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Limited Capacity at the State Level:

A Threat to Future School Improvement

Patrick J Murphy
University of San Francisco

Monica Oujidani
CRPE, University of Washington

Introduction

The New Normal

In November 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan argued that education in the United States had entered an era of the *New Normal* – characterized by, among other things, “the challenge of doing more with less.”

Emphasis on Accountability and Improvement

In addition to doing more with less, federal legislation has also emphasized the need for greater accountability and school improvement. Under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, state and local school officials are held accountable for school performance. Interventions can range from offering support to the closing of schools.

The most recent initiative from the federal government - Race to the Top (RttT), which emphasizes improvement and school turnarounds - has emerged as an important element in discussions surrounding the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.



source: www.colorlines.com

New Expectations

The Future of Education Reform

Current national education reform trends suggest a continued emphasis on school performance and accountability. Consequently, the number of schools identified as low performing will rise as academic achievement targets become more stringent.

The federal government has begun to look to state education agencies (SEAs) to play a more direct role in turning around failing schools. This increased emphasis, however, will take place at a time when public resources are becoming increasingly constrained.

A New State Role

To meet the demands of education reform efforts, SEAs will need to :

- Monitor performance vs. ensure compliance
- Provide assistance vs. establish guidelines
- Plan strategically vs. apply formulae

Looking forward, one is forced to ask:

Will SEAs have the capacity to meet their new roles?

Prior Research on SEA Capacity

Insight into the functioning and capacity of SEAs can be drawn from earlier research on the implementation of NCLB and ARRA legislation. However, these studies did not ask how SEAs allocate resources – a critical step in evaluating SEA capacity.

NCLB Implementation

- Qualitative case studies (6 states)
 - Administrators take requirements seriously; lack resources and capabilities to implement
- Survey of administrators (50 states)
 - Generally pessimistic; states with biggest challenges least optimistic

ARRA Implementation

- CRPE state survey (2010)
 - Adoption of reforms uneven
 - Most progress on performance monitoring; scarce on improvement plans

Research Questions For This Project

1. What do we know about SEA resources?
 - What functions do SEAs perform?
 - How do SEAs allocate their resources?
 - What are the sources of those funds?
2. Will SEAs have the capacity to improve failing schools?

A Study of SEA Resources

Methods and Data

To begin, we must first determine how state agencies currently allocate their resources in order to assess whether enough capacity exists to meet new expectations. The focus of this project, therefore, is on the distribution of central resources for the following SEAs:

California
Louisiana
New York
Texas

Colorado
Minnesota
Tennessee
Washington

The eight states were selected for their accessible information and diversity in geography, size, and structure. The group also includes two RttT winners.

The research approach might be best described as *budget forensics*. The data collection effort included a review of each SEA's website for agency information. Finance staff members also were contacted in order to obtain internal budget documents and to answer questions. Finally, researchers conducted a thorough analysis of financial documents in order to categorize activities.



source: www.buzzle.com

What Functions Do SEAs Perform?

Functions

Functional categories were defined according to the most common types of activities. Researchers then coded each SEA activity and assigned it to the appropriate function.

In some cases, certain activities were excluded from the totals since they did not represent typical SEA activities (i.e., activities associated with running state special schools for the blind and deaf). In other cases, activities from other state agencies were included in our analysis (i.e., normal SEA activities managed under other state agencies).

Functions List
Administration
Executive Services
General Administration
Financial Management
Federal Compliance
Nutrition Program
Special Education Program
Performance and Improvement
School Performance
School Improvement
Teaching and Learning
Curriculum Development
Teacher Certification
Other Programs
Community Programs
Career and Vocational Education

Overview of Resources

Personnel

Personnel figures proved to be the most commonly available resource data element. Personnel data, therefore, formed the basis of state-to-state allocation comparisons.

Presented here are SEA central staff totals relative to total K-12 expenditures and student population.

