sessions at which they have shared information, materials, staff, and expertise among themselves in order to build in-house capacity to provide services to RSN participants in their respective regions. In addition to helping center staff improve their own knowledge and skills in this area, participation in RSN has also helped the Comprehensive Centers share expertise and resources while providing direct services to clients in their regions who seek to introduce RSN in their schools and districts.

5. Self-Assessment Guide for Excellent Services (SAGES) for Children and Youth in Homeless Situations: The New York Technical Assistance Center, Support for Texas Academic Renewal (STAR) Center, Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center, and the Region XIV Comprehensive Center worked together on a collaborative research project with the Texas Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. The goal of the project was to identify factors that contribute to academic success for homeless students and to develop a tool for assessing the effect of academic programs on homeless students. In order to broaden the scope of the project and increase its national significance, approximately two staff members from each of the participating organizations interviewed classroom teachers, homeless liaisons, school and district administrators, and homeless services providers in 25 school districts around the nation.

The project team then analyzed the data and developed a self-assessment tool for educators and service providers.

6. Services to Rural Areas: The Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (SWCC) and the Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico Rural Systemic Initiative (UCAN-RSI) are both located at New Mexico Highlands University. UCAN-RSI is a National Science Foundation initiative that is designed to involve community members in efforts to improve science, mathematics, and technology education in selected rural school districts in the four-corner states. In partnership with UCAN-RSI, SWCC has endeavored to expand its services to American Indian communities, help reform education through professional development, and improve science, mathematics, and technology education in rural communities.

7. Services to the Pacific Region: The Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center is one of several organizations located within Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), a nonprofit corporation that serves the Pacific educational community. The center collaborates with the Hawaii Department of Education, various community organizations, and other technical assistance organizations such as the regional lab, STAR Center (Program), and the Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Pacific Regional Consortium, which are also located at PREL. The collaboration among PREL staff has focused primarily on hosting a professional development conference for educators from the Pacific region and Alaska, organizing a Leadership Academy for school and district administrators, and providing intensive technical assistance to a local public school on a small Pacific island that educates 1,200 students grades 1–8. Collaboration between the center and other PREL organizations is aided by the fact that PREL leadership and staff share a common mission and service region.

8. Superintendents' Policy Institute: The Region III Comprehensive Center, together with Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)—a regional education laboratory in Georgia—and superintendents from two school districts, organized and led a working group in examining issues pertaining to accountability, language minority students, education reform, and school improvement. The goals of the institute, which brought together approximately 30 superintendents from school districts with high concentrations of poor students, were to: (1) generate cutting-edge thinking about education reform and school improvement, and (2) disseminate new knowledge developed through collaborative inquiry among the participants. In addition, as part of the collaboration, one of the superintendents has allowed staff from the center to field-test in his school district some of the theories and ideas that emerged from the institute.

PSA conducted in-depth telephone interviews with the center staff involved in the eight collaborative activities, and with the representatives of the participating organizations with whom they work. We sought to enhance our knowledge of how, why, and when collaboration occurs, what it means to those involved (for example, in terms of what they do, feel, and experience), and what effect it has on those who provide and receive the services and assistance. Specifically, our questions focused on: (1) the extent to which the centers have become part of a networked system of assistance, and are drawing on the resources of each other and other technical assistance providers in their region; (2) the conditions that have impeded or aided collaboration and coordination; (3) the extent to which collaboration is an important goal for center staff; and (4) the results or effects of collaboration.

Each profile that follows describes the focus or goals of the collaboration, factors that have motivated the relationship, planning and development processes, the context in which the relationship has developed (for example, personal attitudes, local and organizational politics), and the effects or outcomes associated with the activities. As a group, they effectively illustrate the extent to which the term “collaboration” and the requirement to “coordinate” have been broadly interpreted and understood, and the many factors that have impeded or aided the Comprehensive Centers’ efforts to satisfy this legislative objective.

Civil Rights Project

Region IV Comprehensive Center at the Appalachia Regional Educational Laboratory (AEL) Office for Civil Rights Southeastern Equity Center

Focus of Collaboration

ED's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) asked the Region IV Comprehensive Center and the Southeastern Equity Center to offer their services to three school districts in North Carolina. The districts had been identified as being out of compliance with certain civil rights laws regarding the education of limited English proficient (LEP) students. OCR believed the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center could provide valuable services to the districts because they possessed a great deal of knowledge and expertise in designing and developing educational programs, and in providing staff development and training to school and district staff.

Motivation for Collaboration

OCR was aware that staff at the Comprehensive Center have in-depth knowledge of education-related issues and particular expertise in addressing the needs of LEP students because of a prior working relationship between staff at the two organizations. In addition, OCR knew that staff at the Equity Center have an understanding of civil rights issues and are able to look at education programs and understand the civil rights implications of the decisions that are made. The Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center were invited to work together in North Carolina because of this "complementary expertise." In addition, the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center were interested because they recognized that the need for assistance was great, and that collaborating with each other would satisfy important objectives of each organization.

Planning and Implementation

One staff person from each of the organizations attended the initial meeting that was held at OCR to discuss the new project. The roles and responsibilities of each organization were discussed and clarified. Following this meeting, OCR, the Comprehensive Center, and the Equity Center traveled to the school districts that were not in compliance to meet with district staff and review the findings of OCR's earlier monitoring visits. The Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center then held preliminary

discussions with district officials about the changes that were needed in order for the district to become compliant with the law.

The Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center agreed to help each of the participating school districts to draft and implement an agreement with OCR and prepare required periodic progress reports. To facilitate the process, the three collaborating partners held conference calls with each district. In addition, the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center received copies of all correspondence between OCR and the school districts (for example, monitoring reports and resolutions that described where and how the districts were deficient). In return, they provided OCR with copies of work plans that described how they intended to help each district.

The staff member from the Comprehensive Center and the staff member from the Equity Center who were assigned to this project spent a great deal of time communicating between their offices in Arlington, Virginia, and Miami, Florida via telephone and e-mail. AWe wanted to make sure we were in agreement about what we were saying . . . we did not want to confuse the districts so we made sure to stay in touch.≡ Their responsibilities were similar, although there was some division of labor based on expertise and availability. For example, the staff member from the Comprehensive Center has significant classroom experience at the secondary level, and with teaching LEP students. The staff member from the Equity Center has worked with district and elementary school staff, and has expertise in desegregation issues. The two “negotiated who would do what . . . [one] might do a training on assessments or on leadership for ESL directors, while [the other] might do [training sessions] on literacy, ESL strategies for the middle grades, or ways to improve communication with parents.≡ Assistance to school and district staff was provided both jointly and individually by them, depending on their availability and on the nature of the activity and need that was being addressed. For example, sometimes they would speak to a group of teachers together, or they might divide the group by grade level (that is, elementary and secondary).

Context

The Comprehensive Center, Equity Center, and OCR report that they are quite pleased with the close working relationship that has developed over the course of the joint project. It has been an easy, seamless relationship, with neither OCR nor the districts able to distinguish between the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center in terms of the nature or quality of the services that are provided.

