The Missing Link: How States Work with Districts to Support School Turnaround

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Over the last several years federal initiatives have called on states to improve the nation's lowest performing schools. States' efforts to turn around these low-performing schools have met with mixed success. Districts may be the missing link between federal and state desires to improve schools and actual, demonstrable changes that improve learning for students. This descriptive, mixed-methods analysis uses survey data from state-level turnaround leaders in all 50 states and interviews with eight intentionally selected state leaders to launch a discussion about how states support districts in school-turnaround efforts.

Purpose

The federal government during President Obama's administration has put intense focus on the nation's lowest performing schools and the plight of students attending these schools. This attention led to federal directives aimed at turning these schools around, including federal School Improvement Grants (SIGs; U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and state waivers to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provisions (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2015b; Redding, Dunn, & McCauley, 2015). The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a) has continued this focus on school turnaround.

In addition to these federal directives, in 2012 the federal government funded the Center on School Turnaround (CST), one of seven national content centers under the Comprehensive Centers Program, a discretionary grant program authorized by Title II. The CST, which published this report, focuses on assisting state education agencies (SEAs) to improve the nation's lowest performing schools.

While most federal school turnaround initiatives are targeted at the state and school levels, data from the CST's annual survey of state education agency (SEA) leaders suggests that closely involving districts in these efforts may be a key factor in successful school turnaround. This notion is further supported in research on turnaround, which calls for district supports to the core functions of teaching and learning (Knudson, Shambaugh & O'Day, 2011; Zavadsky, 2013).

A recent publication by the American Educational Research Association (Daly & Finnigan, 2016) summarizes what is known about the district role

in school turnaround and calls for more research in this area. This CST analysis is further supported by that call. According to data from the CST's annual surveys of SEAs, increasing the capacity of districts to assist with school turnaround was one of the top three perceived needs across the nation (Scott & Lasley, 2013; Scott & Lasley, 2014; Scott & Ostler, 2015).

The CST leadership and evaluators wanted to know more about how SEAs were currently supporting districts in improving their capacity to assist with school turnaround efforts and how that support could be improved. We suspected that systematic district support might be the missing link between federal and state desires to improve schools and actual, demonstrable changes that improve learning outcomes for students. Therefore, this analysis posed the following questions:

1. How do states support districts in turning around low-performing schools?

2. How, if at all, do states work differently with rural versus urban districts on school turnaround, and is this differentiation important?

3. How have federal policies influenced the schools and districts with which states work on school turnaround?

At the time of the survey and interviews, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act had not yet been reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This reauthorization will likely pose a challenge to the current alignment of federal and state initiatives, and, at the very least, will require reworking SEA supports for districts and schools. In particular, ESSA calls for states to set aside 7 percent of their federal Title I funding for school turnaround and improvement and also provides more flexibility for the use of those funds by both states and districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). While some of the logistics for school turnaround efforts will be changing in various ways under ESSA, many of the details, insights, and strategies provided by SEAs through these surveys and interviews are still relevant to helping SEAs think about how to provide high-quality support to districts on school turnaround.

Background

The role of SEAs in school turnaround efforts has changed dramatically in recent years, yet there is a surprising lack of research explaining or describing that change. In the last decade, the No Child Left Behind Act charged SEAs with supporting both schools and districts, but most of the federal funding that supported school improvement was earmarked for school-level initiatives (NCLB, 2002). Early examinations of the capacity of SEAs to work with districts showed that more than half of states reported one or more barriers to monitoring and providing technical assistance to districts that had schools identified for improvement, such as insufficient number of SEA staff members and inadequate state and federal funding (Minnici & Hill, 2007).

While many SEAs once primarily supported schools with improvement efforts, in the past several years most states began supporting both districts and schools (Unger, Lane, Cutler, Lee, Whitney, Arruda, & Silva, 2008). Districts may play an important role in driving and supporting school improvement, but, currently, there are very few resources that identify promising prac- tices for how SEAs can best leverage districts to drive school improvement efforts.

Much research has attempted to identify the characteristics of effective districts; these char- acteristics include having a focus on student outcomes, having a clear mission or vision, moni- toring frequently, as well as having a focus on accountability, organizational coherence, stan- dards alignment, and quality professional devel- opment (Trujilo, 2016). Despite the field's knowl- edge about district effectiveness, some argue that research on school improvement has often completely overlooked or ignored the potential of districts as substantial contributors to systemic reform (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008).