State	SEA Central Staff	Expenditures (2007-08) [Millions]	Total Students (2008-09) [Thousands]	Expenditures Per Staff Ratio [Millions]	Students Per Staff Ratio
California	1,672	\$61,571	6,323	\$ 36.82	3,781
Colorado	364	\$7,339	818	\$ 20.16	2,248
Louisiana	527	\$6,814	685	\$ 12.93	1,300
Minnesota	419	\$8,416	836	\$ 20.09	1,995
New York	1,288	\$46,443	2,741	\$ 36.06	2,128
Tennessee	483	\$7,540	972	\$ 15.61	2,012
Texas	1,171	\$39,033	4,752	\$ 33.33	4,058
Washington	403	\$9,332	1,037	\$ 23.16	2,573
All States	6,327	\$186,488	18,164	\$ 29.47	2,871

SEA Personnel by Function

The table below disaggregates personnel figures for each state relative to the established functional categories.

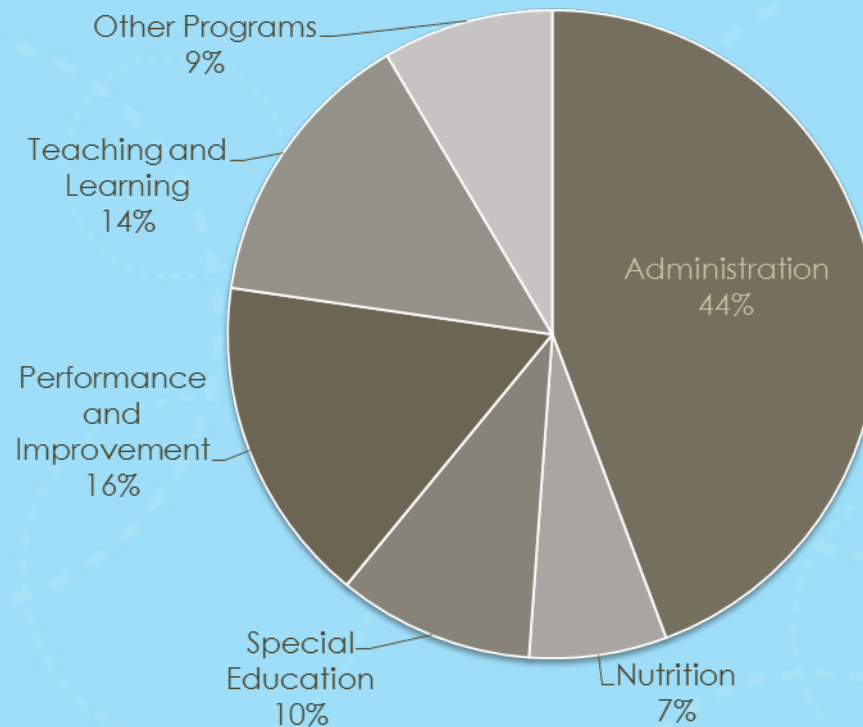
Function	CA	CO	LA	MN	NY	TN	TX	WA
Administration	605	184	234	194	699	152	483	201
Nutrition Program	192	8	34	39	34	25	114	32
Special Education	142	70	31	45	124	71	46	24
Performance and Improvement	152	24	97	80	139	115	326	62
Teaching and Learning	291	70	82	21	219	48	159	64
Other Programs	291	9	49	40	74	72	44	21
TOTAL ALL FUNCTIONS	1,672	364	527	419	1,288	483	1,171	403

Aggregate Staff Distribution

Functional Breakdown

Drawing on the data collected for each SEA, this figure presents an aggregate picture of how personnel are distributed by broad functional categories for all eight states.