The organizations attribute their success to several factors. First, months of careful planning occurred in the initial stages and there were ample opportunities to clarify needs, expectations, and roles. For example, during the planning phase the technical assistance centers were able to instruct the relatively new OCR staff on the economic and educational context of North Carolina, an area that was somewhat unfamiliar to them. In return, OCR promoted the technical assistance centers within the districts and

helped to clarify questions and concerns about their role. AThey let everyone know that they [the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center] were good technical assistance providers.≡

The Comprehensive Center staff and Equity Center staff also attribute their good working relationship to the fact that they are both quite knowledgeable and confident and that they share similar philosophies of education and views on pedagogy. AThere . . . has been flexibility on both our parts . . . we see and accept each other's ideas and perspectives.≡ The nature and extent of the contact between them has varied based on which phase of the project they are in. At times there has been daily contact (for example, when planning an activity), and at other times it has been monthly (for example, while waiting for the LEA to prepare a response to OCR).

Currently the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center are working primarily in only one of the three original districts. OCR reports, however, that it has initiated reviews in two other districts, and it plans to inform these new LEAs about the help that is available from the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center. Both the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center have expressed their interest in continuing this work together with OCR in other districts.

Effects

One of the most noticeable effects of this collaborative project has been the tremendous improvement in the quality of the progress reports that are submitted by the school districts to OCR. In fact, because of the help they have received, OCR expects that Adistrict compliance will happen sooner rather than later.≡ The Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center share the credit with OCR. They point out that, because of OCR=s involvement, they have the Aleverage≡ to carry out good programs within districts that are being monitored for compliance. In addition, because of the detailed reports that are prepared by OCR, the districts know exactly where they are deficient and are aware of what they need to do to correct the problems. Thus, Asuccess≡ is easy to identify, measure, and track.

Collaboration has aided the delivery of a Adouble dose of expertise” because the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center are able to target their resources at the identified needs. In addition, the two staff members acknowledge that, together, they are able to provide much more assistance than either one of them would have been able to provide working alone. Given the level of need that exists, this is important.

Working together has also improved the exchange of knowledge and expertise. For example, OCR reported that its staff members sometimes ask staff from the Comprehensive Center and the Equity

Center about the appropriateness of a strategy being proposed by a district (for example, a service delivery model or a testing strategy) and have been given clear, informative answers. As a result, OCR's understanding of education-related concepts and issues has been enhanced by its collaborating partners. Similarly, staff from the Comprehensive Center and the Equity Center have had an opportunity to observe and learn from each other during joint workshops and trainings.

OCR anticipates that collaborative technical assistance will prove to be quite cost effective in the long run, because it will ultimately help to reduce the amount of time and money that is spent in monitoring activities. In fact, OCR staff report that they have already noticed that the quality of the information that they are getting from the districts that have received help from the technical assistance centers has greatly improved.

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program

**New York Technical Assistance Center
Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's
Comprehensive Center, Region X
Region XIV Comprehensive Center**

Focus of Collaboration

Since its inception in 1996, the Comprehensive Centers have provided technical assistance to clients interested in applying for Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program (CSRSD) funds, and those actually planning and implementing the program. Here we examine the collaborative services related to CSRSD that are provided by four Comprehensive Centers: (1) the New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC), (2) the Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC), (3) the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Comprehensive Center, Region X (NWREL Region X), and (4) the Region XIV Comprehensive Center. Specifically, we focus on the Comprehensive Centers' services to New York, Mississippi, Florida, and the northwest region.

The Comprehensive Centers collaborated with the regional labs, state departments of education, and other organizations to provide a wide range of services. For example, the Comprehensive Centers have collaborated with other organization to: (1) host model showcases to introduce the CSRSD program and other reform models; (2) sponsor conferences that address implementation and evaluation issues; (3) give intensive assistance to "fragile" CSRSD schools that require ongoing support; (4) help states complete their applications for CSRSD funds; (5) assist in the state review and selection of CSRSD subgrant applications; and (6) create materials, such as a guidebook to CSRSD evaluation and an overview of reform models and resources. The collaborative partners provide services to customers at all levels of the education system, including teachers, principals, and district and state administrators.

Motivation for Collaboration

Participants in all four collaborative efforts said they were motivated to collaborate in order to meet their organizational goals and contractual charges. ED expects the Comprehensive Centers and the regional labs to facilitate the implementation of CSRSD, and there are few differences in the expectations for each of the programs. The regional labs and Comprehensive Centers have overlapping regions and clients, so it made sense for them to work together, provide common service, and satisfy contractual obligations.

Some staff from both the Comprehensive Centers and state education agencies (SEAs) also

mentioned that they were motivated to collaborate by their desire to leverage additional funds. For instance, by collaborating, they were able to host one large school reform model showcase, rather than two smaller events. By pooling their resources with the regional labs, which had received a larger portion of the funds for providing CSRD-related assistance, the Comprehensive Centers were able to provide more services than they would have been able to otherwise. Similarly, staff at state departments of education said they would never have been able to fund services to their local districts and schools that were comparable to what they received. They expressed thanks that “the regional educational laboratory and center supplied the lion’s share of funds.”

Other motivators for working together are a desire to avoid service duplication and “mixed messages,” and the recognition that, because each organization brings staff with specific skills, knowledge, and expertise, the quality of the services provided can be improved through collaboration. For example, several respondents noted that the labs are recognized for their knowledge of the CSRD models and how to evaluate them, while the Comprehensive Centers are valued for their close relationships with school, district, and state personnel, and their working knowledge of local school improvement efforts. The SEAs are relied upon to provide valuable information about client needs and the state agenda; they are also an efficient avenue for communicating with schools and districts.

Planning and Implementation

Although there were variations among the four Comprehensive Centers, typically they reported that most of their collaborative activities occurred with the regional labs and SEAs. All of the partnerships sponsored a workshop or conference, and most held a showcase of school reform models, during which model developers gave presentations on their programs and the CSRD program was explained to potential applicants. Several collaborative partnerships also: (1) assisted SEAs in preparing their CSRD applications; (2) produced products, such as an evaluation guidebook; and (3) provided direct assistance to school-level CSRD programs.

New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC). NYTAC and the SEA in New York created a “think tank” to assist in the design, development, and implementation of CSRD in New York. NYTAC is in charge of planning and preparing for these meetings; it sets the agenda, handles logistical details, and facilitates the discussions. The 25-to-30 member group includes representatives from the: (1) Comprehensive Center; (2) SEA; (3) Effective Schools Network (a state-funded group of regional centers that work with Title I schools around the state to achieve school improvement); (4) New York City Board of Education; and (5) the regional educational laboratory that serves New York. The group meets for one or two days on a bimonthly basis to identify and discuss program needs, suggest changes, engage in strategic planning, and provide needed assistance to the state and CSRD subgrantees. For example, NYTAC assisted the SEA in designing its CSRD application, and, together with the regional

lab, hosted a model showcase and trained review teams in the appropriate use of a rubric to assess CSRD applications. Similarly, NYTAC and the SEA have collaborated to provide direct technical assistance to schools seeking to implement CSRD.

