

# Coherence

**in Statewide Systems of Support**

Thomas Kerins, Carole Perlman, & Sam Redding

This publication includes an analysis of the results of a survey completed by the school improvement leader in each state education agency, including Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, and an indepth profile of the Ohio Department of Education. The survey was conducted as a joint venture of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Center on Innovation & Improvement. We thank CCSSO, and in particular: Gene Wilhoit, Lois Adams-Rodgers, Rolf Blank, Nina de las Alas, and Adam Peterman.

## Information   Tools   Training

Positive results for students will come from changes in the knowledge, skill, and behavior of their teachers and parents. State policies and programs must provide the opportunity, support, incentive, and expectation for adults close to the lives of children to make wise decisions.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement helps regional comprehensive centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students.

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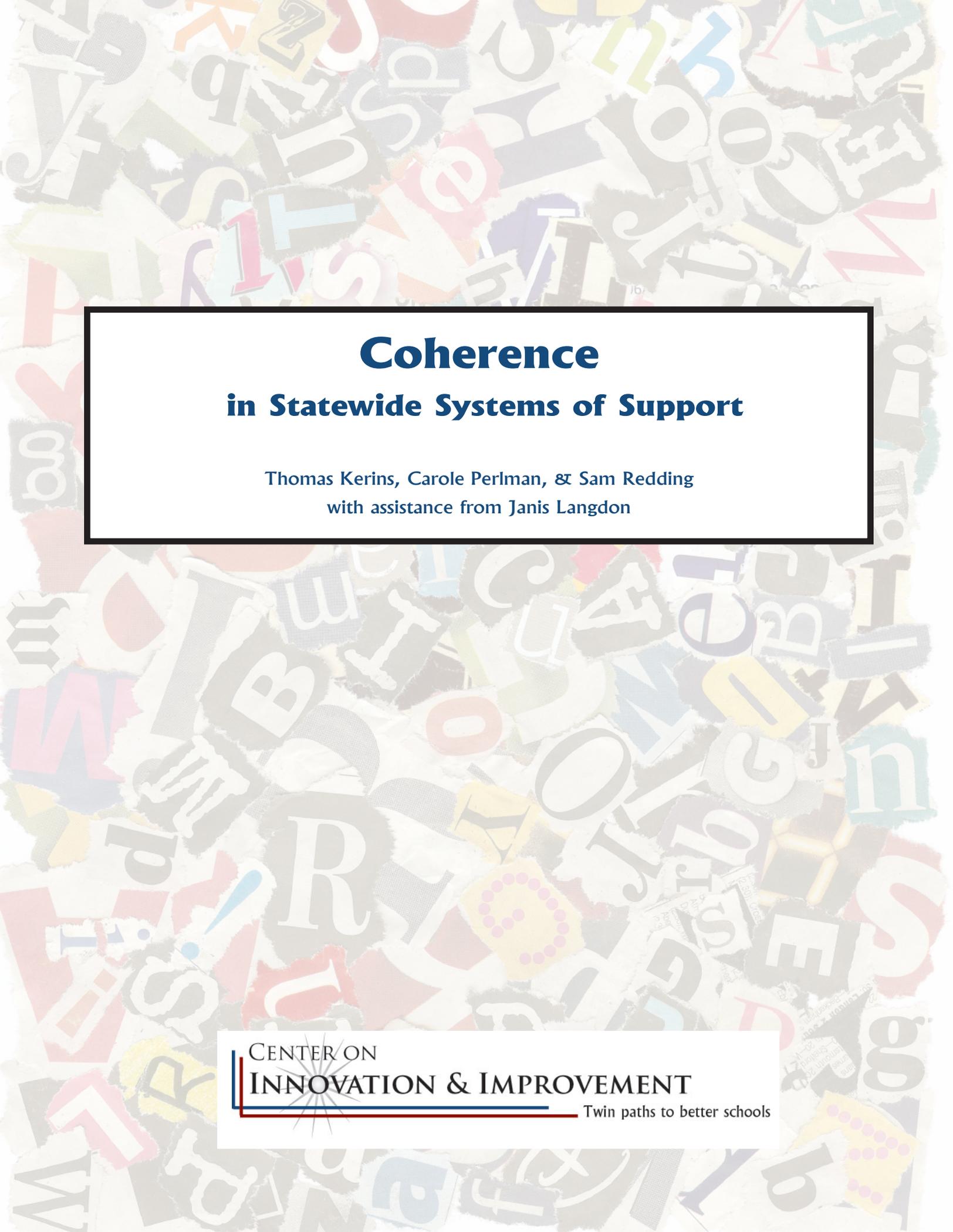
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Thomas Kerins, Carole Perlman, & Sam Redding  
with assistance from Janis Langdon

CENTER ON  
INNOVATION & IMPROVEMENT

Twin paths to better schools

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## Introduction

Sam Redding

When a state education agency (SEA) undertakes to provide a statewide system of support for school improvement, it realizes that its organizational structure, resource streams, communication channels, and ways of interfacing with districts and schools fit like a straitjacket. The agency's responsibility for ensuring local compliance with state and federal regulation doesn't go away, but new duties are layered in, often residing within the same departments and performed by the same staff, but calling for new skills and different mind-sets. While compliance monitoring requires precise definition, circumscription, certain boundaries, and standardization, school improvement demands agility, responsiveness, keen judgment, and differentiation.

In 2007, the Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII) released the *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (also published by Information Age) to help states construct and operate systems to support school improvement and student learning. The *Handbook* includes a conceptual framework for an effective statewide system of support (SSOS), based on a review of the research literature and a theory of action. This framework centers on three components: Incentives, Capacity, and Opportunity, and these three components rest on a foundation of continuous evaluation and improvement of the system itself. These same three components could describe any system whose purpose is to create an optimal environment to change the behaviors (improve the performance) of clients served by that system. A district system to support school improvement would provide incentives, build capacity, and offer opportunities for the schools in the district. A school would systematically provide the right mix of incentives, capacity, and opportunity for teachers to improve instruction. The three components of the SSOS framework, then, may be applied to any organizational structure that best serves its clients by encouraging and enhancing their *own* improvement.

The CII framework is a theory of action for encouraging and supporting change in districts and schools (through changes in the behaviors of people within them) in order to improve students' learning. The theory of action is behavioral in essence, premised on the notion that institutional improvement is driven by changes in people, resulting from their new understandings, new skills, and new ways of coordinating their work. The closer the person to the student, the greater the leverage for improving the child's learning.

The *Handbook* also includes profiles of the systems of support in four states—Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Washington—each with its own strong elements of the CII framework. Further, the *Handbook* provides a comprehensive process by which the state can assess its own system of support and plan for its improvement. *Strengthening the Statewide System of Support*, a second publication by CII, is a technical assistance manual to guide a regional comprehensive center in facilitating the SSOS self-assessment process with a state education agency.

The CII framework expands the definition of a statewide system of support beyond the usual focus on compliance-driven regulation leavened by programmatic supports and professional development. The CII framework considers the broader context that the state provides for school improvement, including the incentives and opportunities for constructive change as well as systemic attention to the pre-service preparation and licensing of school leaders and teachers, state data and information systems (including school improvement processes and resources), state initiatives to place high-quality school leaders and teachers in hard-to-staff districts and schools, and the creation of “new space” for innovative schools.

President James A. Garfield is famously quoted as saying that an ideal school is “Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other,” referring to his former teacher, renowned for bringing to his students a rich mastery of the curriculum, an ability to inspire, and an example to be emulated. If only it were so simple in our day and age. The moving parts of a state education system are manifold, a vast array of pieces, all of which must work in concert and to a high level of precision. Modern education bears

little resemblance to the simple triad of the log, the student, and the teacher. With complexity comes a tendency toward redundancy, sluggishness, and wasted motion, making functional efficiency and operational fluidity imperative. In education, the system must be trained to efficiency while retaining its devotion to each student’s learning, the same as would Mark Hopkins from the other end of the log.

This report is published two years after the release of the *Handbook*, two years in which the authors of the report and other CII staff have worked alongside regional comprehensive centers to assist states with their systems of support. We have learned a few lessons (see Chapter 5) and pinpointed a few areas in which states are seeking guidance. To gain a clearer understanding of the work in the field, CII and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) surveyed the school improvement directors (by various titles) in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. At the same time, CII looked closely at one state—Ohio—to see how it had transformed its state education agency, integrating functions and departments and systems to point them more directly and coherently at support for student learning.

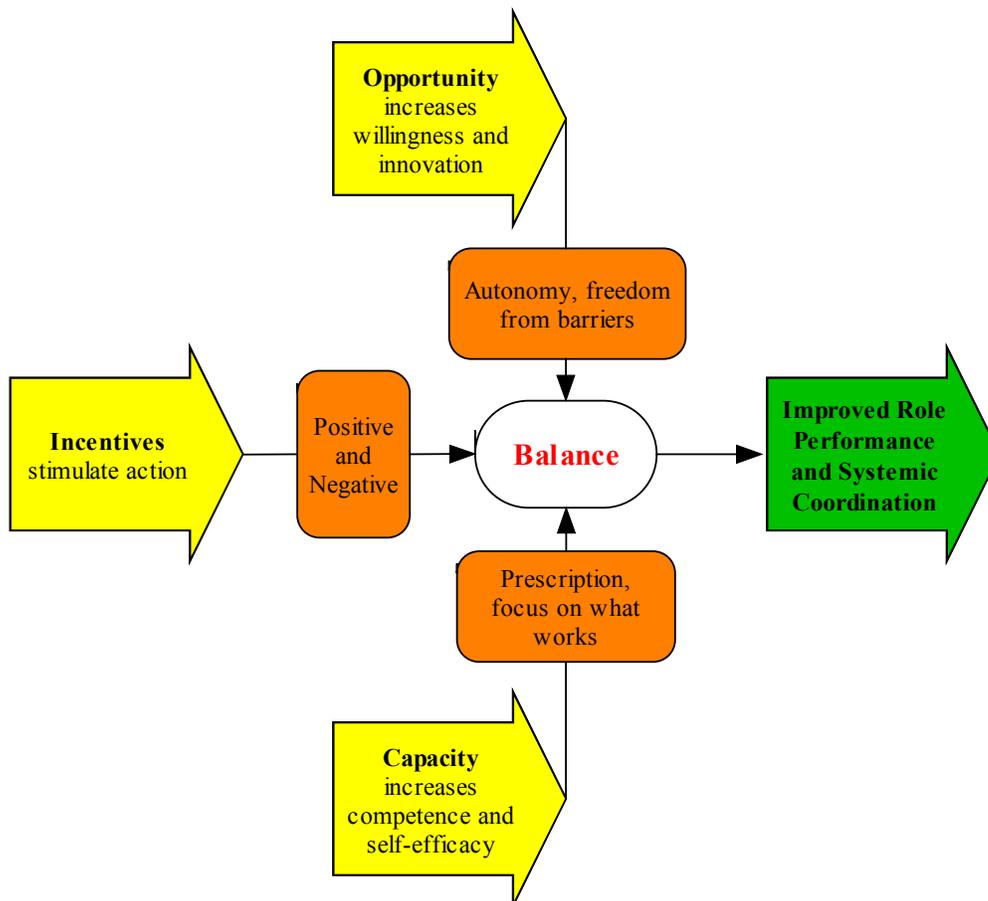
The chapters that follow in this report include an analysis of the survey results and a retrospective study of Ohio’s decade-long transformation, especially its integration of functions and resources in pursuit of coherence and effectiveness.

## Theory of Action of the Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support

A statewide system of support is a system that supports the improvement of districts and schools that are themselves systems. The theory of action of the Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support for School Improvement may be stated as follows:

A system is a group of linked parts, assembled in subsystems that work together toward a common end. Schools, districts, and statewide systems of support are all social systems in which the parts are people who perform roles to fulfill the purposes of their subsystems and the system as a whole. Social systems fulfill their purposes (achieve their ends) when the people within them understand their roles and play them competently. People improve the performance of their roles when provided incentives, opportunity, and capacity, thus enhancing their competence and self-efficacy. A social system functions optimally when the roles played by people within it, and the subsystems they compose, are efficiently coordinated. An effective statewide system of support offers incentives, builds capacity, and provides opportunity to the people in districts and schools so that they might continuously improve the performance of their coordinated roles toward the end of all students meeting or exceeding learning standards.

**Figure I.1: Theory of Action of the Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support**



## Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support

### A. Providing Incentives for Change

States use incentives to motivate district and school personnel to change or improve. Incentives, then, are pressures from the state rather than mandates. They may be pressures that encourage or pressures that discourage certain district or school actions. The following “incentives” are examples of pressures that states may use to influence districts and schools.

1. Publicly Disclosing Low Performance
2. Levying Consequences for Low Performance
3. Providing Positive Incentives for Improvement
  - a. Recognition for Accomplishment
  - b. Funding Contingencies that Encourage High-Leverage Improvement Strategies
  - c. Financial Rewards for Results
  - d. Financial Rewards for Working in Hard-to-Staff Districts and Schools
  - e. Greater Autonomy
4. Providing Market-Oriented Incentives (charter schools, public school choice)

### B. Providing Opportunities for Change

States provide opportunities for districts and schools to improve by removing obstacles to improvement and creating new space for schools. The following are some strategies that states may use to remove obstacles and create space.

1. Removing Barriers to Improvement (e.g., waivers; exemptions from rules, regulations; alternate routes to certification)
2. Creating New Space for Schools (e.g., charter schools, pilot schools, lighthouse schools, schools-within-a-school)

### C. Building Capacity for Change

1. Building Systemic Capacity
  - a. Creating and Disseminating Knowledge

States create, support the creation of, and disseminate knowledge relevant to district and school improvement processes and strategies as well as effective teaching practices. The knowledge disseminated includes:

- i. Materials created by the state (guides, manuals, syntheses, tools, etc.),

- ii. Materials created with state support or in partnership with the state (state-financed research and practical guides, etc.), and
- iii. Materials created by other organizations but selected by the state for wider distribution to its districts and schools.

### b. Enhancing the Supply of Personnel Equipped for School Improvement

States—through statutes, policies, and agreements/partnerships—influence university programs that prepare teachers and school leaders so that graduates of these programs understand the state’s accountability system, school improvement strategies, and evidence-based teaching practices. States also encourage talented students to enter the field of education. States provide programs to directly train teachers and school leaders for service in schools and districts in need of improvement. States report to universities about the workplace experience of teachers and school leaders that have graduated from their programs. States also help channel highly-qualified teachers and school leaders to districts and schools most in need of improvement.

### c. Providing a Strong Data System to Assist School Improvement

The information that the state provides schools and districts to assist with their improvement includes web-based access to assessment data, planning tools, and other resources. Also, the state’s data collection policies and procedures determine what information can be organized and made available to schools and districts.

### 2. Building Local Capacity

#### a. Coordinating Capacity-Building Structures and Roles

The statewide system of support is indeed a system, with its own boundaries, structures, and roles. In an effective statewide system of support, someone is obviously at the helm, the players and their roles are known, and the system is coordinated, with communication among its players and a coherent approach to its function. Coordination includes both staff within the SEA and organizational

partners, distinguished educators, support teams, and consultants. The system of support has boundaries, as illustrated on an organizational chart and in job descriptions for all parties in the system. The system of support is coordinated through regular, written communication and through periodic face-to-face meetings. Personnel within the system of support (both SEA and external) are selected based upon criteria, trained, supervised, provided ongoing professional development, matched to their purpose and to the needs of districts and schools served, and evaluated.

#### b. Differentiating Support to Districts and Schools

States make choices about districts and schools receiving services from the statewide system of support, and what services each district or school receives. NCLB provides a rubric to determine priorities in serving districts and schools, and states often supplement this rubric with their own criteria. Typically, districts and schools are selected according to need as determined by their prior performance and the desired trajectory for improvement (incremental or turnaround). Systems of support operate with rubrics and assessment methods for determining which districts and schools receive services, what type of services are received (aligned with assessed need), and the intensity and duration of services provided.

#### c. Delivering Services to Districts and Schools

The system of support both provides services directly to districts and schools and allocates resources to districts and schools with guidelines for their use of these resources in their improvement.

##### i. Provide Services

In delivering services to districts and schools in need of improvement, the statewide system of support engages in a four-phase process. First, it must determine the district's or school's current operational and performance status. Second, it assists the district or school in planning specific interventions to address weaknesses. Third, the statewide system of support provides consultation, training, technical assistance, and professional development to sup-

port the school's or district's implementation of its planned interventions. Fourth, the statewide system of support monitors the district's or school's progress with implementation and provides advice for necessary modifications to the plan.

##### ii. Allocate Resources for Services

In addition to directly providing services to districts and schools, the statewide system of support may allocate resources that enable districts and schools to secure their own services from other providers. When resources are allocated, the statewide system of support provides guidelines for aligning services with the improvement plan, monitoring the delivery of these services, and evaluating their effectiveness.

### Evaluating and Improving the Statewide System of Support

To continuously improve the statewide system of support, the system itself needs clear goals, objectives and benchmarks, and a process for monitoring its ongoing operations and for evaluating its effectiveness.

#### A. Monitoring Ongoing Operations of the Statewide System of Support

1. Goals, Objectives, Benchmarks for Statewide System of Support
2. Periodic Operational Reports (related to goals, objectives, benchmarks)
3. Periodic Implementation Reports (on district and school implementation of improvement plans and SSOS provision of services)

#### B. Evaluating and Improving the Statewide System of Support

1. Annual Evaluation of Statewide System of Support (components, coordination, effectiveness)
2. Established Criteria to Determine Effectiveness
3. Modifications Based on Evaluation Results
4. Distribution of Evaluation Reports
5. Includes District and School Evaluation of Services Received
6. Includes Measures of Student Learning Outcomes





## Chapter 1: The Pursuit of Coherence in Support of Student Learning

Sam Redding

This report includes the results of a survey administered to school improvement personnel in the state education departments of all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. The survey results shed some light on how states are organized to provide systematic support for the improvement of their schools. Also included in this report is a retrospective case study of one state, Ohio, and its journey across a decade to achieve internal coherence and provide its schools a sophisticated system of support that is able to flex to meet their individual needs without being unduly restricted by regulation that typically accompanies funding streams.

To better understand the thinking of the people who administer the funding streams (and the programs, rules, and regulations that accompany them), the Center on Innovation & Improvement's authors of this report interviewed three U. S. Department of Education administrators (Title I, special education, and technical assistance for school improvement) and a regional comprehensive center administrator with expertise in federal and state programs for English language learners. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into the current thinking of people at the federal level who interface with states on matters of school improvement and use of federal categorical monies.

If there is a word as commonly bandied about in state education departments as “data” and “capacity,” it is “silos.” While successful schools and districts have nimbly reorganized themselves around clear purposes, streamlined their internal structures, weeded out non-productive initiatives, and targeted resources to achieve goals, state education departments have typically not been so agile. Why? Silos. At least that is the conventional explanation.

Silos—the captivity of personnel and programs within narrow tunnels of vision, often emitting light only from the end where the funding originates—are obstacles to coherence, but not the only obstacles. Politics blows the winds of change in sudden and contradictory gusts. With each change in leadership comes a fresh attempt to diverge from the past and put a personal stamp on the directions of the future. With each newly-identified national problem comes a wave of federal funding and regulation, often followed by a similar state

response, and seldom with sufficient consideration for how the new is made coherent with the old. More silos. Or more balls to juggle for the denizens of the silos.

It is convenient to blame “siloization” on upstream regulation that accompanies federal funding, or lateral regulation that comes with state initiatives, but categorical programs arise for a reason. Typically, federal (and many state) programs are spawned to assist a class of students otherwise underserved by the education system or to address social problems that are beyond the ability of localities to ameliorate. The regulations that accompany the money are necessary to ensure that the chosen class of students receives the benefits of the program, or that the targeted social problem is truly attacked.

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), reauthorized since then with various names, now includes Title I programs and funds to bolster the educational opportunities of students living with the disadvantages of poverty. ESEA’s Title II supports training and professional development of teachers and school leaders. Title III programs and monies are targeted to help students who are English language learners and immigrants. Title IV addresses school safety, prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, and after-school programs. Title V is largely aimed at fostering charter school creation and operation, extending federally funded services to eligible private school students, promoting school choice, and assisting parents, but includes also an assortment of other initiatives, from counseling services, to women’s equity, to the arts, to mental health, to a subpart for “Educational, Cultural, Apprenticeship, and Exchange Programs for Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Their Historical Whaling and Trading Partners in Massachusetts.” Title VI supports the improvement of state accountability systems; Title VII assists Indians, Native Hawaiians, and Alaska Natives; and Title VIII provides support via impact aid for localities impacted by federally-connected children, mostly children of federal employees and military dependents in areas that add the cost of education to the local system without a corresponding ability for the local system to offset the costs through property taxes. Every title

carries an array of parts and subparts, each with its collection of rules and regulations. To receive the federal support, the state or other recipient entity must comply with federal rules and regulations, not only in its own use of the funds but also in the use of funds passed through the state to, for example, school districts.

Of course, states are subject to compliance regulations from federal sources other than ESEA. The most significant of these sources in terms of impact on state and district operations is IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA finances and regulates: research on disabilities and rehabilitative services, grants to states for special education, services for pre-school children with disabilities, early intervention programs for infants and toddlers, a host of technical assistance centers, and discretionary grants of all sorts.

When children arrive at school, they are not presorted by family income, disability, language, temperament, talent, or prior learning. They aren’t marked with the sign of a tier. Schools do the sorting. Or, better yet, good schools become adept at sorting their learning activities and support services and fitting them to each student’s needs so that the students themselves do not require sorting. The way a state department of education interfaces with its schools influences the school’s ability and inclination to adapt learning strategies rather than sort students. The way a state department is organized, coherently or in rigid silos, prefigures its manner of interface with its schools. Does the state contribute to the sorting of students for orderly tracking of funding streams, or does it provide systems that enable the school to understand each of its students and differentiate its instruction and supports to meet each student at his or her sweet spot?

The rigidity of state education departments is not only due to the uniqueness of each silo’s purpose and source of funding, but also to the inertia inherent to any bureaucracy and the understandable identification of programs with the people who created and developed them. George’s program may have outlived its purpose, but it is, after all, George’s program. And we all like George, who has labored

for years in devotion to a program he holds dear. Helen's staff could really be better coordinated if supervised by Glenda, since Glenda's office depends so much on their performance, but how could they be taken from Helen, to whom they are so loyal? The point being that, even in formal organizations like state education departments, the forces of personality and genuine consideration for people and their work can cloud a cold-eyed look at what would make most operational sense.

The Ohio state education department, over the course of a decade, systematically reorganized itself with an eye to structures that would most coherently support school improvement, allowing flexibility for schools to match resources to each student's learning needs while also embedding processes to ensure efficacious use of funds and transparency in meeting professional and operational standards. Ohio's accomplishments were propelled by visionary leadership and an ample dose of administrative will. Ohio carefully consulted with and secured the approval of the U. S. Department of Education along the way, showing that federal rigidity may be a state's excuse as much as its real obstacle.

In our survey of state school improvement administrators, we asked them to describe their biggest challenge relative to their system of support for school improvement. The tension between a rising number of schools in need of assistance and stagnant or contracting state resources for personnel is palpable in their responses. So also is the recognition that school improvement work requires a different mindset and different skills than compliance monitoring. As one respondent put it, "the biggest challenge is changing the old way of just focusing on compliance."

Internal coordination of the state's system of support also presents a challenge, according to the survey respondents. One state reported that:

The biggest challenge is ensuring that all appropriate personnel are together to create a more cohesive system. Some programs operate in isolation of other programs; however, this is improving by creating teams of persons from every area to resolve issues. Some of our initiatives

are considered burdensome by the schools and districts. A challenge is developing assistance and tracking results for schools without undue paperwork.

The challenge of achieving coherence, coordination, and consistency across programs within a state department and between the state department and its partners in a statewide system of support is not unrelated to that of silos. One respondent to the state survey addressed this issue directly:

The biggest challenge is breaking down the silos and getting all partners focused on improving results for all students. We are making progress within the Department and most of our work efforts are made up of staff from various workgroups that mix curriculum, special education, the Title programs, etc. We are working to build tools that will also help schools and districts think in the same way while not violating the federal and state requirements for programs and funding. We are making progress, but still have a way to go!

To better understand the federal perspective on balancing the desire of states and districts for more flexibility in the use of federal funds with the rightful claim of underserved students to resources allocated in their name, Tom Kerins and Carole Perlman interviewed Fran Walter, Group Leader, Technical Assistance Group, School Support and Technology Program, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (USDE); Zollie Stevenson, Jr., Director of Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs (USDE); Debra Price-Ellingstad, Education Research Analyst, Office of Special Education Programs (USDE); and Marilyn Muirhead, Associate Director for Field Services at the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center.

The investigators wanted to know:

Do you see advantages for student learning in integrating school and district improvement planning with planning for categorical programs (e.g., programs for English language learners or students with disabilities)? Are there any downsides?

Fran Walter offered this perspective:

I really think the department is making a concerted effort to try to address what are broadly called the “silo” issues, the fact that programs tend to be very categorical. The efforts the Department makes include implementing legislation and providing guidance on options like EdFlex and transferability that give states and districts more flexibility about what they can do with their money. Often funds can be moved from one categorical area to another. I don’t know how well people even know that those options are available, but they are there. These options were created in part in response to the requests of practitioners to have more flexibility. Title V—Innovative Programs—also allowed for some movement of categorical funds.

Another example of what the Department has done to address the issue of “don’t do this, don’t do that” with funding is Title I Schoolwide Programs. In the old days of Title I, districts and schools could use funds only to provide targeted assistance; they had to identify kids with learning deficits in high poverty schools, and they were usually pulled out of their regular class and taught by a “Title I teacher.” By 1996 the Schoolwide Program allowed districts who had schools with a 50% or higher poverty rate to take that categorical money and use it to serve all kids in the school. I was working in a school district then and it was a huge plus for us to be liberated from identifying kids and pulling them out of classrooms and tracking the dollars and the equipment.

Schoolwide Programs lead me to think about the whole planning thing, where schools and districts wind up having multiple plans. I don’t think we—the Department—have made as much progress with that problem. States, districts, schools still often end up having a plan for special

education, a plan for general education, a plan for improvement, and a new plan for restructuring. I think the states have probably done a better job than the Department with helping districts interpret what they need and helping them come up with a single improvement plan that reduces categorization and encourages thinking of the district or school as a system with many parts.

I do think that the Department understands the frustration people have with categorical funding, and to the degree that it can, the Department tries to address that frustration. I will say though, on the other side, that some things are just not under the control of the Department. The legislation behind many programs often makes them categorical. Certain programs are designed to serve a distinct population of kids. They’re designed to promote a certain perspective. The funds tied to those programs don’t lend themselves to all being put in the same pot. That’s not the Department’s fault. That’s the legislation. To a certain degree, the Department can issue guidance to encourage flexibility, but it can’t change the law.

While the idea of school-wide programs supported by federal funds has been justified for Title I, when the school’s student population exceeds a threshold of poverty, the same logic does not apply to children with disabilities. Special education dollars are meant to assist specific students whose educational needs are dissimilar to those of the general population of students and to each other. In explaining how the Department is in the process of consolidating some Title I (poverty) programs and Title III (English language learners) programs, Zollie Stevenson pointed to the difficulty in making similar consolidations with special education programs, but also efforts to do so.

The Department of Education (Education) is consolidating how we monitor and the direction we provide to states. We are

clarifying some Title III interpretations. We have reorganized at the Department so that Title III programs have become a program office within the Student Achievement and School Accountability (SASA) office, as is the case with Title I.

Part of the reasoning for this reorganization was that many Title III children (over three million) are already served by Title I because of the economic status of their families. Many of the program requirements of Title III and Title I mirror each other, and they share similar requirements for assessment of English language proficiency. The idea of coordinating educational service delivery for Title III children with Title I is viewed as a mechanism for breaking down silos and stimulating collaboration and communication. Title III children from economically disadvantaged families were always eligible to receive the services that were provided by Title I, but in some districts and schools those services were not coordinated. We are trying to convey a message that Title III kids are largely also the same kids served by Title I and should receive, have access to, the services that Title I provides. As a result, we will conduct joint Title I and Title III program monitoring and coordinate training for the state level directors. We have already started having joint meetings with state directors of Title I and Title III to make sure they are on the same page in terms of educational service delivery, how the rules of one mesh with the other, and to assist in understanding program differences.

Early feedback from the states has been very positive. At least 60% of the state Title I directors either have Title III as a direct report, or they both report to the same person. They have already realized the need to coordinate Titles I and III services within their states. We have some Title I directors with no previous experi-

ence with Title III, so we are providing training to help bring Title I people along in their understand of the Title III requirements and visa versa.

Title I and special education offices at Education are also coordinating their technical assistance to states. We have worked together on assessments issues and have made a big push on providing technical assistance to states on RTI [Response to Intervention], with the federal guidance coming jointly from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, SASA, Title III and OSEP [Office of Special Education Programs]. We are coordinating the work on RTI with two other program areas because of the intricacies that are related to how the Federal funds can be spent (depending on if the school is targeted assistance or school-wide for Title I, for example). An enormous amount of work has been undertaken related to RTI to clarify the supplement/not supplant issues related to using Title I, Title III, and special education funds in the same classroom. We have had to figure out which Federal funding should be used first in a classroom setting where you have Title I eligible children, students with disabilities, and English language learners. The goal of this work has been to maximize the use of Federal funds without violating the supplanting rules associated with each.

Special educators are typically cautious about integration of programs and funding streams, careful to not lose ground gained over the years for support of children with disabilities. Debra Price-Ellingstad put it this way:

There could be some joint training, some cost savings that could go on, services that can be available to some students. There could be some integration of teachers, co-teaching, things like that. So we think that there are probably a lot of advantages [to program integration] we haven't even recognized yet.