Average Staff Distribution by Function

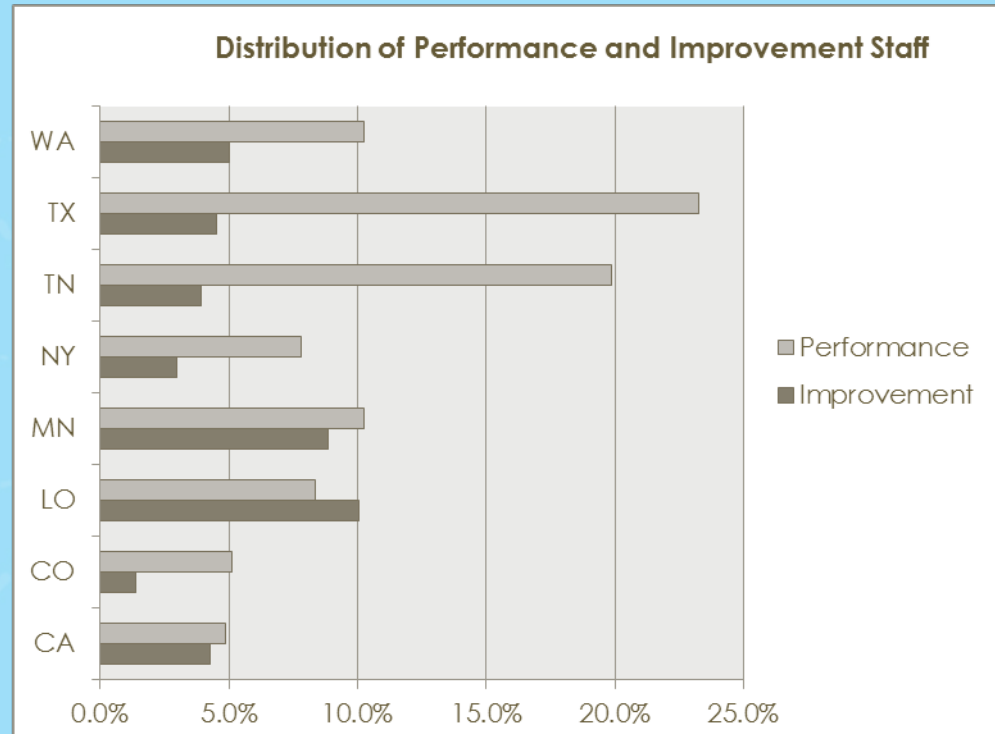


Performance and Improvement

Personnel Distribution

With regard to performance and improvement staff allocations, a similar degree of variation between the states can be observed.

The distribution of personnel in these categories ranges from 4 to 23 percent for performance and 1 to 10 percent for improvement.



How Much Is Enough?

Workload

For all eight states, there is one *improvement staff* member for:

- Every 109 schools in the state
- Every 38 schools not making AYP
- Every 16 Title 1 schools in Need of improvement

There is considerable variance between SEAs:

- CO: 1 staff member for every 354 schools
- LA: 1 staff member for every 27 schools

State	Ratio of Total Schools to Improvement Staff	Ratio of Non-AYP Schools to Improvement Staff	Ratio of Title 1 Schools Identified for Improvement to Improvement Staff
CA	139.4	69.8	39.2
CO	353.8	162.0	32.8
LA	27.5	6.1	1.4
MN	60.2	31.4	7.6
NY	118.9	15.9	10.95
TN	90.0	20.3	5.6
TX	157.6	30.5	6.6
WA	113.4	69.4	23.4
All States	108.8	37.9	15.7

Active or Passive Role?

To answer the capacity question, it is important to identify the type of role SEAs might assume:

Resource Role	SEA personnel provide information to schools and districts
Caseworker	SEA personnel assist schools in identifying appropriate steps and resources
Manager	SEA personnel outline improvement strategies and manage implementation of changes

Moving toward a more active role requires more SEA personnel.

Adequate Future Capacity ?

- Assuming an active SEA role (caseworker or manager) AND
- A current caseload of 27-38 schools per staff member, THEN

Results in a pessimistic outlook concerning the capacity of SEAs to actively manage school improvement and the projected number of school turnarounds.