Task-oriented subcommittees, which include staff from all the organizations that are members of the “think tank,” are charged with implementing many of the activities and ideas that are decided on by the larger group. For example, one subcommittee developed contact logs that are designed to describe and track the technical assistance that is received by the various CSRD subgrantees around the state, while another subcommittee created a Web page to organize and inform clients of services and assistance. A third subcommittee collaborated to produce and distribute notebooks with a list of resources that are available to clients.

Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC). SECAC, the regional educational laboratory that serves Mississippi, and the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) collaborate to plan and implement CSRD-related activities in the state. The collaboration in Mississippi consists primarily of three events: (1) the CSRD model showcase that was held in summer 1998, (2) the CSRD evaluation institute that was held in summer 1999, and (3) the CSR leadership institute held in fall 1999.

The two-day CSRD model showcase provided school personnel with an introduction to the elements of comprehensive school reform, CSRD models, and the state application criteria and process. Fourteen model developers presented their models at the institute, and more than 500 participants attended. Thirty-nine schools had their applications approved and implemented CSRD during the 1998-99 school year. The two-day intensive program evaluation institute was a follow-up for all 39 schools and focused on improving the ability of schools to evaluate their own program. In fall 1999, a two-day leadership institute focused on issues that CSRD school leaders must address after their first year.

Staff participated in conference telephone calls and in-person meetings in the months and weeks prior to each of the scheduled events, in order to establish timelines, agendas, and each partner’s specific responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities were determined based on each organization’s specific capabilities. For example, MDE provided a database of school and district contacts, mailed invitations, and registered participants. The laboratory was primarily responsible for securing speakers for the institutes, putting together materials, and facilitating activities. SECAC handled the logistics regarding accommodations, food, audio/visual equipment, and facilities, and helped facilitate activities and write promotional letters to districts and schools. Staff from all three organizations made presentations at the leadership institute in fall 1999.

NWREL's Comprehensive Center, Region X. The Comprehensive Center is collaborating with the regional educational laboratory that serves the Northwest on three CSRSD activities, and with the Oregon Indian Education Association (OIEA) on a fourth activity. Specifically, the Comprehensive Center is participating in: (1) team site visits to CSRSD schools throughout the region; (2) the development of a CSRSD evaluation guidebook; and (3) a CSRSD evaluation conference. The Comprehensive Center is also collaborating with OIEA on conducting research on “culturally congruent” CSRSD designs.

Staff from the regional educational laboratory and the Comprehensive Center have created teams to visit all of the CSRSD schools in the region to help sites assess their needs and help with planning, implementation, and evaluation. Each site will be visited at least once by the team and will receive follow-up telephone calls. In addition, each site will have a CSRSD liaison who will be responsible for consulting with regional laboratory and Comprehensive Center staff, and requesting services when needed.

In the second collaborative project, the Comprehensive Center and the regional laboratory meet once or twice per month to work on a guidebook for evaluating CSRSD and other whole school reform efforts. Laboratory staff are contributing chapters on the conceptual framework and justification for evaluation, implementation evaluation, and three examples of school reform designs. Comprehensive Center staff are contributing chapters on impact evaluation and on CSRSD resources. The third collaborative activity is closely related to the second. The Comprehensive Center and the regional laboratory will hold a conference at which they will present the CSRSD evaluation guidebook and request feedback. They plan to invite CSR evaluators and state and school leaders who can critique and offer input, as well as benefit from the resource.

Finally, a staff member from the Comprehensive Center is working with OIEA to identify CSRSD models that are “culturally congruent” with schools that have high populations of American Indian students. The Comprehensive Center and OIEA have developed a rating system and plan to invite model developers to a conference to respond to and discuss their related findings.

Region XIV Comprehensive Center. Both the Comprehensive Center and the staff of the regional educational laboratory that serves Florida have conducted workshops and presentations on CSRSD in each of Florida’s five regional areas. Specifically, they have: (1) offered grant writing assistance; (2) raised awareness of CSRSD by emphasizing the intense scrutiny and fundamental changes that accompany the decision to participate in the program; (3) provided training on the nine components of the program; and (4) sponsored a CSRSD model showcase to introduce the models that are available.

The SEA has also received intensive assistance. For example, staff from the Comprehensive Center and the regional educational laboratory spent four days with SEA staff and helped them to

complete the application for state funding. In addition, they have collaborated to train the state's Peer Review Panel in how to score local applications for CSRSD funds.

Respondents estimate that they had face-to-face planning meetings approximately 12 times in the 1998-1999 academic year. In addition, planning and implementation of the Florida model showcase required a total of about one week of their time, although this occurred over the course of a month. Overall, they estimate that approximately 15 to 20 days have been devoted to planning activities throughout that year, with the model showcase and peer review training consuming most of the time.

Context

Many respondents said a close and open working relationship facilitated their collaboration on CSRSD projects. For collaboration to occur, participants must "trust each other, have camaraderie, and speak with openness." It does not help if "people can't say what they really want or don't want." It also helps when individuals are "very professional, cordial, and respectful of each other's expertise." Respondents said that these types of working relationships often grow out of knowing or knowing of the work of potential collaborators. In other words, individuals found it easy to collaborate with colleagues that they had already worked with or knew of through a common network. A few respondents suggested that collaborative partnerships may depend in part on "chemistry" and individual personalities "meshing." The ability to "give and take" is also seen as a necessary part of the collaborative process. As one respondent explained, "You can't dictate collaboration. You can't say, 'Do this and we'll do that.' You have to feel your way around and be open. . . ."

Several respondents emphasized the benefits of being in close proximity to fellow collaborators: You can meet face to face as issues arise, exchange materials, maintain a relationship, and maximize time spent on the project. One respondent stated that the partnership was helped by the fact that she shared an office with her collaborating partner, and another noted that she has an office that is very close to the SEA and this made her more accessible to state staff. Similarly, those who share a common parent organization observed that the partners are more likely to understand each other's mission and current projects, and the proximity makes it easier for individuals to split their time among projects and funding streams in order to maximize service quality and the use of expertise. For individuals who are not close in proximity, technology such as e-mail and conference calls helps facilitate communication.

Respondents were, in general, very positive about their collaborative experiences; however, several potential obstacles to the development of a good, effective relationship were identified. These were: (1) institutional competition; (2) differences between organizations in terms of how they structure and prioritize relationships; and (3) mismatched service regions. In other words, organizations that view each other as potential rivals, or who have goals and missions that are somewhat different, are likely to

find collaboration more difficult.

Effects

Many respondents indicated that the quality and quantity of their services improved through collaboration, and they offered anecdotal evidence of improved CSRD applications or programs, as well as high customer satisfaction ratings, to support their assertion. Specifically, the collaboration provided the partner organizations with additional resources that allowed them to reach more customers, and the collaborative partners provided new and different kinds of expertise that allowed them to effectively address a broader range of needs, questions, and problems.

Several regional educational laboratory staff members said they gained contextual knowledge and benefited from increased contact with local education personnel, by working with the Comprehensive Centers. Likewise, Comprehensive Center staff members said they benefited from the research background of the laboratories, and the exposure to model developers that the laboratories provided. Finally, several individuals also commented that the collaboration with SEAs allowed laboratory and Comprehensive Center staff members to better align services with the state's agenda and needs.