This lack of research on the district role in school improvement is particularly troubling in light of increased federal funding for school turnaround efforts. The additional funding allo- cated to the federal SIG program through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) increased

Figure 1. Percentages of SEAs Working with Schools and Districts on School Turnaround (N = 53)
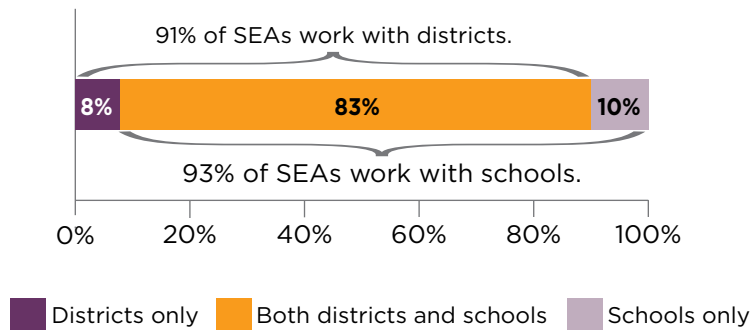
Note: Bar does not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of the Center on School Turnaround's 2015 annual survey of SEA leaders.

popular attention on school and district improvement — billions of dollars were spent to improve the nation's failing schools. Some recent researchers argue that the school-improvement process is occurring without fully leveraging the capacity of school districts to provide assistance. For example, Zavadsky (2013) points out that the $3.5 billion funded through the SIG program in 2009 was directed primarily at schools, while "barely giving a nod to their districts" (p. 3).

To complicate matters, other research has shown that the support that districts need from SEAs to build their capacity to support school turnaround varies considerably; therefore, experts have argued for more differentiation in SEA supports for districts (Jochim & Murphy, 2013). The current role of SEA support for districts, however, is largely unexplored by research.

Findings

The findings throughout this section, organized by the research questions, are drawn from data from the CST's survey of SEA staff from all 50 states, as well as the Bureau of Indian Education, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico; the findings are also drawn from our interviews of SEA staff members from eight states who had indicated on the survey that their SEA was doing exemplary work supporting districts in the school turnaround process and who were selected to participate due to CST leadership's

familiarity with their work. We also discuss various successes and challenges related to the work that each analysis question is exploring. More information about the survey and interviews is contained in the appendix.

How do states support districts in turning around low-performing schools?

SEA leaders reported that 91 percent of their SEAs worked directly with districts on school turnaround. This percentage was slightly smaller than the percentage that said their SEAs worked directly with schools (93 percent). All SEAs reportedly worked with either schools or districts on turnaround, and many (83 percent) worked directly with both (Figure 1).

The survey also included a list of specific ways that SEAs can support schools and districts; respondents were asked to indicate whether they provided each of these respective supports for schools, for districts, or for both schools and districts. The list of supports was generated by CST content experts and through a review of federal requirements for state assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Survey responses showed that more SEAs worked with *both* schools and districts than with *either* schools or districts individually on these specific activities. The activities that the largest percentage of SEA respondents reported working on with both schools and districts were *Assisting in sustaining*

Figure 2. Percentages of SEAs Providing School Turnaround Supports to Schools, Districts, or Both
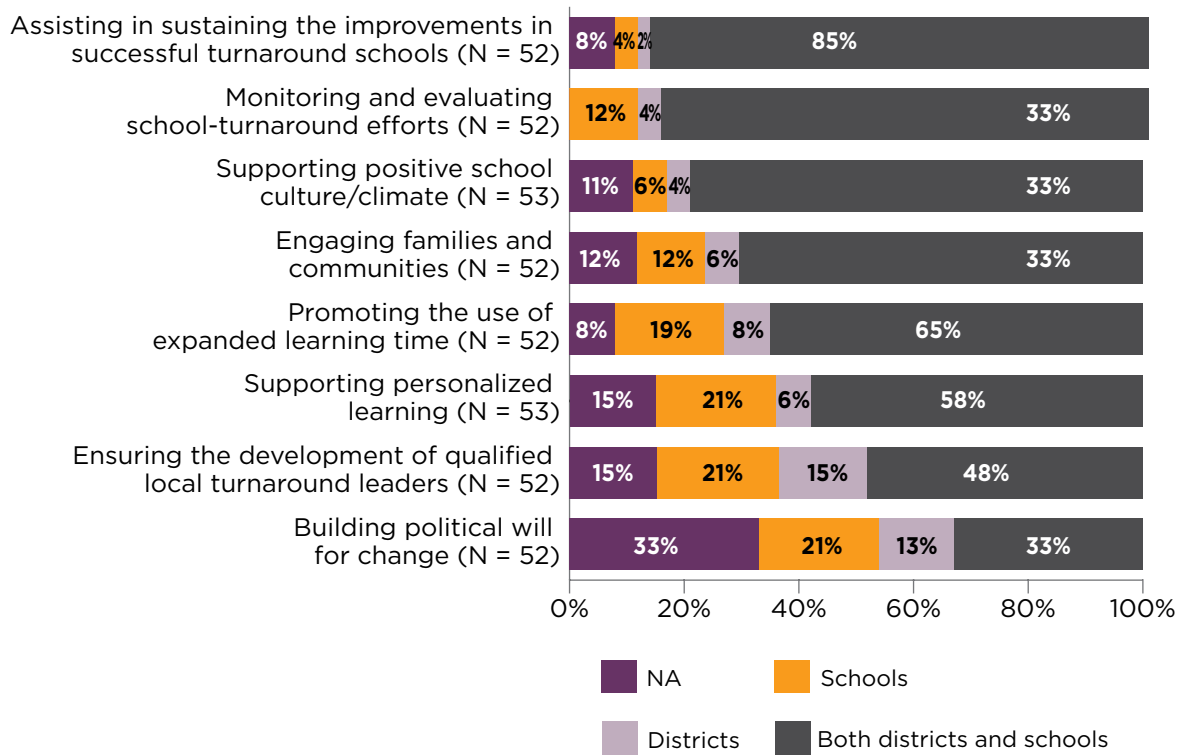
Notes: This figure was ordered by highest to lowest percentage of SEA responses reporting that they provided support to "both districts and schools."