The Department of Education has cross-department efforts on things that could be related to school improvement. For example, our office [Office of Special Education Programs] is working with Title I. Several offices are working in a collaboration around RTI strategies and how various funding streams could be used to support RTI practices in schools. There's been some discussion about RTI as a strategy for school improvement.

Our office has recently funded a technical assistance center [State Implementation of Scaling-Up Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP) Center] that's looking at how to build state capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain evidence-based practices. So this particular project is something we talked about quite a while with OESE [Office of Elementary and Secondary Education] when we were considering developing the RFP for the project. It started with discussions across our divisions. The SISEP Center is working with six states to help them build their capacity to work with districts and schools. We know it has to be across general and special education, bringing in the federal and other divisions of the state offices to do this work. That's one of the requirements of a state working with this technical assistance center. We know that implementation crosses all kinds of different content areas. It's an exciting project, and it's amazing how not only offices within the Education Department, but other departments within the federal government are interested in that kind of work. It's catching on, and I think it's only going to get more important.

The biggest barrier I hear about is tied to collaboration across the different silos, the whole funding issue, whether you can mix funds. We hear that audit requirements are getting in the way of being able to cross those program boundaries. This is, at

least, a perceived barrier. I mean there are definitely requirements for keeping track of the funds, and IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] includes provisions to use some funds for school-wide programs under Title I. Even knowing what is allowable under the law, we have trouble finding really good examples of how districts and schools are legally and effectively blending funds. They tend to be cautious.

The early intervention services provision in IDEA also allows a money stream for actual services for kids who have not yet been identified [as needing special education]. So we are always seeking ways to provide flexibility without diminishing services meant for children with disabilities.

Marilyn Muirhead, an expert in education for English language learners, described the situation this way:

One of the things we know is that it takes an incredible amount of time for state, district, and school people to write up plans for different programs and funding sources. In New Jersey, people are writing up 13 separate kinds of plans for the state, and that takes time away from teaching and learning. That's one reason why it would be advantageous to see states consolidate the planning process at the LEA level. In terms of English language learners and the students with disabilities, we're seeing increasingly that these children are part of the regular classroom environment. If the planning isn't taking place and people aren't making plans to educate them and thinking about meeting their needs, their needs are not going to be met. The point is that careful planning for a student is important, but redundant planning at a program level is a waste of time and resources. The planning has to connect to changes in practice.

We really want to protect the rights of disadvantaged children, but there is a tension between the notion of categorical programs and coherent quality instruction. If I had my wish, I would look at dismantling the categorical programs and redesigning ESEA to focus on improving teaching and learning for Title I, Title III, the migrant part of Title I, and special education students and make the federal program more coherent as opposed to categorical. So that was my wish. We can still protect the rights of children, but not with the old paradigm.

We also need to rethink higher education and the way we certify people. When you talk to higher education people, you talk about course hours, but there aren't enough hours in a degree program to incorporate all the separate parts, if we view them as separate parts. So students specialize in special education or ELL or a subject area, and they fail to see that it is all part of a coherent approach to teaching by differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students. Again, pre-service preparation of teachers follows an old paradigm, an old structure for thinking about something and it's keeping us confined to doing the same old, same old. We've got to break out of it a little bit.

If you look at the system of education as a whole system, we have a lot of solutions for the technical issues, but we're struggling with the application. Those are the problems that we're faced with and, in my mind, that's where we, as technical assistance providers, have to help people with the adoption process.

Lean state budgets will demand streamlining and efficiency, but they will also cause advocates for specific programs and classes of students to battle for position to ensure their share of scarce dollars. The Ohio story, told in this report, may offer guidance for other states, but what works well in one state is

not always easily transferable to another. Each state has its own history, its own traditions of relationship with its schools, and its own story to tell about the evolution of its structures, programs, and approaches to school improvement. What states have in common is a realization that increased responsibility for school improvement brings with it the need for fresh thinking, greater coherence, more flexibility in the allocation of resources, and nimbleness in aligning the right supports with the specific needs of each district and school.

As states make the necessary adjustments in policy, structure, and approach to add support for improvement to their traditional chore of ensuring local compliance with regulation and proper use of funds, their relationship with their districts and schools changes, requiring adjustments also in the way districts and schools understand their responsibilities relative to the state. Ideally, districts and schools will address their own improvement with more candor, urgency, and discipline, able then to negotiate appropriate supports from their state and to apply those supports to greater effect.

*The authors thank the four educators interviewed: Fran Walter, Zollie Stevenson, Jr., Debra Price-Ellingstad, and Marilyn Muirhead.*





## **Chapter 2: Results from the Statewide Systems of Support Survey**

Carole Perlman, Thomas Kerins, & Janis Langdon

### **Introduction**

During the spring of 2008, the Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) conducted a survey of the school improvement leaders in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. The survey was developed by CII with assistance from CCSSO and was reviewed by several state department of education personnel.

This chapter displays and discusses what these 50 states and two jurisdictions are doing to help those schools and school districts that have continuing problems in meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP). As discussed by Rhim, Hassel, and Redding (2008), “SEAs are increasingly being required to provide direct support and technical assistance to districts and individual schools to help them build capacity for meaningful change that will improve academic outcomes.” Rhim et al., as well as Reville (2007), go on to note that each state’s design for a system of support is shaped by its own internal capacity and each state’s assumptions about how to achieve better results.

In their analysis of a 50 state survey of SEA capacity and approaches to providing ongoing support to schools identified for improvement, Le Floch, Boyle, and Therriault (2008a) identified the key components of these state systems as: (1) providing tools to support the school improvement process, (2) providing staff or personnel who deliver support, (3) supporting activities, (4) funding school improvement, and (5) providing the content of the improvement strategies themselves. These components are included in the following analyses, but in this chapter there is additional emphasis on how states are reconsidering how to reorganize and restructure themselves in order to accomplish the mission of school improvement. The profile of an SEA with a hundred separate silos, each uniquely dedicated to a program or group of children, does not work given the mission of SEAs by NCLB. Chapter 3 looks specifically at the responses of five states that understand this new approach. The rest of this chapter will provide descriptive information about the progress of the remaining 45 states as well as the responses from Puerto Rico and Washington, DC.

The CCSSO/CII survey begins by asking the respondents’ background, and then asks about the structure of their SSOS such as the greatest strength of their system and the biggest challenge that each state is facing.

### System Structure

How are states combining forces with partners to help districts? Table 2.1 shows the various sources being used. Rhim et al. (2008) note that while these state systems of support structures may be viewed as distinct structures, in practice most states’ systems are comprised of a combination of these structures. Rhim et al. go on to point out the inherent risk of inefficiency in a large, multi-layered state approach.

Table 2.1

SEA Partners in the Development of a SSOS			
Entity	Number of “Yes” Responses	Total Number of Responses	Percent
SEA staff	52	52	100.0
Regional offices	32	52	61.5
Distinguished educators	36	52	69.2
University staff	31	52	59.6
Consultants	44	52	84.6
State associations	28	52	53.8
Other organizations	28	52	54.9

CII’s case studies have found, however, that even relatively large and complex states, such as Ohio, have shown that they can effectively use regionally based support teams to create a coordinated, integrated, and aligned system that even includes support designed specifically for special education pupils. States such as **Alabama** (Kerins, Hanes, & Perlman, 2008a) may have limited financial resources, but they can be creative in their organization. This state department established a Roundtable approach within the SEA to demolish the existing program silos in order to provide a coordinated, seamless system of continuous technical assistance and support. In turn, this effective model has now generated

regional agency and district roundtables. In **Washington**, (Kerins, Hanes, & Perlman, 2008b) School Improvement Facilitators (SIF), or distinguished educators, are external change agents who work with SEA staff to help local educators build capacity and sustainability for local improvements.

Of course, all states use SEA staff. **Colorado** provides a typical response: “The chief responsibilities of SEA staff are to: (1) identify direction, purpose, goals, and specifications for the statewide system of support; (2) marshal resources that will address the goals; (3) coordinate the design and delivery of support to the field; and (4) complete evaluations appraising project success.”

Over 60% of the SEAs utilize regional offices of education. **Louisiana** has eight Regional Educational Service Centers that are responsible for training local educators in all facets of the school improvement process. These centers also provide on-site technical assistance as well as workshops in the areas of curriculum, Reading First, special education, early childhood, and NCLB programs. **Colorado** is redesigning its regional services so that greater emphasis will be paid to ground-level implementation support. Recently enacted legislation is providing funds for the expansion of these regional service providers, including the responsibility to conduct “comprehensive appraisals for district improvement.”

As Rhim et al. (2008) note, “distinguished educators” has been envisioned as one of the main sources of support for the implementation of NCLB. In fact, almost 70% of the states utilize this approach. **Alabama** (Kerins et al., 2008a) contracts with LEAs to “loan” staff to the SEA in order to provide on-site assistance as Regional School Improvement Coaches, Peer Mentors, Regional Reading Coaches, Regional Principal Coaches as well as Math and Science Specialists. **Pennsylvania**’s distinguished educators (DE) are experienced and trained educators who are assigned to struggling schools and districts to assist in planning and implementing effective school reform efforts. “Depending on the needs of the schools and districts to which they are assigned, DEs serve as coaches or mentors for administrators;

assist in the development of prescriptive solutions to student achievement problems; and provide budget and financial assistance. DEs are assigned to schools for a minimum of a year and work one-to-one with school personnel as an integral participant in reform efforts.” In **Washington** (Kerins et al., 2008b), the SIFs work with schools that volunteer to participate in School Improvement Assistance Program. “Each SIF works with the schools, districts, as well as school improvement teams to develop a plan to address identified needs and to prepare and implement a jointly developed performance agreement between school, school district, and the SEA. SIFs are experienced educators who have been successful in improving student performance.”

Almost 60% of the states utilize university staff as a source of help. In **Oklahoma**, university staff participate on the School Support Teams that make site visits, observe in classrooms, provide feedback to teachers and administrators, interview parents, students, teachers, and administrators. They also provide feedback to School Support Team Leaders for reports to building administrators based on the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements framework. In **Pennsylvania**, university personnel are part of the content expert teams, and in **North Carolina**, they deliver professional development to turnaround administrators. In **Missouri**, they provide research capabilities and statistical data analyses for their student achievement data as well as demographic information.

Almost all (84.6%) use consultants for specific tasks, from supplementing existing responsibilities on assistance teams (**Iowa**), to advice on professional development content (**Montana**), to the development of specific seminars for school improvement site teams (**Oklahoma**). **Indiana** utilized its partnership with Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center and CII to find the research that is now being used to inform the development of a new Institute for School Leadership Teams that will prepare school leaders to:

- ✦ Implement a team approach to instructional leadership;

- ✦ Use data to determine students’ needs and plan appropriate teacher responses;
- ✦ Utilize research-based practices from high-performing, high-poverty urban districts;
- ✦ Receive support from current and recent successful urban principals; and
- ✦ Meet, work, and plan on a regular basis with the school improvement team.

Over half of the states work with state associations such as school boards, school administrators, PIRCs (Parent Involvement Resource Centers), and teacher unions as partners in their state system of support. **Kentucky** (Kerins, Hanes, & Perlman, 2008c) identified its state’s associations as critical in the evolution of its system. In addition, **Indiana** uses the North Central Association (NCA) since schools may choose to be accredited by both NCA and the state. NCA offers numerous workshops on a variety of important areas, and their improvement planning model is an approved model for school improvement planning in Indiana.

In the “other organization” category, respondents often listed various technical assistance centers and labs funded by the Department of Education. Other states used resources from within their own state. For example, the **Georgia** Learning Resources System is a network of 17 centers that provide training and resources to educators and parents of students with disabilities and provide ongoing professional training to teachers and administrators to assist them in implementing effective instructional strategies. In **Vermont**, the Education Data Warehouse provides a statewide database that links state and local assessment data as well as other information closely associated with student achievement.

In order to gauge the size of the SEAs’ Systems of Support, the survey then asked each respondent to estimate the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of staff within the State Department of Education as well as externally whose primary responsibility is to assist low performing schools and districts. Table 2.2 shows this distribution. As Le Floch et al. (2008a) note, the number of staff available to provide support to schools is a critical component of state capacity.

Table 2.2

Number of Staff Devoted to SSOS		
Number of staff	FTE within the Department	FTE external to the Department
None	3	10
1-25	38	24
26-50	4	7
51-75	0	1
76-100	4	0
101+	2	7
blank/NA	1	3
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>52</b>

### Strengths and Challenges

Figure 2.1 displays the responses of the states regarding the greatest strengths of their current state-wide system of support. The most frequent response focuses on the knowledge and skills of their staff, that is, the SEA respondents believe they have quality personnel in place. For example, **Arizona** stated that “[Our] greatest strength is our people. We bring years of classroom teaching and administrative experience to the schools we serve and can work with school and district leadership to bring about positive change for the schools.”

Tied with that is the response about the ability of states to customize their available services to meet district and school needs. **Maryland** believes that the greatest strength of their SSOS is its ability to respond and provide customized support to districts upon request. They believe they can do that because of the strong coordination of services among multiple providers (e.g., external agencies, SEA staff, and consultants) and to provide cross-district programs that address common challenges facing districts and schools. **Michigan** also believes that their SSOS is tailored to meet the unique needs of each high priority school based on the school’s comprehensive needs assessment and school improvement plan. **Arizona** believes its greatest strength is the flexibility it has in providing support to failing schools based on the interventions recommended by a panel of educators and SEA staff after a three-day visit.

Just below on the list are two responses regarding collaboration—one focuses on districts and schools while the second discusses collaboration within the SSOS. In the first, **Louisiana** has brought local superintendents and local school boards to the forefront of accountability by including them in discussions related to interventions in specific schools. “The movement toward more state intervention would be more difficult if the LDE did not involve the local superintendents and their board in preparation of possible interventions and sanctions.” In **Nevada**, School Support Team leaders are achieving the greatest success in schools where they are able to establish a mentoring relationship with the principal, and where the assistance of the team is seen as true support rather than as a sanction or punishment. With regard to that approach, **Colorado** states that it has shifted its state’s SSOS center of gravity from compliance to support. That theme is repeated in the five states studied by CII: **Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, and Washington** (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

With regard to collaboration within the SSOS, **Colorado** now uses a cross-functional team of state department of education staff to forge three-year partnerships with a number of their districts. The Department has begun to “partner up” with its Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to support improvement efforts in small and rural districts via regional trainings in identified areas of need. “For example, a partnership with a BOCES in Southwest Colorado has started which focuses on the Native American student population. It will help ensure targeted interventions for preschool and kindergarten students. The pilot brings together services from English language acquisition, special education, and early childhood units.”

**Figure 2.1: Greatest Strength of Current SSOS**

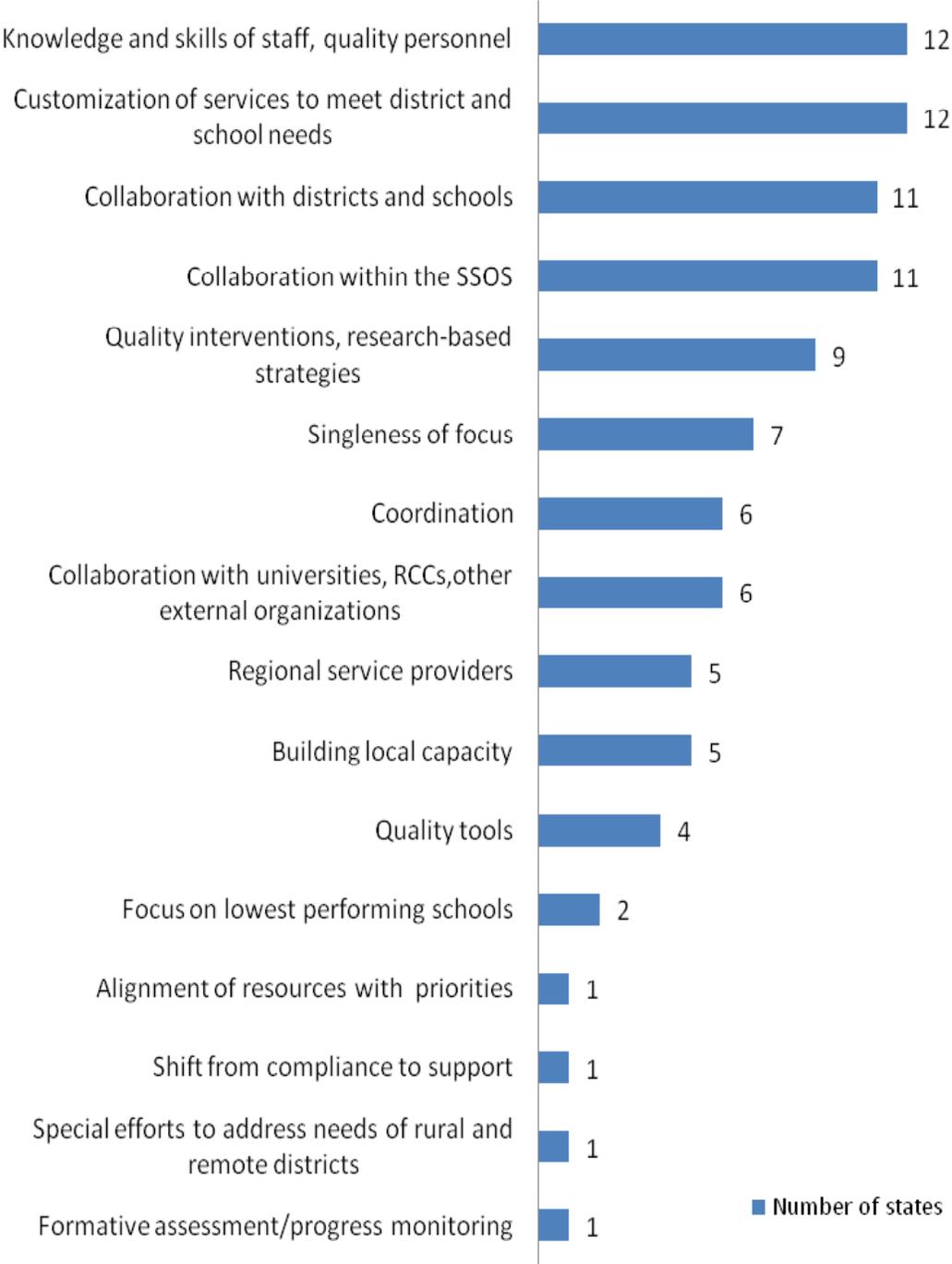


Figure 2.2 displays the states' responses to what they believe are the major challenges facing their SSOS. By far, the major concern is limited resources: funding, staff, and time. Reville (2008) has noted that "...little effort is made though NCLB to build state capacity. This leaves understaffed, underfunded education agencies with a history and culture of compliance monitoring to suddenly reinvent themselves into leadership agencies." As Le Floch et al. (2008b) note: "Adequate capacity implies that state education agencies have resources to provide sufficient numbers of external staff, generate timely data, deliver professional development, offer grant monies and leverage relevant expertise in the service of low-performing schools."

**Arizona** was quoted above stating that one of its greatest strengths was its staff. However, they have also noted that staffing is one of its major challenges. "The greatest challenge is to provide the needed assistance to individual schools and school districts throughout the state with a limited number of specialists. The greatest need in the schools and in the school districts is in leadership. Principals and district level administrators need to be instructional leaders. Many of them do not understand how to use data to make instructional decisions, assess student learning through benchmarks, evaluate good instruction, and hold staff accountable for improving student achievement. It becomes the greatest challenge for our specialists to individualize their work with the 40 to 50 schools to which each of them is assigned."

**Nevada** reports that: "Keeping up with the demand for service is probably our biggest challenge right now. As AYP targets go up, so does the number of schools that must be assigned school support teams. Finding and training a cadre of committed, competent school support team leaders is a daunting task."

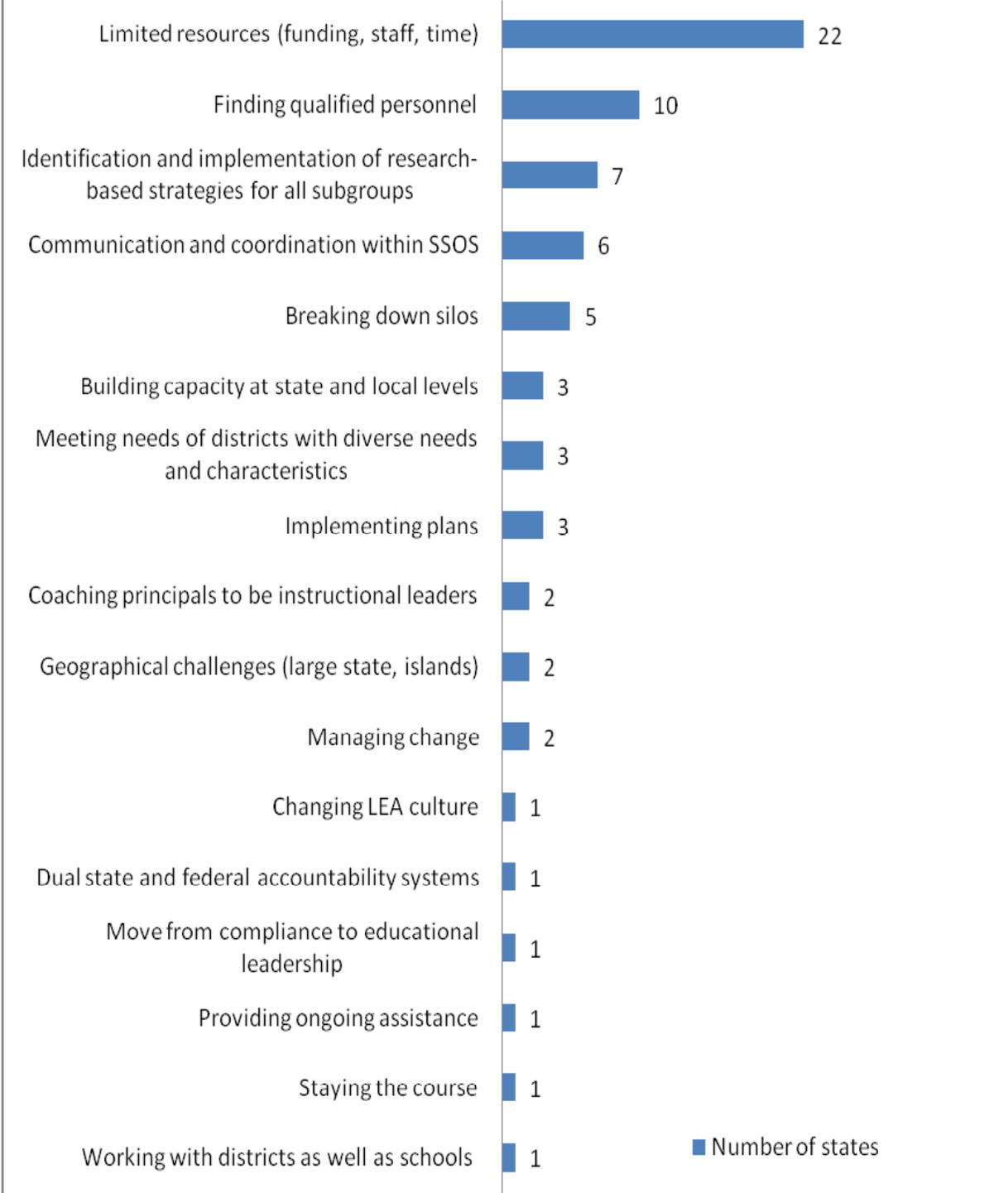
**Ohio's** experiences have made the staffing issue even more critical. "One challenge is the longstanding beliefs and practice of implementing reform efforts on a school-by-school basis. The Ohio Improvement Process and SSOS view districts and buildings as a connected unit, and our improvement efforts require the establishment of new leadership team structures for aligning and focusing the work across

the district as a system. This change requires new behaviors and the 'letting go' of some positional authority so that efforts can address fewer, but more relevant needs based on data." The Ohio decision to approach school improvement as a cohesive unit rather than isolating a school was a theme reported in all four states in the *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

**Oklahoma** notes that: "The biggest challenge facing our current SSOS is having enough time with each of the school improvement sites to provide enough technical assistance and professional development. The challenges include specific subgroups including economically disadvantaged students, the growing population of English language learners and special education students' specific needs."

**West Virginia's** response begins to focus on the issue of silos with regard to its major challenge which is "coordination of all of the pieces of support for schools into one true statewide system of school support. Currently the pieces operate independently of one another and have no unifying method of collecting and analyzing data for identifying specific school or district level problems, setting priorities, identifying appropriate personnel to supply technical assistance based on the identified problems and priorities, and monitor and evaluate results of the technical assistance in order to adjust future support."

**Figure 2.2: Greatest Challenge Facing SSOS**



## Cross-Unit Linkages

Figure 2.3 illustrates linkages between states' special education units and their systems of support. The states' responses run the gamut from little consideration about how a state's SSOS may be linked to special education to major planning and actual joint fieldwork. **Alabama, Arizona, North Carolina,** and **Texas** have active planning meetings between special education and school improvement personnel. In **New Jersey**, the special education staff work directly with the literacy initiatives to serve low-performing schools. They also work together on the diagnostic teams that are sent into low-performing schools.

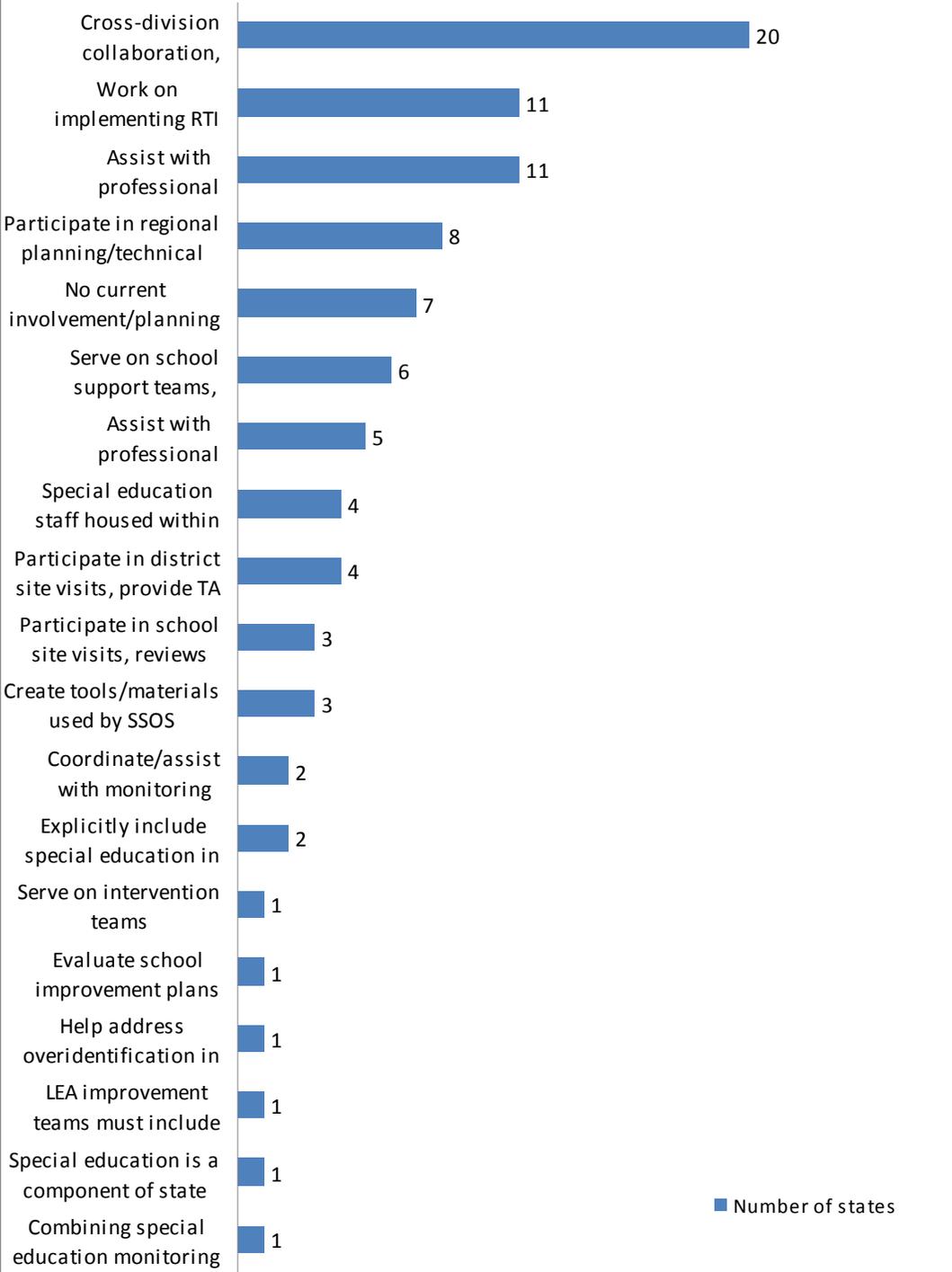
In **Wyoming**, "Special education personnel are part of the SSOS. We align RTI and technical assistance (TA) delivery with the results from special education monitoring and use of data. Special education personnel are members of our TA teams and consult with the School Improvement and Technical Assistance Team." Similar approaches are used in **Maine** and **Michigan**. Also, in **Georgia**, "The special education personnel work with the school improvement personnel by coordinating special education monitoring with Systems Performance Reviews and share monitoring data with the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards analysis teams. The special education personnel and the Georgia Learning Resources Services in the regions collaborate with regional support teams to provide special

education intervention and improvement services to schools."

In **Delaware**, "Special education staff is core to our SSOS. Schools under improvement have first priority for services provided through SSOS. We include in this prioritization all of the special education indicators. Our application, evaluation, and monitoring systems are in the process of being revamped so that they provide the infrastructure to support the SSOS. We have also revised the District and School Improvement Plans—now our District and School Success Plans—so they articulate the complete strategic plan for the agency—one plan that encompasses all students."