Data Strategies Initiative

New England Comprehensive Assistance Center Eisenhower Regional Alliance for Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education Reform Northeast Regional Resource Center

Focus of Collaboration

In the fall of 1997, the New England Comprehensive Assistance Center (NECAC) joined together with the Eisenhower Regional Alliance for Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education Reform (Eisenhower Regional Alliance) and the Northeast Regional Resource Center (NERRC) to sponsor the first of three Data Strategies Institutes. The Data Strategies Institutes formed the backbone of the Data Strategies Initiative (DSI), a collaborative effort to assist school districts and state departments of education in improving their accountability systems. By working collaboratively on DSI, the three organizations were able to combine expertise and other resources to achieve common goals without losing sight of the unique purposes of each separate organization.

Motivation

NECAC, the Eisenhower Regional Alliance, and NERRC are members of the New England Technical Assistance Collaborative (NETAC). As members of this group, they meet regularly to share information and to coordinate technical assistance to states, districts, and schools. The idea of collaborating on the DSI developed at a quarterly NETAC meeting as the different organizations identified shared goals and interests. For example, NECAC and the Eisenhower Regional Alliance decided to collaborate because both organizations were interested in working with data. A NECAC staff member explained that “the Eisenhower group . . . had done a couple of events, held a couple of meetings [regarding data]; we had also, but we figured out soon that we shouldn’t reinvent the wheel. We pulled together our data collection activities.”

Although the organizations were interested in helping educators to use data more effectively, they did have somewhat different perspectives and agendas. NECAC was interested in data as a tool for promoting schoolwide change, while the Eisenhower Regional Alliance focused more specifically on using data to address the math and science needs of underserved populations. NERRC became involved because they wanted to ensure that states did not ignore special-needs students when looking at the data.

Planning and Implementation

The planning team for the DSI included one or two people from each organization. While there were occasional face-to-face meetings, most communication happened through weekly conference calls in the months prior to a Data Strategies Institute. According to one staff member, “Most of [the planning] was done on teleconferences. There was a lot of work done between teleconferences, so when we [made] the calls it was like a walkthrough. There was dialogue on decision points.” Also, the use of e-mail facilitated the sharing of draft materials. Another added, “I don’t see how we could have done it without computers—without the Internet. It would have been so cumbersome to share information without it. Even with a fax machine, it would have been too tedious and time-consuming.”

According to the participants, the organizations approached the DSI in “the true spirit of collaboration.” They brought their resources—including time, money, and skills—to the table and figured out how they could use them most effectively. The budget was developed around the resources that each organization was able to offer to the group, and a flexible accounting system was put in place. Costs are shared as fairly as possible, and efforts are made to “even things out” so no one organization bears an unfair cost or burden of responsibility.

Negotiating the content and format of the DSI required compromise. In fact, one participant observed that some of the organizational differences that gave strength to the collaboration were also factors that hindered it: “We all have, to a certain extent, different scopes of work and different audiences that we normally deal with. That to a certain extent puts large obstacles in our way.” Nevertheless, the project was “a real collaboration: it was giving and taking. Sometimes there was something that we really wanted that didn’t fit in. We figured out how to do that in different ways without ruining the collaboration.”

Context

Staff from each organization stressed the importance of shared goals. “Common need makes it work. You can’t collaborate about nothing.” Sharing goals did not obscure important distinctions among the organizations, however. The director of the Eisenhower Regional Alliance explained that they found it important not to construct a collaborative effort by “overlapping all goals and objectives.” Each organization contributed to the collaboration with their own purpose and perspective.

The collaboration was facilitated by good working relationships among the partners. This was partly because staff from the participating organizations had prior relationships that had been built through NETAC and other contacts. As a result, the ground was ripe for collaboration. Regular, effective communication also made a difference. Although they did not hold many face-to-face meetings, they communicated regularly by telephone and did not rely completely on e-mail. “A lot of things happened

by e-mail, but you can't deal with resolving problems through e-mail very well. . . . We kept in touch all the time." In fact, according to one participant, had it not "happened naturally," they would have had to establish rules to ensure consistent communication.

Effects

The DSI has helped several states to provide better technical assistance and support to local districts regarding the use of data, and helped to bring some structure and resources to an area of need within many SEAs. For example, the SEA in Maine decided to host their own DSI for local districts. Most acknowledge, however, that it is too early to evaluate the full effect of the DSI: "Nobody is looking for improved student achievement out of it at this point. Some are still looking for data warehousing systems to use. They are all further down the road to developing systems for accountability. I don't know what the lasting benefits will be."

Collaboration also had a positive effect on the collaborating partners. According to one participant, "It enabled us to do something that we couldn't have afforded to do on our own and to do it the way we really wanted to do it. We were able to do it the way we dreamed." This was partly because of the synergistic effect of combining expertise and resources. It also resulted from improved efficiency, such as sharing a secretary. Another suggested that the organizations ". . . could [not] have afforded to run the three or potentially four institutes we were planning on running on our own budgets. Collaboration enabled us to stretch our dollars and our resources and to benefit from the combined work of the organizations."

The collaborating organizations also enjoyed other benefits associated with the DSI project. NECAC staff say they learned new workshop techniques; the Eisenhower Regional Alliance said it brought focus to their work; and NERRC said they gained a better understanding of schoolwide change and how it relates to their own work with special needs students. In addition, collaboration helped to motivate and inspire participants. "It really kept the fire alive. It was like having a trainer, someone keeping you going."

Finally, DSI was said to have promoted "cross fertilization" and a networked system of technical assistance by expanding contacts and relationships between and among staff in the various state departments of education and collaborating organizations.

Reading Success Network

All 15 Comprehensive Centers

Focus of Collaboration

The purpose of the Reading Success Network (RSN) is to improve the reading achievement of students in grades 1-3 by developing a national network of trainers of teacher-coaches who support classroom teachers' efforts to provide powerful instruction in reading. It includes five components: (1) diagnosis of reading skills; (2) intervention strategies; (3) data analysis to inform instruction; (4) coaching for results; and (5) support network. Originally an initiative of the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center, RSN was born out of a need for a regionwide brain trust in Southern California of literacy experts who specialize in helping disadvantaged students.

Motivation

At their December 1997 meeting, the Comprehensive Center directors decided to spearhead an initiative that would give the Comprehensive Centers broader recognition and, at the same time, advance ED's goals. During brainstorming sessions, the directors searched for "common denominators" around which to organize their initiative. Reading, one of ED's top priorities, emerged as the topic of choice. The director of the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center suggested that the Comprehensive Center network expand his region's Reading Success Network. The directors agreed that it would be beneficial to have an existing model from which to draw ideas and experienced staff from whom they could rely on for training and guidance. Moreover, the fact that ED had already expressed an interest in RSN made the initiative even more attractive.

Planning and Implementation

Following the center directors' meeting in December 1997, planning for RSN moved forward quickly. Implementation of RSN occurred in three phases: (1) the first RSN training session in San Antonio, Texas, in May 1998; (2) the second training session in New Orleans, Louisiana, in February 1999; and (3) the third training session in Southern California, in August 1999.

