Reform Support Network

Sustainability Rubric

A Tool to Help State Education Agencies Assess Their Current Efforts to Sustain Reform Strategies to Meet Student Achievement Goals

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Introduction to Sustainability

Overview

For States to produce transformative, sustainable improvement in student achievement, State education agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) will have to focus on and commit to improving student outcomes in ways that go beyond any particular program or funding stream. Transformative changes resulting in improved student achievement are bigger than any one initiative, program or project.

So how can State-level education leaders make sure the changes they are making work for students, and are durable in the face of changing conditions? LEAs must successfully implement reforms at the district and classroom level, and SEAs must play a leading role to support them, providing direction, offering limited but critical assistance and building capacity, all at a statewide scale. In the course of this change, the role of the SEA will evolve from one focused largely on monitoring and compliance to one that includes leadership toward statewide goals for improved student growth, targeted support to LEAs and performance management of SEA activities.

What is Sustainable Reform?

Sustainable reforms are durable, adaptive and persistently focused on priority goals for improved student growth in the face of changing conditions.

In order to think about sustainability, reform leaders must start by asking two questions:

- What goals is the agency trying to achieve for students? A **priority goal** is a commitment by the SEA to achieve an improved level of performance for a particular student outcome measure (for example, increase the number of students that are college and career ready, improve proficiency or graduation rates).

- What specific reforms must the agency sustain in order to achieve those goals? A **priority reform** is a body of work that an SEA is undertaking in order to achieve one or more of its priority goals (for example, implementing college- and career-ready standards [CCRS], ensuring quality data systems, implementing new educator evaluation systems).

Clearly identified priority goals and priority reforms are central to any effort to improve sustainability.

When planning for sustainability, reform leaders must keep in mind the following realities:
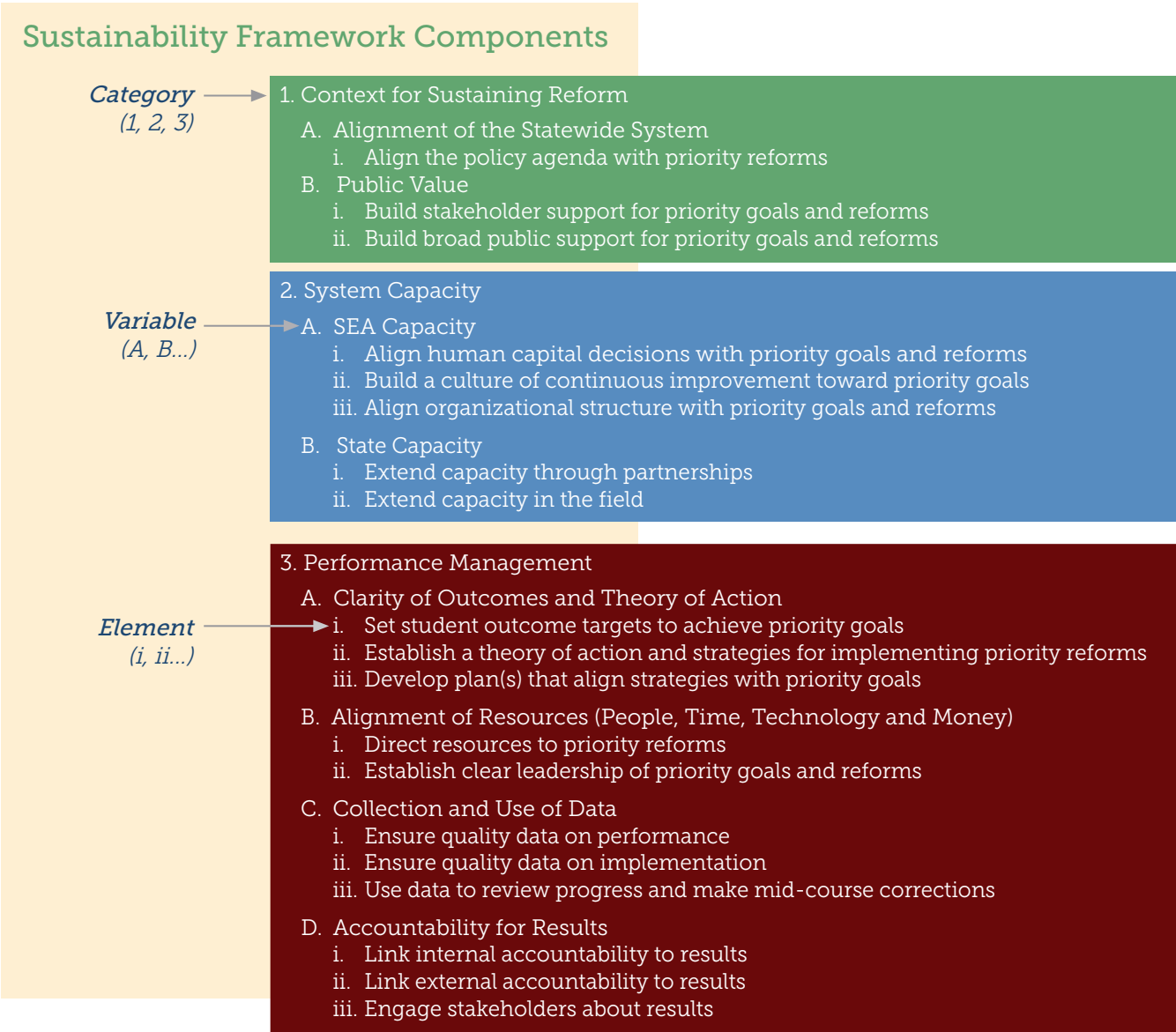
- Implementation is just the beginning. Sustainable reform outlives the completion of specific projects or initiatives and often calls for substantial organizational change that may not have been anticipated in early phases of implementation. By definition, a project is not sustainable, as it has a defined beginning and end. The long-term success of a reform depends on how sustainable the goals of the initiative are beyond its launch, regardless of how well the SEA implements the reform and the associated strategies. Its success depends on responsiveness to the needs of students.