In **Maryland**, "A strength of this system is the inclusion and coordination of cross-divisional and external agency support and expertise, including special education. The first step in the process is the review and triangulation of various needs assessments to identify pervasive as well as isolated needs in assessment, leadership, curriculum and instruction, organizational configurations, and community and family engagement. The system works to build foundational strength in core areas of needs and provide enrichment support in more focused areas, such as special education. Special education staff will have a critical role to play in both areas (foundational and enrichment) and are inextricably linked in structure and delivery to this system."

**Figure 2.3: How SSOS and Special Education Staff are Linked**



*Note: States did not always specify to whom professional development was given*

While a number of states are still in the planning stages of integrating their ELL (English language learning) personnel within their SSOS, a number of states are moving into weekly planning across divisions, integrating staff working on school support teams when they visit schools, and in developing professional development programs (see Figure 2.4). In **Arizona**, “ELL education facilitators/specialists participate in all LEA Resource Team District visitations. Additionally, ELL representatives meet with other units in bi-monthly cross-unit communication meetings where school improvement staffs collaborate.” In **Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, and North Carolina**, the ELL personnel work closely with school improvement staff in providing regional services and to ensure that improvement teams are knowledgeable about best practices in this area. In Colorado, the department is participating in a McREL-sponsored study that examines “what works” for the English language learner population in 23 schools.

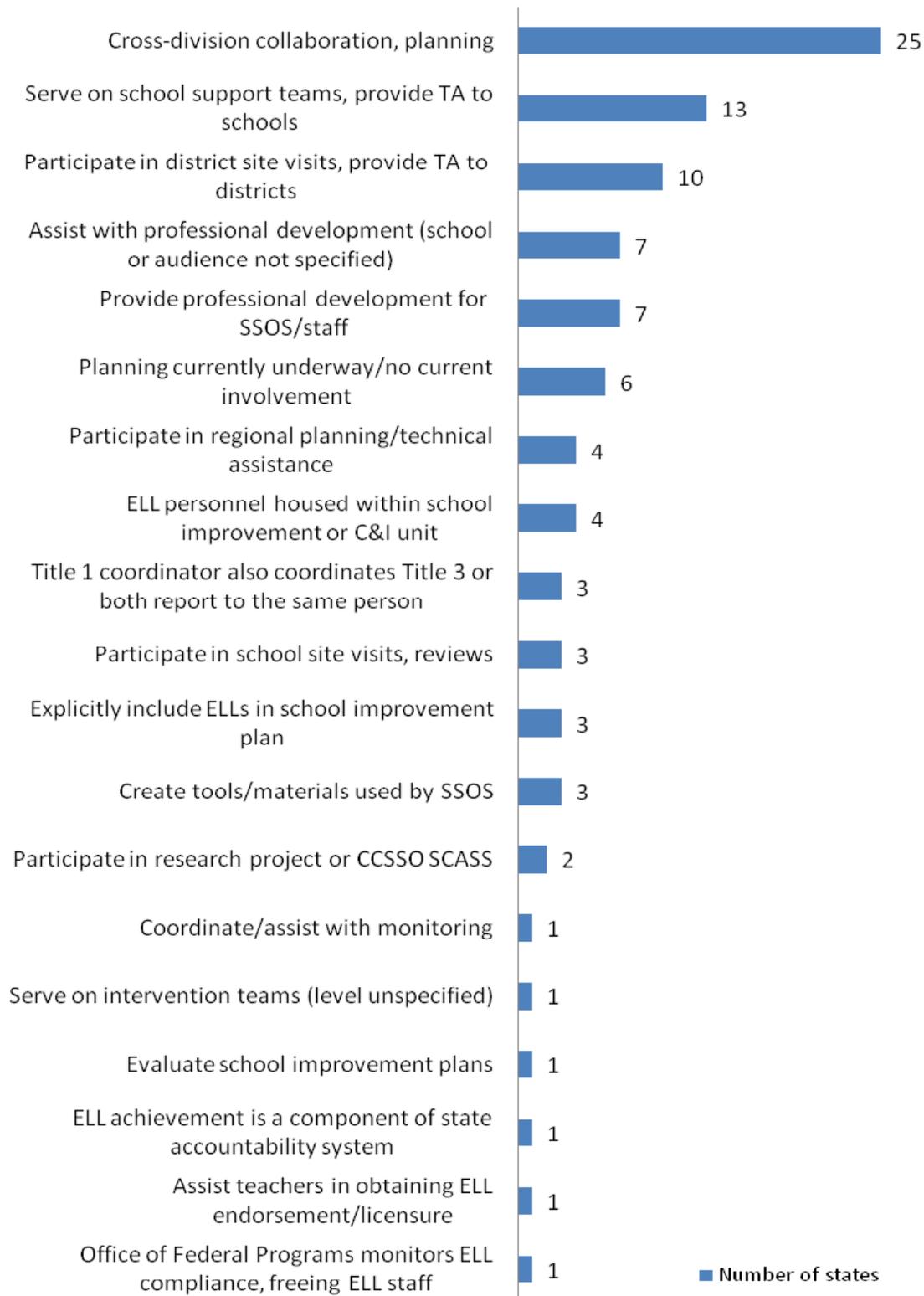
In **New Mexico**, the ELL personnel are linked in two ways. “The first is through participation on a cross-functional professional development work group. The work group is focused on coordinating both the need and the provision of professional

development for schools and districts. The second way is through close collaboration with the Assessment and Accountability staff and linking the federal Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives with the progress of schools on the AYP.”

**Ohio** has limited ELL staff and agency capacity. “To make the best use of their time, the Office of Federal Programs provides much of the routine administration of their funding programs and of the compliance reviews. This allows them [ELL staff] to be more of a resource to districts/schools needing targeted assistance for ELL. ELL issues are also being addressed as part of statewide literacy reform initiatives which are embedded in the SSOS, and many of their activities are conducted via the Ohio State Support Teams.”

In **Rhode Island**, “District Corrective Action Plans and District Negotiated Agreements contain plans that delineate SEA services including ELL for the designated district. Each district is provided a Joint Capacity Team, which includes members representing general education, special education, and ELL staff from both the SEA and LEA levels. The SEA is moving to include the results of the ELL ACCESS Test in the district/school classification.”

**Figure 2.4: How SSOS and ELL Staff are Linked**



While most states have some active working relationship between their SSOS and Title I staff (see Table 2.5), in some states the respective units are on the same floor and/or working in nearby offices. States such as **Nevada** and **New Hampshire** report that the “Title I staff members are part of the SSOS—part of planning, implementation, and direct services. Because of our capacity, most of us do double or triple duty, so we have to work together.”

The **Colorado** Department of Education is reorienting itself around the mission of enhanced service to the field in support of greater student achievement.

As a result, they are “...bringing together resources from across the Department of Education (including, but not exclusively, District Improvement Funds and Title I funds) to develop and deploy tools, strategies, and processes that enable districts to achieve greater growth and performance.”

In **Kansas**, the SSOS includes Title I staff. “In addition, the state is emphasizing a Multi-Tier System of Supports similar to Response to Intervention which increases the coordination and collaboration among all staff and programs as they support schools and districts.” **Massachusetts** and **Ohio** have eliminated their Title I offices as they integrate their SSOS efforts.

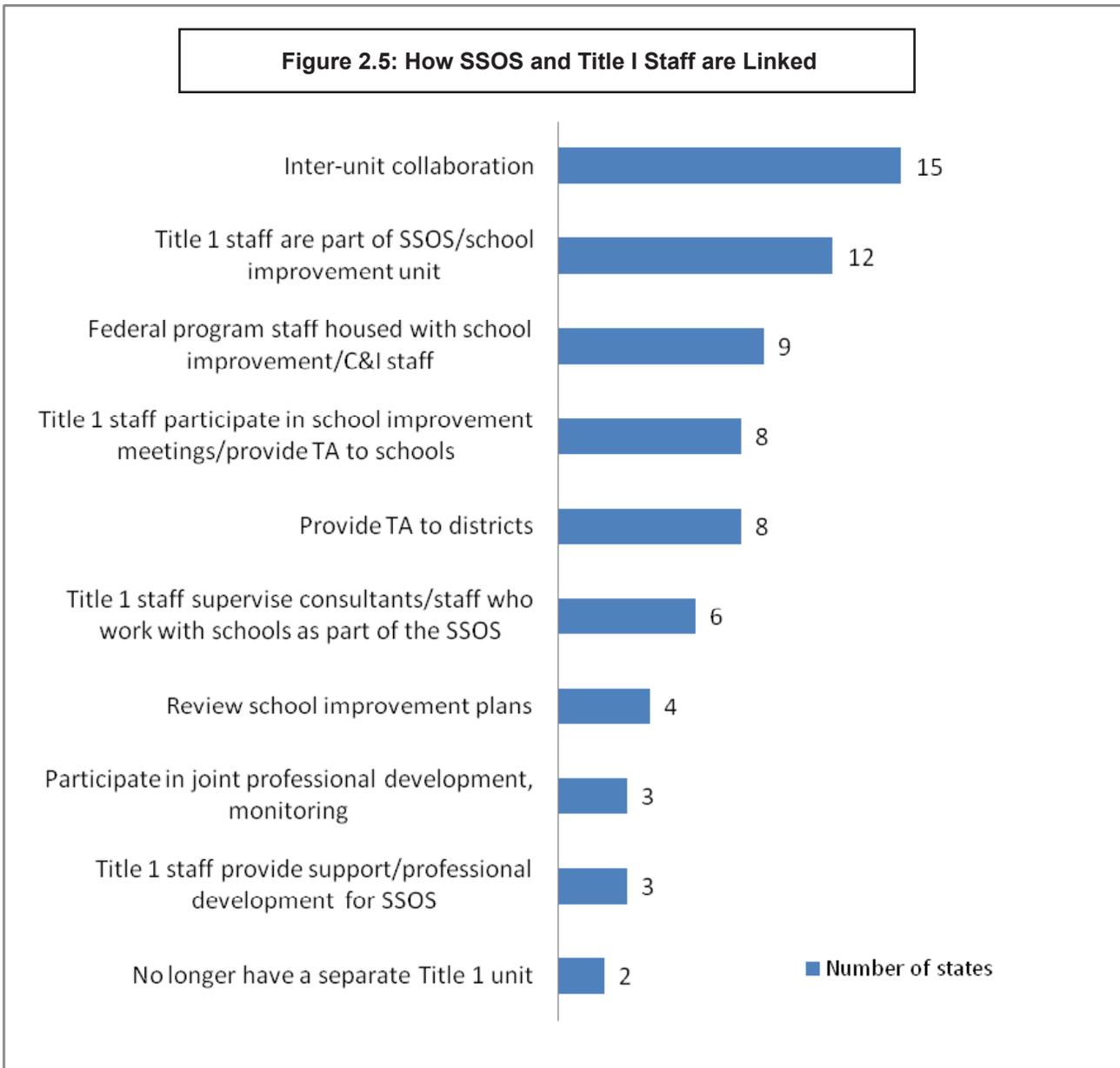
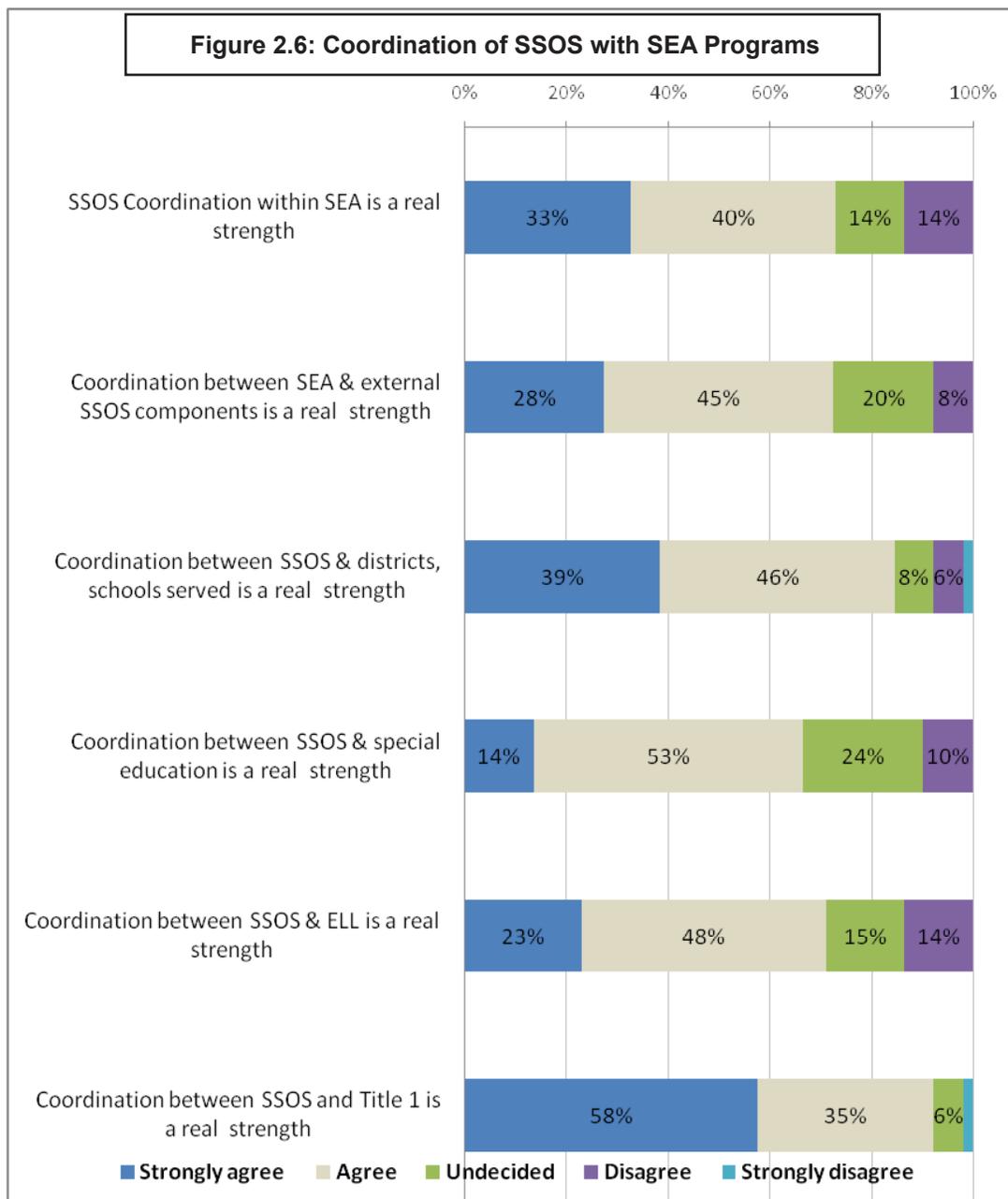


Figure 2.6 gives respondents' opinions on the extent to which their statewide system of support coordinates within itself and with categorical programs. The best coordination was with Title I, with 93% agreeing or strongly agreeing that coordination between the SSOS and Title I was a real strength; 58% strongly agreed that that was the case. The next best coordination was perceived to be with the districts and schools they serve, with about 85% of states agreeing or strongly agreeing that that was a

strength. Just over 70% expressed agreement that coordination within the SSOS was a real strength, but 14% were undecided and 14% disagreed. The least agreement (67%) was with the statement that the coordination between the SSOS and special education was a strength; 24% were undecided and 10% disagreed. Coordination between the SSOS and ELL was rated slightly higher.



## Response to Intervention

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 and its regulations of October 2006 required states to use a process based on the student's response to scientific, research-based intervention rather than a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability. States, such as **Illinois**, have subsequently modified their rules and now require each district to complete a plan for transition to use the above process by January 1, 2009. Illinois districts must implement RTI as part of their evaluative procedure for making SLD (Specific Learning Disability) determination by the 2010-2011 academic year.

According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (RTI), "With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities." The RTI method has been developed by researchers as an alternative to identifying learning disabilities with the ability-achievement discrepancy model, which requires students to exhibit a severe discrepancy between their IQ and academic achievement as measured by standardized tests.

This survey asked states to respond to how they see RTI fitting into their systems of support. Figure 2.7 shows that nine states believe RTI can be a key component of school improvement, and twelve states are at the beginning level of implementation. Fourteen states noted their cross-unit collaboration, but others noted that the best they had to say was that personnel are in the same unit.

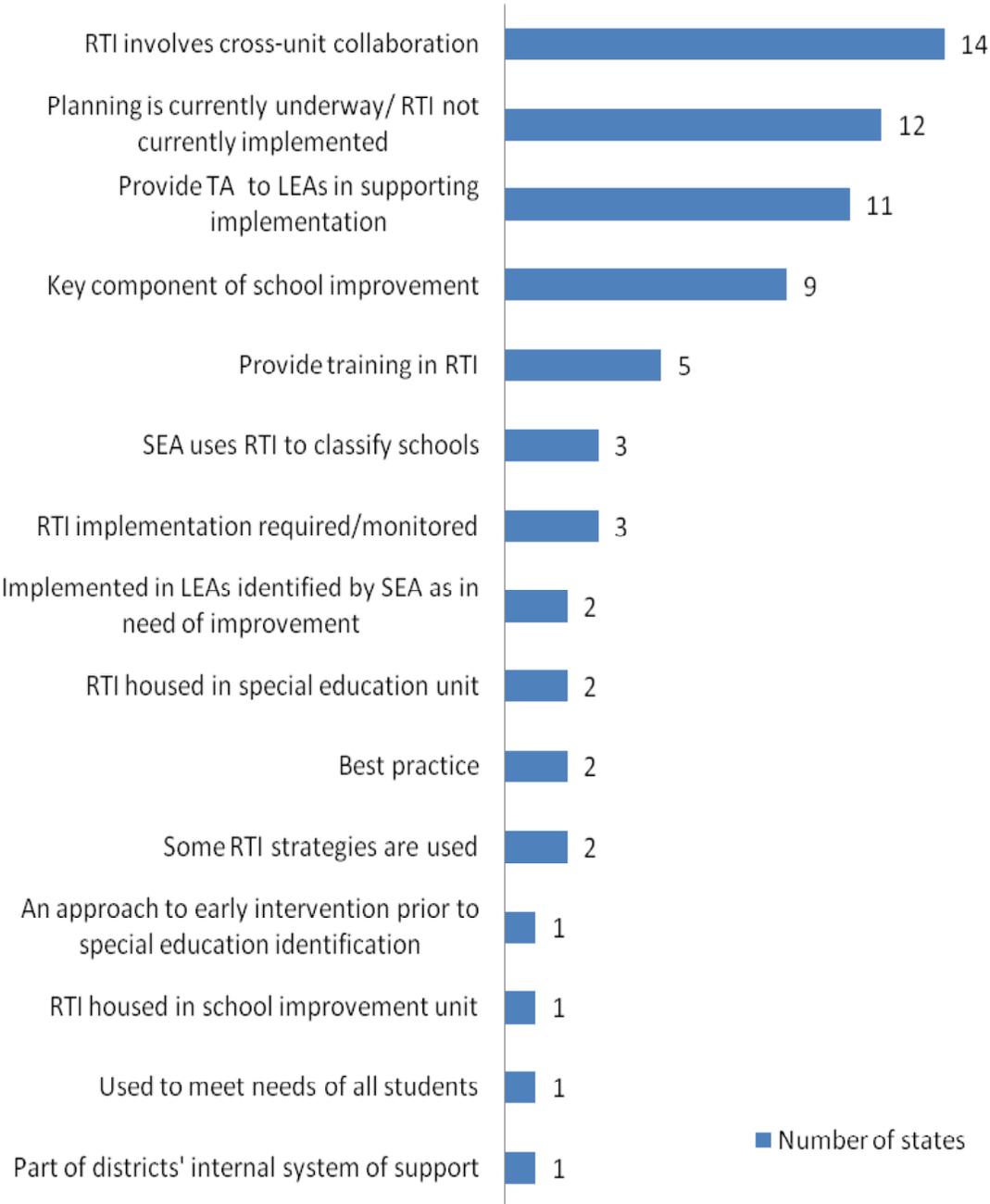
**Delaware** sees RTI "...as a critical component of school improvement and therefore our SSOS. Staff from curriculum, assessment, and special education are all involved in the design and implementation of this statewide project." **Florida** agrees: "RTI goes for deeper meaning in progress of schools. It is an integral part of school improvement." **Hawaii** noted that "RTI continues to be a best practice foundation for schools, complex areas, and state level programs. Consistent intervention practices build for consistent student growth."

**Iowa** has focused on Instructional Decision Making, which takes the Response to Intervention model to meet the needs of all students, not just those with special education identification. RTI definitely fits into **New Mexico's** SSOS. "New Mexico state rules require each school to implement the three-tier model of student intervention that is synonymous with the RTI model." **Nevada** "believes that it is critical for every school in corrective action or beyond to have established some systematic way of intervening with students who don't master content through regular classroom instruction. RTI provides such a systematic plan."

Finally, **Washington** stated that "RTI has been an on-going initiative to help districts assess and implement a multi-tiered system that incorporates instruction, intervention, and assessment to identify and intervene early with the most struggling students."

Some states (e.g., **Michigan, North Dakota, Nebraska, and Oregon**) are currently able to provide support services to all schools in improvement status or beyond; these states have a relatively small number of schools that fall into that category. Most states, however, lack the resources to provide intensive assistance to all districts and schools that need it.

**Figure 2.7: How Response to Intervention Fits into SSOS**



Note: All states responded "yes" when asked if RTI fit into their SSOS.

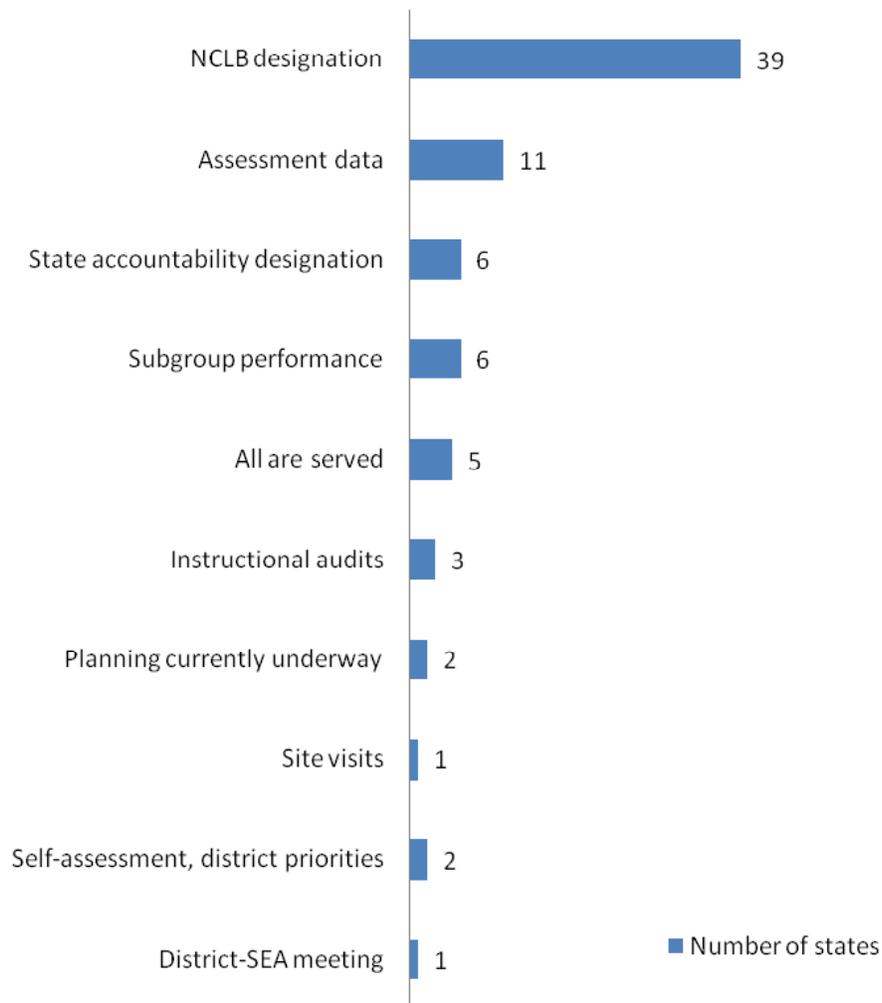
## Determining School and District Support

Figure 2.8 illustrates how states decide which districts and schools receive support. Nearly four out of five states base that determination on NCLB designation, usually with schools receiving more intensive services the longer they have failed to make AYP. Several states take into account the number of subgroups that failed to make AYP. For example, **Washington** offers special technical assistance to districts that met achievement targets for all groups except students with disabilities; other districts in improvement receive more comprehensive assis-

tance. Similarly, **Maryland** notes that, “districts at risk of entering improvement or whose needs are restricted to one or two subgroup populations, will receive intensive support that is specific to their area of need.”

A number of states with their own accountability systems in addition to NCLB use their state’s accountability designation as a criterion for determining what support, if any, will be provided; sometimes the state’s designation is used along with NCLB status. **Arizona** relies on schools’ state accountability status: “In the state accountability system, schools receive labels based on a growth model

**Figure 2.8: How SSOS Determines Which Districts and Schools Receive Support**



where data from state testing is averaged over several years. Schools can receive labels from ‘Excelling’ to ‘Failing to Meet Academic Standards.’” Support is provided to schools that have been designated as Failing to Meet Academic Standards.

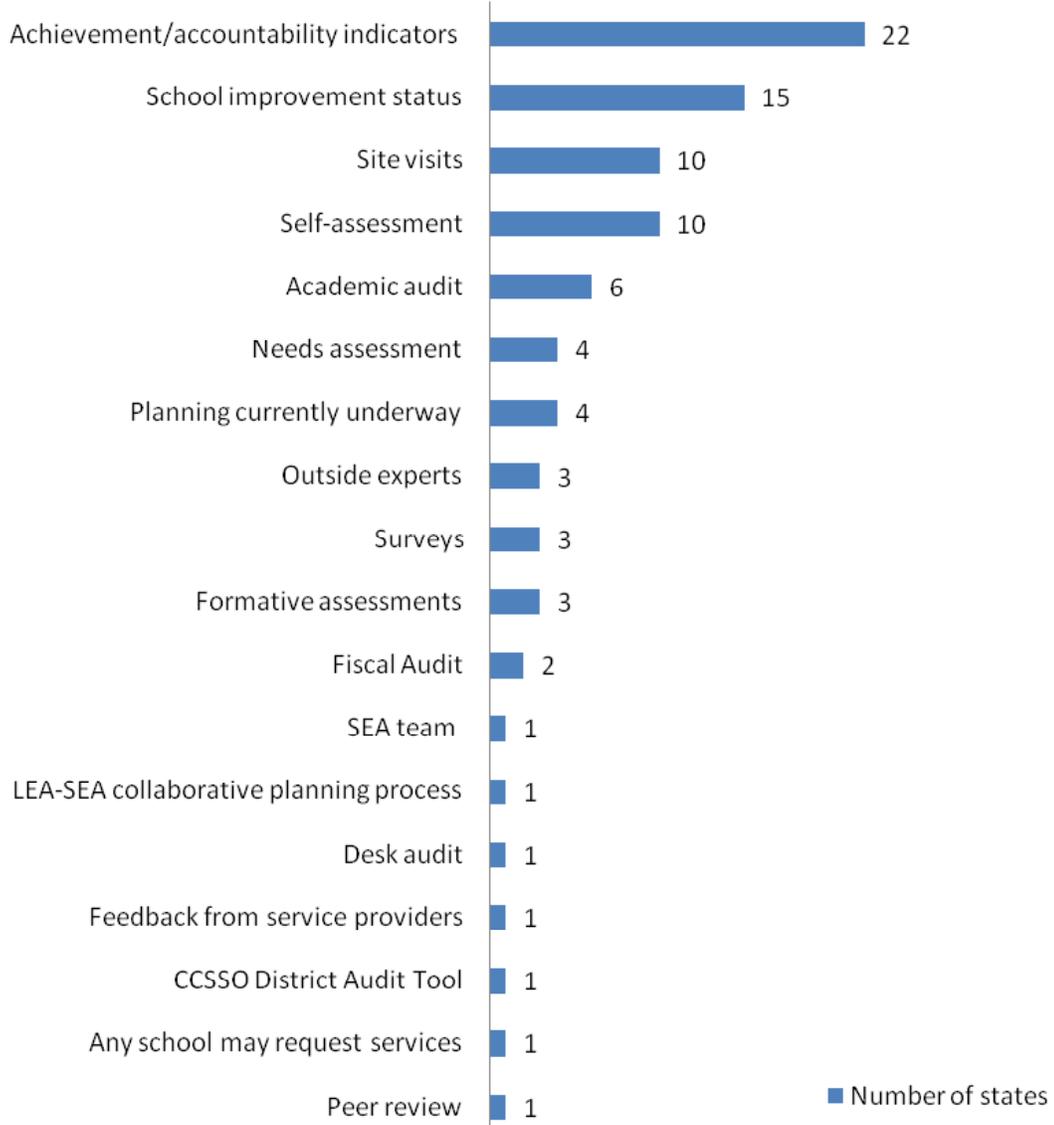
A number of states use audits (including self-audits). In **New Jersey**, “Districts do a self-assessment that includes a score for Instruction and Program, Fiscal Management, Operation, Personnel and Governance. If they have a low score, the state sends in teams who are trained to help districts...identify underlying causes of their problems.” Schools in the lowest NCLB categories receive diagnostic visits from the SEA.