The number of SEAs responding to each item varied because not all individuals responded to all survey items.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of the Center on School Turnaround's 2015 annual survey of SEA leaders.

the improvement in successful turnaround schools and *Monitoring and evaluating school-turnaround efforts* (Figure 2).

Despite the fact that many states reported working with districts on school turnaround, 91 percent said they would like to increase their support to districts. Given this result, it is likely that even when SEAs are providing supports, they do not perceive these supports as adequate to ensure school turnaround.

The interviews delved more deeply into exploring how SEAs provided support to districts on school turnaround. SEA leaders from all eight states reported that they provided an integrated systems-based approach by interweaving district and school supports in various ways. Some states provided direct support to districts with the aim of building their capacity

to effectively manage turnaround efforts. Other states provided less direct support to districts and, instead, included them as partners in school turnaround efforts. The reported mechanisms for SEA support included:

- Presentations and resources on the state department of education website.

- In-person professional development for school and district staff.

- Onsite coaching from state personnel at district and school levels.

- Leadership teams composed of state-, district-, and school-level personnel.

Successes and challenges. SEA leaders who participated in interviews noted some promising school turnaround results. All eight SEA

interviewees expressed satisfaction with the improvements in their lowest performing schools and districts. Targeted schools were moving out of priority status, district and school leaders were building their capacity to support turnaround, and states were able to pursue innovative programs to support districts and schools.

SEA leaders from Arkansas, Kentucky, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah pointed to effective collaboration and communication as one of the biggest facilitators of their success when working with districts. Arkansas interviewees, in particular, described their role as "brokers of resources" for districts and schools. SEA staff in Arkansas identify and provide needed trainings, strategize use of funds, present at and attend conferences, produce tools and documents, and give coaching comments through Indistar (an online data organizing tool) to the schools with which they are working.

SEA leaders from five states (Kansas, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, and Utah) specifically discussed how they are creating sustainable changes through systems and infrastructure to build district capacity. Texas, for example, developed a common framework of school and district improvement that SEA leaders use in their district capacity-building work. Several states mentioned developing systems to better examine data and assess needs at the school and district levels.

SEA leaders reported a variety of challenges related to turnaround. Most notably, seven states indicated that a significant challenge was staff turnover at all levels of the system — from SEA staff, to district leaders, to principals, to teachers. SEA staff members sometimes leave the state education office for higher paying school or district positions, often in the districts they have directly assisted. "SEA staff are out working in the schools and, honestly, the schools can see just how good they are and the quality of training that they've received. So we lose people to the schools — at least two to three staff members annually — [and] to the school districts," noted an Arkansas SEA leader. Though the schools and districts benefit from having former SEA staff familiar with turnaround efforts, state level staff turnover makes it difficult to sustain consistent SEA supports.