- Today's context will change. Sustainable reform cannot be solely dependent on the conditions in place when it started. Organizations and resources, including people, time and money, will change over time and so will the context in which they operate. Sustaining reform does not mean simply maintaining or replicating a specific program or policy innovation. It requires clear goals grounded in a theory of action, data to track and evaluate progress toward them and commitment by reform leaders to adapt—including policies, funding streams, organizational structures and work routines—as the reform moves forward.

- Sustainability planning begins early. States realize the full benefits of education reform years after the initial enthusiasm, commitment and program investments. State leadership has to intentionally work to keep these supports in place as part of a continuous improvement process. Managing sustainability is an ongoing process that begins at the start of the reform and evolves as circumstances change and lessons are learned.

How the Sustainability Rubric is Organized

There is no single right way to approach sustainability, and there is considerable variation among States. It is not possible, therefore, to create a "template" or "blueprint" outlining the best way to approach the topic. But there are common factors that State leaders can consider when planning for sustainability. In this rubric, these common factors are called *variables* because they are neither constant over time nor consistent across States. These variables are present in all organizations and reforms, but some may be more important than others depending on the specific context and time. For the purpose of organizing this rubric, we have placed them in three *categories*: context, system capacity, and performance management. The rubric breaks down each variable into *elements*, or constituent parts that enable thoughtful

analysis of State conditions for sustainable reform. Taken together, the categories, variables and elements create a framework of sustainability.

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Education began to work with the Race to the Top States to develop a framework to help them plan for the sustainability of their education reforms. The Reform Support Network (RSN) convened a workgroup to address that need. Six States participated in the workgroup to develop tools for assessing, planning, and monitoring the sustainability of priority reforms. They outlined a framework of sustainability that became the foundation for this rubric, which States can use to think about how sustainable their reforms currently are, and what they need to do to make them more sustainable. In no way is the Sustainability Rubric the last word on the topic. Its utility comes from the thinking it prompts.

Sustainability Framework Components

Category (1, 2, 3) →

1. Context for Sustaining Reform
  A. Alignment of the Statewide System
      i. Align the policy agenda with priority reforms
  B. Public Value
      i. Build stakeholder support for priority goals and reforms
      ii. Build broad public support for priority goals and reforms

Variable (A, B...) →

2. System Capacity
  A. SEA Capacity
      i. Align human capital decisions with priority goals and reforms
      ii. Build a culture of continuous improvement toward priority goals
      iii. Align organizational structure with priority goals and reforms
  B. State Capacity
      i. Extend capacity through partnerships
      ii. Extend capacity in the field

Element (i, ii...) →

3. Performance Management
  A. Clarity of Outcomes and Theory of Action
      i. Set student outcome targets to achieve priority goals
      ii. Establish a theory of action and strategies for implementing priority reforms
      iii. Develop plan(s) that align strategies with priority goals
  B. Alignment of Resources (People, Time, Technology and Money)
      i. Direct resources to priority reforms
      ii. Establish clear leadership of priority goals and reforms
  C. Collection and Use of Data
      i. Ensure quality data on performance
      ii. Ensure quality data on implementation
      iii. Use data to review progress and make mid-course corrections
  D. Accountability for Results
      i. Link internal accountability to results
      ii. Link external accountability to results
      iii. Engage stakeholders about results

1. Context for Sustaining Reform

Description of Category

SEAs operate in a complex context. They work and collaborate with a wide range of jurisdictions, agencies and organizations that hold different authorities, positions and interests within a K12 structure that is at once hierarchical and decentralized. The context for reform is not only complex, it is dynamic. SEAs do not operate in a political, cultural or economic vacuum. Therefore, SEAs need to be prepared for the context to change over time. The sustainability of reform requires constant attention to changing circumstances in order to manage a balance between persistent adherence to attaining goals and responsive adaptation to address the real challenges of implementation. Although context is largely external to SEAs as organizations and something over which they do not have direct control, they need not treat it as beyond their consideration. As they pursue the goals of their reform initiatives, SEAs should take their complex and changing environment into account, not only reacting to it, but actively shaping it and leveraging its strengths.

Key Variables

When developing the context for sustainable reform, SEAs will want to consider two variables:

A. **Alignment of the Statewide System.** Sustainable reform takes place across multiple public jurisdictions and different agencies and organizations that serve a wide range of functions, hold different interests and act independent of one another, often intentionally so. State, local and municipal governments, and State and local boards of education all play a role, as do regional delivery systems (such as Boards of Cooperative Educational Services, or BOCES) and local school districts. In pursuit of transformative and lasting outcomes for students, SEAs must map this complex environment, identify what policies and practices can accelerate or impede progress, align State education organizations and others around these policies and practices, and, to the extent possible, anticipate changes. Common requirements for transparent reporting, similar performance measures and aligned policy to shared outcomes are all methods for developing a coherence that can support sustainable reforms.