Figure 2.9 shows how states responded when asked how their SSOS assesses district and school needs to determine what support is provided. The greatest number of states (22) makes use of either achievement data or other accountability indicators. Fourteen states reported using school improvement status as a criterion. Site visits and self-assessments are each used by about a fifth of the states. Many

states employ a combination of methods. A case in point is **Georgia**:

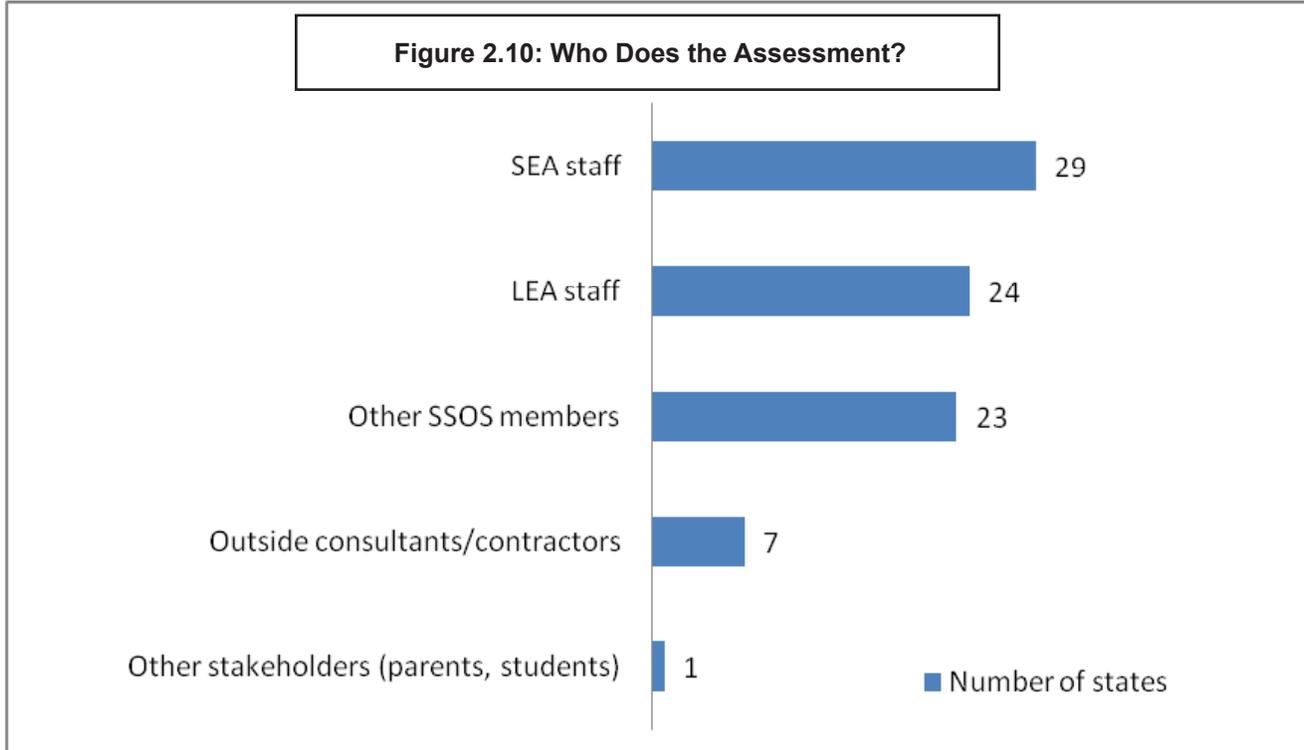
School and district needs are assessed in several ways. Real-time data analysis identifies the reasons schools and systems did not make adequate yearly progress. In addition, regional support teams collect anecdotal information through working with these systems and schools. Two other sources for needs assessment are the Georgia Assessment of Performance on Schools Standards (GAPSS) and the System Performance Review (SPR). The GAPSS analysis measures the degree of implementation of a school [of the Georgia state standards]. The SPR measures a system’s adherence to research-based practices for school systems and the level and quality of support given to schools within the system. This layered data analysis is then used by SDOE staff to customize and map the level of support based on the real needs of each school and/or district.

**Figure 2.9: How SSOS Assesses District and School Needs to Determine What Support Is Provided**



Just as multiple indicators are frequently used to determine what support the SSOS will provide, multiple entities collaborate to make that determination (see Figure 2.10). In 29 of the states, SEA personnel are involved; 23 states report that other SSOS members participate; and in an equal number of states,

LEA staff play a part in arriving at that decision, often using tools provided by the state. In some states, such as **North Dakota**, each school or district is solely responsible for assessing its own needs. Outside consultants, either alone or in collaboration with other entities, are used by seven states.



### Services Provided

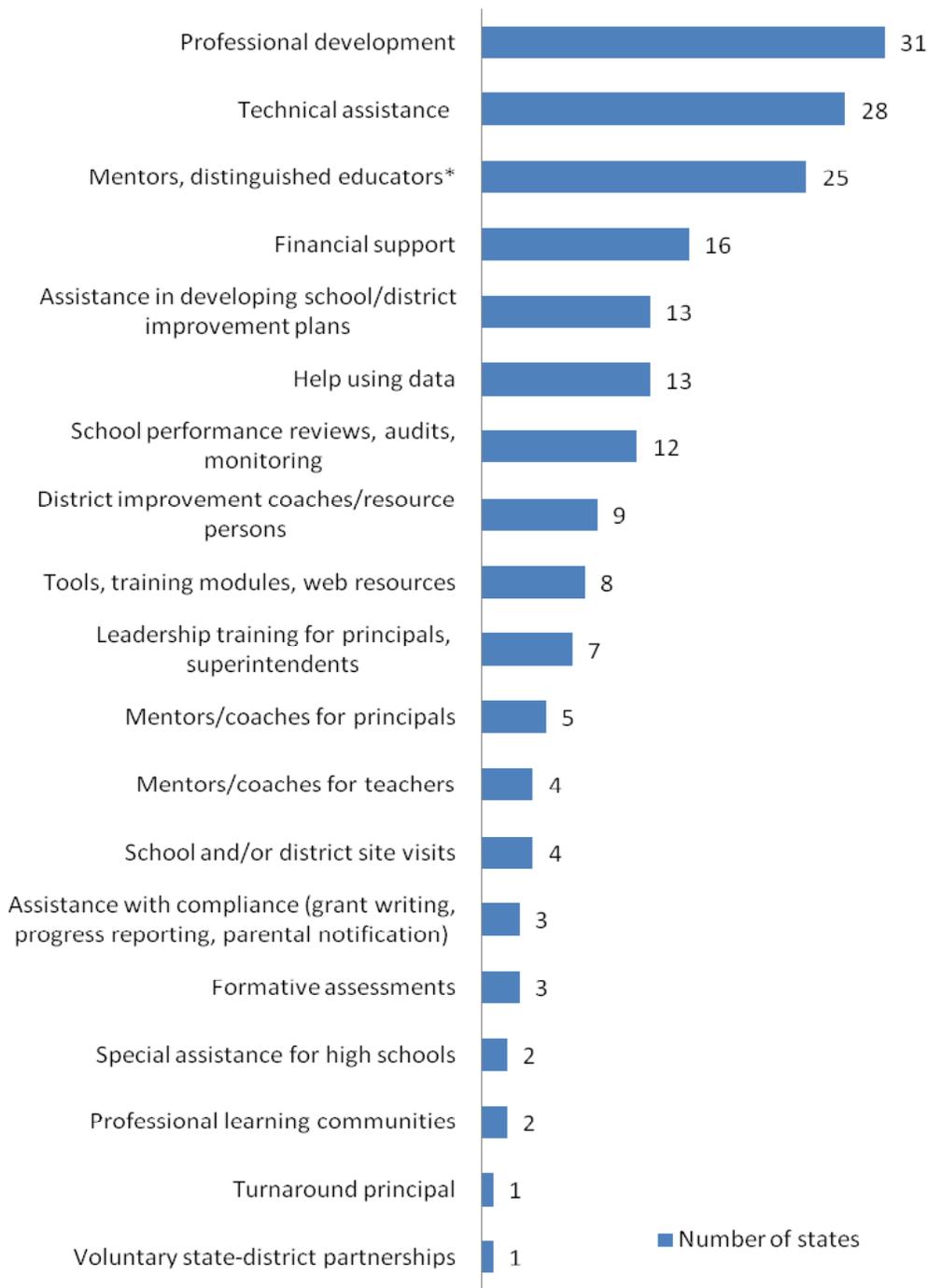
Figure 2.11 illustrates the services and resources provided to districts and schools by statewide systems of support. The most frequently offered services involved professional development, technical assistance, and mentors or distinguished educators. Most states did not specify who received the mentoring; of the states that did (**Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, and Rhode Island**), all offered mentoring for leaders. School improvement plans and data use are key areas in which assistance is offered and state-developed tools, training modules and web resources are often provided. About one-fourth of the states conduct site visits or school performance reviews.

States typically provided a variety of services and resources. For example, **Alaska** reported using “district improvement coaches, teacher/principal/superintendent mentors or coaches for new staff teachers/principals/superintendents, on-site and/or regional trainings for district staff, leadership training for principals and superintendents.”

**California** “...provide[s] a full range of services from site-based to regional collaborative efforts, including professional development, training in use of state tools, and alignment of fiscal actions with program services.”

**Florida** offers “...on-line and web support, TA, regional institutes, professional development, data analysis, facilitators working with districts and schools, conference calls, mentors, best practices, and school matches.”

**Figure 2.11: Services and Resources Provided to Districts and Schools**



\*Includes the following categories below: district improvement coaches/resource persons, mentors/coaches for principals and mentors/coaches for teachers

States use a variety of criteria to decide the intensity, duration, and types of services provided by their systems of support (see Figure 2.12). The most commonly mentioned methods are NCLB designation and, not surprisingly, needs assessments. Generally the schools that have failed to make AYP for the longest time receive the most intensive services. For example, in **Alaska**, “there are core foundational services that all intervention districts receive, then more specific services based on unique needs.” Le Floch et al. (2008b) found that 38 states had tiered systems in which the type and intensity of support increased as a school’s NCLB designation worsened.

As the number of schools in corrective action or restructuring increases, states are working on ways to best help those schools. In **Delaware**,

We are only in our second year of having schools in planning for restructuring. Those schools are high priority, and as we have reviewed and approved their plans, we are learning a lot about what we have and what we still need to have in order to provide adequate support. We also realize that we need to be providing much more support early in the process and have designed especially the School Success Plan to make sure this happens.

**Florida** has five levels of intensity of service provided by their state system of support ranging from reviewing school improvement plans to having staff visit and work with schools.

Within a given NCLB level (e.g., corrective action), **Georgia** has a tiered approach “so that the intensity of services varies according to the distance the school performance is from cut-offs for making AYP.”

**Oregon**’s SSOS facilitators meet regularly with the school improvement staff and monitor evidence of implementation to determine where additional assistance may be needed.

**Pennsylvania** has a three-tiered model, in which all schools are eligible for Foundation Assistance, which is intended to address newly identified problems before they result in NCLB sanctions. Schools in school improvement receive Field-Based Assistance, which adds a greater level of scrutiny and support. Targeted Assistance, which is the most intensive and directive, is provided for districts and schools in corrective action. This level includes one-on-one work with school and district personnel “to target the planning and implementation of proven and effective school reform efforts to meet school and district needs.”

Rhim, Hassel, and Redding (2007) assert that structures for effective monitoring and evaluation are an essential part of the design of a statewide system of support. However, they and Le Floch, et al. (2008b) note that little research has been done on how those support systems might be evaluated.

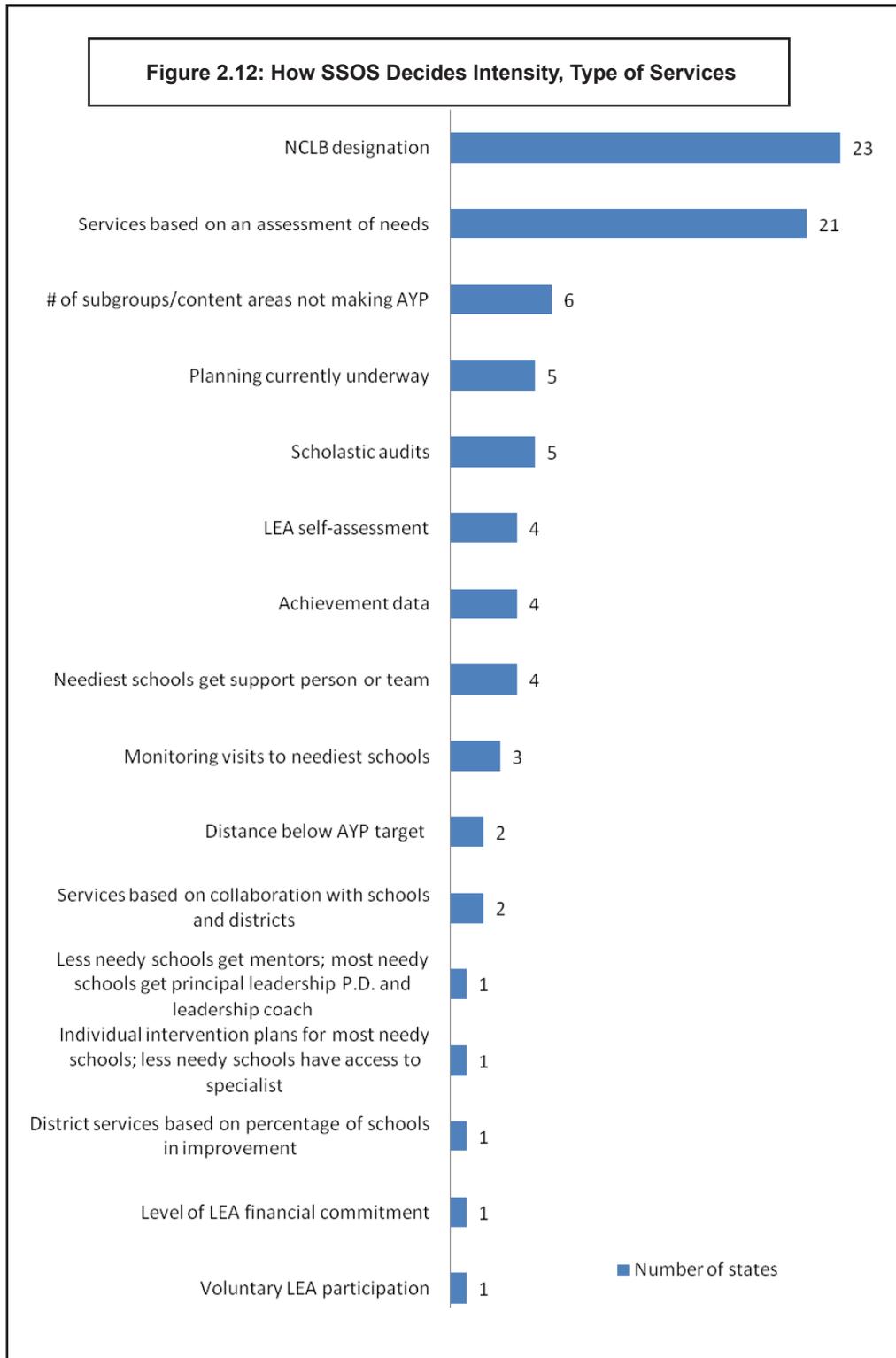
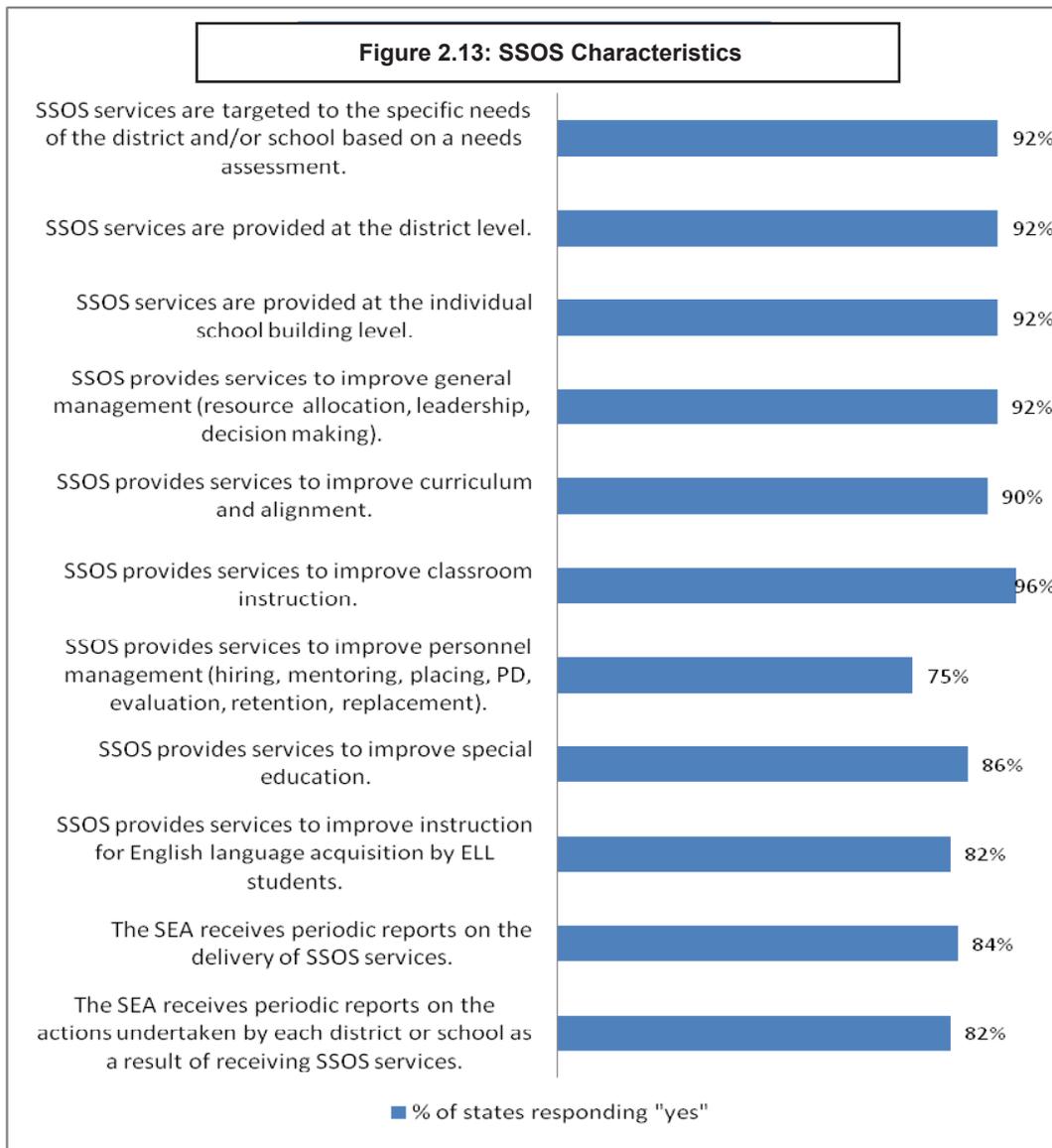


Figure 2.13 displays the responses of the states to 11 questions that illustrate a national profile of how these support systems operate. Over 90% of the states report that their support services:

- ✦ Are targeted to the specific needs of the district and/or school based on a needs assessment;
- ✦ Are provided at the district level;
- ✦ Are provided at the individual school level;
- ✦ Provide services to improve general management (resource allocation, leadership, decision making);

- ✦ Provide services to improve curriculum and alignment; and
- ✦ Provide services to improve classroom instruction.

Between 80%-90% of the states provide services to improve instruction for students with disabilities and English language learners. By contrast, only 74% provide services to improve personnel management (hiring, mentoring, placing, professional development, evaluation, retention, replacement). About 84% of the SEAs receive periodic reports on the delivery of SSOS services and 82% receive periodic reports on the actions undertaken by each district or school as a result of receiving SSOS services.



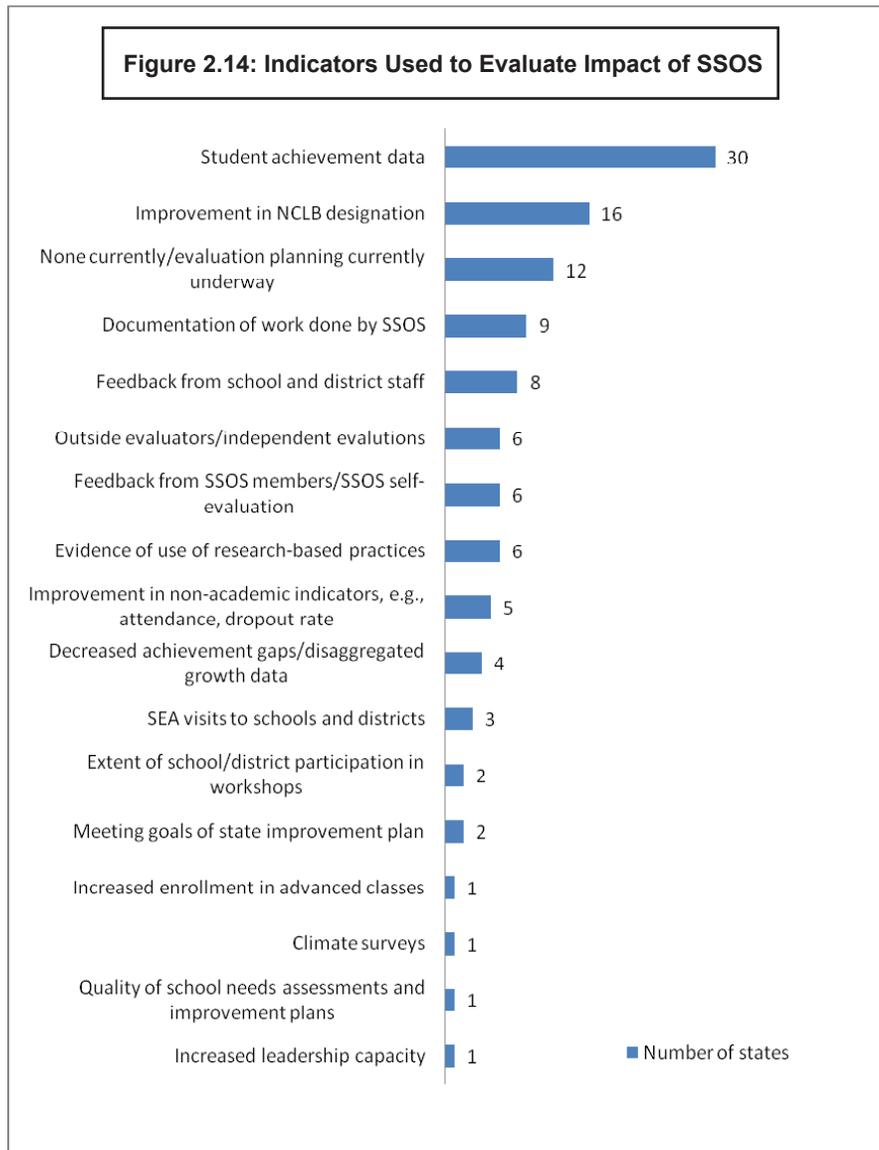
## Evaluating the System of Support

The indicators states use to evaluate the impact of their systems of support are shown in Figure 2.14. The most frequently mentioned measures were student achievement data (30 states) and a closely associated indicator, improvement in NCLB designation (16 states). Documentation of work done was mentioned by nine states, and eight states use feedback from their schools and districts to evaluate program impact.

It is illuminating to compare these responses with those of SSOS clients. School and district staff were interviewed as part of case studies of systems of support in **Washington, Alabama, Kentucky,** and **Tennessee** (Redding & Walberg, 2007). When

asked what criteria might be used to evaluate the quality of a statewide system of support, all agreed with the states that assessment data and changes in NCLB status were important. However, all of the LEA staff said that collaboration and communication between them and the statewide system of support were critical, as was the state’s responsiveness to requests and suggestions from schools and districts.

Six states use outside evaluators and an equal number rely on feedback from members of the system of support or other self-evaluation. About a quarter of the states are currently in the process of planning how they will evaluate their systems of support.



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## Chapter 3: Results from the SSOS Survey—Five Case Study States

Thomas Kerins, Carole Perlman, & Janis Langdon

### Overview

During the spring of 2008, the Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) conducted a survey of the school improvement leaders in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. The survey was developed by CII with assistance from CCSSO and was reviewed by several state department of education personnel.

The goal of this report has been to develop a national profile of what each of the 50 states and two jurisdictions were doing to help those schools and school districts which had continuing problems in meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP). The *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*, (Redding & Walberg, 2008) discussed the research related to statewide systems of support (SSOS) and provided an in-depth look at how four states had organized four different approaches to help local districts improve student achievement.

As a result of that work and the comments from readers, it became clear that a new emphasis for the Department of Education, SEAs, and local educators was how multiple federal and state requirements could be successfully integrated to reduce needless paperwork and loss of instructional time. The vast majority of the districts being served by each state's SSOS include students who are served by Title I, have disabilities, and/or are in ELL programs. Yet, each program has its unique planning and improvement requirements. While Chapter 4 continues CII's practice of conducting in-depth case studies of state systems of support, it seemed important to grasp what all the states and jurisdictions are doing with this important issue of integration.

So that readers will be able to understand each state's context, the survey begins by asking respondents background questions about the structure of their state system of support (Figures 3.1 and 3.2), the greatest strength of their system, and the biggest challenge that each state is facing. Then, a series of questions ask about how each state's unique approach fits in with other federal and state requirements, as well as how each state selects which districts receive state support, the extent of that support, and what instruments, tools, or measures are used. Previous work had indicated that an important question that many states were wrestling with was what indicators should be used to evaluate the impact of their SSOS (Rhim, Hassel, & Redding, 2008).

Each state was asked to list their URLs that could be a resource for other states. Then, 11 “yes” or “no” questions were designed to develop a national profile of State Systems. Finally, six questions were asked that would not be used as part of a state’s profile, but rather as a national benchmark for states to express their thoughts about internal coordination.

The following discussion focuses on the five states in which CII staff has conducted field studies—Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, and Washington.

### System Structure

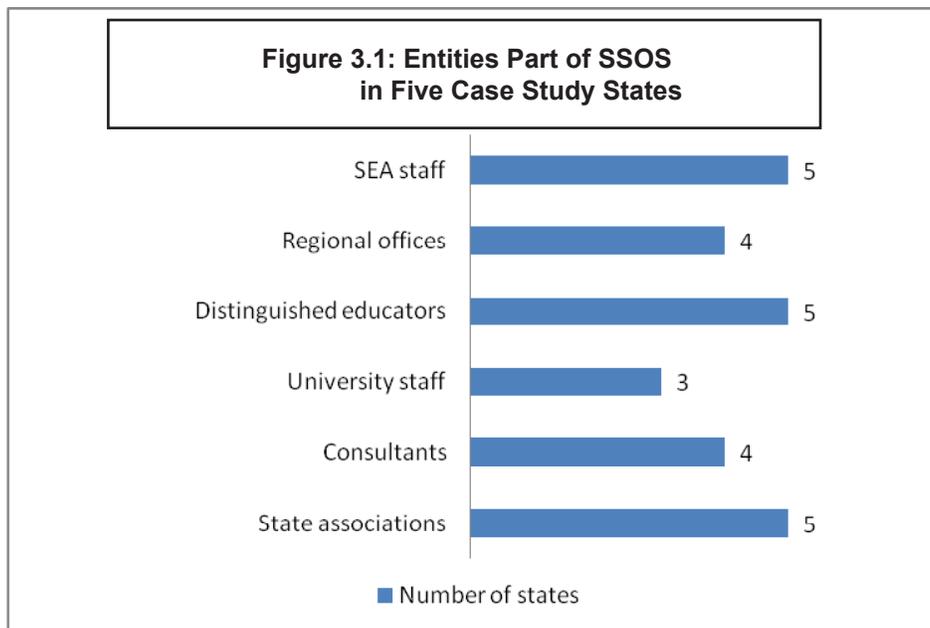
A SSOS is typically a collaboration among several entities such as the SEA, regional offices, distinguished educators, universities, consultants, and state professional associations. Figure 3.1 illustrates the components of the states’ systems of support.

The following paragraphs highlight some of the open-ended responses provided by these SEAs. All five states have staff involved in activities ranging from providing technical assistance and on-site support to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools helping to organize teams of consultants that do diagnostic reviews and staff development. It is clear that each of these states rely on a core of staff to provide coordination and leadership.

Four of these states rely on regional offices as their first line of support for school improvement. The regional office’s responsibilities include conducting program and professional development needs assessments to actually delivering the needed training. In Alabama, they also organize statewide professional development opportunities such as the Gulf Coast Writing Conference.

The Tennessee Regional Offices also provide services in the areas of special education and NCLB. Staff from the Washington Regional Education Service Districts (ESDs) also serve on school performance review teams, lead school teams through the improvement process, and provide training in the areas of special education, Response to Intervention (RTI), Reading First, English language learners, and curriculum and instruction, particularly in mathematics, reading, and data collection.

All five states rely on the resources of “Distinguished Educators.” In Alabama, the SEA contracts with LEAs to “loan” in-service teachers to the SEA to work as Regional School Improvement Coaches, Peer Mentors, Regional Reading and Principal Coaches, as well as math and science specialists. These coaches and specialists provide on-site coaching to district personnel and teachers.



Tennessee has approximately 100 Exemplary Educators working in high priority schools. Washington calls them School Improvement Facilitators (SIFs), and they work with schools that volunteer to participate in the School Improvement Assistance Program. The SEA contracts with SIFs to work with the school district, schools, and a school improvement team to develop a plan to address identified needs and to prepare and implement a jointly developed performance agreement between the school, school district, and the SEA.

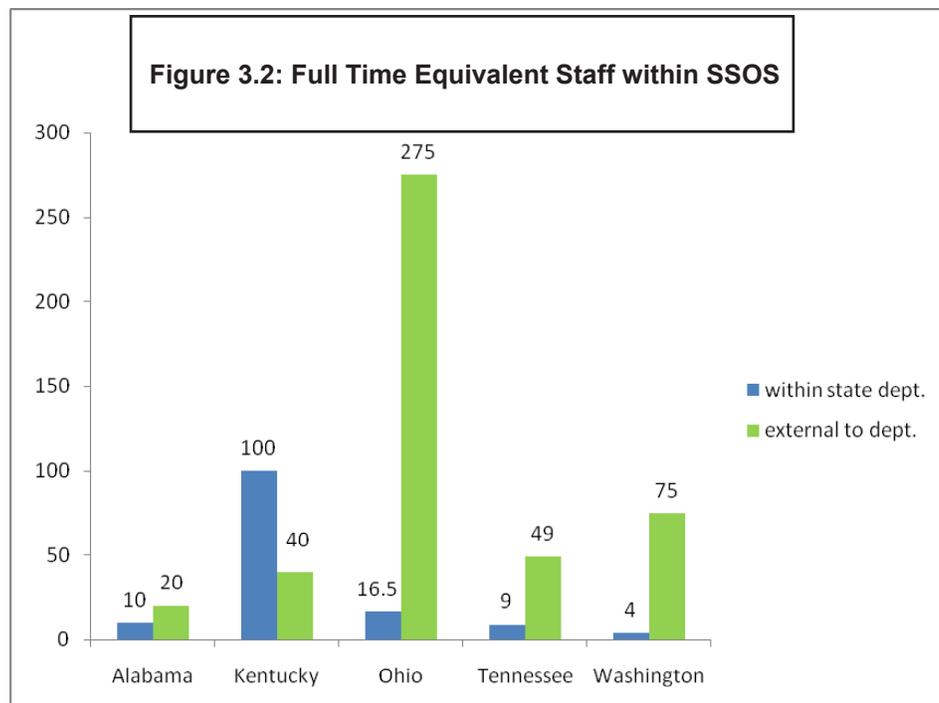
University staff is the least used resource by these five states. In Alabama, they support the training provided for the Department's consultants and for specific local school personnel. In Ohio, they sit on state development teams and are used by regional State Support Teams to provide technical assistance to identified districts and schools.

Alabama contracts with retired educators to provide services such as Instructional Reviews and Continuous Improvement Plan assistance. In Ohio, the Center for Special Needs Populations (Ohio State University) and others are providing technical assistance and support in the development of tools, materials, training, and on-going refinements. Tennessee has

eight System Targeted Assistance Team consultants working in high priority school systems and five Achievement Gap Elimination consultants working in schools with high-risk subgroups.

All five states work closely with state associations, which conduct training in Alabama; supply members for improvement teams in Kentucky; develop products in Ohio; supply school improvement services in Tennessee; and do evaluations in Washington.

In order to understand the magnitude of each state's allocation of resources in their SSOS, we asked about how many staff, both inside and outside of the SEA, were dedicated to school and district improvement. The responses are shown in Figure 3.2.



## Strengths and Challenges

### *Question 6 — The greatest strengths of your current SSOS:*

Alabama believes that their Regional Support Roundtable Meetings are their greatest strength. All support personnel assigned to a region meet regularly to align services and prioritize support. SEA personnel from all agency sections attend to provide support to regional staff. Kentucky's strength is the collaboration among the state department and the state associations. Ohio benefits from a high level of support from partner groups committed to improving instructional practice and student performance as they implement the Ohio Improvement Process. Tennessee believes its strength is the quality and knowledge of the personnel working on school improvement in a collaborative manner to assist Tennessee schools and districts on the High Priority List. Washington lists its District and School Improvement Facilitators and their acceptance by local staff as a key strength.

### *Question 7 — The biggest challenge facing your current SSOS:*

Alabama's biggest challenge is continuing to find qualified personnel and securing their release from local districts so they can work with the Department. Kentucky and Tennessee believe that the resources needed to meet the growing number of schools and districts must increase. Ohio notes that their biggest challenge is moving against the beliefs of many that reform efforts should be on a school-by-school basis, as opposed to viewing districts and schools as a single unit. Ohio's stance is that improvement efforts require the establishment of new leadership team structures for aligning and focusing the work across the district as a system. Washington notes a key challenge is the decreasing pool of well-qualified educators to serve as facilitators, coaches, and mentors while the demand for these services increase.

## Cross-Unit Linkages

### *Question 8—How are your SSOS and your special education personnel within the SEA linked to serve these lowest performing schools? How do the two areas work together in the SSOS?*

In Alabama, special education personnel are members of the Accountability Roundtable (ART), which coordinates the departmental school improvement effort. In Kentucky they serve on intervention teams together.

Beginning with the 2007-2008 school year in Ohio, the special educational regional resource staff and the regional school improvement team staff have blended into a single State Support Team (SST). This SST now uses a single school improvement process with combined training and resources. Additionally, Ohio is in the process of combining the special education focused monitoring process with its diagnostic review process. Ohio staff is investigating the similarities and differences of these two processes and what parts of focused monitoring can be addressed through the larger Ohio Improvement Process. Ohio's State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) is providing an opportunity to test, within 32 districts across the state during the 2008-2009 school year, the integration of the special education and general education improvement models.

In Tennessee, the SSOS and Special Education personnel within the SEA work in a collaborative manner with consultants such as the Exemplary Educators to develop and provide technical assistance to State-identified High Priority schools in areas where they have failed to satisfy accountability requirements. The technical assistance consultants have been successful in working with particular subgroups, such as students with disabilities and English language learners.

Washington's process of monitoring special education changed from a broad statewide process to a more comprehensive district specific tiered identification process which enables staff members to systematically review and analyze district level data to select those districts that need assistance in addressing identified performance indicators.

If improvement is required as a result of monitoring, districts are strongly encouraged to incorporate improvement activities relating to special education into their existing school improvement plans.

*Question 9—How are your SSOS and your English language learning personnel within the SEA linked to serve these lowest performing schools and districts? How do the two areas work together in the SSOS?*

ELL personnel are represented on the Alabama Roundtable and they meet with regional support coordinators on a regular basis to develop and deliver statewide training. In Kentucky, they serve on intervention teams. In Tennessee, ELL staff work directly with the Exemplary Educators and other consultants to provide technical assistance to high priority schools.

In Ohio, as in most states, they have limited ELL staff and capacity in the state agency. To make the best use of their time, the Office of Federal Programs provides much of the routine administration of their funding programs and compliance reviews. This allows ELL staff to be more of a resource to districts/schools needing targeted assistance. Ohio is trying to align ELL efforts within the overall Ohio Improvement Process.

In Washington, the Migrant/Bilingual Education staff work closely with other units to guide districts whose English language learners are not making AYP. The SEA provides districts with technical assistance in evaluating their current ELL service delivery plans, using data to make adjustments to their plans, and in identifying necessary professional development. This technical assistance is often the result of collaboration among the different units at the state level, including Title I, special education, assessment, and school improvement staff. ELL personnel participate in the efforts of the SSOS to update school improvement rubrics for districts to ensure that the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners are addressed.

*Question 10—How are your SSOS and your Title I personnel within the SEA linked to serve these low performing schools and districts? How do the two areas work together in the SSOS?*

Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee all involve Title I staff in their planning to develop and provide technical assistance to state-identified schools and school systems in areas where they have failed to satisfy accountability requirements. In Washington, many of the Title I personnel have gone through the training that the SSOS office has provided so that the Title I staff can build that training information into their work with schools and districts. Ohio uses its Consolidated Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP), an automated planning and budgeting tool, for creating and monitoring school and district improvement plans. The plans are reviewed and supported by the regionally based State Support Teams and the Office of Federal Programs. Since Ohio has consolidated most of the major federal programs through the CCIP, they have no separate Title I office.

## Response to Intervention

*Question 11—Do you see Response to Intervention fitting into your SSOS? If so, how?*

Alabama's SSOS will provide assistance to LEAs to support implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in their schools. Also, the state RTI coordinator will provide training to the members of the SSOS in the RTI process. Kentucky's System of Interventions will provide schools a framework for intervening with all students. The Tennessee Divisions of Special Education and General Education collaborate to promote inclusion within all systems and schools. Ohio sees RTI fitting into their SSOS, but not as a standalone piece because it has significant scalability issues. While some RTI strategies are supportive of the Ohio Improvement Process and can be implemented through district and building improvement plans, Ohio staff believes other RTI activities are essentially strategies most suited to individual student needs.

In Washington, RTI has been an on-going initiative to help districts assess and implement a multi-tiered system that incorporates instruction, intervention,

and assessment to identify and intervene early with those students who are struggling most. In January 2008, the Professional Education Standards Board approved revisions in the state's K-8 teacher certificate and special education endorsements that include pre-service training to teachers on RTI components.

## Assessing Needs and Providing Services

*Question 12—How does your SSOS determine which districts and schools receive support?*

Alabama and Tennessee use their accountability data in combination with other factors to identify districts. Kentucky uses its state's accountability system to provide support to its neediest schools and districts. Ohio relies on a tiered model for determining intensity of support. Districts with the greatest needs (as determined by data and improvement status) receive the highest level of support and assistance from Ohio regional State Support Teams. Districts in corrective action also receive an on-site visit from the State Diagnostic Team.

In Washington, eligible schools and districts may volunteer for state support. Eligibility is determined by NCLB status. In the event that the number of schools requesting state support exceeds available funding, priority is given to those Title I schools with the most subgroups not meeting performance standards and those that have failed to make AYP for the longest time.

*Question 13a.—How does your SSOS assess needs in a particular school or district to determine the amount and kind of support it will receive from the statewide system of support?*

Members of the Alabama SSOS meet with the local central office personnel and analyze accountability data and formative assessment information to determine district and school needs. On-site support is planned for the year by the regional staff and LEA personnel based on the needs of the schools in the district.

In Ohio, districts, facilitated by the State Support Team, begin using Ohio's Decision Framework process/tool to analyze their data to identify areas of greatest need. These needs then drive the develop-

ment of a focused plan. A subsequent partnership agreement describes the activities to be supported by the SSTs.

In Tennessee, needs for assistance are assessed through collaboration among Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC), Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and State Department of Education personnel in the areas of special education, federal programs, teaching and learning, ELL, and consultants.

In Washington, intensive on-site School Performance Reviews are conducted by an outside team to assess areas of strength and to recommend opportunities for improvement. A Washington State rubric based upon the Nine Characteristics of Effective Schools, common interview prompts and protocols, and student performance data are utilized in each Performance Review; these serve as the basis for school improvement planning. Once a School Improvement Plan has been developed, a Performance Agreement is developed which outlines the commitment and support that will be provided by the school, the district, and the SSOS to support improvement efforts over the next three years.

*Question 13b.—Who does the assessment?*

In all five states, collaborative efforts between outside contractors, regional staff, and SEA personnel produce the assessment.

*Question 13c.—What instruments, tools, and measures are used?*

Alabama uses state accountability data, culture/climate survey results, and instructional review data. Tennessee uses the Tennessee Comprehensive Systemwide Planning Process (TCSP) and the Tennessee School Improvement Planning Process (TSIPP), the CCSSO Audit Tool, as well as the "What's a Good School" and "What's a Good District" analysis tools. In Ohio, their Decision Framework is the tool of choice. Data include state assessment results, data about curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices; leadership; school climate; parent/family engagement; and resource management. Qualitative data derived from the State Diagnostic Team review is shared with

districts and funneled into the Decision Framework to give the reviewed districts and buildings a more comprehensive and accurate needs assessment.

**Question 14—***What services and resources does your SSOS provide to districts and schools to assist their improvement?*

Alabama provides on-site coaching, statewide training, and a school improvement website where tools can be accessed. Program specialists are assigned to each school system. In Kentucky, Highly Skilled Educators, District Achievement Gap Coordinators, SEA personnel, and intervention teams are assigned. Tennessee's Exemplary Educators, as well as other consultants, provide audits of schools and systems. In Ohio, a district's focused plan and partnership agreement determine the assistance districts receive and from whom. In Washington, the SEA website provides school improvement tools and resource links to support school improvement. The SEA also sponsors conferences, workshops, and institutes and produces a Comprehensive School Improvement Resource Guide for local educators.

**Question 15 —***How does your SSOS differentiate by intensity, duration, and kind of services the school or district receives?*

Alabama assigns Peer Mentors to work in schools in year 4 or more of improvement. School Improvement Coaches and Alabama Reading Initiative Partners prioritize their support within the region based on district needs. Kentucky differentiates based on their scholastic audits. In Tennessee, based on AYP status, sanctions and interventions are applied from Improvement to the most severe status, State/LEA Reconstitution Plan. Ohio's three-tier system is used to focus most of the work with those districts in the top tier. They are now moving to encourage their 59 educational service centers to provide services to the second tier of districts/schools in improvement status. In Washington, participating schools that volunteer to work with the SEA receive a minimum of three years of financial and technical assistance support as outlined in their Performance Agreements.

**Question 16—***What indicators do you use to evaluate the impact of your SSOS?*

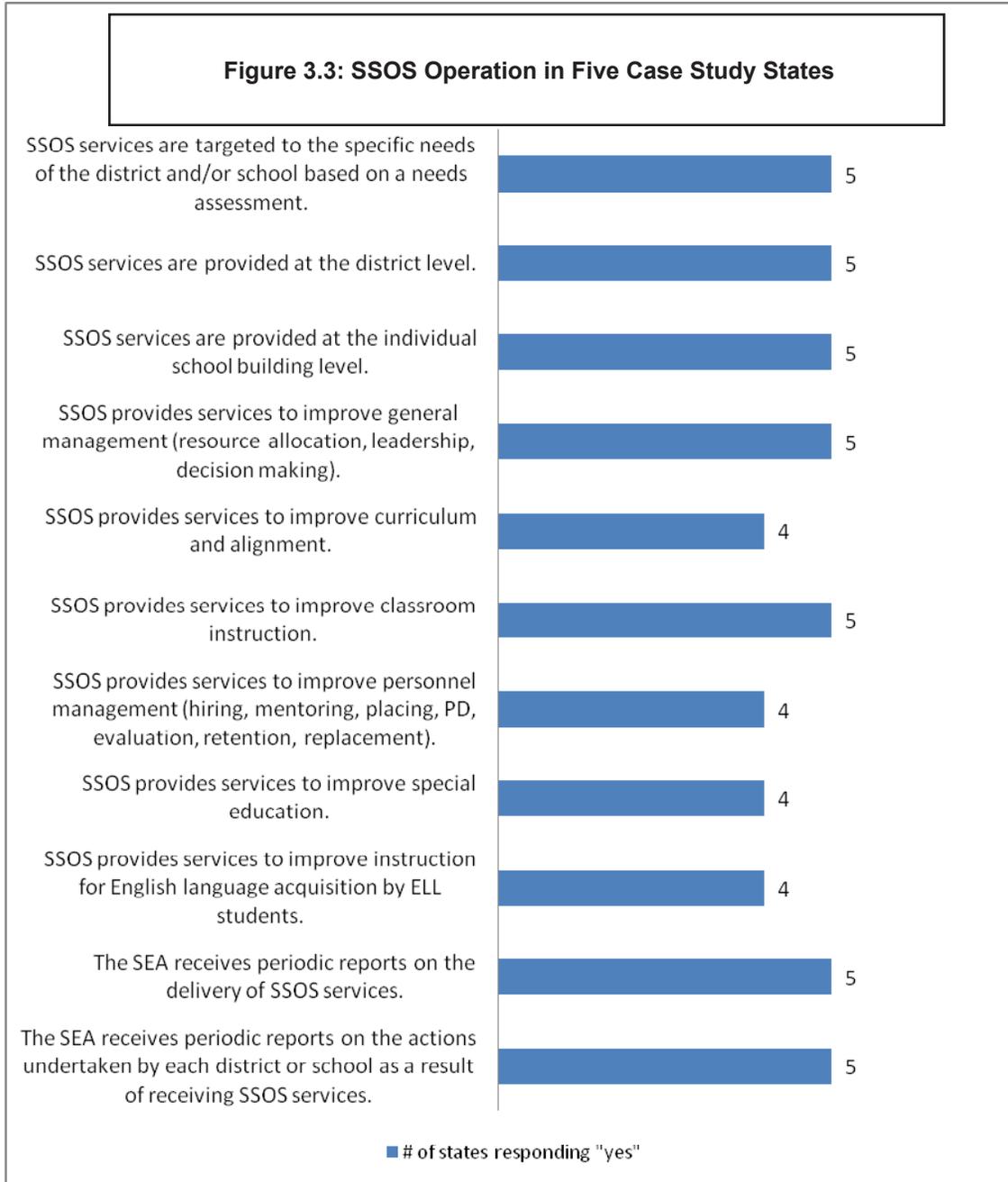
Alabama uses the number of schools in improvement status, whether there has been an increase in student achievement scores, and informal surveys of regional staff. Kentucky uses interim and summative assessments. Tennessee employs the results from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program, High School Gateway Exit Exams, and End of Course Exams. It also uses several non-academic indicators: graduation rate, attendance, suspensions, expulsions, and teacher quality data.

Ohio evaluates the deliverables as promised in the Performance Agreements. These include collection of evidence documenting completion of required activities and submission of all required fiscal/performance reports; development of regional plans; completion of partnership agreements, and evidence of implementation and impact; completion of needs assessments using the Ohio Decision Framework; and the subsequent development of a focused plan.

In Washington, various means of evaluating their SSOS include: participant feedback through surveys; third party evaluations of program effectiveness and impact; exiting improvement status or decreasing the number of schools not meeting AYP; repeating classroom observation studies to measure changes in instructional practice; perception surveys by all stakeholder groups—monitoring and benchmarking responses on repeated administrations; test results, especially sub-group analysis; and successful compliance and monitoring visits.

**Questions 18-28—SSOS operations.**

The responses to Questions 18-28 are shown in Figure 3.3 (on following page). The responses show general consistency among these five states.



## References

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### **Ohio Department of Education Acronyms**

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress	RAC: Regional Advisory Committees
BASA: Buckeye Association of School Administrators	RSIT: Regional School Improvement Team
DLT: District Leadership Team	SDT: State Diagnostic Team
ESC: Education Service Center	SEA: State Education Agency
ERSS: Educational Regional Service System	SEC: Surveys of Enacted Curriculum
CAPE: Council Attracting Prospective Educators	SERRC: Special Education Regional Resource Center
CCIP: Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan	SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely
CCSSO: Council of Chief State School Officers	SPDG: State Personnel Development Grant
CIA: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	SPoC: Single Point of Contact
IMS: Integrated Management System	SPP: State Performance Plan
OEC: Office for Exceptional Children	SSOS: Statewide System of Support
OFEA: Ohio Future Educators Association	SST: State Support Team
ODE: Ohio Department of Education	STARS: System to Achieve Results for Students
OIP: Ohio Improvement Process	TDDA: Teacher Distribution Data Analysis
OLAC: Ohio Leadership Advisory Council	TDF: Teacher Distribution File
PCL: Partnership for Continued Learning	TLP: Teacher Leadership Program



## Chapter 4: A Systematic Approach to Providing Integrated Services to High Support Districts and Schools in Ohio

Thomas Kerins & Carole Perlman

*The information included in this portrayal of Ohio's statewide system of support is derived from an on-site visit by the authors to the Ohio State Department of Education (ODE), telephone interviews with regional staff as well as district superintendents and principals, and artifacts provided by the ODE. Additionally, the authors interviewed the ODE Superintendent of Public Education, Dr. Susan Tave Zelman. The Ohio State Department of Education is Ohio's state education agency.*

### Introduction

This introductory section provides background on Ohio's development of a system to support school improvement, the factors that Ohio Department of Education (ODE) personnel have determined to have the greatest impact on school improvement, and the lessons ODE personnel have learned along the way. This information was derived from interviews with ODE personnel.

#### Evolution of the Statewide System of Support in Ohio

*Question: Most statewide systems of support evolved into what they are now, under NCLB, from state systems that developed during the 1990s. How did your State Education Agency (SEA) assist districts and schools with improvement prior to NCLB, and how has the system of support evolved from what existed before NCLB?*

Prior to the passage of NCLB, ODE developed the concept of Title I School Support Team Facilitators aligned to nine regions across the state. All the Ohio Education Service Centers (ESCs) were included within these nine regions. In the late 1990s, the Title I improvement monies and other federal funds were placed in a few ESCs across the nine regions, and facilitators were hired to administer the grants. These School Support Team Facilitators provided onsite technical assistance to Title I schools and districts as well as regional workshops. Their task was to carry out and support the state's accountability system, which was evolving at the same time as other state legislation.

When Dr. Susan Tave Zelman became state superintendent in 1999, she led both internal and external key stakeholders through a comprehensive planning process to raise expectations for public education and to build the capacity of ODE to meet those expectations through aligned initiatives. For example, she initiated the Ohio content standards so teachers would know what to teach and what the state would assess, or putting teaching before testing.

Under this state superintendent, Ohio's philosophy was to integrate program planning and service delivery. The new content standards were for all children; therefore, it became an equity issue to make sure that all students in every part of the state, rich and poor, including those in bilingual programs and those with disabilities, were taught in such a way they could meet these learning standards. Dr. Zelman insisted that algebra have the same content and expectations for students in Cleveland as in the rural districts of southeast Ohio, and that all students have access to high-quality curriculum, taught by highly qualified teachers, in all seven of the learning areas covered by the Ohio content standards. To assure equity of access to a rigorous curriculum, Ohio developed end-of-course exams for use by local districts.

Even prior to NCLB, one of Ohio's main strategies was to integrate a variety of state and federal programs for seamless and efficient delivery of services. One way to make this happen was to get Governor Taft on board via his Governor's Commission for Student Success. Dr. Zelman then established the Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) and the Integrated Management System (IMS) as major positive forces in moving from multiple program requirements for improvement planning and compliance into one planning tool in which resources were aligned with needs and plans of action. Prior to the CCIP, schools were required to create separate (and often merely *pro forma*) plans for each state and federal program. The CCIP integrated the many plans into a single document, aligned with fiscal resources that would serve as a guide to districts and schools in their improvement efforts. A key change was the movement from compliance monitoring on the part of ODE to an

effort to become a genuine partner and resource for improved instruction.

By 2001, Ohio added Regional Professional Development Centers, state-funded School Improvement Facilitators, and federally funded consultants in addition to the Technical Support Coordinators. Each had separate funding, unique reporting relationships to ODE, different missions, goals, and planning processes. All were approaching districts separately and advising district planning activities separately.

A subsequent review of these disparate approaches by the State Superintendent produced an evaluation document by a third party contractor. This report, as well as other data, began the momentum to consolidate the many regional overlays into one aligned system of state support. ODE began to collapse its own "silos" and subsequently created the Office of Regional School Improvement Services, now the Office of Field Relations, with the intent of working across the agency to better integrate and align the agency's products, services, and efforts. In the 2004-05 school year, the structure of the Regional School Improvement Teams (RSITs) was created to bring the regionally sponsored work into one team that would collaborate with other regional service providers to better serve districts and buildings. The focus of their work was comprehensive school improvement. Although the Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRCs) collaborated with the RSITs, they did not fully integrate the special education compliance work and the school improvement work at that time. The initial work of the joint teams was teacher training centers, but they gradually became school improvement teams.

In summer 2005, ODE restructured itself and created the Center for School Improvement. In the process of defining the Center's work and giving it direction, ODE identified six areas of focus: data analysis; research-based practices; focused planning; monitoring and implementation; resource management; and delivery of high-quality professional development to school/district sites.

To ensure that regional service providers were offering professional development and technical assistance that supported districts in building their

capacity in the above six areas, ODE held the first Ohio School Improvement Leadership Conference in August 2005. RSIT members, along with internal ODE staff, attended the conference to hear ODE's vision for school improvement—integration and alignment toward one system of support. The goals of the conference included strengthening partnerships and relationships among regional service providers and ODE personnel.

The integration effort was propelled forward in 2006 when House Bill 115 established an Educational Regional Service System (ERSS), with 16 common regional boundaries, and required the creation of a coordinated, integrated, and aligned system of state support for school district efforts to improve school effectiveness and student achievement. The intent of the Ohio General Assembly was for this regional service system to reduce the unnecessary duplication of programs and services and provide for a more streamlined and efficient delivery of educational services without reducing the availability of services needed by school districts.

Each region is now developing an advisory council that identifies regional needs and priorities for educational services; develops policies to coordinate the delivery of services to school districts; makes recommendations regarding the expenditures of funds available to the region for implementation of school improvement efforts; and monitors implementation of state and regional education initiatives and school improvement efforts by regional partners. Each of the 16 advisory councils has one representative on a statewide regional alliance advisory board that also includes parents, teachers, local administrators, business leaders, and higher education personnel. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction chairs the statewide board. The board's purpose is to promote communication and coordination among the state board, fiscal agents, advisory councils, and users of the educational regional service systems. In addition the board makes recommendations regarding quality standards for the delivery of services to school districts and schools through the regional service system.

The merger of former RSITs and SERRCs in July 2007 into State Support Teams (SSTs), finalized the

long-desired integration of general education supports and special education. Each SST now uses a single school improvement process—The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)—with aligned training, tools, and resources. The Great Lakes Comprehensive Center at Learning Point Associates facilitated a state design team to develop a practice guide and training for the SSTs.

One year into the full integration, ODE is still identifying areas of duplication, honing the integration of efforts and processes, and prioritizing services for the combined teams. One example includes the incorporation of the Focused Monitoring process into the State Diagnostic Review process. ODE is investigating the similarities and differences of the two processes and what parts of focused monitoring can be addressed through the larger OIP. Ohio's State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) is providing an opportunity to test with 32 districts—two per SST—the integration of the special education and general education improvement models. A prime consideration in this test of the integration of the OIP and SPDG is the scalability to all districts and schools across Ohio.

The 16 SSTs are responsible for the regional delivery of school improvement, literacy, special education compliance, and early learning and school readiness services to districts using the Tri-Tier Model, a differentiated technical assistance structure for support based upon need. Sixteen ESCs were selected through an RFP process to act as fiscal agents for the SSTs. The SSTs work with the Office for Exceptional Children, Office of Literacy, Office of Early Learning and School Readiness, and the Office of Field Relations to provide technical assistance and professional development.

One ODE staff member is the Single Point of Contact for SST staff. She coordinates and integrates communications among ODE, SSTs, and districts. The Office of Field Relations supports and monitors, through six Regional Managers, the Statewide System for School Improvement Support and the delivery of services to all districts, with the greatest intensity of support to the 147 high-support districts with greatest needs that are the first priority of the SSTs. ODE has narrowed the scope and prioritized

the SST work. Previously, the professional development offered by the SSTs lacked a coherent focus and varied from region to region.

Each of the SSTs is responsible for implementing a tiered-service delivery model identified in the goals and strategies articulated in the Performance Agreement between ODE and its fiscal agents. This model outlines how all districts are served through a differentiated technical assistance structure to support school improvement efforts, with the highest need districts receiving the greatest intensity of service. Additionally, the model focuses on assisting district and instructional leaders in developing the capacity to plan and implement effective school improvement systems around the themes of leadership, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school climate.

Ohio has 291.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff outside of ODE funded through performance agreements with the 16 fiscal agents to provide technical assistance. Additionally, the state funds 23 information technology centers that are often the keepers of student level data and provide data analysis services for the districts. Some of these centers are within an ESC and others are stand-alone.

NCLB requires states to provide statewide support services to schools in need of improvement around four basic stages in the reform process, as identified by the U.S. Department of Education: needs assessment and goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Ohio has developed a comprehensive Statewide System of School Improvement Support through which it fulfills this requirement and partners with districts to build their capacity to plan and implement school improvement processes that close achievement gaps for all students.

### **Factors that Contribute to Improvement and Services that Address Them**

Questions: *What factors do you think are most important in contributing to a school or district's improvement in student achievement and why? In other words, what does a school or district do that matters most in improving student learning? What services does the statewide system of support provide that you think have the greatest impact on the three improvement factors you just described, and why?*

Factor 1—School and district improvement is most likely within a system of support that builds capacity at each level.

The NCLB requirement for a plan on how regional services would best be delivered required ODE to work with the legislature and Governor's office to shape an effective regional system with the primary mission to best serve all schools and districts, especially those that are low performing. ODE's intention was to build capacity in Regional Teams so that Ohio educators did not have to rely on external vendors. Ohio did not want to bring in consultants who would provide services without simultaneously building capacity at the state, regional, and local levels.

ODE leaders believe that the best way to make academic gains for all students is to ensure a high-quality educational system in which all students participate. Therefore, ODE integrated the two existing support systems—SERRCs and RSITs—into one SST. A goal of the newly formed SST was to ensure that special education students would have the same access to teachers who understood the academic content standards and curriculum implications as regular classroom teachers. ODE combined federal Title VIB special education discretionary funds with state general revenue funds to provide a single system of support that addresses the needs of all students.

Factor 2—School and district improvement are enhanced by access to high-quality data and data analysis.

SSTs devote a considerable amount of time helping district staff understand data and know how to use it for improvement planning. Local personnel can now drill down into item analysis by classroom.

The OIP involves four stages of improvement based on high-quality data:

1. Use data to identify areas of greatest need;
2. Develop a plan to address those areas of need that is built around a limited number of focused goals and strategies to significantly improve instructional practice and student performance;

3. Implement the plan with integrity; and
4. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the improvement process in changing instructional practice and impacting student performance.

ODE staff believes that improvement is not random. Rather, improvement is highly focused, begins with an honest assessment of student data, and identifies academic weaknesses that must be addressed. Stage 1 of the OIP begins with this kind of assessment using the Decision Framework tool. The Decision Framework is a decision-making process designed to assist districts in making informed decisions—based on what their data tell them—about where to spend their time, energy, and resources to make significant and substantial improvements in student performance. A state-developed data warehouse allows relevant data, needed to complete the Decision Framework process, to be readily available to districts and buildings. These data are organized in such a way as to allow district and school leadership teams to answer essential questions and make decisions about their greatest needs related to improving student performance.

Using the Decision Framework tool, a district goes through a process of looking at data from four levels. Each level has data resources and essential guiding questions to assist the district in identifying, analyzing, planning, and evaluating the critical components for improving the performance of all students. The data are examined in relation to student performance in content areas, identifying the weakest grade levels, subgroups with poor performance, and the extent to which the problems are present throughout the district. Once the student performance needs are identified, the district then looks at the performance in relation to instructional management (curriculum, instruction, and assessment), professional development, and educator quality.