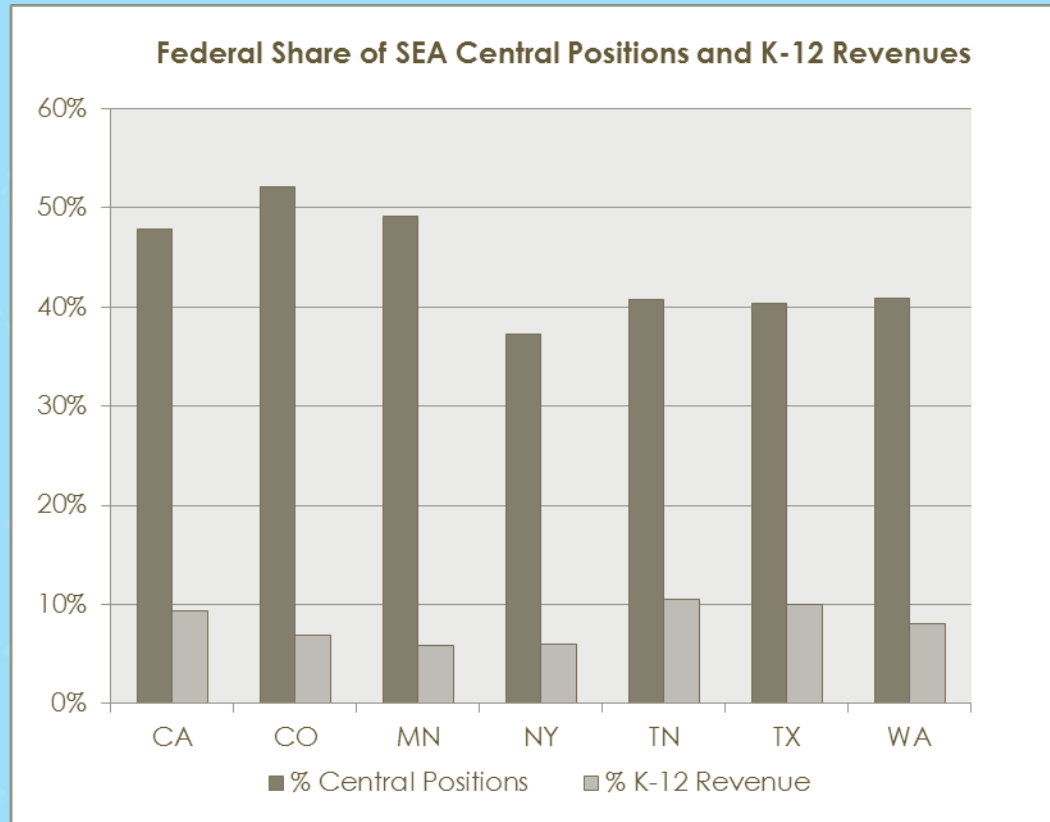
Strategies to Expand SEA Improvement Capacity

Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages
More flexibility in the allocation of federal resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential impact is large <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ A 5 percent change will result in a 40 percent increase in improvement staff. ➢ A 10 percent shift nearly doubles improvement staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplanting state dollars • Value of current activities • Assumes skills interchangeable
Contract out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick; avoid civil service hiring constraints • Access broader skill set • Expand/contract as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still requires more oversight than current capacity suggests • Additional resources needed for contracts
Leverage RttT funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong emphasis on turning around schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted to local reform, not state capacity building

Federal Resources

Federal Resources

While the federal government typically provides less than 10 percent of total K-12 funding, federal resources support between 40 and 50 percent of all headquarters positions.



Note: Data on federally funded positions were not available for the Louisiana Department of Education.

Conclusions

- Assuming an active role for SEAs in school improvement, we are pessimistic about the adequacy of existing capacity
- Possible to shift some existing resources; would require federal cooperation
- Increasing reliance on contracted services will still require significant investment
- RttT, as currently configured, will make a modest contribution to capacity
- Overall, we know very little about SEA functioning