B. **Public Value.** Reform faces many public audiences: the broader community, parents and students and a wide range of State and local stakeholder groups. The value placed on reform by these audiences—their opinions, attitudes, perceptions and active participation—is a variable affecting sustainability that SEAs can measure and act upon. SEAs can also use communication and other engagement strategies in order to increase the focus and clarity of reforms over time. Sustainable reforms are adaptive in shifting landscapes.

A. Alignment of the Statewide System

i. Align the policy agenda with priority reforms

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Are the right policies in place across the State to facilitate and enable priority reforms and goals? • Is this policy agenda reflected in legislation at the State level? • Is this policy agenda aligned across critical State education organizations—higher education, early childhood, other State agencies, the State board of education and third party advocacy and support groups—to support priority reforms and goals? • Do the critical State education organizations—the SEA, higher education, early childhood, other State agencies, the State board of education, unions and professional associations—work together to coordinate implementation of priority reforms? • Is this alignment reflected in resource allocation and budgeting across these State education organizations? • Is this alignment reflected in the field— at the regional/county, district and municipal level?	SEA leaders view their work in relative isolation from that of other State education organizations, and policies pursued by State education organizations are often at cross purposes. Legislation largely happens to the SEA and does not form a coherent agenda with SEA efforts. Budgets for the SEA and other State agencies reflect political bargaining rather than what is necessary to carry out priority reforms. Local policy to enable reforms is minimally influenced by decisions undertaken at the State level. State education organizations do not collaborate or cooperate to coordinate implementation efforts. Programs are sometimes duplicative or work against each other.	SEA leaders are committed to taking account of the larger State context, and policies pursued are consistent across State education organizations. Some legislation reflects SEA priority goals and reforms. SEA leaders work with other State agencies to align their overall approach to budgeting, but there are still inconsistencies in the final product. The SEA provides support to LEAs to help them consider how local integration of policy across agencies and organizations can improve results in their communities. State education organizations generally get along and programs no longer interfere or conflict. Cooperation is heavily driven by the SEA.	SEA leaders view their work and the work of other State education organizations in the context of a State education policy agenda and policies of the organizations support and reinforce the enabling policies for the SEA's priority reforms. Legislation enables and facilitates the SEA's priority goals and reforms. Budget decisions and requests focus resource investments across the P-20 system on strategies aligned with the SEA's priority reforms and goals. This policy integration and alignment encourages LEAs to undertake similar work at the local level. State education organizations collaborate on some of their major efforts. Implementation efforts build on one another and the SEA coordinates implementation, but is first among equal partners.	The governor, legislators, SEA leaders and leaders at other State education organizations share a single education policy agenda , and the policies of all State education organizations are consistently aligned in support of common priority goals and reforms. Legislation reflects these common priority goals and reforms across the State. The State's education budget is a complete reflection of the shared agenda; it invests in the strategies across the P-20 system that yield the greatest impact on common priority goals. Many LEAs use the shared statewide agenda as a model for policy integration at the local level in order to support priority reforms. State education organizations take collective responsibility for implementing priority reforms with shared planning and shared monitoring of progress. The efforts do not rely on involvement of the SEA.	There is evidence of a common reform agenda among the governor, legislators and leaders at other State education organizations (for example, a written document, common language in public statements about priority goals and reforms). The chief and/or legislative director engages frequently with leaders of legislative education committees and governor's policy advisors to maintain the alignment of policy The SEA participates in or creates mechanisms for regularly convening or engaging leaders to integrate key policies (for example, a P-20 council, a workforce and economic development working group, a task force for child health and welfare). Policy alignment focuses on the intersections and overlaps between the work of the SEA and other State education organizations (for example, educator effectiveness and educator preparation in cooperation with higher education, kindergarten readiness with early childhood, STEM partnerships with economic/workforce development agency, wraparound services for turnaround schools with child welfare agency). The State uses a public accountability mechanism, such as a scorecard, to measure progress of statewide, multiagency priority goals. Cooperation between institutions includes broad data sharing and a focus on meaningful and actionable analysis that can guide policy alignment and integration. The budgeting process involves collaboration between State education organizations, rather than political bargaining over who gets what. LEAs undertake policy alignment and partnerships with similar characteristics that are aligned with the SEA's priority reforms.