The directors from the Comprehensive Centers in regions III, VII, XII, and XIV were

instrumental in getting the San Antonio training session organized. The Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center spearheaded the training, preparing materials, planning the content, issuing letters of invitation, convening a panel of experts, and delivering the training, while the Region VII Comprehensive Center took care of logistical arrangements, with the support of its host organization, the University of Oklahoma. For example, they devised a payment system to coordinate cost sharing by the Comprehensive Centers, coordinated the meeting registration, made hotel arrangements, and organized mailings and other information exchanges with meeting participants.

The week-long training in San Antonio featured Comprehensive Center staff and, when appropriate, representatives from each center's own RSN project. Following the training, a copy of each Comprehensive Center's RSN plan was disseminated throughout the network. Shortly thereafter, the New England Comprehensive Assistance Center set up a RSN listserv through which Comprehensive Center staff could communicate and share ideas.

The second and third training sessions took place in January and August 1999, in New Orleans and San Diego, respectively. The content and format of the New Orleans training session was based in part on requests from the field, and in part on discussions with Comprehensive Center directors. Again, the Comprehensive Centers contributed in various ways to the event. For example, the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center shared information about data analysis and intervention; the New York Technical Assistance Center led the section of the training on coaching; the New England Comprehensive Assistance Center monitored the progress of RSN implementation; and the Region VII Comprehensive Center helped identify appropriate contacts to conduct training sessions, and made logistical arrangements. The first two training sessions involved Comprehensive Center clients responsible for implementing RSN in their respective regions. The third training in Southern California, which was described as a "joint effort" of the Comprehensive Centers, was, however, reserved for Comprehensive Center staff only.

RSN's five essential components are the common thread that binds the various Comprehensive Center initiatives. However, while each Comprehensive Center must adhere to the essential components, they may pursue multiple goals (for example, parent involvement, services to students with limited English proficiency), and implement the initiative at their own pace.

Modern technology has facilitated this common initiative. Apart from work done at directors' meetings and RSN training sessions, a great deal of planning and information sharing takes place technologically, using the RSN listserv, e-mail, and conference calls. In fact, the listserv streamlines communication, ensuring that all Comprehensive Centers receive the same information in an efficient manner.

Context

The RSN is arguably the “most significant” collaboration among the centers. The initiative benefits from the leadership skills of all 15 Comprehensive Center directors and is facilitated by extensive communication among them. According to one Comprehensive Center director, this communication allows for the “testing out [of] ideas and [creation of] new ways of doing things, the latter of which is very important.”

To enhance the network’s communication with ED, the directors of the 15 Comprehensive Centers select four directors to sit on the RSN Coordinating Committee. The committee, which rotates three members each year, represents the directors on key issues related to RSN. However, the network’s committee structure can slow progress as decisions await approval from all 15 directors. In addition, as one director explained, “Collaboration takes a lot of give and take, and all [players] have to believe in the bottom line. [Among the centers], there are different levels of interest and commitment [to RSN].”

Collaboration sometimes occurs on a smaller scale within the network. For example, the Region VI Comprehensive Assistance Center at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the Region VII Comprehensive Center co-hosted a one-day orientation in Chicago for approximately 75 decisionmakers at the SEA and LEA levels (for example, curriculum directors, superintendents, assistant superintendents, Title I directors) to “move RSN throughout our 12-state region” and to involve key decisionmakers “so that things don’t fizzle out.” The two centers saw opportunities for collaboration due to their geographical proximity and as a way to maximize limited resources.

Effects

Collaboration has had a positive effect on the Comprehensive Centers’ capacity to provide services to RSN participants in their regions. “Every center has carved out its own way to build in-house capacity to implement RSN,” observed one center director. For example, some Comprehensive Centers have promoted ED’s concept of a networked system of technical assistance by coordinating with regional educational laboratories, universities, and other partners in their regions to enhance their capacity to use the RSN and expand their reach. This collaborative sharing of information, materials, staff, and expertise has not only enabled the Comprehensive Centers to use the RSN quickly, it has bridged gaps among the directors, helped foster greater trust, and made the Comprehensive Center directors’ meetings more productive. “We learned that we were quite capable of bringing our expertise together,” added another Comprehensive Center director.

Individual Comprehensive Centers have supported the network in different ways. For example, by: (1) attending and conducting training sessions throughout the regions; (2) serving as resources throughout the planning and development processes; (3) sharing staff expertise; and (4) developing and disseminating training manuals, newsletters, surveys and evaluation instruments, and other materials.

While in most cases the Comprehensive Centers distribute materials as a means of sharing with their colleagues, they also do so to obtain comments on new products. “RSN has opened up great opportunities for center staff to learn about one another,” observed one Comprehensive Center director. “It takes a lot of work to pull this collaboration together, but once it gets going, the benefits are too numerous to count.”

RSN has become extremely popular; however, the Comprehensive Centers do not have the resources to meet the high demand for services. Although most Comprehensive Center directors believe it is too early to determine the effects of RSN on clients, there are early indicators of success. The initiative has generated a “groundswell of interest from teachers” and schools have begun to commit time and resources to the project. The Comprehensive Centers are working together to design a national evaluation, which is being informed, in part, by evaluations conducted in individual Comprehensive Centers. It will measure changes in teacher practices and student achievement, among other things.

Self-Assessment Guide for Excellent Services (SAGES) for Children and Youth in Homeless Situations

**New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC)
Support for Texas Academic Renewal (STAR) Center
Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (AKRAC)
Region XIV Comprehensive Center
Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin**

Focus of Collaboration

The Self-Assessment Guide for Excellent Services (SAGES) for Children and Youth in Homeless Situations was a collaborative research project involving staff from the New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC), the Support for Texas Academic Renewal (STAR) Center, the Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (AKRAC), the Region XIV Comprehensive Center, and the Texas Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, located at the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. The purpose of the project, which was supported by a grant from ED, was to identify factors that contribute to high levels of academic success for homeless students, and to develop a tool for assessing the impact of academic programs on homeless students.

During the spring of 1998, a team of 10 researchers from the participating organizations interviewed classroom teachers, McKinney homeless liaisons, school administrators, district administrators, and homeless service providers in 25 school districts throughout the nation. Based on the data collected, the SAGES team collectively identified seven factors that contribute to the academic success of homeless students, and developed a self-assessment tool for educators and service providers who work with homeless children and youth.

Motivation

In 1997, the Texas Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth asked the co-director of the STAR Center for assistance in measuring the success of McKinney Homeless Education programs in Texas, particularly in their capacity to foster students' academic success. The co-director then contacted ED to discuss the need for a tool that would help educators throughout the state assess and address the needs of homeless students.

ED supported STAR Center's proposal but anticipated that the project would have greater national significance if the research was conducted, and the tool applied, in various geographical settings.

Thus, in addition to Texas, the project was expanded to include the states served by the NYTAC, AKRAC, and Region XIV Comprehensive Centers.

Planning and Implementation

ED awarded the SAGES grant in October 1997. The STAR Center received the largest portion of the grant and took the lead in planning and organizing the project. The three other Comprehensive Centers received smaller grants to support their participation. The first SAGES meeting took place in January 1998 in San Antonio, Texas, and important decisions and plans were made. Specifically, the SAGES team named the project, discussed its focus and scope, developed interview protocols, established timelines, and identified next steps.