In addition, interviewees from five of the states noted that school leaders were difficult to recruit and retain. Oregon, for example, remarked that "every year about a third of our schools get new leadership. Out of that one third most of those new principals are brand new to their jobs." This creates a need for an ongoing cycle of training and support to develop strong school turnaround leaders.
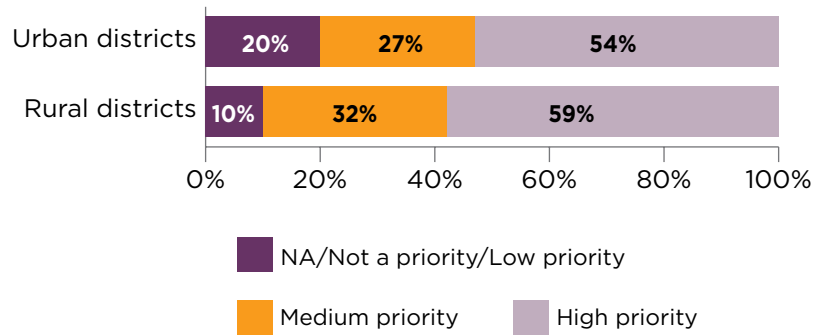
How, if at all, do states work differently with rural versus urban districts, and is this differentiation important?

Much of the early response to federal school turnaround policies questioned whether rural districts, in particular, would be able to implement the reforms necessary to turn around low-performing schools. There was particular concern about the feasibility of replacing staff and providing ongoing professional development, both of which can be difficult in areas that are less densely populated (Klein, 2010). While much attention has been paid to rural school turnaround recently (e.g., Parsley & Barton, 2015), prior to this survey, the field had little empirical data about whether SEAs differentiated their support to rural districts. Therefore, our survey asked SEA leaders about differentiation in the support they provided for rural versus urban districts on building capacity to assist in school turnaround efforts. The data showed that states placed similar priority on serving urban and rural districts (Figure 3 on page 6).

Furthermore, states were about evenly split on which type of district they rated as a high priority for receiving school turnaround support. About a third of states rated both rural and urban districts a high priority, and a similar percentage rated only rural districts or only urban districts a high priority (Figure 4 on page 6).

However, data from the interviews showed that the eight SEA leaders we talked with did not think about differentiation in terms of degrees of urbanicity. Most of the eight SEA leaders mentioned customizing support for all districts, regardless of their urban or rural status. For instance, SEAs differentiated support based on
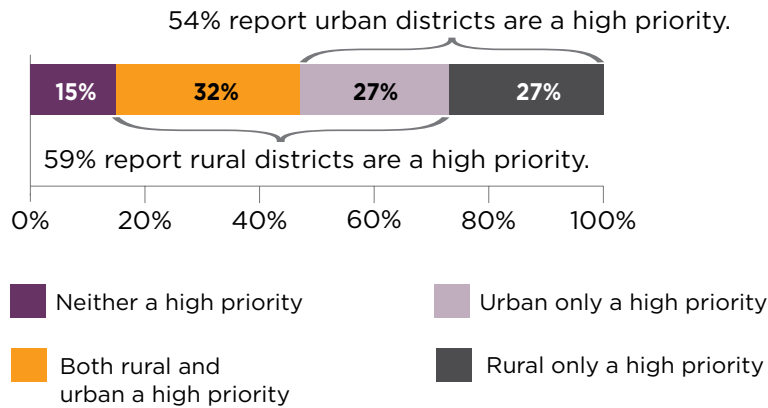
Figure 3. SEAs' Reported Priority Levels for Working with Rural and Urban Districts on School Turnaround (N=42)

	NA/Not a priority/Low priority	Medium priority	High priority
Urban districts	20%	27%	54%
Rural districts	10%	32%	59%

■ NA/Not a priority/Low priority

■ Medium priority   ■ High priority

Note: Analysis was limited to participants who responded to both the survey item about urban districts and the survey item about rural districts. Bars do not total 100 percent due to rounding. The number of SEA responses was 42, because not all individuals responded to these survey items.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of the Center on School Turnaround's 2015 annual survey of SEA leaders.

Figure 4. Percentages of SEAs Reporting that Serving Rural and/or Urban Districts Was a High Priority (N = 42)

54% report urban districts are a high priority.

15%	32%	27%	27%

59% report rural districts are a high priority.

■ Neither a high priority   ■ Urban only a high priority

■ Both rural and urban a high priority   ■ Rural only a high priority

Note: Analysis was limited to participants who responded to both the survey item about urban districts and the survey item about rural districts. Bar does not total 100 percent due to rounding. The number of SEA responses was 42, because not all individuals responded to these survey items.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of the Center on School Turnaround's 2015 annual survey of SEA leaders.

an understanding of each district's size, culture, history, and data. As a leader in Oregon stated, "We have some standardized things we offer our districts and schools, but it's also nimble and responsive, and differentiated."

In many SEAs' situations, there are few large urban districts in the state; the majority of districts are rural. There is often a large geographic distance between districts and schools in remote areas. New Mexico and Oregon indicated that they have

to take distance into consideration when planning professional development events and trainings for their state, district, and school personnel. Tennessee discussed how remote schools and districts can be difficult to reach with SEA personnel, so they have hired regional consultants to provide state-level support.

However, while SEA staff agreed that rural and urban districts posed different challenges, they related the challenges to enrollment size more

than to urban versus rural. Large districts (which are often urban) posed challenges in implementing systemic changes across numerous schools. Small districts allowed for more rapid change, with more opportunities for direct contact and fewer obstacles to instituting change across the district. As an Arkansas SEA leader noted, "To be honest, the way that we've seen it is the smaller the district, the quicker the buy-in from the central office because [the district] is more connected. The larger the district, the less connection there is, in some cases, to the individual schools — so we don't see the change taking place as quickly."

Small districts, however, pose some accountability and capacity challenges, which can affect the type of support that SEAs provide to them. As an SEA leader from Texas noted, smaller districts might struggle with accountability, as one staff person generally has to fill multiple roles. He explains, "Ideally, that district coordinator of school improvement (DCSI)...is not the superintendent, and it's not the principal. It's a separate person who can hold that principal accountable and then hold the superintendent accountable — but we do have instances where the DCSI may also be the superintendent. We've actually had a small handful of cases where the DCSI is the principal and the superintendent. There, the issue is just really around the capacity of one individual to be able to take on all of those tasks."

Successes and challenges. Interviews revealed some promising practices around differentiation in providing support to districts of varying size and makeup (both urban and rural) on school turnaround. Working specifically with each district to get buy-in, offer autonomy, and provide targeted coaching were all mentioned as successful ways to differentiate supports to districts.

SEA differentiation strategies included having SEA staff help develop buy-in with district staff. SEA leaders from Arkansas and Kansas specifically indicated that their support strategies have been more effective when they had buy-in from district staff. As an Arkansas SEA leader stated, "What we have found is...as...the schools have shown gain[s], and the districts have observed that, then we've had buy-in from the district[s].

And once we have buy-in, then we can help support them in any number of ways, and we see them starting to make the change." When the SEA, district, and school shared the same vision of change that fit their local needs, they were more coordinated in their efforts.

Different districts need differentiated SEA support to help schools effectively recruit, develop, and retain school turnaround leaders. While each community faces different challenges in recruiting and developing school leaders, the SEA can help districts build systems to support these efforts. SEA leaders from Kansas, Kentucky, New Mexico, and Tennessee discussed how coaching, developing, and recruiting school leaders have facilitated turnaround efforts. Some SEAs, such as New Mexico, have built leadership development programs that engage districts in the effort to ensure local buy-in and relevance, recognizing the districts' role in school leadership development. Other SEAs, such as Kentucky, work with the districts to help them maximize their supports for school principals.

As an education leader from Kentucky stated, "[The district team members] created an entire system of how they support principals — specifically the priority school principal — how they monitor them, and how they do leadership meetings at the district level and then support at the school level. It's really been tremendous to see them adopt that approach. They monitor and then they make improvements. They gather feedback from leaders. It's been tremendous to watch that happen because I feel that's been a result of the good work that our educational recovery staff did to help them overcome their obstacles." The SEA provided support as needed in the development of the system, but the district had high capacity to both develop and execute their support system. Effective school leaders are integral to turnaround efforts and districts need different SEA supports to help develop these leaders.

As discussed previously, staff turnover — at the SEA, district, and school levels — was cited as a common challenge to providing effective school turnaround support. Differentiation requires relationship building and is difficult to sustain as staff change; seven of the eight state leaders

Figure 5. Percentages of SEAs Providing Support to Schools, Based on Federal and State Policies

The schools supported by SEAs were…
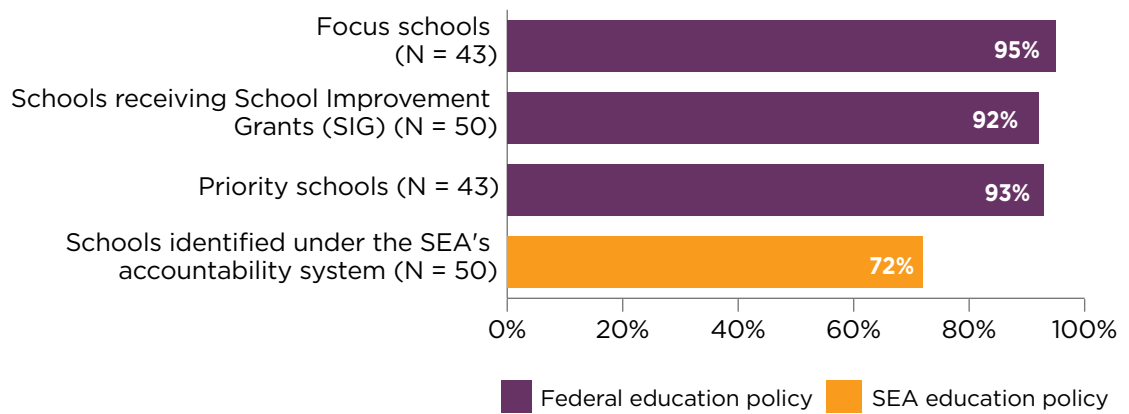
Note: This figure was ordered by highest percentage of responses. The number of SEAs responding varied because not all individuals responded to all survey items.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of the Center on School Turnaround's 2015 annual survey of SEA leaders.

interviewed mentioned the challenge of offering differentiated support to districts amidst staff turnover, regardless of the geographic location of the district and school. SEA leaders also reported difficulty with recruiting and retaining teachers at low-performing and remotely located schools in particular. In Utah, for example, SEA leaders discussed the difficulty of recruiting teachers for schools on Native American reservations.

How have federal policies influenced the schools and districts with which states work on school turnaround?

Federal policies appear to have had a large influence on which districts and schools states work with. According to the survey data, larger percentages of SEAs provided supports to districts and schools identified by federal policies than to schools identified by state policies. In particular, federal regulations under NCLB and ESEA waivers required SEAs to identify and serve "priority schools," which were by definition the SEA's lowest performing schools, as well as "focus schools," which were among the next lowest group of schools that also had gaps in achievement between particular student groups,

such as students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch versus those not eligible. Almost all SEAs supported schools receiving School Improvement Grants (94 percent) and schools identified as priority (93 percent) or focus (95 percent) under ESEA waivers (Figure 5).

Federal policies, and especially federal policies based on the identification of low-performing schools, also appeared to influence SEA supports for districts. In our survey, the largest percentage of SEAs (77%) reported they supported districts with priority schools, and 64 percent supported districts with focus schools. Fewer (52%) supported districts identified for improvement under ESEA waivers. The lowest proportion (less than half) supported districts based on their identification through any state policies (Figure 6).

The interview asked states why larger percentages of SEAs provided supports to schools identified by federal policies than to schools identified by state policies. Five of the eight states focused on federally identified schools to target support because they did not have a separate state accountability system to identify schools. Three states (Texas, New Mexico, and Utah) did have separate state accountability systems. Utah indicated that it used data from its state

Figure 6. Percentages of SEAs Providing Support to Districts, Based on Federal and State Policies
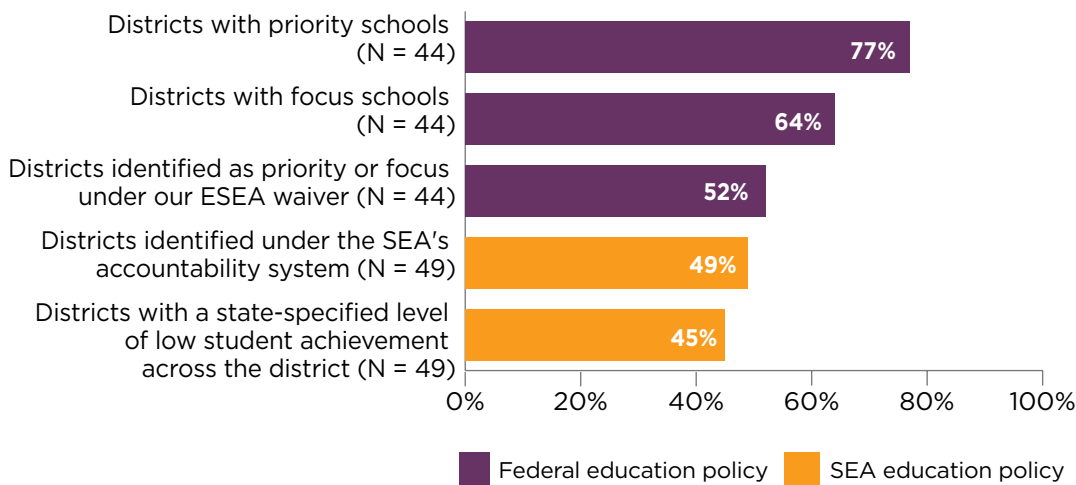
Note: This figure was ordered by highest to lowest percentage of responses. The number of SEAs responding varied because not all individuals responded to all survey items.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of the Center on School Turnaround's 2015 annual survey of SEA leaders.

accountability system to identify the priority and focus schools. Texas had different teams supporting the federally designated priority schools and schools that the state accountability system had identified as low-performing, though there was overlap in the schools identified by the federal and state systems. The other seven states had merged the federal and state accountability systems or the support across these two systems to some degree.