Factor 3—Leadership is key to school and district improvement.

More than creating a shared vision, mechanisms have to be put into place to build a culture of success, embedded in school and district leadership

teams. A fundamental assumption underlying Ohio’s work to create a coherent and cohesive leadership development system is that the purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role (Elmore, 2006).

One challenge is the long-standing belief and practice of implementing reform efforts on a school-by-school basis. Ohio’s Statewide System of Support views districts and buildings as a connected unit, and improvement efforts require the establishment of new leadership team structures for aligning and focusing the work across the district as a system. ODE believes this change requires new behaviors and the “letting go” of some positional authority so that efforts can address fewer, but more relevant needs based on data.

ODE, in partnership with the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA), established the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) in March 2007. OLAC is identifying a common core of essential practices around which systemic efforts to improve leadership can be unified and advanced. For example, OLAC believes superintendents should focus their efforts on creating goal-oriented districts by engaging in collaborative goal setting and working with the local board to set and monitor progress and align resources toward meeting non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. It also believes that effective leadership team structures at the district and school level have to be in place to implement strategies and actions in an aligned and focused way to reach district goals.

Factor 4—School and district improvement requires the right balance of expectation, support, flexibility, and absence of barriers.

The ODE approach has been highly successful at resource management: helping SSTs, districts, and schools make smarter decisions. The philosophy is to control little, but influence a lot. This is not to say that ODE is unwilling to provide direction and actively engage in all phases of the development and deployment of regional efforts. ODE understands and takes seriously its obligation to monitor fiscal expenditures in accordance with state and federal

statutes and Performance Agreements; therefore, the Agency ensures the SSTs deliver the system of support as defined by ODE and in accordance with the law.

For example, the CCIP contains the district's goals, strategies, and action steps. The Funding Application contains the program budgets and the needs assessment, which drive district goals, strategies, and action steps.

ODE staff views the CCIP as a resource tool that enables school and district improvement planning to be enhanced. With the CCIP, the district has one plan as its guide to school improvement, not a potpourri of requirements from multiple programs. Subsequently, local staff has more time to analyze data for its one plan. They do not have to write multiple "program driven" improvement plans; they can concentrate on one planning process based upon data.

ODE staff can monitor compliance through district self-evaluations, site visits, telephone surveys, and data quality reviews.

Currently, some but not all district and school data can be aggregated at a regional level for use by SSTs through automated reports. ODE is working to further automate these reports for all data. Staff of the Center for School Improvement has developed many regional views of relevant data to support the SSTs in their data analysis work. ODE will implement a web-based data warehouse for districts and buildings by January 2009.

### Lessons Learned

Question: *What are some "lessons learned" from your state's experience with a statewide system of support that would be helpful to other states?*

Lesson 1—The state must be willing to judge.

"We need to...sometimes say that we are going to judge you as a district. We are going to come in and observe what you are doing and make recommendations." At one time in ODE, staff had been reluctant to say that a district was not doing well enough. It is now acceptable for ODE personnel to say that they have expectations for improved performance. In

fact, "It is our responsibility to say we have expectations."

Lesson 2—The state must be willing to learn.

"We need to learn from districts, even those in corrective action, since everyone has some strengths." While observing districts in corrective action status, improvement staff found really good things going on in all these districts, and that local personnel learned more from each other than from the state. ODE staff learned to build on those strengths instead of just focusing on weak areas. They now focus on the strengths and start with those. They also found that it was important to build personal relationships with local staff by listening to district leaders and encouraging them to talk about how their goals and plans were being aligned.

Lesson 3—A student-centered rather than program-centered approach is best.

"We are now a system of educational supports for all students." ODE worked with federal officials to obtain maximum flexibility in using federal funds. The ODE modeled how internal cooperation can be accomplished so that funds and requirements can be integrated. This has caused school personnel to think about how they can most effectively combine funds for improvement as well.

This particular approach originally concerned parent advocates who were worried that special education services might be lost. ODE has maintained that a student-centered approach, rather than a programmatic or funding-centered approach, will be best for all children. "By improving the whole system, we improve the learning for special education students."

Lesson 4—Schools must become both more effective and more efficient.

"We now include school finance staff with school improvement personnel as part of the decision process. Everyone needs to know how the money is being spent." Money follows the student and links to school improvement. In Ohio, school finance people even participate as members of the State Diagnostic Team. Each team reviews low-performing schools to ensure that their budgets are aligned with identified needs. As a team, they work together to

ascertain how schools can become more effective and efficient. ODE trains the review teams according to the philosophy that schools should move away from compliance behavior to leadership for improvement.

## Functions of a Statewide System of Support

This section organizes the information provided by the Ohio Department of Education personnel into the evidence-based framework for a statewide system of support in the *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (Redding & Walberg, 2008). The framework outlines a change process whereby the state supports school improvement by providing incentives, extending opportunity, and building capacity (both systemic and local).

### Providing Incentives for Change

#### *Publicly Disclosing Low Performance*

Ohio places a public spotlight on districts that show continued low performance on its federal and state blended accountability system. Ohio has five designations as well as a federally required special education IDEA annual determination based on a district's ability to implement IDEA. In August 2008, there will be an additional value-added indicator on school report cards. Districts that do not make the absolute benchmark can show they are making improvement.

#### *Levying Consequences for Low Performance*

Districts identified as Tier 1 because of continued low performance work with their SST to complete the Decision Framework in order to arrive at a comprehensive needs assessment that is entered into the district CCIP. The SST also helps the District Leadership Team (DLT) integrate all data collection efforts into the Decision Framework, including all compliance-related monitoring to ensure the development of a single aligned and coherent needs assessment and a reduction of duplication. The following outcomes are expected:

- ✦ Summary and analysis of data sets;
- ✦ An understanding of how to apply the data to the Decision Framework;

- ✦ An interpretation of key findings from the needs assessment; and
- ✦ A priority list of data-based critical problems derived from the Decision Framework.

### *Providing Positive Incentives for Improvement*

#### Recognition for Accomplishment

On one hand, Ohio does have corrective action for districts with continued low performance that exceeds NCLB sanctions. On the other hand, there is public recognition for schools that show improved results, especially "Schools of Promise" that have high achievement and high poverty and "Schools of Distinction" that have high achievement and a high percentage of special education students.

#### Funding Contingencies that Encourage High-Leverage Improvement Strategies

Although some grants and programs are available to support school improvement for low-performing districts and buildings, Ohio's Statewide System of School Improvement Support focuses more on providing services that assist district and instructional leaders in building their capacity than on providing money without potential strategies and intended outcomes for impact on student achievement.

Any district or building funding that is available as a result of the district's need for improvement is leveraged and integrated with existing SST support to ensure alignment of initiatives with prioritized goals within the focused plan. Five years ago, the ODE used a flow-through funding approach. Now the state looks at data-driven needs and requires the district to use funds to address those needs.

ODE earmarks one million dollars in the SSTs across the state toward parent engagement and involvement. In addition, the Office for Exceptional Children allocates funds to other regional service provider organizations that support mentors and other support systems.

#### Financial Rewards for Results

Ohio has special assistance available to districts with high concentrations of poverty. One portion of this funding is provided to districts where the percentage

of schools in academic distress is higher than the state average. A district can receive a 3.5% increase in funds if they improve on this comparison.

#### **Financial Rewards for Working in Hard-to-Staff Districts and Schools**

Legislation provides teachers a signing bonus (\$20,000) or loan forgiveness in return for a commitment to teach in a hard-to-staff school for at least five years.

#### *Providing Market-Oriented Incentives*

##### **Charter Schools**

There are 324 charter schools in Ohio. Charter schools are authorized to open in areas where schools are continually underperforming. However, if a charter school is classified as in “academic emergency” for three years, the charter has to close.

##### **Public School Choice**

With regard to market-oriented activities, there are several efforts in Ohio. There is a building-based voucher program for schools in academic watch or emergency status for two of the last three years. Cleveland has its own voucher program. There is a statutory provision for intra-district choice. However, each district board has the option to decide if it will accept open enrollment from other districts.

#### **Providing Opportunities for Change**

Ohio has a waiver process and the most frequently requested waiver is for fewer days of instruction so local personnel may have additional professional development. Waivers will be granted for a pilot period if the waiver is tied to student achievement. There is a concern that this kind of waiver takes time away from students. See also description of Ohio charter schools above.

#### **Building Systemic Capacity**

##### *Creating and Disseminating Knowledge*

The OIP provides a consistent approach to organizing information, tools, and resources to guide DLTs through data analysis and needs assessment, plan development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Some of these systemic tools are listed below:

- ✦ **Ohio’s Aligning Data and Planning for Achievement Framework.** Provides overview of the key components of the process for collaboratively analyzing district and building data, prioritizing needs, identifying strategies, collecting data to inform decisions, and developing action plans to address root causes for low performance.
- ✦ **District and Building Profiles.** Provides a snapshot of some specific data at both district and building levels that SSTs can use with district and school instructional leaders to engage them in initial conversations about needs based upon drilled down data, areas of potential concern, areas in which further data are needed, and potential gaps that exist.
- ✦ **Local Report Card.** Provides information for districts and schools.
- ✦ **Ohio’s Interactive Local Report Card.** Provides districts and buildings with longitudinal and snapshot data to inform school improvement planning and implementation. These data are used to further drill down in the Local Report Card information.
- ✦ **Instructional Management System.** Ohio has an on-line Instructional Management System that enables teachers and administrators to access: Ohio academic content standards, lessons and unit plans (including examples), assessments (including understanding state tests), research on standards, tools and resources for implementing a standards based classroom, program improvement guidance, and science toolkits.
- ✦ **The Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC).** The SEC is a research-based data tool that allows teachers, administrators, and policy makers to examine the extent of alignment between the enacted curriculum (what teachers teach), the intended curriculum (what the standards require), and the assessed curriculum (what the state tests). The SEC Collaborative is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers

(CCSSO). Over 20 states and several large urban districts participate. Ohio is a leader in the Collaborative and has the largest SEC project of all the states. Ohio initiated a pilot collection of data in 2003-04. This project expanded in Year 2 (2004-05) to include over 2,100 teachers in over 200 school buildings across the state. Presently, all interested districts and schools may participate in the project at all grade levels of mathematics and English/language arts.

### *Enhancing the Supply of Personnel Equipped for School Improvement*

#### **Increasing the Supply of Teachers and School Leaders**

Approximately 14 percent of Ohio's nearly two million students are minority students, but less than eight percent of Ohio's teachers represent minorities. The Council Attracting Prospective Educators (CAPE) is one effort in Ohio to identify and attract young, talented people from diverse backgrounds to a career in teaching, with a goal of increasing the minority representation in teaching. In 1990, a group of concerned Ohio educators initiated discussions about establishing a pre-collegiate minority teacher recruitment program in Ohio. With the support of organizations and individuals from across Ohio, CAPE was established. The CAPE Teacher Academy is a five-day summer academy experience designed to introduce Ohio high school students to teaching as a career possibility. The academy provides an opportunity for 50 high school students from diverse backgrounds who are interested in the education process to experience a university environment, to develop leadership skills and positive self-images, to explore a career in education, and to interact with peers and professional role models from diverse backgrounds.

Ohio Future Educators Association (OFEA) is a statewide organization for middle school and high school youth who are interested in a career in education. OFEA was initiated in 1991 by the ODE and Phi Delta Kappa, a leading association of educators, and is growing every year. OFEA works with advisors and officers of local chapters to recruit members, plan projects/activities, share trend/program

information and provide a statewide communications network for local chapters. Local chapters help motivate students who are interested in a career in education by encouraging them to set educational/career goals early in life, focus on academic achievement, explore teaching through direct experience in the classroom, and become citizen leaders through school/community service.

#### **Preparing Teachers and School Leaders for School Improvement**

The State Superintendent supports sending Ohio superintendents to the Harvard summer training program annually and believes this core of superintendents has played a leadership role in helping their peers know how to think strategically, especially about instruction.

#### *Career Lattice Framework*

The Education Standards Board and ODE chose to design a career lattice framework that invites varied teacher roles and responsibilities, promotes the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, uses multiple measures of performance and student achievement, and supports collaboration among teachers and with administration. The pilot framework is shown in Appendix A.

Ohio's Career Lattice Framework expands teacher leadership opportunities, drives collaboration between teachers and administrators on school design, leadership, and school policy. The framework creates a more common culture of teacher professionalism, improving teacher retention and, ultimately, enhancing student achievement. It also provides a framework for teachers to create and sustain a community of professional practice where they have collective opportunities to reflect upon their teaching, consider the progress their students are making, learn about and apply new knowledge in their fields, and help each other improve.

The Career Lattice Framework provides a means for schools and districts to re-invent the ways teacher leaders fulfill newly identified roles, including whether the teacher leaders will maintain full or partial classroom responsibilities. Districts submit a proposal for a locally designed Teacher Leadership Program (TLP) to pilot over a period of 3 to 5 years.

### *eLearning Literacy*

eLearning Literacy modules were developed to standardize professional development throughout the state. These modules strengthen instructional strategies and are focused towards Tier 1 schools that demonstrate the greatest need. They were first developed for K-3 teachers by the ODE Office of Literacy. The modules are now available to all K-5 teachers across the state, with modules for grades 6-12 teachers soon to be available. The goal is to link professional development to data and then offer customized professional development opportunities via these modules, as well as provide opportunities for teachers to gain the NCLB “highly qualified” status.

ODE believes that eLearning is an effective way to disseminate consistently high-quality professional development content statewide since it focuses on scientifically-based reading research content. The most successful eLearning modules are those that are developed based on school or district needs as determined by available data. For example, data may indicate that teachers in a particular school may benefit from vocabulary or comprehension professional development, or test scores may indicate a need for professional development in all five components of reading instruction. Courses can then be tailored to meet the specific professional development needs of that school.

These modules have proven to be very useful for teachers since they provide real-time, ongoing and job-embedded support. It is a video rich resource that draws on the expertise of local and national subject matter experts. eLearning can also fit within a teacher’s busy schedule by giving access to self-paced content. With an internet connection, teachers can access learning content at any time and place.

### **Statutes and Policies**

The Partnership for Continued Learning (PCL), a current statewide effort, connects pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary education to post-secondary education and the workforce through an articulated and coordinated system. The PCL is headed by the governor and includes the state

superintendent, the chancellor of the board of regents, Ohio’s director of development, various legislative leaders, as well as representatives from elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education. The PCL facilitates collaboration among providers of preschool through post-secondary education by aligning the expectations of what students should learn through 12th grade with the requirements for credit-bearing coursework in college. It holds high schools accountable for graduating more students who are ready for post-secondary education and the workforce and holds colleges and universities accountable for improving their graduation rates.

The state requires both public and private teacher preparation programs to provide pre-service instruction on the state’s accountability system, including standards and assessments. The state also requires school leader preparation programs to provide pre-service instruction for school leaders on the state’s accountability system.

Spring 2004 legislation required standards for teachers, principals, and professional development. These standards now guide training, provide a tool in developing coaching and mentoring programs, and support higher education in developing and providing content and requirements for pre-service training and ongoing professional development. Common themes across all three sets of standards include:

- ✦ A focus on student achievement
- ✦ Data-based decision making (principals use data to lead the development of a vision and goals of the school; teachers use data to set their instructional plans and professional development goals)
- ✦ Communication and collaboration
- ✦ Shared leadership
- ✦ Principals as instructional leaders
- ✦ Continuous professional development

### **Agreements and Partnerships**

The ODE’s Office for Exceptional Children (OEC) was awarded a \$9.5 million five-year SPDG through the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

(OSERS). This federally funded project serves to pilot the work of the OIP to determine scalability of the processes statewide.

The SPDG will also be used to provide leadership training for district leadership teams in the implementation of focused goals for improving instruction and achievement for all children. As mentioned earlier, there are now 32 districts in the pilot as of the 2008-2009 school year. During each of the next two years, another cohort of 16 districts will be selected to participate in the grant and receive three years of support. The SPDG will provide districts, families, and relevant organizations access to a wide variety of resources, including the project's website, eLearning academies, and a series of products, tools, and supports.

### Reporting the Experience of Graduates in the Education Workplace

A basic theory underlying Ohio's statewide system of school improvement support and professional development is that if the knowledge by district and instructional leaders can be increased in the following five areas, they can successfully plan and implement school improvement processes that identify and remedy low performance:

- ✦ Standards-based Content: What students should learn.
- ✦ Standards-based Instruction: How students learn.
- ✦ Standards-based Assessment: How we know students learn.
- ✦ Conditions and Climate: What environment supports teaching and learning.
- ✦ Leadership: What systems need to be in place to ensure all components operate efficiently and effectively.

SSTs provide opportunities for participation in state-funded High Quality Professional Development aligned with capacity building strategies for the district that answer the above questions. These opportunities are targeted, based upon ODE's Tri-Tier Model, with priority registration given to the teachers within Tier 1 districts. SSTs work with DLTs to ensure a critical mass of attendance.

### Channeling Highly-Qualified Teachers and School Leaders to Districts and Schools in Need of Improvement

In 2006, the State Superintendent established ODE's Office of Educator Equity to focus on successful implementation of the Teacher Equity Plan by ensuring that a highly qualified teacher teaches every Ohio student. ODE is working with colleges and universities to align Ohio's standards for teachers and principals with education and licensure standards for teacher preparation. Ohio's Entry Year Program sees to the needs of new teachers and principals to ensure their successful transition in their new roles.

The Office of Educator Equity finalized the Teacher Distribution File (TDF) for each school district in Ohio. School districts may use the TDF to conduct an analysis to determine where their teacher inequities exist. To help districts conduct the Teacher Distribution Data Analysis (TDDA), TDF can:

- ✦ Identify (by core subject area and by school) where more than 10 percent of the core subject courses in schools are taught by teachers who are not highly qualified. (Ohio has identified "high percentages" as schools where more than 10 percent of the core subject courses are taught by teachers who are not highly qualified.)
- ✦ Identify the percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students who are taught core subjects by inexperienced (less than three years' experience) teachers vs. experienced teachers (at least three years' experience).
- ✦ Identify the percentage of minority students who are taught by highly qualified vs. not highly qualified teachers.
- ✦ Identify the percentage of inexperienced vs. experienced teachers in high-poverty schools vs. low-poverty schools.
- ✦ Identify the percentage of highly qualified vs. not highly qualified teachers in high-poverty schools vs. low-poverty schools.

After conducting the TDDA, Ohio school districts and community schools write their District Teacher Equity Plan in the Highly Qualified Teacher Component section in the CCIP. A 1999 review of policies in 50 states suggested that the quality of teachers was directly related to improved student performance. In fact, students' backgrounds – poverty level, language background, and minority status – are less influential in predicting achievement levels than the quality of the teaching force (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Ohio's own research shows that often the children in low-performing schools who need the most experienced, most educated, most skilled teachers get the least effective educators (Levin, Driscoll & Fleeter, 2005). Ohio's Teacher Equity Plan is focused on closing both the gaps in student achievement and the gaps in teacher quality.

Ohio's research contributed to the basis for a national study on teaching inequality (Peske & Haycock, 2006). In 2004, Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin partnered with the Education Trust to identify the extent of any inequitable distribution in teachers across each state. Over the course of this two-year project, Ohio conducted a comprehensive, multi-dimensional review of the distribution of teacher characteristics across different kinds of students and schools, with a focus on the distribution of teachers to low-performing, high-need schools and districts.

The major findings from quantitative data analysis of district-level teacher characteristics are:

- ✦ Major urban, high-poverty districts have significantly fewer highly qualified teachers than the state average.
- ✦ Lower achieving districts employ fewer highly qualified teachers.
- ✦ Districts with larger percentages of minority students employ fewer highly qualified teachers.
- ✦ No significant differences were found at the district level with regard to years of experience of Ohio's teachers.

Among the major strategies in Ohio's Equity Plan is development of a system in which ODE will

continuously monitor and improve the distribution patterns of Ohio's teachers to ensure that poor and minority students are not being taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.

### *Providing a Strong Data System to Assist School Improvement*

To take advantage of their longitudinal record system, Ohio has undertaken a statewide program to provide training in the use of data, including information from value-added and projection models for instructional decision-making. Through a trainer-of-trainer model, ODE and an Ohio non-profit organization are ensuring that each of the more than 600 Ohio districts has at least two staff members with advanced training in using the data from Ohio's accountability system to identify what is working well and what is not, and to be analytic and diagnostic with respect to determining which school programs and practices are accelerating academic growth and which are not. By using the value-added and projection models, schools will have better capacity to interpret the strengths and weaknesses of their curriculum, instructional methods, programs, and practices to make data-driven decisions about where to focus resources.

### **Building Local Capacity**

#### *Coordinating Capacity-Building Structures and Roles*

##### **Size of the Statewide System of Support**

Ohio has 306 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff outside of ODE funded through performance agreements with 16 fiscal agents to provide technical assistance. Additionally, there are 23 information technology centers funded by the state that are often the keepers of student level data and provide data analysis services. Some of these centers are within an ESC and others are stand-alone.

##### **Organization of the Statewide System of Support**

SST members perform a variety of roles including presenter, consultant, coach, and facilitator. These roles are determined by and in response to a district's level of sophistication with school

improvement planning and implementation and their particular needs. In some cases, the SST member presents district data and acts as a consultant to guide the district through the process of analysis, root cause identification, and goal setting. In districts with more expertise in school improvement planning and implementation, the SST member coaches or consults the district throughout the process, using a cognitive coaching model in which the SST member asks probing questions, provides observations, and allows the DLT to develop hypotheses, goals, strategies, and action steps. If necessary, the SST member challenges the DLT to provide data and evidence for their decisions.

The DLT has the ultimate responsibility for analyzing data and developing a district improvement plan. Before meeting with the SST members, the DLT completes an initial analysis of multiple sources of data across multiple years, develops hypotheses for the areas of low performance, identifies goals and strategies that might impact performance, and is prepared to walk the SST through the analysis and plan.

When plans contain too little specificity, lack high quality strategies, or are not connected to solid data sources, SST members engage DLTs in dialogue in an effort to increase understanding and strengthen their plans.

### **Organizational Partners in the Statewide System of Support**

To help Ohio reach its goal, the Office of Field Relations collaborates with other offices within the ODE and various regional providers across the state to coordinate a Statewide System of School Improvement Support. Using the Tri-Tier Model, ODE provides aligned resources, information, tools, professional development, and technical assistance to all districts, with the greatest intensity to those districts with the greatest need for support.

Districts in need of school improvement efforts show enormous variation. Districts in every category—urban, suburban, and rural, all grade levels, and every economic standing—have been identified for improvement and have been granted funds or services made possible by those funds.

SST members involve various partners in the review of data and identification of needs. These partners may include, but are not be limited to: institutions of higher education, ESCs, and Information Technology Centers. Partners are leveraged to provide services based upon existing relationships or content/process knowledge expertise.

ODE staff members believe that a key for success is to continue to inform and work with major advocacy groups such as teacher unions, business groups, education coalitions, deans of public and private schools, and superintendent associations. The State Superintendent (Zelman) holds Performance Councils composed of top ODE staff, and others as necessary based on the agenda. These councils focus on improving the processes and efforts of the SEA. She deliberately asks difficult and provocative questions of this group to keep everyone moving forward on the improvement agenda at the state level. It is important to “treat them as partners by taking both their feedback and advice.” (Interview with Dr. Zelman)

### **Support Teams**

During the planning phase, the SST members facilitate the DLT’s work as they examine data at deeper levels, study research-based best practices, and scrutinize existing practices to arrive at multiple strategies that can be leveraged across goals. SST members assist DLTs in understanding that there are no “silver bullets” and therefore, no single strategy can completely address an identified concern.

Also in the planning phase, SST members ensure that DLTs establish what will constitute noticeable evidence of implementation and desired impact. Finally, they assist districts in mapping out the action steps necessary to enact the strategies and collect evidence of both implementation and impact.

As part of local improvement planning, cross-functional local teams (composed of the superintendent, principals, key teachers who work with a variety of students) come together to develop a common definition of what is high quality instruction and to look for data to support their judgment. The teams must evaluate the alignment of their policies and strategies by using data. This philosophy is based

on the medical rounds model developed by Elmore (2007). Practitioners on each local team work in a disciplined way to develop a common body of evidence they use for diagnostic purposes and then work through a set of solutions. This approach also operates around a model of professional accountability. Members of the local team are accountable to one another—for the quality of their observations, analysis, and advice.

Focusing school leaders' work on instructional practice can create a serious disorientation. Superintendents move from a world in which they spend much of their time managing political conflicts among members of their boards, dealing with unhappy parents and trying to balance the budget into a world in which they are talking with their colleagues about specific classroom practices and how these practices relate to problems of student performance in their district. Likewise, principals have similar disorientation. To connect the specific work of instructional improvement to the broader picture of organizing and managing complex school systems, we ask school leaders to develop a personal theory of action...a brief statement of how the practice of the individual—at the system or school level—leads to increases in learning and performance for students. (Elmore, 2007)

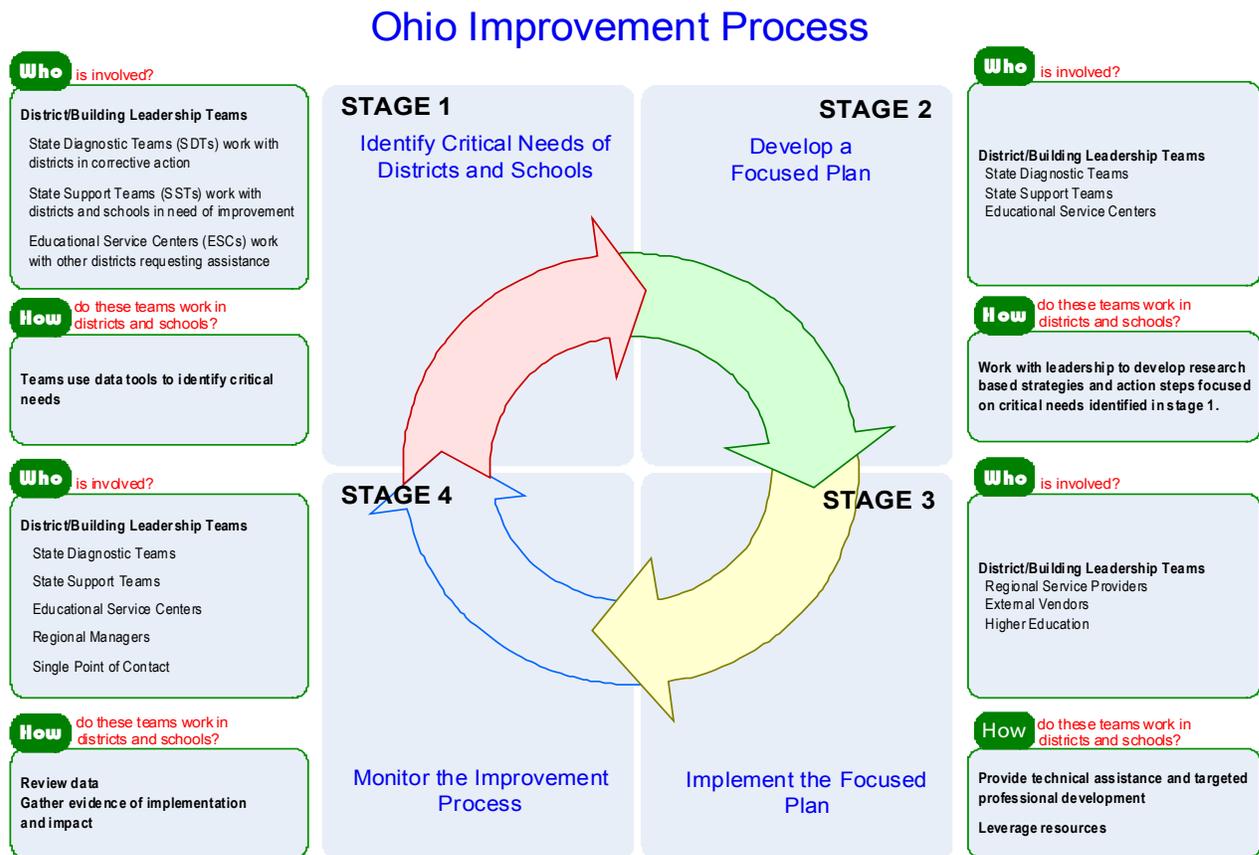
This model is designed for specially trained superintendents who are committed to forming a community whose common purpose is sustained instructional improvement. Therefore, everybody in the system has to be an instructional leader. This means that technology staff, career/technical personnel, finance staff, and others must contribute to instruction or the improvement of instruction in some way.

### *Differentiating Support to Districts and Schools*

Ohio's current Statewide System for School Improvement Support emphasizes a collaborative partnership in which members of the SST engage with district and instructional leaders in a dialogue about district and building data using the Decision Framework tool.

Ohio's four-stage improvement process provides a basis to align structures, tools, and people to significantly improve instructional practice and student performance (see Figure 4.1). In the needs assessment and goal setting stages of the process, the SST and the DLT look at student achievement, demographics, perception, and school process data over a period of years to identify gaps and concerns, prioritize goals, and drill down deeper into root causes of the problems using school and student level data, such as formative assessments, interactive local report card, and item analysis.

Figure 4.1: Ohio Improvement Process



**Partnership Agreement Process and Expectations:**

The following overview outlines a step-by-step procedure for creating and implementing a quality Partnership Agreement. Expectations for each section of the agreement are outlined below. However, prior to commencing Stage 1 work, the SST will support the district in establishing a DLT. The responsibilities of the DLT are to:

- ✦ Set performance targets aligned with board-adopted district goals
- ✦ Monitor progress toward the targets
- ✦ Build a foundation for data-driven decision making across the district
- ✦ Design system planning and focused improvement strategies, structures, and processes
- ✦ Facilitate the development of collaboration structures

- ✦ Broker and facilitate high-quality professional development consistent with district goals for instruction and achievement
- ✦ Allocate system resources toward instructional improvement

Ohio’s statewide system of school improvement support uses the Tri-Tier Model of School Improvement Support (see Figure 4.2) to deliver school improvement services to all districts, but with the greatest emphasis on districts that have been identified by ODE as highest priority.

**Tier 1** services are provided within the parameters of the Performance Agreement to ODE-identified high-priority districts or to districts identified by ODE to participate in state initiatives. The following pages will focus on Tier 1 services. For a more comprehensive description, see the 2008-2009 Performance Agreement published by ODE. (Contact ODE Office of Field Relations.)

**Tier 2** services are determined and delivered within the parameters of the Performance Agreement to any district in the region based upon regional needs assessment and in consultation with the Regional Advisory Committees (RAC) and the SST in each region. RACs are responsible for identifying regional needs and priorities for educational services, developing policies to coordinate the delivery of service, and monitoring implementation of state and regional education initiatives and school improvement efforts.

**Tier 3** services are provided within the parameters of the Performance Agreement universally to all districts and to all district-operated or other pre-school programs across the state.

The SSTs' work for FY09 will focus on the implementation of the four stages of the OIP:

Stage 1: Identify Critical Needs

Stage 2: Develop Focused Plan

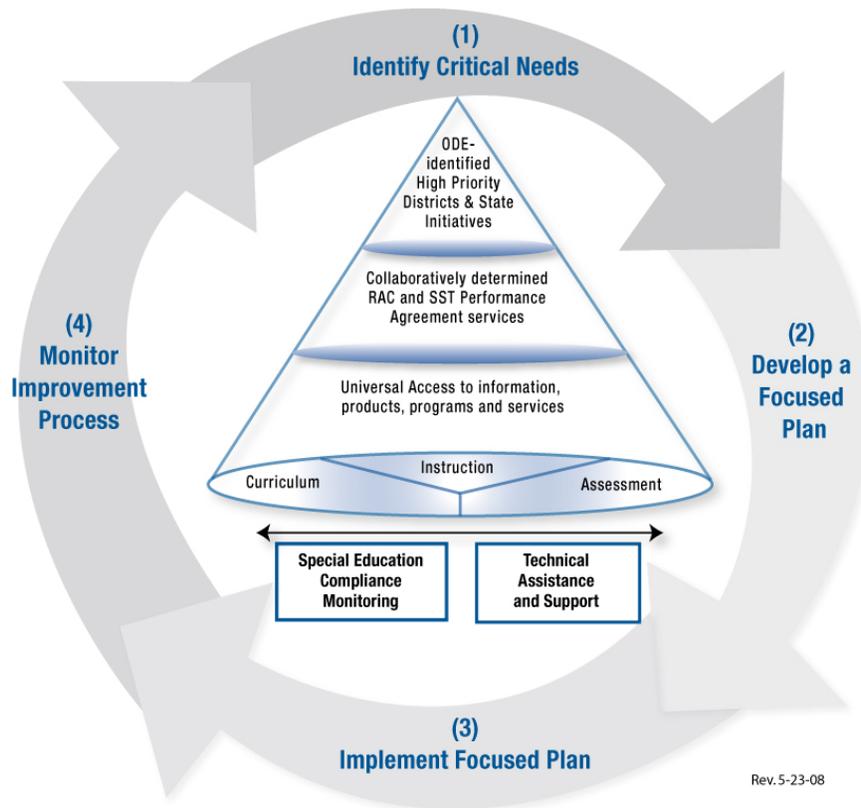
Stage 3: Implement Focused Plan

Stage 4: Monitor Improvement Process

Capacity building funds will be used to:

- ✦ Develop an effective and efficient SST that assists districts in addressing Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the OIP.
- ✦ Identify areas of low academic performance and plan school improvement efforts in priority districts.
- ✦ Build the content and process knowledge of the SST regarding the OIP and Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA) as outlined in the Performance Agreement.

**Figure 4.2: Tri-Tier Model of School Improvement Support**



Rev. 5-23-08

### Tier 1 Districts

The following is the scope of work to be delivered to Tier 1 districts as identified by ODE using 80% of all remaining allocated SST funds after operational costs, capacity building set asides, and IDEA set asides have been calculated.

#### Stage 1: Identify Critical Needs

The SST provides intensive coaching to assist DLTs in completing the Decision Framework in order to arrive at a comprehensive needs assessment that forms the basis for the district's CCIP. The SST also helps the DLT integrate all data collection efforts into the Decision Framework, including all compliance-related monitoring, to ensure the development of one aligned and coherent needs assessment and a reduction of duplication and/or processes.

The following outcomes are expected from Stage 1:

- ✦ Summary and analysis of data sets
- ✦ An understanding of how to apply the data to the Decision Framework
- ✦ An interpretation of key findings from the needs assessment
- ✦ A priority list of data-based critical problems from the Decision Framework

The SST and DLT review the district, school, and student data and identify areas in which students are not achieving. Some questions they should be able to answer are:

- ✦ In which grades and subjects did performance go down?
- ✦ In which grades and subjects did performance rise?
- ✦ In which grades and subjects did the district not meet AYP goals?
- ✦ If achievement increased and yet they did not meet the AYP goal, what are the district's strategies?
- ✦ Are the current strategies working and just need time? What evidence do you have that this is the case?

- ✦ Do buildings within the district demonstrate the same trends? If not, who is outperforming the district? Who is underperforming the district?
- ✦ Do subgroups demonstrate the same trends? Which subgroups outperform the district? Which subgroups underperform the district?

The SST and the DLT develop a joint commitment to implement the action steps they collaboratively developed and write them into the Partnership Agreement. This may include new initiatives, behaviors, and/or processes to achieve the intended goals.

#### Stage 2: Develop a Focused Plan

The SST provides intensive coaching to assist DLTs in building their capacity to complete a plan with two or three goals and enter the plan into the computerized CCIP system. This plan integrates the district's federal and state planning requirements into one district improvement plan with two or three goals entered into the CCIP with the support of ODE:

- ✦ CCIP requirements (including Title I requirements)
- ✦ Corrective Action Plan
- ✦ Highly Qualified Teacher Plan
- ✦ Targeted monitoring and accountability efforts related to the Office of Special Education Programs

The SST works with district and instructional leaders to identify hypotheses about the areas of low performance and the strategies that will address the root problems.

- ✦ Based upon the data analysis, what two or three district CCIP goals will leverage the greatest impact on student achievement?
- ✦ What initiatives are already in place or planned by the district to accomplish these goals?
- ✦ Based upon the data analysis, the inventory of the district's existing initiatives, and the district's CCIP, how will the SST support the district?

The following outcomes are expected from Stage 2:

- ✦ Development of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) goals
- ✦ Determination of existing cause-and-effect relationships
- ✦ Development of strategies for each goal
- ✦ Establishment of indicators as well as baseline and progress measures for each strategy
- ✦ Creation of actions that have the greatest likelihood of increasing student performance and changing teacher-leadership practices
- ✦ The adoption of a district plan after review and revisions

Once the intended outcomes are specifically defined, the SST works with the DLT to complete a task analysis of the action steps required to arrive at the intended outcomes. Timelines also are assigned for each action step, given the overall timeline and school calendar. The SST identifies the data that will be reviewed to provide evidence of implementation and impact. Impact should demonstrate the district's change in behavior aligned to research-based practices.

### **Stage 3: Implement the Focused Plan**

The SST scope of work for Stage 3 is limited to supporting DLTs in their efforts to build their own capacity and the capacity of their Building Leadership Teams to plan and implement new collaborative structures and processes for aligning shared responsibility, expectations, and accountability. The SSTs also support the DLTs in effectively implementing school improvement processes and strengthening curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

#### *School Improvement Processes*

1. Building a school culture that supports effective data-driven decision making
2. Establishing priorities for instruction and achievement aligned with district goals
3. Providing opportunities for teachers to learn from each other
4. Monitoring and providing effective feedback on student progress

5. Supporting the development, implementation, and monitoring of focused building improvement strategies/plans
6. Making recommendations for the management of resources, including time and personnel, to meet district and building goals

#### *Curriculum*

1. Assist DLTs in aligning district curriculum and goals for instruction and achievement
2. Assist DLTs in implementing the approved district curriculum in all schools
3. Assist DLTs in conveying clear priorities among the district's instructional goals and strategies

#### *Instruction*

1. Assist DLTs in implementing a system of high-quality standards-based instruction aligned with the district's curriculum and goals for instruction and achievement on a district wide basis
2. Assist DLTs in implementing a delivery system of high-quality instruction across the district that:
  - a. Is founded on research-based practices
  - b. Engages students
  - c. Incorporates culturally responsive practices
  - d. Relies on ongoing assessment and progress monitoring to inform instruction
3. Assist DLTs in implementing systems that consistently and regularly monitor the district's instructional program
4. Assist DLTs in implementing systems that consistently and regularly monitor student and student groups' achievement and ensure full access and opportunity to meet district goals
5. Assist DLTs in implementing systems that consistently and regularly monitor the implementation and evaluation of prevention/intervention strategies as part of the instructional program to ensure all students meet performance targets

*Assessment*

1. Assist DLTs in developing and implementing a system to collaboratively develop common formative and summative classroom assessments to gauge student progress and guide instructional planning toward meeting district goals
2. Assist DLTs in implementing systems that consistently and regularly monitor each student's progress toward meeting district goals

**Stage 4: Monitor the Improvement Process**

The SST assists the DLTs in developing a system to monitor staff usage of data to inform instructional decisions. The team also assists the DLTs in the ongoing monitoring of a single district improvement plan that focuses on the two or three focused district goals.

The SST works with the DLT to infuse the new content/process knowledge they acquired during the professional development training with their existing experience, allowing opportunities for practice and feedback in nonthreatening, low-risk scenarios.

If the intended impacts are not evident, the SST works with the DLT to analyze the data further to understand if their strategies and plan need more time or if their strategies are not appropriate and need to be revised to meet the intended outcome. If adjustments are needed, the SST coaches the DLT through the process again by returning to the Planning phase.

*Intensity and Duration of Service*

Ohio's Statewide System of School Improvement Support is a comprehensive system that provides support to all districts with the greatest level of intensity aimed at districts in district improvement status and districts with buildings in school improvement status. Support for improvement does not begin or end; rather it ramps up and becomes more intensive if performance is low. Districts with continued low performance receive greater intensity, and support becomes more directive as longevity increases.

ODE commissioned case studies of "Schools of Promise" for their substantial progress in ensuring

high achievement for all students even when more than 40% of their students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Five common elements emerged:

- ✦ Rigorous standards and instruction
- ✦ Strong instructional leadership
- ✦ Instruction designed for all students' success
- ✦ Parent and community involvement
- ✦ A positive school culture

ODE has used this research to inform the school improvement process with research-based resources for educators and administrators. The result of this integration is a state diagnostic tool designed to help districts and schools improve student performance by comparing their current practices against effective research-based practices, identifying areas needing improvement, and recommending resources they can use to improve performance. The expanded basis for this tool is now:

- ✦ Alignment with Standards
- ✦ Instructional Practices
- ✦ Environment/Climate
- ✦ Leadership
- ✦ Professional Development
- ✦ Data-driven Decisions

Within each of these six areas are diagnostic indicators that describe effective practices that are critical to improving academic achievement. Using the diagnostic indicators, review team members determine the degree to which a school or district demonstrates effective practices.

The ODE's State Improvement Diagnostic Review process is designed to gain access to observable behaviors and practices that provide information beyond existing data. The methods and protocols created for this review process are grounded in scientifically-based research practices and are aligned with the above themes that emerged from the Ohio Schools of Promise case studies. This diagnostic process relies upon skilled and trained reviewers from outside of the district or school, and standardized protocols for data collection and analysis. Because review team members collect data in the form of observations, interviews, and document analysis, members must be skilled in one-on-one and group interviewing, classroom observations, and data analysis. The quality of available evidence as well as

the results from the team members produces profiles which result in diagnostic summaries that are expected to guide the school district as it assesses its needs and sets priorities for improvement.

### *Type of Service*

SST members leverage existing state-provided training to assist districts in developing their capacity to plan and implement school improvement processes. In some cases, when training does not exist and regional service providers who are very knowledgeable in the needed content are available, the SSTs may subcontract with regional services providers as part of their district partnership to create access for the district to the needed training. All professional development provided by the SSTs is tracked through “System to Achieve Results for Students” (STARS). STARS is a web-based application that allows educators to register for professional development opportunities across Ohio.

Besides the STARS system, there are many sources of technology used to reach the districts to assist them in thinking through quality implementation. For example, ODE staff use Elluminate and Adobe Connect to create virtual meeting spaces for large numbers of participants. Documents are placed on regional share-point sites to foster collaboration and consistent, transparent communication.

### *Delivering Services to Districts and Schools*

#### **Provide Services**

##### *Assessing Operations, Performance, and Need*

In addition to the roles already described in the school improvement process, the SST members also act as “brokers of services” in the planning phase by assisting districts with acquiring access to the products, programs, and services they need to carry out their improvement plans.

Focused monitoring is one of the processes by which ODE gathers information from districts to ensure their compliance with federal and state laws and regulations applicable to children with disabilities. This was mentioned earlier as one area where staff is trying to combine efforts across units within the ODE. ODE selects districts for review based on

performance data associated with specific State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators and school improvement status. Focused monitoring activities require selected districts to analyze instructional practices and research-based interventions that impact student performance and develop corrective action plans that improve results for students with disabilities. ODE uses a “focused monitoring” approach to drive improvement on twenty indicators. Eventually, staff agreed to drop a compliance-only approach and concentrate on student achievement.

As part of its responsibility to evaluate how students are served in special education programs, ODE produces an annual performance report on these indicators along with any changes that staff need to make. This information is posted on a website and made available to the SSTs to decide what areas to work on within their region.

##### *Planning for Improvement*

SST members do not select interventions for districts. However, they do engage DLTs in conversations about sound practice based upon research, and will challenge strategies where there is no research linking the strategy to improved student learning. One of the roles of the SST consultants is that of “critical friend.”

SST members frequently engage in conversations about resource management as a way of helping districts think differently about how they can implement proven practices with existing funds. SST members also periodically involve Financial Area Coordinators (positions funded by ODE) who have expertise in school finance to engage them in supporting districts in resource management efforts.

##### *Implementing the Plan*

Since the role of the SST members is to work with DLTs to develop their capacity to plan and implement school improvement processes, their role during the implementation phase is to ensure that the DLT has a solid plan for how they will monitor implementation of the Improvement Plan at the building and/or district level.

*Monitoring the Progress*

Prior to adopting the current method of evaluating Performance Agreements, ODE and the SSTs used a rubric to document progress. While ODE has moved past this document, it might be useful to some SEAs as they develop their statewide system of support (SSOS). SST members collected and reviewed evidence of implementation and impact, seeking clarification when necessary, and challenging districts to increase the quality of their evidence as appropriate. DLTs guide SST members through a review of their progress and provide formative and summative data to demonstrate the impact of their efforts and their progress in improving their school improvement planning and implementation processes. As a result, completion of the rubric by these two organizations provides a focused look at the most important systems within five critical areas—curriculum, instruction, assessment, conditions/climate, and leadership—to assist DLTs (see Appendix B).

As an example, in this four-point rubric under the “System” heading, one of the fourteen dimensions on which progress is evaluated is “Formative and Summative Assessments.” Definitions of the point values of the scale are as follows:

**1 point:** No or insufficient implementation of formative assessment processes to drive instructional decisions and inform progress of individual student learning

**2 points:** Limited implementation of multiple sources of formative and/or summative assessments are used to drive instructional decisions and inform progress of student learning

**3 points:** Consistent implementation of multiple sources of formative and summative assessments drive instructional decisions and inform progress of individual student learning as evidenced by completed quality pre and post assessments, revised lesson plans, and regularly documented feedback to student regarding performance

**4 points:** Systematic and ongoing districtwide common formative and summative assessments from a variety of sources are used for

each standard and benchmark, and vertical and horizontal team discussions take place to inform instructional practice and communicate the progress of every student’s learning

As a result of completing the entire rubric, the participants in the partnership agreement asked themselves: Did we do what we said we would do by the time we said we would do it? What difference did it make as measured by movement from the previous year on the rubric? What does the district do or have now that it did not do or have before? What evidence/artifacts do we have to answer these questions?

**Evaluating and Improving the Statewide System of Support***Monitoring Progress of the Statewide System of Support*

SST consultants complete formative progress reports as they provide intensive coaching to district leaders. Results of ongoing work are captured in STARS. Additionally, SST members perform quarterly Partnership Agreement reviews with all Tier 1 districts to document evidence of implementation and impact and to revise strategies as needed based upon data. Finally, an annual summary of technical assistance provided to each Tier 1 district and the impact of those services on the district is provided by the SST in June. This summary captures the district’s efforts and change in practice and helps guide ongoing work while documenting history and progress of the SSTs’ efforts. (See Appendix C for an example from the 2008-2009 Partnership Agreement.)

Ohio’s Statewide System of School Improvement Support is founded on the principle of building a district’s capacity to plan and implement school improvement processes. It is the belief of ODE that by working with district and instructional leaders, they can assist districts in learning how to better work with their building leadership to increase achievement for all students while closing the achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing students. Rather than providing services as part of the district’s team, SST members act as partners to

improve and leverage existing services in support of the district's improvement plan.

### *Evaluating and Improving the Statewide System of Support*

The Ohio Chief State School Officer stated that it is the responsibility of the Chief to continuously evaluate the key strategies that are being used to meet State Board Goals. "One has to incorporate an evaluation component at the beginning to see if the improvement strategies are working. The state has to stay the course since each day and year more issues can emerge which will tend to force mission drift if staff is not vigilant. It is critical that the culture of the SEA remain focused on instruction, student learning, and improvement."

Primarily, staff reviews multiple measures such as improvement of student achievement as demonstrated on formative and summative assessments, movement within state designations, and movement regarding AYP rating. Staff will be sampling parents and teachers for more information.

SST members meet regularly in the districts they serve. During these meetings, SST members discuss evidence of progress within the district aligned to the Essential Practices Guide. These meetings reduce the pressure districts feel when being "audited" as they allow SST members to create a collaborative relationship to support the local quality plan rather than appearing to have the approach be compliance driven.

The effectiveness of Ohio's statewide system of support can be measured, in part, by looking at student test scores as well as the distribution of districts and schools according to designations ranging from "Excellent with Distinction" to "Academic Emergency." The Ohio performance index, which reflects the achievement of every student tested, has increased by more than 25 percent since it was introduced in 1999-2000, from 73.7 to 92.3. During the 2007-08 school year, more than half of Ohio districts improved their performance index scores over the previous year.

In addition, more districts and schools than ever are designated as "Effective" or higher. This reflects

almost 85% of school districts and almost 70% of school buildings. These figures include 74 districts and 158 schools that have earned the new "Excellent with Distinction" designation (see Appendix D). This rating is achieved by districts and schools that otherwise would have been rated "Excellent," but exceeded the value-added standard for the second consecutive year. For the third year in a row, Ohio does not have any districts in Academic Emergency.

The 2007-08 school year was the first year that the value-added measure was part of Ohio's report card system. Value-added measures the progress districts and schools made with their students even though the students may not have met the proficiency standard. The results can help teachers pinpoint problems and determine successes. Instead of only emphasizing a snapshot of student performance, the Ohio approach measures how much progress is being made over time.

Ohio is one of eight states that received approval from the U.S. Department of Education to provide schools and districts with an additional way to meet AYP. Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, through the Growth Model, students who were projected to be on a path to proficiency within two years are treated as proficient in the current year. Use of the Growth Model enables Ohio to focus on the schools and districts where performance is of greatest concern—those in which proficiency rates are low and in which students are not projected to be on a path toward proficiency.

## Views From The Field

### Regional Perspective

#### *State Support Team Overview*

Two of the regional facilitators who oversee SSTs and serve as their region's single point of contact (SPoC) were interviewed. Both are former teachers and principals; one splits her time between being the regional facilitator and executive director of instruction services for the ESC that serves as fiscal agent for her SST. One of the regions is a six-county area that includes one large urban district, a small urban district, and a mix of suburban and rural

districts. The other region covers four counties with a mix of urban and suburban areas.

One of the SSTs has eight staff members: two full-time and six part-time. Members of the team are retirees who were formerly teachers, principals, superintendents, special education directors, and curriculum directors, all of whom have worked under the current accountability system. Although each is assigned to a district as point person, they may provide assistance in other districts, if their particular expertise is needed. The members are highly trained and have ongoing professional development, with some training of team members done in-house and some involving outside consultants. The training has gone beyond customary topics to include facilitation skills, coaching, and customer service. The other SST has 27 consultants and 6.5 support staff. SST members work with DLTs in the areas of data use, continuous improvement planning, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The SSTs are also involved with special education compliance and assist schools in finding ways to structure lessons to meet the needs of all students.

### *A Break from the Past*

Prior to the implementation of the new SST model, the RSITs and SERRCs conducted what one regional facilitator described as “come one, come all professional development—what’s hot, what’s not” for teachers whose principals sent them to these workshops. With the advent of the new model, there were several major changes in professional development. First, the SSTs no longer offer one-shot professional development. Second, training is more targeted toward using data, planning, monitoring, and meeting specific instructional needs. Training has become, in the words of one regional facilitator, “very focused, very purposeful, and it’s ongoing. That’s what the research tells us, and what we see makes a significant difference.”

Another major change was that the SSTs now provide direct service exclusively to leadership teams, rather than teachers (although school and district leadership teams typically include some teachers). “[W]e are no longer working directly with teachers. We’re working with building capacity at the district

level and empowering those people to go back in the building and train their own folks.... We’ve been hand-holding for a long time, and the administrators have relied on us to do much of the training of their staff, and [now] they have to do it, the administrators and the building leadership teams....” Although the SSTs focus on leadership teams, teachers can still receive professional development through other regional service providers.

Finally, there is an integration of regional special education services and staff with school improvement staff to create a system of support for all learners, which one regional facilitator describes as “blending special education services and regular education services together in a unified effort to say that kids are kids, and we’re going to serve them all.”

[ODE] saw the need to bring all of the departments together instead of operating in silos. Something would happen at the Office of Exceptional Children, and something would happen in school improvement, and something would happen in another area, and we were all attacking the districts from different perspectives, and the district didn’t know how to sort all that out. What we’ve done is we have funneled this down so we’re the source of information for one-stop shopping. You come to us, and we now can disseminate information, and all the departments [at ODE] are speaking to one another.

We still have bugs in the system, you know, everything’s not perfect.... We have become a cohesive department delivering services to our districts. No longer am I walking in the front door and a special education person is coming out of the other door, and she’s created a plan, and I’m going to create a different plan. We’ve all created one plan, and we’re all working together with the districts in unison.

This merger is, in the words of one regional facilitator, “one thing the state is doing that is a step in the right direction...it’s about time we put together special education services with regular education

services.” This change has been difficult, because “people felt like they’re giving up pieces...but I think everyone will eventually see it’s a better process.” When asked how a state might accomplish “getting people out of their silos,” she responded,

I think...you have to stop making it about you. We learned about each other, learned about each other’s processes, our strengths...we did lots of things so that we understood that our mission/vision was about kids, that we all truly believe the same thing. We just have a different way of approaching it. Your methodology for approaching it is quite different than mine; it doesn’t mean that I’m right and you’re wrong. It just means we have to understand one another. And sometimes, I think at the department level, for some divisions and departments to exist, they need funding. So it’s about them. They want to covet that money, and I totally understand that....It’s all about collaboration. How do we overcome some of these issues? How do we make this work happen? Because it’s not about me, and it’s not about you, it’s about those little babies in the seats and what’s best for them.

The merger of special education and regular education services and the creation of the Single Points of Contact have improved communication among the districts, regions, and ODE:

[Information about and feedback from the district] goes through me and I take it back to the department. The department knows what’s going on in the region. They know what’s going on in my districts. And it’s not 17 different people telling them; it’s one person. Which I think, trying at times as it is, because it’s a lot of responsibility for one person, and one contact person at the state, it has cleared up and organized the work around districts. And I think [the districts] appreciate that.

### *School Improvement Planning*

The new model focuses on school improvement planning, creating district level leaders, and communication from the school level to the state level and back. Through the OIP, “basically everyone in the state is receiving the same training, the same information. To me, that is a major step forward for the state.”

SSTs have an active role in the development, implementation and monitoring of school and district improvement plans. Here is how one regional facilitator describes the process:

We met at the beginning of the year with high-priority districts. We looked at their data, sat with them, presented their data to them. We did the drilling down, showed them how we did it, and mentored them in the process. We had conversation about what’s in your strategic plan? What will give you the most bang for your buck? Many of our districts have plans that are hundreds of pages...but there are few accountability measures, strategies that are solid at getting them to the goal. We look at those and talk about SMART goals and strategic planning. How can we write these so you have fewer goals/strategies, but yet with greater output in terms of student achievement? That’s what we do throughout the year. We have an action plan with them, steps that we are going to follow, that we’re going to provide support and technical assistance to them, maybe professional development, and then we help them monitor that throughout the year. We want to see the benchmarks. We want to have checkpoints throughout the way, so we’re essentially modeling for them what we want them to do and over time we hope that they’ll take that on as their methodology...of using the data, continuing the refinement of the goals and the planning process.

In addition to facilitating the planning process and rolling out the ODE’s new decision framework, the SSTs help districts and schools establish professional learning communities, monitor the effectiveness of

school improvement strategies, and serve as a broker of services to help schools find training or other assistance to meet their clients' special needs.

### *Specific Services Provided by State Support Teams*

*Needs Assessment and Data Use.* Both regional facilitators reported placing a heavy emphasis on needs assessments and effectively using data. They hosted data retreats and data academies that helped schools carefully examine both academic and perceptual indicators. As one regional facilitator described it,

It's not just looking at numbers, but having discussions around the data. Why are these numbers saying what they're saying, and are they true? What other pieces of evidence do we need to support that? ... Often that begins the conversation about what data do we need? ... We write our goals, strategies, action plans based on their needs. We train them in the process, and the goal is for leadership teams to go back to their buildings and do the same process within their buildings.

That regional facilitator periodically meets with the DLT to examine what action steps were taken and what the results have been, what changes might need to be made, and what services the SST could provide. They try to maintain a focus on data at district meetings and their own meetings with superintendents. "So we're trying to make sure the superintendents' conversations are not about the football game and drinking at the prom, but about the data. That's a challenge sometimes because it's easier to talk about the basketball game and the prom."

*Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.* The SSTs have provided considerable assistance to their districts with the state standards by creating alignment guides, curriculum maps, and pacing guides. They emphasized how a teacher can create engaging lessons that can be adapted to meet the needs of students with varying ability levels. SSTs give support on differentiated instruction, prevention/intervention models, and scheduling and use of instructional

time. In addition, SSTs provide assistance and professional development in selecting or creating appropriate assessments aligned with the standards.

*Classroom Management.* Both SSTs have taken advantage of the special education expertise of their members to do substantial work on Positive Behavior Supports. "The former regional school improvement teams were heavily academically focused. The SERRCs were more behavior-focused. By integrating the systems, we have an enriched system bringing the expertise from both together."

*English Language Learners.* Only one of the two regions had significant numbers of English language learners in some districts with the number increasing. They offer a range of services, which partly fall under the SST's performance agreement with the state, and some through districts that may not be eligible for SST services.

The regional facilitators spend the greatest amounts of time on needs assessments, interpreting and using data, planning, curriculum, and intervention techniques for students who are having difficulties with particular concepts. When asked which services have been the most helpful to their schools' and districts' improvement efforts, one responded, "helping them make decisions based on data." The other cited:

...work around standards and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Also leadership training on how you put systems in place is probably what's been the most helpful; getting districts to understand that it all works as a total system. You can't leave out one piece of the system and be successful...if you're not a systems thinker; you have a tendency to concentrate on your one area.

### *Work with State Diagnostic Teams*

The ODE assigns State Diagnostic Teams (SDT) to review districts in need of highest support. They conduct thorough examinations of districts and their schools including, among other things, walk-throughs and focus groups, and then report on their findings. SST members make an effort to attend review meetings between local staff and the SDTs,

serve as a liaison between the local staff and the SDT, and help the districts design action plans that address the weaknesses identified in the State Diagnostic Team's reports.

### *Evaluations*

ODE collects customer satisfaction data, and the SSTs conduct self-evaluations, both formal and informal. Techniques include surveys, interviews, and portfolios for individual districts that include a history of what services the SST provides and the district's data. The SSTs measure impact after training and follow up with the districts to see what changes in practice have taken place and the effects of those changes. One facilitator said that although others might disagree, she is "a firm believer that our ultimate impact is on student achievement."

### *Lessons Learned*

- ✦ "Capacity building of all partners would be a major piece. To be as inclusive as possible. There are a lot of turf wars, but if we don't look at it as there's enough work for all of us, and if we don't work together as a system, we're not going to have success. I think that would be number one."
- ✦ "You have to be very clear and systematic in your approach to change. You have to be very specific about what you want to see in order to get that change."
- ✦ "You have to honor the work that has been done and to take the best to create a totally new system. Don't try to piecemeal systems together. Design a new system."
- ✦ "Don't change things in midstream.... that creates havoc in the districts.... Stay the course for a year, see what happens...."
- ✦ Consistency and credibility. "If you say you're going to do something, do it and follow through with it. And be responsive. If districts need something, make sure that you at least acknowledge it, if you can support it or not...have that conversation."
- ✦ It is crucial to build and nurture relationships with school and district staff. "If we

can't build relationships, we're not going to get our foot in the door.... Yesterday, I went to one of my districts and laid everything out on the table. Here are your options. And they say, 'We trust you—what do you advise us to do?' Two years ago I didn't have that level of trust with the districts. I ask questions, they ask questions. We have conversations around that. And they ultimately make the decision, but I'm involved in helping them make them. You know, they listen to me. It's about being credible and developing that relationship."

### **Local District Perspectives**

Superintendents from three districts were interviewed; other administrators participated in two of those interviews. The districts, all of which have worked with State Support Teams through the SPDG Program, represent varying community types and levels of academic performance. District enrollments ranged from approximately 1,500-3,800. The smallest district was in an area of Appalachia that has seen many of its jobs disappear. About half the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch and nearly a fifth of the students have disabilities. This district had been in district improvement status for three years because it had not met targets for their special education students; it did make AYP in 2006-2007. The second district covers three varied communities in northwest Cincinnati, where 37% of students qualified for free or reduced price lunch in 2006-2007. The racially diverse district has approximately 5% English language learners, 18% students with disabilities, and a relatively large number of therapeutic foster homes and high-needs foster students with disabilities. They have had individual schools fail to make AYP, but no school has failed to make AYP for two consecutive years. The district made AYP in 2006-2007, but did not make AYP in the two previous years. The final district is a relatively affluent district in suburban Cleveland which has consistently made AYP.

### *Factors Contributing to Improvement*

The district staff members were asked what they believe are the most important factors that contrib-

uted to their schools' improvement and why. Here are their responses:

- ✦ Instruction based on a consistent curriculum aligned with state standards
- ✦ Pacing guides with flexibility for individual students
- ✦ Benchmark assessments
- ✦ Increased monitoring. Principals were required to do learning walks, note the instructional practices teachers used, and submit detailed reports on their findings to the district office
- ✦ Ensuring that instruction for special education students focuses on state standards
- ✦ Inclusion of students with special needs and adapting curriculum to better serve them
- ✦ Teacher quality
- ✦ Principals serving as instructional leaders
- ✦ Supportive parents and a community that provides adequate financial resources
- ✦ A literacy consultant who worked with teachers one-on-one

Two of the districts reported relatively little interaction with their ESC prior to the current SST program, though two had more extensive dealings with their SERRC. The other district used the ESC for professional development, an audit of their math and science programs, and preschool curriculum development.

### *State Incentives*

Two of the three districts felt the pressure of public accountability in response to schools' assessment scores. One believed the effect was positive: "I'm a believer that we need to hold adults accountable. Education has been far too long willy-nilly. I believe that sometimes public pressure is okay." The other felt that this had a negative effect, since the schools and the district were not being judged on the progress their students have been making despite high mobility, poverty, and a large number of students with disabilities. The pressure of undesirable consequences for persistently low performance had a

positive effect in the third district, which had failed to make AYP because too few special education students were tested and because those students' scores were too low. It took the threat of state takeover to convince some special education teachers that their students had to be instructed in the state standards.

The threat of financial loss for low performance served as a motivator in that district, but it was not low performance on the part of students; the state had threatened to withhold some special education funds if the timeliness and completeness of IEPs did not improve. An administrator from another district pointed out that what could be lost is not money, but some flexibility in how their money could be spent. When that district went into academic emergency (a state designation), 10% of their money had to be spent on school and district improvement. It is too early to tell whether the effect of using that money on professional development has had an effect.

None of the districts reported financial or other rewards for effective school leaders or teachers; two pointed out that high-performing teachers and principals are internally motivated to do well. Nor were there financial or other rewards for principals and teachers to work in low-performing schools.

The pressure of competition for students from charter schools was felt by only one district. The effects were negative from a monetary standpoint, as over \$1 million per year went to the charter school rather than to the district, since funds follow the students. The charter school has attracted some students by offering full-day kindergarten, which the district is unable to do. The pressure of competition from other public schools was deemed to have little effect.

Other incentives included honorary designations (one school was named a "School of Promise") and the opportunity to participate in special programs, such as the Appalachian Leadership Program and the SPDG. As one principal observed, "Sometimes knowledge attainment is overlooked and not called an incentive, when I think it really can be a huge incentive."

### *State Opportunities*

Waivers from state education laws or rules have been used by two of the districts, and the third would consider asking permission to use some instructional days for professional development. One district requested class size waivers and a waiver to allow more special education students to take the alternate assessment. The effect of that has been positive for them. Another district used some instructional days for curriculum alignment across grades and other work on standards, development of pacing guides, and using data to identify areas of weakness. This gave them flexibility to allow teachers to work in grade level groups, across grade levels, and within subject groups, sometimes within schools and sometimes all three schools together. They also used waiver days for leadership training and other professional development. One of the districts received a waiver to appoint an assistant principal who wasn't fully certified at that time, but all principals followed a traditional path to certification.

One district has had experience with alternatively certified teachers, most of whom did not work out well, with the exception of those who had previous experience working with children or bilingual teachers who had relatively small classes. None of the districts has sought waivers from a teacher contract, though one has used a memorandum of understanding to modify instructional and planning time to accommodate programmatic changes that occurred in the midst of a contract. None has offered special training for principals to become turnaround specialists. Other opportunities the state provided include a grant that funded a literacy specialist in one of the districts.

In addition, all the districts interviewed are participating in the SPDG program. (An SEA official notes that the funds from this grant are given to the SSTs to leverage in support of this pilot program. The monies help underwrite the SSTs' costs for participating in the pilot. Without the funds, the SSTs would still exist and serve these districts. With them there can be greater intensity.) All felt the training for the district teams was beneficial, though one suggested tailoring it to meet the needs of the

districts involved, some of which were already more proficient than others in the material being covered.

### *School and District Improvement Planning*

All of the districts reported some changes in their school and district planning processes as a result of their decision framework training by ODE and their work with SSTs. The new process involves establishing school and district leadership teams that include teachers and administrators. They gather and analyze data and develop a plan that addresses weaknesses using research-based strategies, with an emphasis on literacy and mathematics. All the districts described their SSTs as critical in helping them analyze data and constructing their plans. Data-based decisions on instructional strategies and professional development needs are central to the process.

One of the districts had previously followed a model for creating school improvement plans that is similar to ODE's. What is different now is that they are making much more effective use of data. In the past, district plans were typically developed by central office teams, rather than by the more inclusive district leadership teams. "It's provided us with the opportunity to get together and...have the right conversations ...establishing as a district team what we believe, setting goals, and moving forward."

The SSTs helped districts create more tightly focused plans than they had in the past. In the words of one superintendent, whose district had no school-level improvement plans at all prior to their work with the SST:

Our continuous improvement plan for the district had way too many things in it. You could never measure all of them; you could never do all of them. So we get involved with the OIP, which teaches us to pick a few things out, do them well, measure them really well, and make them SMART goals. So as a district, we've created a focused plan. The next step for us is having nonnegotiable goals at the district level and then teaching our principals and others to write school improvement plans....We're pretty excited about that.

The superintendent explained his support for the Decision Framework this way:

Because every school district in Ohio, and really, frankly, everywhere probably needs to do [planning], it makes good sense for a state to support that....If we're going to be held accountable...for producing high quality instruction and student learning as measured by these summative accountability tests, then we need some help from our [state] department of education to get better at setting our goals and focusing ourselves, because otherwise, there are 611 school districts in Ohio and 611 entities doing 611 things differently. That seems kind of goofy. If our focus is to do things and get better, why not have a state model? ...Come get trained and we'll teach you how to do this stuff. It just makes sense.

The SSTs get uniformly high marks from the districts for being helpful and easy to work with and for tailoring their services to each district's needs.

The good thing about our SST is that they're flexible. I think if a SST came in and said this is our job and this is what we're going to do without first understanding what are the needs of the district, it could be viewed as rude and coming in and telling us what to do.... What's good with the SST in working with us is that they can meet us where we are and help improve our district.

The districts also praised the SSTs and ODE for improving communication between districts and ODE and alerting ODE to their problems and concerns. "By regionalizing things, it allows the information to flow from local districts to the regional improvement team and then to the department of education."

### *Resources for School Improvement*

The districts receive a variety of state and federal funds, including grants that paid for extras such as a literacy coach or special programs such as leadership training.

If they had additional resources, districts would use those resources to do the following:

- ✦ "Engage in further job-embedded professional development...have teachers observe other teachers and witness high quality instruction happening. I'd like to have time for teachers to collaborate on student data. We can do some of this, but we're limited... To look at what they did not do well on and what kind of interventions are we going to provide."
- ✦ Hire instructional coaches.
- ✦ Have summer retreat time for team building.
- ✦ Hire intensive intervention specialists for struggling students during both the school year and the summer.
- ✦ Conduct on-site professional development in which a trainer works with teachers in their own classrooms.
- ✦ Build time into the school day for teachers to plan and have professional learning communities.
- ✦ Have a longer work day for teachers.

While the districts were clearly eager for increased student achievement, one expressed concern that they would lose some state financial support, and that it would then be difficult to find money to purchase needed services.

### *Specific Services Provided by the State Support Team*

**Information and Data Systems.** The SSTs won praise for helping the leadership teams understand and use data.

ODE's Decision Framework tool, which is in development, provides a structured way for school and district teams to look at data.

The data can be too overwhelming at times. When we got in to look at our data, one of the things we found was we couldn't really answer the questions we needed to answer in any way that was really a data-based decision....This process really helped us to

identify things we had, but more importantly, I think, identify the things we didn't have and that we needed to get.

The districts use ODE's websites to build user-friendly data reports used in school improvement planning. Assessment data for individual students, including item analyses, are available but these do not arrive until the fall semester has begun.

The state offers many online data tools, and they are in the process of creating an annotated catalog of those data tools. One superintendent explains the contents of the catalog:

Here are all the data tools that are out there; here are the purposes of these data tools; here's how these data tools are similar to one another; here's how they're different; and here's when you would use them for particular things and here are the links to those particular data tools.

**Curriculum.** The SST has assisted districts by giving feedback, suggesting tools and resources, and assisting with curriculum alignment and the development of pacing guides. The ODE has many websites for state educators. One set of sites provides curriculum information, lesson plans, and assessments. The districts report that use of these sites is increasing as the number and quality of resources increases and as teachers become more familiar with it.

**Instructional Delivery.** The SST has provided professional development on best practices, increased the use of learning walks and, as one superintendent put it,

...helped us to understand that science-based methods were a better way of teaching our students than the "I know how to teach" model. We're seeing principals and teachers moving toward that [scientifically-based] model and that's a huge change after spending eight years trying to get teachers to adapt.

**Instructional Time and Scheduling.** The SST helped one district revamp its school schedules to include an intervention/enrichment period.

**Assessment.** SST members have helped districts and schools identify appropriate assessments aligned with state's standards. The state's website includes short-cycle assessment items aligned with state's standards.

**Classroom Management.** The SST provided assistance with Positive Behavior Supports and culturally responsive practices.

**Special Education.** The regions hold monthly meetings to update districts on changes and disseminate information. One district reports that high staff turnover at the state has resulted in a poor flow of information.

One district educator emphasized the importance of continuity of SST staff, so that the team members would be able to develop knowledge of each district's circumstances and constraints. It also is important for all members of the SST to have sound pedagogical knowledge in addition to facility with data. Although that superintendent believed that there needed to be a better balance between time spent learning about data and the time spent learning about intervention strategies, the superintendent concluded that; "They have led us to various resources that have really supported us strongly. I can't say enough about what they've done."

#### *What's been the most helpful?*

When asked which of the services provided by the SSTs have been the most helpful, they offered these responses:

- ✦ "The Decision Framework is the most important. [It] allows a district to have a tool to look at itself diagnostically and say that these are the things we've got to work on. I think the state's gone about it in the right way saying here's a tool to help you analyze your organization; here are the things that have an impact on student achievement; analyze your data and move on to the next step. The framework is a very valuable tool to do that."
- ✦ Professional development.
- ✦ Help with the improvement plan and data; "they've been very good facilitators."

*How might a state department of education determine the effectiveness of its system of support?*

One superintendent proposed comparing districts that received service with similar districts that did not and monitoring the extent to which the professional development provided by the state system of support has been implemented. Possible measures could be achievement data and whether schools and districts exit corrective action.

*How might a state continuously examine the effectiveness of its system of support and improve it?*

One superintendent suggested this:

Setting well defined goals, just pick a few—practicing what you preach. [Having the state say,] “These are the things we’re going to focus on. We’re not going to pick a lot of them.... We’re going to make them measurable, measure them, and seek feedback from those who partook in the process. We’re going to continuously improve ourselves based on the feedback from the field. The thing that ODE has gotten better

at is, again this is through regional support networks, listening to those of us in the field about what’s going on and what we need. And they’re getting better at providing what we need rather than what they think we need.”

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Career Lattice Pilot

As envisioned by the ESB and ODE, the following table provides illustrative examples of teacher leadership roles and a continuum of increasing responsibilities in the pilot of the Career Lattice.

Standard	Accomplished	Distinguished
Standard 1: Teachers understand student learning and development, and respect the diversity of the students they teach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Be a mentor or coach</li> <li>*Lead a team of teachers in developing learning plans for individual students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Design and teach literacy workshops for non-English speaking families</li> <li>*Design and teach cultural competency class</li> <li>*Train mentors and/or coaches</li> </ul>
Standard 2: Content Teachers know and understand the content area for which they have instructional responsibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Design and lead a service learning project, job-shadow or career day</li> <li>*Develop action research project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Lead content-area workshops</li> <li>*Lead curriculum development/alignment committees</li> <li>*Lead a team in cross-curricular unit development</li> </ul>
Standard 3: Assessment Teachers understand and use varied assessments to inform instruction, evaluate and ensure student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Serve as a coach to peers to assist in disaggregating student achievement data</li> <li>*Generate data-driven tools to share with other teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Conduct training/presentation on classroom assessment and/or use of data</li> <li>*Lead a professional learning community or book study</li> <li>*Lead workshops on student-led instruction and reflection</li> </ul>
Standard 4: Instruction Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction that advances the learning of each individual student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Be a mentor or coach</li> <li>*Offer a demonstration classroom</li> <li>*Participate in vertical articulation, curriculum mapping or looping committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Participate in district or state level committees</li> <li>*Conduct differentiated instruction training</li> <li>*Lead workshop on use of technology in instruction</li> <li>*Train mentors and/or coaches</li> </ul>
Standard 5: Learning Environment Teachers create learning environments that promote high levels of learning and achievement for all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Design and share units using cooperative learning and other strategies</li> <li>*Design and share tools for effective classroom management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Participate in district policy committees</li> <li>*Design and lead training on service learning or cooperative learning and/or other strategies</li> </ul>
Standard 6: Collaboration and Communication Teachers collaborate and communicate with students, parents, other educators, administrators and the community to support student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Become a member of a community group focused on academic, social and medical issues that affect students</li> <li>*Serve as North Central Accreditation chair</li> <li>*Coach colleagues in demonstrating proficiency in the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Take a lead role in peer assistance and review</li> <li>*Develop partnership with local community agency or business</li> <li>*Assume a lead role in District TLP</li> </ul>
Standard 7: Professional Responsibility and Growth Teachers assume responsibility for professional growth, performance, and involvement as an individual and as a member of a learning community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Become a member of a content or instructional area committee</li> <li>*Participate in district TLP development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Participate on state or national policy committees</li> <li>*Become a professional development trainer</li> <li>*Write and/or manage a grant</li> </ul>

**Appendix B: Partnership Agreement Rubric**

	1	2	3	4
<b>System</b>				
Alignment to Ohio's Academic Content Standards	no or insufficient evidence of attempted alignment among written, taught, and tested curriculum	limited evidence of attempted alignment among written, taught, and tested curriculum with partially completed curriculum maps	alignment of written, taught, and tested curriculum to Ohio's Academic Content Standards as evidenced by completed quality curriculum maps, pacing guides, and assessments	systemic and ongoing continuous improvement cycle and action research for evaluating alignment of written, taught, and tested curriculum to Ohio's Academic Content Standards
Equal Access to Learning	no or insufficient evidence of differentiated written, taught, and tested curriculum	limited evidence of differentiated written, taught, and tested curriculum evidenced by some modifications for students with disabilities	written, taught, and tested curriculum is culturally responsive and provides for different learning needs of students as evidenced by use of some best practices and review of disaggregated and individual student data to ensure all students are successful in meeting each standard, benchmark, and indicators	systemic and ongoing data-driven review and improvement of the written, taught, and tested curriculum effectively addresses the level of cultural responsiveness and the diverse learning needs of all students by providing equal access to learning opportunities and eliminating social and physical barriers
Formative and Summative Assessments	no or insufficient implementation of formative assessment processes to drive instructional decisions and inform progress of individual student learning	limited implementation of multiple sources of formative and/or summative assessments are used to drive instructional decisions and inform progress of individual student learning	consistent implementation of multiple sources of formative and summative assessments drive instructional decisions and inform progress of individual student learning as evidenced by completed quality pre and post assessment, revised lesson plans, and regularly documented feedback to student regarding performance	systemic and ongoing district-wide common formative and summative assessments from a variety of sources are used for each standard and benchmark, and vertical and horizontal team discussions take place to inform instructional practice and communicate the progress of every student's learning
Student Engagement in Learning	no or insufficient evidence that students are aware of learning expectations or are involved in determining what and/or how they learn	students can identify standards but focus on grades and assignments with limited opportunities for students to have a voice regarding what or how they learn	students consistently express expectations for what they are to know and do, are aware of areas that need improvement, and are regularly involved in defining what and how they will learn	systemic and ongoing strategies for engaging students in defining what and how they learn within and outside the classroom exist; students monitor their own progress in meeting learning expectations and can communicate areas in need of improvement
Monitoring standards-based education	no or insufficient processes for monitoring implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned to the Ohio Academic Content Standards at the building and classroom level	limited processes for monitoring implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned to the Ohio Academic Content Standards at the building and classroom level with no documentation of current practice or desired improvements	consistent processes for monitoring and collecting data regarding the implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned to the Ohio Academic Content Standards at the building and classroom level without formalized documentation	systemic and ongoing processes for monitoring and collecting data regarding the implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned to the Ohio Academic Content Standards at the building and classroom level to ensure the instructional program is meeting the needs of all learners

**CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT**

**Appendix C: Impact Outcomes for SST Work in Tier 1**

Throughout implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process, each SST monitors districts' progress. The following is one example.

		Y	IP*	N	Outcomes	Evidence (Aligned to the Ohio School Improvement Effective Practices guides)
Stage 3	Curriculum				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DLT has aligned Ohio Academic Content standards, District curriculum, and goals for instruction and achievement.</li> <li>• The DLT has implemented the approved District curriculum in all schools.</li> </ul>	
Stage 3	Instruction				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DLT has implemented a system of high-quality instruction across the district that:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Is founded on research-based practices</li> <li>b. Engages students</li> <li>c. Incorporated culturally responsive practices</li> <li>d. Relies on ongoing assessment and progress monitoring to inform instruction.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• The DLT has implemented systems that consistently and regularly monitor student and student groups' achievement and ensure full access to the curriculum and opportunity to learn.</li> <li>• The DLT has implemented systems that consistently and regularly monitor the implementation and evaluation of prevention/intervention strategies as part of the instructional program.</li> </ul>	

\*IP: In Progress

**Appendix D: Table of District and School Ratings Page 1**

Designation	Districts						Schools				
	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008		2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
<b>Excellent with Distinction</b>	—	—	—	—	74		—	—	—	—	158
<b>Excellent</b>	117	111	192	139	152		920	889	1290	1143	1116
<b>Effective</b>	229	297	299	347	292		906	1136	1217	1255	1164
<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	224	175	112	113	83		1211	962	643	693	589
<b>Academic Watch</b>	34	21	7	11	9		125	239	218	230	230
<b>Academic Emergency</b>	4	5	0	0	0		222	288	208	182	234



## Chapter 5: Building Local Capacity for Change

Sam Redding

Building local capacity is one of the three chief levers for change in the CII framework for a statewide system of support. Based on lessons learned over the past two years in working with regional comprehensive centers and state education agencies to design and improve systems of support, CII offers the following action principles to guide a state's thinking in constructing and operating a coherent system to build local district and school capacity to effect change and improve learning opportunities for all students. Notice that these action principles all begin with verbs—action words. For a statewide system of support, building the capacity of districts and schools to drive their own improvement is a complex array of actions, as people engaged in this work will surely attest.

### Action Principles for Building Local Capacity for Change

1. Conceive of a system of support as a coherent and coordinated means for supporting people in performing their various roles in children's education.
2. Build a system of support first from what exists by coordinating components that are extant, adding missing pieces, and achieving coherence.
3. Move past a review of symptoms (poor test scores) to understand causes (district and school operations) in order to apply remedies.
4. Build the capacity of districts to assume greater responsibility for the continuous improvement of their schools.
5. Differentiate the necessary roles of personnel within the system of support, including those who audit/assess district or school operations, those who provide services (training, coaching, consulting), and those who oversee and manage the process (process managers).
6. Create and refine true "systems" of support rather than providing fragmented services.
7. Coordinate SEA personnel, field staff, intermediate centers, organizational partners, distinguished educators, support teams, and consultants in one coherent system of support.

8. Make the transition from compliance only to compliance plus support for improvement.
9. Provide a “big picture” view of a system of support that is coherent and systemic.
10. Bring special education, ELL, Title I, and career education (structurally separated by funding streams and departmental organization) within the tent of a unified system of support.
11. Restructure (redesign) the SEA (and regional centers) to provide for effective coordination and administration of the system of support.
12. Assess district/school operations in addition to examining test scores in order to differentiate and target system of support services.
13. Align the system of support Service Plan with the district or school Improvement Plan and with the results of careful assessment of performance and operational data.
14. Assess district/school operations with an approved set of indicators, procedures, and instruments.
15. Monitor both the implementation of the district or school Improvement Plan and the aligned system of support Service Plan.
16. Evaluate the effectiveness of the system of support’s procedures and services.
17. Intentionally link systems from the state to the district to the school and classroom in order to affect variables that will spawn improvement.
18. Draw a straight line from every state policy, program, and service to the intended result for a student in a classroom.
19. Provide a single, integrated school or district improvement planning process rather than separate ones for each categorical program.

### Cycle for Building Local Capacity

Figure 5.1 on the following page illustrates an effective cycle for building local capacity, showing the relationship between the work of the district or school (Improvement Plan) and that of the statewide system of support (Service Plan) following careful examination of both performance data (student learning outcomes) and operational data (district or school functions).



## Assessing District or School Functions

To differentiate its services and target its supports to specific district or school operations that are in need of improvement, the statewide system of support must include standard criteria, procedures, instruments, and analytical tools for ascertaining the current quality of a host of functions that contribute to student learning outcomes. This process is sometimes called an “audit” or an “operational assessment.” It requires that SSOS personnel (SEA staff, distinguished educators, support teams, consultants, etc.) with the requisite training and expertise conduct an on-site examination of the district and school, analyze the findings, and report them in a way that will inform modifications in the Improvement Plan and SSOS Service Plan.

Detailed sets of indicators and/or rubrics organized within categories form the basis for the operational assessment. Operational assessments typically include examination of documents and artifacts, interviews with leaders, interviews with teachers, classroom observations, and interviews, surveys, or focus groups with parents, students, and other stakeholders.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement presented a set of categories of district and school functions in its *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*.

They are:

### A. Leadership and Decision Making

1. Allocation of resources to address learning goals
2. Decision-making structures and processes
3. Information and data systems

### B. Curriculum and Instruction

1. Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards
2. Curriculum
3. Formative and periodic assessment of student learning
4. Instructional delivery (teaching and classroom management)
5. Instructional planning by teachers
6. Instructional time and scheduling

### C. Human Capital (Personnel)

1. Performance incentives for personnel
2. Personnel policies and procedures (hiring, placing, evaluating, promoting, retaining, replacing)
3. Professional development processes and procedures

### D. Student Support

1. English language learners—programs and services
2. Extended learning time (supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)
3. Parental involvement, communication, and options
4. Special education programs and procedures
5. Student support services (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)

The charts on the following pages show how specific district or school functions can be clustered within these categories and used to align operational assessments with Improvement Plans and SSOS Service Plans.

## SSOS Process to Improve School or District Functions

Please check one: \_\_\_ District \_\_\_ School

### A. Leadership and Decision Making

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

For **Plan–Service**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its Service Plan of SSOS services provided.

For **Implement**, check this item if the statewide system of support provides assistance (consultation, training, professional development, coaching) to improve this function.

For **Monitor**, check this item if the statewide system of support includes this function in its monitoring reports to document school implementation of the improvement plan and corresponding delivery of system of support services.

For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)				Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement		
				Allocation of resources to address learning goals	
				Decision-making structures and processes	
				Information and data systems	

### B. Curriculum and Instruction

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

For **Plan–Service**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its Service Plan of SSOS services provided.

For **Implement**, check this item if the statewide system of support provides assistance (consultation, training, professional development, coaching) to improve this function.

For **Monitor**, check this item if the statewide system of support includes this function in its monitoring reports to document school implementation of the improvement plan and corresponding delivery of system of support services.

For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)				Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement		
				Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards	
				Curriculum—description, scope, focus, articulation, organization	
				Formative and periodic assessment of student learning	
				Instructional delivery (teaching and classroom management)	
				Instructional planning by teachers	
				Instructional time and scheduling	

**C. Human Capital (Personnel)**

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

For **Plan–Service**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its Service Plan of SSOS services provided.

For **Implement**, check this item if the statewide system of support provides assistance (consultation, training, professional development, coaching) to improve this function.

For **Monitor**, check this item if the statewide system of support includes this function in its monitoring reports to document school implementation of the improvement plan and corresponding delivery of system of support services.

For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)				Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement		
				Performance incentives for personnel	
				Personnel policies and procedures (hiring, placing, evaluating, promoting, retaining, replacing)	
				Professional development processes and procedures	

**D. Student Support**

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

For **Plan–Service**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its Service Plan of SSOS services provided.

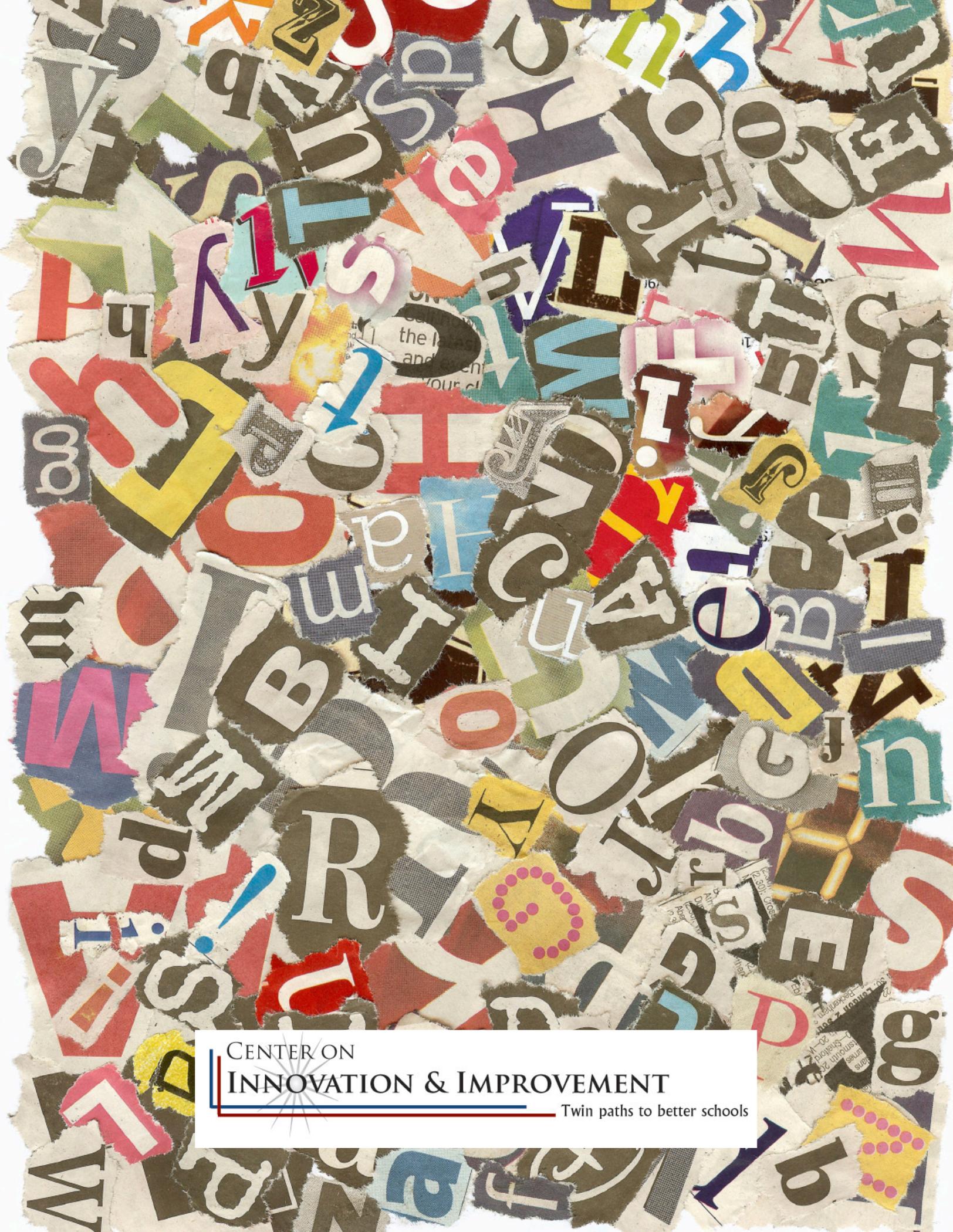
For **Implement**, check this item if the statewide system of support provides assistance (consultation, training, professional development, coaching) to improve this function.

For **Monitor**, check this item if the statewide system of support includes this function in its monitoring reports to document school implementation of the improvement plan and corresponding delivery of system of support services.

For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)				Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement		
				English language learners—programs and services	
				Extended learning time (supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)	
				Parental involvement, communication, and options	
				Special education programs and procedures	
				Student support services (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)	

For more information about Statewide Systems of Support  
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