During the spring of 1998, 10 staff members from the four Comprehensive Centers and the Dana Center interviewed classroom teachers, McKinney homeless liaisons, school and district administrators, and service providers in 25 school districts in Alaska, Florida, New York, and Texas. The team also convened representatives from several state and local departments of education. After most of the data had been collected, the team met again in Dallas for a two-day “working” and “brainstorming” meeting at which they identified the common themes across regions, crafted an outline for the report, and developed the structure of the assessment guide.

The SAGES team identified seven ways in which educational institutions can contribute to the academic success of homeless students, and these factors provided the organizational framework for the final document. Specifically, institutions can: (1) build effective information systems; (2) provide continuity; (3) increase the system’s capacity; (4) use time and resources effectively; (5) create a sense of belonging to increase student-motivated learning; (6) coordinate systemic responses to individual student needs; and (7) generate enthusiasm for learning.

Throughout the project, the team relied on the Internet and telephone technologies to communicate across long distances in a cost-efficient manner. The high cost of travel prohibited team members from meeting face-to-face on a regular basis. E-mail ensured that all members of the team were involved in the development of research instruments and the writing of the report. For example, drafts of the research instrument and the final report were circulated on-line, and comments and suggestions were then shared and discussed during telephone conference calls. Similarly, following the two SAGES meetings in San Antonio and Dallas, a staff member from the Dana Center synthesized the notes from the meeting and distributed them to the entire team via e-mail.

The report highlights examples from each region and contains a set of self-assessment questions and exercises to guide practitioners and service providers. It was submitted to ED in October 1998, and a month later, two members of the SAGES team presented the findings at the National Association of State

Coordinators for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth in Des Moines, Iowa.

Context

From the beginning, the SAGES partners pursued the project with great enthusiasm. Motivated by a clear sense of purpose and deep belief in the value of the information, all team members attended the two meetings and met the agreed-upon deadlines. “There was a real willingness on everyone’s part to see something come out of this,” said one participant. Another added, “Despite the small amount of funding, the Centers had a very sincere interest in doing something that would be of service to the homeless population. Everyone exhibited a sincere interest in making it work, and some did beyond what they were funded to do.”

The process through which SAGES was developed required intensive participation from all parties involved, and the final product reflects the perspectives and expertise of all team members. Although they had to work through some discrepancies in opinions and viewpoints, the congenial nature of the group ensured that they were able to prioritize tasks and reach consensus on key issues. “SAGES involved a true sharing of intellectual resources. We are all people grounded in homeless expertise, research, and technical assistance, and the dialogue flowed freely,” observed a team member.

The director of one of the Comprehensive Centers noted that the SAGES project offers two lessons learned about collaboration: (1) collaboration is more likely to be successful if it is focused on a specific task; and (2) collaborative efforts benefit from one partner playing a leadership role. He explained that the SAGES project was implemented rather swiftly and efficiently because the team had a clear and concrete goal, and effective leadership alleviated the inertia that can often hamper group efforts.

Effects

The collaborative aspects of the SAGES project yielded several benefits. First, team members learned a great deal about homeless students and the fact that, although homeless populations differ throughout the country, the needs of homeless students are more or less the same. Second, the project was enriched by the involvement of four Comprehensive Centers, each of which was able to offer various skills and knowledge. “There’s something inherently positive about having different points of view and perspectives,” said one SEA official. “The result is a more comprehensive, meaningful, and validated product.”

Finally, the SAGES project helped promote communication among the Comprehensive Centers involved. As a result, center staff are now more aware of the kinds and levels of expertise that exist in

other Comprehensive Centers and are more likely to call on their colleagues for help and advice in areas not limited to homeless education. According to one team member, “We now know each other better.”

Services to Rural Areas in Comprehensive Center Region IX

Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico Rural Systemic Initiative

Focus of Collaboration

The Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico Rural Systemic Initiative (UCAN-RSI) and the Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (SWCC) are both located at New Mexico Highlands University. UCAN-RSI is a National Science Foundation (NSF) initiative that is designed to involve community members in efforts to improve science, mathematics, and technology education in selected rural school districts in the four-corner states. Through its partnership with UCAN-RSI, SWCC has been able to expand its work with American Indian communities in its service region.

Motivation

The partnership between UCAN-RSI and SWCC was borne out of a mutual recognition that the goals and objectives of each organization overlapped and that there was an array of potential relationships to be realized. The interest in developing a working relationship was also facilitated by their proximity (that is, they are both housed within the same university) and the fact that some of UCAN-RSI's staff had a prior working relationship with the director of SWCC and were aware of his areas of knowledge and expertise.

UCAN-RSI focuses on math, science, technology, reform, and increasing community involvement. In the course of their work, UCAN-RSI staff also address topics such as standards and assessments and school improvement. They decided to ask the director of SWCC for assistance in preparing their proposal because of his knowledge and experience in these areas. At the same time, the director of SWCC was looking for a partner organization that had a relationship with the American Indian community in the region. SWCC is one of the five Comprehensive Centers that has a special mandate to address Indian education issues and to serve districts and schools with large populations of American Indian students. UCAN-RSI was "a natural fit" because of their emphasis on building and developing partnerships with American Indian tribes, schools, parents, and community groups. In addition, the director of SWCC was attracted by the fact that "NSF's focus was on systemic reform."

Because of their conviction that "there [was] room for both of us to work together," the two organizations "took this goal of collaboration to heart early on," and spent a great deal of time and effort

figuring out the best ways in which to pool their resources so that they could effectively meet multiple needs within schools and districts.

Planning and Implementation

UCAN-RSI and SWCC have worked together on various projects and initiatives. Much of the work they have done together has involved professional development. For example, SWCC has facilitated UCAN-RSI's "high-powered leadership training" in schools and districts by identifying schools that are in need of improvement and has helped UCAN-RSI to evaluate these training sessions. In addition, UCAN-RSI and SWCC periodically train each other's staff.

Both institutions also report that they participate in each other's conferences and special initiatives. For example, UCAN-RSI has helped SWCC prepare for the national bilingual education conference and the migrant education conference, while SWCC has conducted sessions on assessment and on best practices in math education at several UCAN-RSI events. The assistance is practical, with very tangible benefits. For example, UCAN-RSI described how they had been looking for a scale to measure family involvement and, in response, SWCC assigned a member of its own staff to work with them to help them develop their own instrument. Similarly, SWCC reported that UCAN-RSI has helped them to better understand the American Indian community, and to establish relationships with various tribal groups and those who play important roles in Indian education.

Communication and planning regarding these collaborative activities occurs fairly easily because the directors of UCAN-RSI and SWCC attend each other's management and planning meetings, and are kept abreast of the other's activities. Face-to-face meetings are infrequent; however, regular communication is facilitated by fax, e-mail, and teleconferencing. In addition, both organizations have Web pages that are linked to each other. Thus, each organization is aware of the expertise that is available within the other, and requests for information or assistance are easily made on an as-needed basis.

Context

SWCC and UCAN-RSI have a very close relationship, the result of proximity and strong financial and managerial linkages. For example, the director of SWCC is a member of UCAN-RSI's Steering Committee, and SWCC funds two members of UCAN-RSI's staff, one of whom is working on special projects that involve assessing the relevance of culture in the curriculum, and determining ways to improve education for Hispanic students. Similarly, the director of UCAN-RSI is a member of SWCC's

management team. She headed the search for SWCC's current assistant director and sometimes offers suggestions on management-related issues.

SWCC's management team meets quarterly, while UCAN-RSI's Steering Committee meets twice per year. These face-to-face meetings provide an opportunity for each organization to provide an overview of current and planned activities, and facilitates efforts to identify potential areas for collaboration. For example, in September 1998 UCAN-RSI started its Leadership Institute and SWCC was invited to become involved in the new initiative. School teams made up of teachers, administrators, and school board members from around the region now receive training from both UCAN-RSI and SWCC staff on how to achieve school change and reform. The director of UCAN-RSI reports that, through this joint effort, SWCC has helped her organization to raise awareness of the importance of this topic within the American Indian education community.

The directors of UCAN-RSI and SWCC report that because of staff turnover, ongoing training is required to bring new employees up to speed on the status of their collaborative endeavors and to orient them to an innovative way of thinking. As the director of UCAN-RSI explains, "We are on a new frontier . . . [trying] to collaborate across different funding agencies . . . we are in the process of developing a unique model for collaboration."

Effects

The directors of both organizations hope that, in the future, the collaboration between UCAN-RSI and SWCC will be a model to others of how mathematics, science, reading, and school-related management and reform issues can be examined and addressed together in an effort to improve schools and learning. At this stage in the relationship, however, they both agree that their main accomplishment has been in building the "infrastructure or foundation for the future." Specifically, they point to the fact that the collaborative relationship "has helped relationship building in our region," particularly among different tribal organizations, and among staff in the various SEAs. As the director of SWCC explained, "The real value is we have extended the networks we typically work with." Another piece of the "infrastructure" that has been put in place is "a change in attitudes." For example, the director of SWCC reports that in many rural districts without a history of professional development, there is an increased understanding of its importance and a desire to expand opportunities for staff.

Each organization also identified internal benefits that have been realized as a result of this relationship. For example, UCAN-RSI reported that SWCC "has helped us to keep the whole school in perspective." While they have always known about the mandates of the various federal programs, "now [we] focus more on building bridges among them." The UCAN-RSI director also illustrated how SWCC

has helped UCAN-RSI in tangible ways. She explained that a member of the UCAN-RSI staff received training from SWCC in how to use a data system model to collect and analyze data at the classroom, school, and district levels. This UCAN-RSI staff member then taught some UCAN-RSI clients how to use these same skills to help themselves.

Similarly, SWCC reported that UCAN-RSI has aided their work in Indian education, and that SWCC has benefited from the mathematics and science expertise available from UCAN-RSI. UCAN-RSI's emphasis on secondary education has also served to encourage SWCC to look beyond the elementary grades in the course of their work.

Finally, regarding the cost effectiveness of collaboration, the director of UCAN-RSI pointed out: "We have already invested the time in establishing the relationship and building the base. Maintenance will require less time and resources, and the benefits will begin to increase." She concluded by emphasizing that "it is critical for us to show schools a networked system among all programs, not just [ED-funded programs]."

Services to the Pacific Region

**Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center
Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory
Pacific Mathematics and Science Regional Consortium
PRELStar
Freely Associated States Educational Grant**

Focus of Collaboration

The Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center, Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory, Pacific Mathematics and Science Regional Consortium, PRELStar Distance Learning, and the Freely Associated States Educational Grant, are all operated by Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL). In pursuing its mission to improve education in Pacific states and territories, PREL has identified interagency collaboration as a strategic goal and has striven to maintain an organizational culture of collaboration.

Staff members from PREL agencies have maintained ongoing collaboration related to several activities, including the: (1) Pacific Education Conference, an annual conference that draws around 1,000 educators from throughout the Pacific; (2) Al Maron Project, which consists of intensive assistance to a high-poverty and low-achieving school on the overcrowded and isolated Ebeye Island; and (3) Leadership Academy, a two-year, training of trainers academy for a small group of principals and district administrators.

Motivation

Respondents indicated that their agencies value collaboration as necessary for high-quality service. PREL is driven by “a culture of collaboration,” and staff regard themselves as being PREL staff, rather than staff of separate and unrelated agencies. All PREL agencies share a common organizational mission and are focused on carrying that mission out collectively. For example, in PREL’s Strategic Plan, one of the four program goals is “to provide coordinated services to clients through interagency partnerships and collaboration.” Reaching this goal requires that staff from various agencies maintain an ongoing effort to communicate and work together.

Collaboration is a priority for two overarching reasons. First, collaboration makes pragmatic sense and increases the quantity and quality of services. Given the context of the region, “leveraging resources and efforts from other programs” is necessary. PREL customers are isolated and dispersed

throughout the Pacific, and travel costs are high. However, interagency collaboration and communication, as well as splitting time between projects, enables PREL to maximize assistance in relation to cost. Collaboration produces economies of scale because it makes it possible for staff from individual agencies to draw on the knowledge and expertise of all PREL agencies and staff.

Planning and Implementation

Collaboration between Comprehensive Center staff and other PREL staff has focused primarily on three activities: (1) the Pacific Educators Conference, (2) the Leadership Academy, and (3) the Al Maron Project.

Pacific Education Conference. The Pacific Education Conference is an annual event that takes place over the course of several days. The conference typically draws at least 1,000 participants from throughout the Pacific and Alaska. More than half of the presenters are from the Pacific region, and others are service providers or researchers from the mainland. Because of the isolation educators in the region face, the conference is, for many, their only opportunity for professional development.

The conference entails the broadest collaboration in which the Comprehensive Center participates and preparation for the event occurs over the course of an entire year. All PREL programs collaborate in planning, promoting, and putting on the conference. Leading up to the event, staff from all the PREL programs meet to discuss ideas for the conference and clarify roles and responsibilities. Assignments include making logistical arrangements, identifying and inviting experts, communicating with presenters and providing assistance as needed, and making presentations on a range of substantive topics.

The conference is hosted by a different state education agency (SEA) each year, and staff from that agency are also included in the collaborative efforts. Specifically, the SEA determines the conference's focus, which depends on local needs. For example, the 1999 conference was held on Saipan in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. That entity was interested in standards and curriculum alignment and chose the topic as the conference focus.

Leadership Academy. The Leadership Academy was a collaborative activity between the Comprehensive Center and the regional lab. The Academy provided training on issues and challenges that educational leaders face. Eighteen participants attended the Academy in teams of two, each composed of one school principal and one local district administrator. PREL prepared the participants to train others and developed two training videos to assist in them in their efforts. Both the Comprehensive Center and the regional laboratory contributed to planning and organizing the events, as well as contracting expert presenters.

Al Maron Project. The Al Maron Project consists of a team of PREL staff collaborating to provide intensive assistance to Ebeye Public School. The school educates 1,200 first- through eighth-graders on a small Pacific island and is faced with dramatic problems associated with low achievement, isolation, poverty, and overcrowding. The Comprehensive Center and other PREL staff provide professional development and technical assistance in all content areas, support efforts to include parents and the community in education, and advise the local government on facility renovation and use.

The assistance team, which consists of staff from the Comprehensive Center, regional laboratory, and Math and Science Consortium, meet quarterly to plan assistance and discuss current issues. The Comprehensive Center has maintained communication with educators on the island, coordinated project meetings, and provided assistance in the area of reading. The regional educational laboratory and the Math and Science Consortium staff have offered assistance in other content areas, community involvement, and program evaluation. All team members brief each other about their periodic visits to the islands.

Context

Respondents said that collaboration is highly valued in Pacific cultures, and PREL strives to reflect those cultures in its assistance. As one respondent said, “People throughout the region really believe that no work being done by one is worth being done.” PREL staff find it easy to align services to the culture of customers since they believe that service improves through collaboration, and many are Pacific natives who regard collaboration as a part of their own culture.

Several other factors facilitate collaboration between the Comprehensive Center and other PREL agencies. For example, because the agencies share the same parent organization, their goals and missions are similar, and PREL can coordinate activities to reduce duplication of efforts and the sense of competition between agencies. In addition, because of their proximity to each other, staff from all of the agencies know one another and can regularly meet face-to-face.

The collaboration is also facilitated by the fact that the Comprehensive Center and the regional laboratory share a common region. Respondents said that this makes it easier to identify customers in need and provide them with service. A complete overlap of region and customers also makes it easier for staff who split their time between agencies to coordinate their assistance.

Effects

The annual Pacific Education Conference consistently draws around 1,000 participants, many of whom attend regularly in spite of the fact that much of the region is impoverished and travel costs are high. Customers also appear to be satisfied with the Al Maron Project. In fact, the entity has asked PREL to take over the school.

Several respondents asserted that the collaboration between agencies at PREL has resulted in improved service because there are more staff members available to give assistance at any given time. In addition, PREL staff pointed out that the quality of service is improved because the knowledge and skill base is broader and deeper when agencies work together.

Several individuals are on the staff of more than one PREL agency. By dividing their time in this way, individuals are able to work on systemic issues, broaden their professional knowledge and experience, and use their expertise on more projects. Also, when traveling and doing the work of two separate agencies, it is cheaper to send one person and divide his or her time among the work of two agencies, than to send two individuals.

Superintendents' Policy Institute

Region III Comprehensive Center Southeastern Regional Vision for Education Laboratory and Selected District Superintendents

Focus of Collaboration

In April 1996 the Region III Comprehensive Center met with superintendents from several school districts in its service region to create a Superintendents' Education Policy Institute. The Institute is designed to be a "think tank" for superintendents that will focus on issues pertaining to language minority students, education reform, and school improvement—especially in high-poverty school districts. The Institute expects to: (1) generate cutting-edge thinking about education reform and school improvement; (2) develop data on how those new ways of thinking impact local school systems' policies and practice; and (3) disseminate new knowledge developed through the Institute's collaborative inquiry and field-testing activities. Membership in the Institute is limited to approximately 30 superintendents who work in school districts within the Comprehensive Center's service region, and whose schools have high concentrations of poor students.

A survey of 75 superintendents identified nine critical issues facing superintendents in the region. The Institute's Executive Committee decided that accountability, which was one of these critical issues, would be the first topic for collaborative inquiry at the Institute's inaugural annual meeting in Washington, D.C. Specifically, the question to be addressed at the meeting was:

How can a school district, under the leadership of its superintendent, develop and implement an accountability system that focuses the energy of every member of the school district community (for example, administrator, teacher, staff member, student, and parent) on improving student learning and achievement?

Motivation

The Comprehensive Center invited the superintendent from a rural district in North Carolina, the research director at SERVE, and the superintendent of an urban district in New Jersey, to work with center staff in planning and implementing the first three-day Institute.

The Comprehensive Center identified the superintendent from North Carolina and the research director at SERVE as potential collaborating partners because the two had conducted research and co-authored a book on the topic of accountability. Based on their review of this book, the staff at the

Comprehensive Center believed that both could contribute to the overall goal of the Institute by encouraging collaborative inquiry into the topic and related policy issues. The two were invited to share their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives, and to encourage other superintendents to do the same by exploring alternative ways of thinking about the issue of accountability, and generating ideas regarding how they might better address the issue in their respective school systems.

The collaborative relationship between the superintendent from New Jersey and the Comprehensive Center developed because the superintendent wanted to improve accountability in his school district, and the Comprehensive Center needed a “real life laboratory” to field-test theories and ideas about accountability and school change. Both the district and the Comprehensive Center recognized that the collaboration would permit each to assist the other in accomplishing its objectives while working toward achieving its own goals.

Planning and Implementation

In the weeks leading up to the conference, the superintendent from North Carolina and the research director at SERVE had several telephone conversations with the Comprehensive Center about the goals of the Institute and how their presentation might promote specific objectives. Prior to the conference, they sent an outline of the topic to be presented to the Comprehensive Center for review.

On the second day of the conference, the superintendent and deputy superintendent from the district in North Carolina conducted a three-hour presentation entitled “A Case Study: Using accountability as a Lever for Changing the Culture of Schools.” They described their approach to school reform and the process by which they used accountability to achieve “cultural change” in their district. The research director from SERVE introduced the session and served as a facilitator, encouraging participants to explore similarities and differences between their own experiences and the experiences of the presenters.

The superintendent from New Jersey helped to frame the question that was central to the three-day meeting, and has contributed to the development of knowledge—a key goal of the Institute—by his subsequent efforts to implement some of the ideas that were generated at the conference in his district. His efforts have been supported by the Comprehensive Center, which has provided technical assistance to his district during the process.

Context

The collaboration among the Comprehensive Center, SERVE, and the school district in North Carolina has not occurred around any other event or activity, and there has been no further interaction among the three. However, the Comprehensive Center's relationship with the school district in New Jersey has developed over time.

In the months following the Institute, the Comprehensive Center visited that school district and provided technical assistance and feedback regarding the district's efforts to meet their need for greater accountability. Specifically, the Comprehensive Center has helped to: (1) develop strategies for overcoming teachers' resistance to the district's new assessment program that focuses on measuring student progress; and (2) explore ways in which the district can eliminate social promotion of students. In addition, as a direct result of the Superintendents' Institute, the superintendent from New Jersey invited the superintendent from North Carolina to give a presentation to members of his local Board of Education and district staff on policy issues related to accountability. During the course of the workshop, the superintendent from North Carolina discussed the issue of achieving change at the district level and the need to move beyond the simple introduction of new programs. The Comprehensive Center helped to defray the cost of this one-day event.

Effects

The Comprehensive Center worked with SERVE and the two superintendents to design and carry out an event that allowed participating superintendents to share information and ideas about improving accountability in their respective districts. According to the superintendent from New Jersey, the institute achieved its objective of encouraging collaboration among participants, and an opportunity was provided for "creating solutions and strategies that could be brought back home by [participants]." In other words, the Institute increased the possibility that change and improvement in districts' accountability systems will occur within those institutions from which the collaborating superintendents came.