Successes and challenges. Schools are tasked with addressing federal, state, and district initiatives. Education leaders from all eight states discussed the topic of alignment across systems and initiatives. They discussed how their work is intentional and collaborative, bringing together the state, districts, and schools toward the common goal of school improvement.

One SEA leader from Kansas stated, "It's been a real process of changing the culture of how we work within our state, within the districts, and within the schools … It's been very important for us to be intentional [in developing] a line of supports from our agency so that the districts are then intentional about aligning their supports to the school."

As discussed earlier, ESSA will require states to re-examine their supports to districts and schools. This provides a unique opportunity to better align supports across the system for the lowest performing schools.

Implications for State Education Agencies

Based on the survey responses from SEA leaders across the country and our interviews with leaders from eight of those SEAs, we have compiled a list of considerations to help SEAs provide effective support to districts on school turnaround efforts.

Develop and share turnaround frameworks to facilitate sustainable SEA support

Through survey responses, the overwhelming majority of SEAs reported that they worked with both districts and schools on school turnaround efforts. To do this, most of the interviewed state leaders reported that their states created systems, infrastructure, or frameworks. These frameworks and structures not only help SEA staff describe and deliver consistent support to districts and schools, they also serve as mechanisms for documenting SEA processes to support school turnaround. Given the challenge of staff turnover at all levels of the system, this kind of documentation could support sustainable turnaround efforts.

Documented processes also represent potential learning opportunities for other states. States with strong turnaround frameworks could link up with intermediary agencies (or leverage existing learning communities) to share

their materials and resources through various dissemination methods (e.g., webinars, summits, online clearinghouses). This sort of collaboration may be particularly helpful as states try to navigate the transition to ESSA.

The following are some questions for states to consider about turnaround frameworks:

- How does the state turnaround framework align with other improvement efforts in the state?

- What capacity does the SEA have to implement the framework? What other entities could support this work?

- What tools and supports does the SEA need in order to share the turnaround framework with their districts and schools? Would the tools and supports need to differ based on school or district size?

- What tools and supports are needed for states to share turnaround frameworks with other states? How can states identify other states that would benefit most from their particular framework?

Develop and share differentiation strategies to support districts and schools on school turnaround

SEA staff members are tasked with supporting districts that have different achievement levels, capacities, and contexts (e.g., size, student makeup, culture, distance between schools). SEA leaders interviewed in this report discussed the importance of being nimble and responsive enough to adapt their approach based on local factors and needs. As interview respondents noted, this level of differentiation goes beyond simply identifying a district as rural or urban and instead gets at the roots of districts' needs.

The following are some questions for states to consider about differentiating support to districts on school turnaround:

- What tools and supports do larger districts need to facilitate change districtwide? How

do they differ from the supports smaller districts need?

- How does SEA support need to differ if the superintendent fulfills multiple roles (which often happens in very small districts), including acting as a turnaround school principal?

- How do large distances between schools affect professional development offerings? How can technology be used to support staff who are spread out within a geographically large district?

- How can the SEA provide more targeted, differentiated support to districts on school turnaround? What needs to be in place at the SEA level to offer this sort of support?

Adjust turnaround processes and supports based on new authority granted by the Every Student Succeeds Act

ESSA shifts authority away from the federal government and toward states — giving states an opportunity to choose standards, assessments, and accountability models that make the most sense for them (Klein, 2016). While many states had federal waivers in place (waiving key requirements of No Child Left Behind), those waivers expired on August 1, 2016. ESSA gives states a chance to reflect on the best elements of their waivers and school improvement strategies and use those elements to modify their accountability systems — including interventions for low-performing schools — in time for the 2017–18 launch of ESSA.

As indicated in the survey results, federal policies were largely driving which schools and districts SEAs prioritized for their support. This may be because (as indicated in interviews) many SEAs had folded their state accountability systems into their federal waivers. ESSA provides an opportunity for SEAs to further refine how they identify and support their lowest performing schools and what role districts play in that support.

The following are specific questions about ESSA for states to consider:

- As the SIG funding is folded into Title I, how can existing SIG strategies be carried forward?

- How will states proceed in districts where schools fail to improve after a number of years? What will interventions and/or take-over look like in those circumstances?

- What additional indicators will be included in state accountability systems beyond academic indicators? How will they be selected?

- How will states continue to identify the lowest 5 percent of schools and schools with low-performing subgroups? How will states provide comprehensive and differen-tiated interventions for those schools and their associated districts?

Significance

This analysis adds to our emerging understanding of SEA supports for districts related to school turnaround. Based on survey and interview data, we identified the following key takeaways in rela-tion to our three questions:

- Almost all SEAs directly support both districts and schools in school turnaround efforts.

- Many SEAs differentiate their support for all of their struggling schools and associated districts.

- Federal policies largely influence the districts and schools to which SEAs provide support.

In our interviews, SEAs reported early successes in working with districts to turn around schools. More research is needed to track the impact of these strategies that SEAs are using to support their districts. As researchers gather this infor-mation, they should also attend closely to the context of the SEA and the district, since the inter-views pointed to significant variety in the kinds of targeted strategies that SEAs used to meet the unique needs of their districts and schools.

Appendix: Methods

This appendix provides more information about how we conducted the analysis. For this descriptive project, we used a sequential, mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2003). We began with a quantitative survey of SEA leaders involved in turnaround efforts from all 50 states and three territories across the nation. We then conducted a series of interviews with eight purposefully selected SEA leaders who participated in the survey and who indicated on the survey that their SEA had exemplary practices for working with districts on school turnaround. It is impor-tant to note that this analysis was conducted to help the CST better understand the context of district capacity building in states, not to make inferential conclusions about these efforts.

The survey was conducted in February and March 2015. Based on the survey results we crafted an interview protocol to collect more in-depth infor-mation about the analysis questions. The inter-views were conducted in July 2015.

We analyzed both sets of data (i.e., from the surveys and the interviews) to address the analysis questions. To ensure that states were equally represented in the survey, we averaged responses within states. We then analyzed the quantitative survey data using descriptive statis-tics, such as frequencies. We analyzed the related qualitative interview data — using both deductive coding based on the survey and interview items and inductive coding — to identify themes within and across interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Survey

CST evaluators at Education Northwest began administering the CST annual survey in 2013 as part of the ongoing evaluation of the CST. Evaluators based the 2015 annual survey on the CST's objectives and federal school turnaround principles, as well as similar surveys about state support for school turnaround (Le Floch, Boyle, & Therriault, 2008; McMurrer & McIntosh, 2012; Nelsestuen & Roccograndi, 2010; Scott, Krasnoff, & Davis, 2012). Content experts within the CST also had input on the survey items.

The survey served two purposes. First, unrelated to the current analysis, CST evaluators examined SEA satisfaction with CST services across a broad range of stakeholders. This part of the survey was conducted independently of CST leadership. Therefore, to address the first purpose, in January and February 2015, CST evaluators administered the online survey to an expansive group of 260 SEA staff members who were on the CST's email list. This broad sample was needed to ensure everyone receiving emails from the CST had the opportunity to weigh in on the quality of CST services as part of its annual evaluation. Of this broad sample, 87 (or 33 percent) of SEA contacts responded.

The survey's second purpose (unique to the 2015 CST annual survey) was to gather the data necessary for this analysis. Our comprehensive goal was to gather information from every SEA about the services they provide to districts to increase their capacity to support school turnaround efforts. Therefore, after emailing the survey to all CST contacts, CST evaluators targeted efforts to increase the return rate from SEAs that were not represented among those who responded to our initial survey invitations to the pool of CST contacts. After sending five email reminders to this initial pool of CST contacts, we searched websites and used personal contacts to determine which SEA staff member was most responsible for school turnaround in each SEA that was not yet represented among survey respondents. We then sent (or re-sent) the survey to those individuals. We also phoned those individuals and asked them to complete the survey.

Ultimately, we obtained responses from at least one contact in all 50 states, as well as the Bureau of Indian Education, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. All these survey respondents indicated they were familiar with school turnaround practices and policies in their SEA; therefore this analysis does not include any responses from any individuals who were not familiar with the school turnaround practices and policies in their SEA. For SEAs from which we had more than one response, we averaged responses within the SEA. We used descriptive statistics to analyze the data.

Interviews

The survey asked participants to indicate whether they believed their SEA had exemplary practices for working with districts on school turnaround. If the participant responded positively, the survey asked whether CST staff at WestEd could contact the participant to learn more about these practices. Across all respondents, 36 people from 30 states indicated that the CST could contact them. From this list, CST staff selected 10 SEAs that were believed to be doing in-depth work with districts based on the CST's past technical assistance to the SEAs. Of these 10, eight were available for phone interviews: Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah. The semi-structured interviews of one, or sometimes two, SEA leaders involved in turnaround in each of these states, lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were transcribed before analysis.

These interviews were not intended to be representative of the work of all SEAs; they were conducted to collect information about exemplary practices from SEAs who seemed to be doing particularly effective work with districts on school turnaround.

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