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B. Public Value

i. Build stakeholder support for priority goals and reforms

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Is there a critical mass of relevant stakeholder groups—including State education organizations, but also extending to parents, teachers, administrators, political leaders, philanthropies, opinion leaders, business and community leaders—that understand and support the State's priority goals and priority reforms? • Is there similar support among local stakeholder groups such as LEAs, regional organizations, local philanthropies and associations and school boards? • Does the State engage those stakeholder groups through a deliberate strategy that is designed to build this support? • Does this strategy differentiate its approach to different stakeholder groups, both in the messaging and in the means of engagement?	The SEA has no specific strategy for engaging with stakeholder groups relative to priority goals and reforms; the function of communication and other forms of engagement may be disconnected from other work in the agency. The SEA has a poor understanding of the stakeholder groups it will need to reach; leaders may understand a few of them, but tend to treat "stakeholders" as one large audience rather than differentiating. The SEA has no specific strategy for communicating with or otherwise engaging local stakeholder groups.	The SEA is actively developing a stakeholder engagement strategy in support of its priority goals and reforms; it is mostly focused on communications and owned by communications leaders who solicit input from those responsible for the priority reforms as they craft the strategy. SEA leaders have a good sense of the key stakeholder groups that will be targeted by this strategy and attempt to differentiate engagement with them, but most of the work is informal. The SEA communicates with some local stakeholder groups as part of this strategy to build support for its priority goals and reforms.	The SEA has a stakeholder engagement strategy which includes a clear leader, has a core message that describes and links its priority goals and reforms, involves those responsible for implementation of priority reforms and is coordinated with similar efforts at other State education organizations. The strategy identifies the stakeholder groups whose support is most critical to priority goals and reforms and defines a differentiated approach to each one, including key objectives, tailored messages and means of engagement. The SEA has identified the most powerful and critical local stakeholder groups to the reform efforts and targets them alongside statewide groups through its engagement strategy.	State education organizations pursuing a common agenda collectively take responsibility for communications and other forms of stakeholder engagement; the SEA participates in and helps coordinate a statewide engagement effort to build support for priority goals and reforms. In addition to its differentiated approach to key stakeholder groups, the stakeholder engagement strategy is integrated with the core work of reform itself, converting every reform activity into an opportunity for engagement. Leaders in the field are equal partners with State education organizations in shaping and pursuing the engagement strategy; they bring maximum credibility to communications and other forms of engagement with local stakeholder groups across the State.	The SEA and State education organizations dedicate significant and senior staff resources to the leadership of their communications work as part of a broad engagement strategy (for example, the communications lead is on the leadership team). The engagement strategy includes core messages that link all of the agency's priority reforms and illustrate clearly how they work together to improve performance against priority goals. The engagement strategy includes communications as one of many forms of engagement; it is not "just" about communications. The engagement strategy is captured in a written plan that clearly differentiates the most critical stakeholders, is connected to other reform plans and drives ongoing work across the SEA and other State education organizations. The engagement strategy includes efforts to inform and maintain cordial relationships with opponents of priority goals and reforms. There is a wide and creative variety of mechanisms in use statewide to engage stakeholder groups and reinforce core messages in the appropriate context (for example, social media, key meetings/conferences, newsletters from the chief, professional learning convenings, one-on-one outreach, responding to stakeholder questions and concerns before misinformation can spread).

i. Build stakeholder support for priority goals and reforms *(continued)*

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
	SEA leaders have little sense of the current level of support for priority goals and reforms in most stakeholder groups.	SEA leaders have some anecdotal evidence of the strength of current stakeholder group support for priority goals and reforms, and they use this to improve their engagement efforts.	The SEA seeks feedback from stakeholder groups to better understand the success of its communications and other forms of engagement; it makes occasional mid-course adjustments based on this input.	The State collects quantitative and qualitative feedback to regularly assess the impact of the engagement strategy on stakeholder group support and adjust its work accordingly.	Local stakeholder groups are prominently featured in the engagement strategy, and local leaders play a significant role in carrying it out. Feedback is collected from key stakeholder groups through surveys, polls, focus groups, interviews and other creative mechanisms. SEA and State education organization leaders regularly examine this data for trends; they use it to continuously refine messages and engagement strategies. Leaders of State and local stakeholder groups regularly advocate on behalf of or work to support priority goals and reforms. Feedback data suggest that stakeholder support is high and growing across the board (for example, quantitative data show high levels of support; any given stakeholder could articulate the priority goals and reforms and why they are supportive).

ii. Build broad public support for priority goals and reforms

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Is there strong public support for priority goals and reforms? • Do SEA and State leaders demonstrate a commitment to making the case for the public value of priority goals and reforms? • Do SEA and State leaders identify, cultivate and coordinate "champions" for reform—including leaders of State education organizations, leaders in the field and leaders of other stakeholder groups—to build public confidence in its priority goals and reforms? • Do SEA and State leaders ensure that there is high visibility and understanding of priority goals and reforms? • Is this work driven by regular feedback on the larger public opinion and public value of priority goals and reforms?	SEA leadership has shown very little evidence of making a commitment to building the case for the public value of priority goals and reforms. The SEA has not devoted time, attention or resources to building public commitment to priority goals and reforms. The SEA has made no attempt to engage potential champions who could speak out in support of priority goals and reforms. The SEA has little or no sense of public sentiment and has no strong mechanism to gauge it.	SEA leadership is committed to making the case for the public value of priority goals and reforms, but has varying success in doing so. The SEA has developed strategies for building and maintaining public value of its priority goals and reforms. The SEA has attempted to engage champions to support priority goals and reforms. The SEA is beginning to use mechanisms that allow it to gauge public sentiment and to receive public input about priority goals, priority reforms and progress being made.	Making the case for the public value of priority goals and reforms is a high and consistent priority of SEA leaders and many other State leaders. The SEA coordinates with other State education organizations to implement a set of well-defined and comprehensive strategies for building the public value of priority goals and reforms. The SEA and other State education organizations have identified, engaged and coordinated champions to lead the implementation of their strategies for building public value of priority goals and reforms. The SEA and other State education organizations have well-established mechanisms that they use to gauge public sentiment and to receive public input; they use this information to shape reform work and the messaging about it.	SEA leaders, State leaders and a critical mass of local leaders share a common commitment to making the case for the public value of priority goals and reforms. Statewide strategies for building public value influence the tone of all State interactions with the public, so that there is a culture of building public value throughout the SEA and other State education organizations. There is an extensive and self-sustaining network of engaged and active champions that are fully integrated into these strategies as both co-authors and executors of them. State leaders actively listen to and shape the public conversation around priority goals and reforms; they have a consistent sense of public sentiment and are dynamically responsive to it.	SEA and other State leaders devote significant time and energy to issues of public value; their public statements show consistent support for priority goals and reforms. There is a written strategy for building public support for priority goals and reforms; everyone in the SEA and other State education organizations understands the strategy and their role in it. All pertinent communications of the SEA and other State education organizations are designed to build public support for priority goals and reforms. SEA leaders can name the circle of core reform champions; they present a united message on priority goals and reforms and they lead the effort to build public support independent of the SEA. There is a healthy public conversation about the progress of reform (for example, in social media, traditional media) in which State leaders and staff are active and effective participants (for example, they are present, shape opinions of others, have as much as or more airtime than opponents). There is evidence of independent support for the State's priority goals and reforms (for example, from editorial boards, thought leaders, stakeholder organizations or other similar venues). There is strong positive public feedback (for example, through surveys, focus groups, polling) on the State's priority goals and reforms; levels of support are much higher than anything that the SEA could achieve with its own resources.

2. System Capacity

Description of Category

Capacity is the resources, readiness and willingness of a system to achieve its priority goals. Resources include not just money, but also time, people, direction, systems and processes. SEAs can sharpen and define their roles in building capacity as they move from compliance to support, leveraging their available resources to better sustain priority reforms.

Sustainable reform, however, is not the sole responsibility of a single agency or jurisdiction, and priority reforms will not be sustained if they are treated like a special project, separate from the regular operations of the broader school system. Rather, to be sustainable, reform must permeate the State context and, ideally, be taken up by educators and the public as their own purpose. Therefore, this rubric examines system capacity both as a property inherent to the SEA and as a property of the broader State context—the sum of resources, readiness and willingness throughout the State to accomplish sustainable reform. Although SEAs do not have direct control over the extended capacity of the entire State, part of the work of developing sustainable reform is to leverage this broader capacity so that it is aligned with shared expectations for successful implementation.

Key Variables

In order to develop the capacity for sustainable reform on a statewide basis, SEAs should consider two variables:

A. **SEA Capacity.** SEA capacity is the resources, readiness and willingness dedicated to reach priority goals

through the implementation of priority reforms. SEAs are multipurpose organizations, and therefore do not commit 100% of their capacity to reform-related activities. Nevertheless, the position of reform related activities within the SEA organization and the allocation of resources, especially the development and management of valuable and limited human capital and the organizational culture surrounding it, are critical strategic considerations for SEAs as they organize their reform effort. The data, processes and systems SEAs use to conduct ongoing performance management of reform activities lead to strategic and tactical adjustments of SEA capacity. Although the distinction between the two categories of sustainable reform is somewhat artificial, this rubric understands capacity to be the static, present allocation of resources and the organizational structure that supports them, and it understands performance management as the dynamic action of using data to consider how to reallocate them over time.

B. **State Capacity.** SEAs are relatively small organizations with many limitations, and therefore are not the sole driving force to accomplish priority goals. The true capacity to create sustainable reform includes resources, readiness and willingness dedicated statewide, throughout the complex system of jurisdictions, agencies and support organizations at the State and local level. To develop sustainable reform, SEAs should extend their capacity through multiple means, including, but not limited to local partnerships, regional delivery systems and cross-State collaborations, to encourage the commitment of resources and support reform implementation throughout the State.

A. SEA Capacity

i. Align human capital decisions with priority goals and reforms					
Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Do all SEA staff members understand how their work supports the SEA's priority reforms and goals? • Does the SEA have well-designed recruitment and accountability structures that hold staff appropriately accountable for results?	Individual staff and team goals are not aligned to the SEA's priority goals or reforms. Recruiting at the agency has little or nothing to do with achieving the agency's priority goals or implementing its priority reforms. The SEA does not hold staff accountable for achieving the SEA's priority goals or implementing its priority reforms.	All staff in the SEA know how their individual goals align to the goals of their team but may not know how their goals align to the SEA's priority goals or reforms. Recruiting at the agency includes ability to achieve priority goals as one of several criteria for considering new candidates. The SEA holds high-level staff accountable for multiple criteria, including contributing to priority reforms and goals.	All staff in the SEA know how their individual and team goals align to priority goals; they also know how their work supports the SEA's priority reforms. Priority goals and reforms are the primary consideration for recruiting at all levels in the agency. The SEA holds all staff accountable for their contributions to implementing priority reforms and achieving priority goals.	All staff members in the SEA demonstrate a thorough understanding of how their individual work and goals contribute to the agency's priority reforms and goals. The SEA actively recruits top talent from inside and outside the education field to ensure that the agency always has the skills and expertise necessary to implement priority reforms and achieve priority goals. The SEA holds staff accountable for outcomes and rewards top talent for exemplary work that contributes to the implementation of priority reforms and achievement of priority goals.	Staff can articulate how their work contributes to priority reforms and goals. Decisions to recruit, retain, promote and dismiss staff are grounded in the priority goals. Human resources is service-oriented and helpful (for example, minimal red-tape to hire, promote or initiate transfers, clear criteria for hiring that are aligned to priority goals and reforms). Staff know what is expected of them and take initiative to move the work forward (for example, staff can appropriately manage up and are not overly dependent on managers for direction).

ii. Build a culture of continuous improvement toward priority goals

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Is there a culture of continuous improvement that extends to every staff member of the agency? • Is that culture anchored in a regular formative assessment of each individual's skills, strengths and areas of growth with respect to supporting goals? • Does that assessment drive robust professional learning throughout the agency?	Little or no formative assessment of staff skills occurs throughout the agency; where it does, it is at the initiative of individuals rather than as a result of organizational practice.	Some formative assessment competency exists and is practiced by managers in the agency, but it is still not an organization-wide practice.	There is a shared expectation in the agency that a primary responsibility of every manager is to provide high quality formative and summative assessments of their teams that drive professional learning and growth to help employees implement priority reforms and contribute to priority goals.	Every individual in the organization, including managers and their teams, excels in feedback and coaching, and the practice is pervasive. Feedback drives professional growth to develop the skills needed to implement priority reforms.	Formative assessment (for example, feedback meetings, reflections on progress) is a common and regular practice in the agency. High-quality protocols and/or agency-defined practices exist for employee reviews and (if applicable) formative feedback. Written employee reviews and/or formative assessments are of high quality. There is a catalog of professional learning offerings and process for deciding what to offer, to whom and when. Staff members provide feedback indicating that they feel a culture of continuous improvement exists, skill and competence of managers is high and formative and summative assessment processes are strong, etcetera. There is a high number and/or percent of highly talented mid and senior leaders that were "grown" from within the agency.
	The practice of summative assessment of staff is a formality or viewed as an unpleasant element of the agency's culture.	Managers understand and take seriously their roles in summative assessment; however, quality of this practice varies considerably.	All managers actively strive to improve their skills in providing both formative and summative feedback, and most managers are highly competent.		
	The SEA offers few, if any, professional learning opportunities; those that it does offer are disconnected from any understanding of the needs or growth opportunities of staff.	The SEA offers professional learning opportunities that are generally good, but these opportunities are not necessarily tailored to staff needs.	The SEA offers professional learning opportunities to staff on the basis of individually assessed growth and development needs; offerings agency-wide are dynamic and responsive to these shifting needs across the organization.	The SEA does not distinguish between "professional learning" time and other time; every moment is considered an opportunity for improvement, punctuated by formal training that is tailored to individual needs.	

iii. Align organizational structure with priority goals and reforms

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Does the organizational structure facilitate the implementation of priority reforms and the achievement of priority goals? • Does the SEA encourage collaboration across the organization, ensuring a focus on the priority goals and reforms rather than funding streams or individual programs? • Does the SEA focus on guidance and support to LEAs rather than the traditional compliance focus?	The SEA's organizational structure is not aligned with priority goals and reforms. Agency staff members generally work within their program areas and rarely communicate with other units or share information. Relationships and communication with LEAs is compliance-focused, may appear disjointed and does not represent shared ownership of student success.	The organizational structures charged with implementing priority reforms and/or achieving priority goals are identified, but these structures are not highly developed, aligned or appropriately staffed. Some agency staff work across units on special projects or have developed relationships across divisions that support collaborative implementation of priority reforms. LEAs view the SEA as mostly compliance oriented and not focused on priority goals or reforms.	The organizational structure of the SEA creates coherent organizational units that are focused on priority goals, priority reforms or both. The SEA intentionally and regularly brings together staff from across the agency to plan and coordinate implementation of priority reforms and achievement of priority goals. LEAs view the SEA as having established a balance between service-orientation and leadership and a focus on priority goals and reforms.	The entire SEA is organized in a way that is anchored in priority goals and/or reforms; while there is strong shared ownership for improving student outcomes, clear roles and lines of responsibility exist for reform implementation. The SEA has cohesive cross-unit teams, where necessary, that maintain focus on implementing priority reforms and/or achieving priority goals. LEAs and the SEA are true partners in reform; the SEA continuously examines ways in which it can improve the balance of service and leadership in the field.	Priority goals and/or reforms have dedicated units working on implementing them, though there may not be a one-to-one correspondence of units to reforms and goals. Cross-agency teams gather regularly to focus on priority goals and/or priority reforms; these teams write shared values aligned to goals and use them for making decisions to best serve districts and schools. Agency staff members differentiate support to meet needs and ask "why not" instead of "why" in serving districts; staff raise issues to leadership for quick resolution; robust formal and informal mechanisms exist to gather feedback and collaborate with districts and schools in advisory and decision-making capacities.

B. State Capacity

i. Extend capacity through partnerships

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Do the SEA's ongoing relationships with external stakeholder groups give it the necessary capacity to achieve priority goals and implement priority reforms? • Do SEA staff members have the necessary competency to build, maintain and work through these relationships to extend internal capacity? • Are the priority reforms of the SEA sufficiently aligned with those of the most critical partners, so that this type of relationship is possible and productive?	Given staffing and competing or pressing demands, the SEA considers engaging external stakeholder groups to assist with priority reforms a low priority. The SEA is reluctant to engage in partnership or is stymied in its attempts to form partnerships that expand its capacity. Potential partners, such as local foundations and advocacy groups, pursue reforms that run counter to the SEA's priority reforms.	The SEA attempts to engage external stakeholder groups to help implement priority reforms, but day-to-day demands take precedence. Much of this impetus comes from the leadership; most SEA staff implementing priority reforms do not know how to integrate this kind of engagement into their day-to-day work. The SEA understands where external stakeholder groups can be helpful in implementing priority reforms; some key partners are working in parallel with the SEA and are aligned in their activities.	The SEA has made external partnerships an agency-wide priority; external stakeholder groups actively contribute to the implementation of many priority reforms. Most SEA staff who work on priority reforms collaborate with other organizations to implement these reforms. The most critical partners work closely with the SEA, align with the SEA's priority reform agenda and bring resources to the table that the SEA can leverage to support that agenda.	Nearly all SEA action on priority reforms leverages one or more external partnerships. SEA staff who work on priority reforms work seamlessly with and through external stakeholder groups in their day-to-day work. The most critical partners act as true extensions of the priority reform efforts undertaken by the SEA and are institutionalized as such.	Public statements of priority from external stakeholder groups align with SEA priority reform agenda. There are formal agreements of partnership between SEA and external stakeholder groups (for example, contracts, Memoranda of Agreement/Memoranda of Understanding) or informal agreements that are well understood. Staff provides positive feedback on the role (if any) that external partnerships play in their day-to-day work. The mix of activities and functions in the SEA and in external stakeholder groups reflects a sensible division of labor (for example, SEA "outsourcing" non-critical functions and focusing on critical ones, or partnering with others to extend capacity on critical ones, etcetera).

ii. Extend capacity in the field

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Does the State ensure that the field—regional delivery systems, LEAs, schools and the leaders and educators in them—is empowered and equipped to deliver on the State's priority goals by implementing its priority reforms? • Is there a critical mass of leaders in the field aligned with State efforts to implement these priority reforms? • Are they equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to implement priority reforms?	The SEA provides support in the field that is too limited to make a significant impact. The SEA relies primarily on policy and/or compliance monitoring to make change in the field. SEA leaders in the field provide sporadic support at best.	The SEA provides ad hoc support to the field; SEA leaders are working to align the agency's support offerings to priority reforms and goals. SEA leadership is working to transform the agency into one whose primary orientation to the field is one of service, but this change has only occurred in pockets thus far. A growing cadre of leaders in the field support the State's priority goals and reforms.	The SEA sets a clear direction for support and capacity building in the field; efforts to support field leaders from multiple sources are aligned with the State's priority reforms and goals. The SEA has a prevailing culture of facilitating support to the field and empowering its leaders to fulfill their potential in carrying out priority reforms. The vast majority of leaders in the field, including the most critical, support the State's priority goals and reforms.	The field has a common understanding of the supports that are aligned with priority reforms; the vast majority of supports the field receives, whether from the SEA, each other, or external providers, are consistent and aligned with the State's priority reforms. The SEA facilitates the field as a professional learning community. The community serves to develop local capacity to implement priority reforms. Empowered leaders in the field make self-committed efforts to carry out priority reforms; reform has "taken on a life of its own" in which every field leader is an equal partner with the SEA in implementing and further innovating the State's priority reforms.	The entire field has access to high-quality support aligned to its priority reforms (for example, professional learning opportunities, convenings, networks of leaders, materials and resources for implementation). That support is offered at massive scale by whatever means are available in the State's context (for example, direct provision, facilitation of consensus, use of incentives, showcasing leading examples, licensing content and/or professional learning providers, partnerships with regional delivery systems or external stakeholder groups). Leaders in the field give consistently positive feedback about SEA and other supports and are demanding more and more of them (for example, available seats for professional learning opportunities, download counts, formal feedback submitted).

3. Performance Management

Description of Category

State agencies are taking on complex priority reforms such as new, more rigorous standards, equitable access to effective educators, and turning around low-performing schools. These reforms require more comprehensive oversight, planning and problem-solving than SEAs and LEAs might be used to. While many factors will contribute to short- and long-term success of reform, one powerful influence is the performance management system that SEAs and LEAs establish to ensure that the implementation of priority reforms is on track to meet priority goals.

Key Variables

Performance management is a systemic approach to assure quality and progress toward priority goals—and the priority reforms that lead to them—by setting clear expectations, monitoring progress against them and using this information for continuous improvement. A performance management system aligns organizational planning, processes and routines to establish and reinforce this focus on results. Performance management includes the following variables:

A. **Clarity of Outcomes and Theory of Action.** Establishing and widely communicating targets for achieving priority goals, strategies for implementing priority reforms and a clear theory of action that links them.

B. **Alignment of Resources.** Directing or redirecting resources (time, money, people) to priority reforms that produce results and establishing clear leadership for every aspect of the work.

C. **Collection and Use of Data.** Establishing and implementing routines and processes for collecting, analyzing and monitoring data, including data on performance and on implementation, to provide feedback and make mid-course corrections.

D. **Accountability for Results.** Making decisions to continue, improve or end practices based on data; implementing incentives tied to performance inside and outside the SEA; and closing the loop with stakeholder groups by engaging them about results.

Project management, which is used primarily to track tasks and deadlines of projects across the system, is an essential component of performance management. But it is different: Whereas project management focuses on the **inputs** (activities, tasks, etcetera) that lead to results, performance management focuses on the **outputs** they produce (for example, evidence of quality implementation) and the resulting **outcomes**.

Performance management consists of structures, processes and routines developed, implemented and managed by the SEA or LEA with the intent of improving progress to goals. Examples include easily understood data tracking mechanisms, consistent routines such as weekly or biweekly meetings focused entirely on examining outcomes or transparent and ongoing ways that the SEA gets feedback on implementation challenges from LEAs.

A. Clarity of Outcomes and Theory of Action

i. Set student outcome targets to achieve priority goals

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Has the SEA articulated its priority goals in terms of specific, measurable targets for student achievement? • Do the targets represent a significant improvement for students, and do they address equity between subgroups as well as absolute performance? • Are they aligned with similar outcomes being set at the local level? • Are the goals and outcomes well understood and shared by a wide range of stakeholder groups?	The SEA has not defined clear targets for its priority goals, and the targets they have defined are subject to multiple interpretations. If targets exist, they have little or no resonance outside the SEA—either in the field or with external stakeholder groups.	The SEA has defined some specific metrics to measure its priority goals, but may not have specific targets yet. The outcome measures are educated guesses but not necessarily grounded in rigorous analysis of data; some may be too unrealistic, too incremental, or too vague to know. District and school leaders are aware of the State outcomes, but most of them do not link these outcomes to their own targets. Understanding of and support for the goals vary among external stakeholder groups.	The SEA has translated its priority goals into student achievement targets that leave no room for error in definition. Data analysis and other evidence show that the targets are ambitious but achievable, both for students as a whole and for the most important subgroups in the State. Districts and schools have committed to equivalent local-level targets; together, these targets add up to the targets set by the SEA. Targets are understood and supported by the vast majority of local leaders and external stakeholder groups.	The field and the SEA share ownership of a comprehensive set of goals and targets for the State as a whole. Data analysis and other evidence show that the targets are ambitious but achievable, not just for the State as a whole but for each district and school. These targets are reinforced both by their overwhelming popular support and by all of the most important accountability mechanisms at the State and local level. Taken together, the goals and targets create a sense of urgency and momentum throughout the State to achieve them.	Goals and targets are identical across as many statewide entities as possible (for example, State board of education, governor's office, legislature). Each target has specific parameters (for example, a single measurable metric, baseline date and level, end date and level, interim targets for each intervening year). Each target is backed by rigorous data analysis (for example, benchmarking against historical performance, against other similar systems, against high and low performers within the system) and/or a needs analysis of disaggregated historical performance. There is a clear link between State-level targets and the most salient targets for districts and schools (for example, specified annual measurable objectives, other accountability system measures, targets in school improvement plans). Educators, external stakeholder groups and local leaders have clearly been engaged to support these goals (for example, they co-developed them, were part of a communications strategy around them, can name and defend them, etcetera).

ii. Establish a theory of action and strategies for implementing priority reforms

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Does the SEA have a clear and evidence-based theory of action for how implementing its priority reforms will lead to the achievement of its priority goals? • Has the SEA defined strategies for implementing priority reforms that are informed by this theory of action? • Do critical stakeholder groups understand and support the theory of action and strategies?	The SEA has poorly articulated the relationship between what it is doing and the priority goals that it is trying to achieve. The SEA has not defined any strategies; instead, it has lists of projects or activities that are not guided by any underlying approach or rationale.	The SEA has articulated a theory of action that uses assertions and some evidence to show its priority reforms will contribute to priority goals. The SEA has defined strategies for implementing priority reforms, but they are only superficially connected to the theory of action.	The SEA has defined a theory of action that uses evidence-based practices, research and/or logic to link its priority reforms to its priority goals. The SEA's theory of action informs the selection and implementation of a small number of prioritized strategies for carrying out priority reforms.	The SEA's theory of action is well-known and shared within the agency; staff throughout the organization uses it to guide their day-to-day work. The theory of action brings coherence to the SEA's priority reforms and the strategies for implementing them; it clearly shows how these strategies will work together interdependently to achieve priority goals. The SEA continuously tests and refines its theory of action using evidence that connects outcomes to the implementation of strategies.	The SEA has recorded its theory of action and strategies and made them available in a prominent place (for example, front page of website, promotional and/or other communications materials, social media). Staff can name the theory of action and use it to make decisions (for example, "How can I make sure that the program I run is implemented in a way that empowers teachers?"). The selection of strategies is justified by evidence that links them to the theory of action, rather than an appeal to current practice or history. SEA leadership demonstrates an understanding of the difference between ongoing agency work and strategies designed to change that work during a defined period of time. SEA uses its data and research capacity to test the impact of its reforms using outcome and other data, compare the results with alternatives and build a body of evidence for what works. Most internal and external stakeholder groups (for example, SEA leadership, mid-level leaders, LEA leaders, school leaders, third party groups, media mentions) can accurately name the SEA's theory of action and strategies.
	There is no common understanding across the State of what the SEA is doing or why.	Internal and external stakeholder groups understand the SEA's theory of action and strategies, though support may be uneven.	Internal and external stakeholder groups understand and support the SEA's theory of action and strategies.	Internal and external stakeholder groups are partners in advocating, testing and refining the theory of action.	

iii. Develop plan(s) that align strategies with priority goals

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Does the SEA have plan(s) that articulate its priority goals and reforms, theory of action and strategies? • Do the plan(s) show how the SEA will implement its strategies at scale? • Do the plan(s) show how implementing each strategy will contribute to the SEA's priority goals for reform? • Do the plan(s) drive the day-to-day work of those who will be responsible for implementing the strategies? • Do the strategies in the plan(s) impact the strategic work undertaken by LEAs and schools?	The SEA may have plan(s), but they do not present a coherent picture of what the SEA is trying to accomplish or how. The descriptions of strategies give little or no sense of the scale at which they will be implemented or how this will be achieved. The priority strategies have no clearly articulated connection to expected outputs leading to desired outcomes. If they exist, SEA plans bear little or no relationship to what people do in the building. