



ALIGNING THE SEA'S COMPLIANCE RESPONSIBILITIES AND PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The Need

As state education agencies (SEAs) are developing and implementing new programs and policy initiatives or working to improve the implementation fidelity of existing ones, they are seeking new tools and strategies for managing their legal obligations to federal and state overseers in ways that will offer them time to develop greater strategic thinking and more freedom of action for themselves and the districts and schools they oversee.

The Context

Assuring that state and local agencies comply with the requirements of Federal and state programs has been a central feature of SEAs. The purposes of compliance requirements—ensuring both fiscal integrity and that targeted groups receive intended benefits—are important. But, while such requirements are often well-intentioned, too often they can act to unnecessarily restrict SEAs and districts from serving the very groups such programs are intended to benefit. A compliance-focused mentality results in:

- Organizational silos that impede teamwork and problem solving;
- Administrative, rather than substantive, focus on school improvement;
- Redundant compliance efforts across program areas;
- Unnecessary restrictions on the use of funds that impede managerial flexibility; and
- Poor alignment across components of the strategic plan.

The Opportunity

As the resources constraints become severe, many SEAs are seeking to streamline and integrate their compliance activities, while some others have taken the steps to make the transition from compliance to a performance management organization. Useful lessons are emerging from those that are at the front lines of change. These include information about the importance of coherence and integration in compliance actions, the nature of the relationship with local education agencies (LEAs) that will support mutually beneficial outcomes, and the means of



streamlining the collection of documentation from LEAs in a manner that allows more productive use of time and resources from all agencies. Also, different models of making the transition demonstrate that the changes can be appropriately tailored to the contexts of different SEAs.

The Work

The collaborative benchmarking process is described in the attached paper, *Discovering and Implementing Best Practices to Strengthen SEAs: Collaborative Benchmarking* (2013). The study will be led by the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center), meaning that we will provide the facilitation leader, provide or acquire the subject matter expert (SME), and provide the staff support to conduct the work. We will recruit interested Regional Comprehensive Center (RCC) and SEA teams to obtain guidance on which specific aspects of compliance management they wish to learn about. The ideal SEA team will comprise individuals who have a high level of authority in the SEA in order to effect change, who know and lead the accomplishment of SEA goals, who collectively have knowledge of programmatic, legal, and financial compliance matters, and who are motivated to make improvements in the compliance process. Ideally too, RCCs will participate with their SEAs throughout the process giving them support, providing travel funding, and helping plan implementation of the process changes. Our goal is that the RCCs will continue to support the SEAs in the implementation of the process improvement activities.

The Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center) focuses on helping state education agencies (SEAs) throughout the country, as they adapt to reduced fiscal resources and increased demands for greater productivity. As State Departments of Education are facing a daunting challenge of improving student performance with diminishing financial resources, the BSCP Center provides technical assistance to SEAs that builds their capacity to support local educational agencies (LEAs or districts) and schools, and to the other 21 regional and content comprehensive centers that serve them, by providing high quality information, tools, and implementation support. The partners in the BSCP Center are Edvance Research, Inc., the Academic Development Institute, the Center on Reinventing Public Education (University of Washington), and the Fiscal Analytics Unit (Georgetown University).

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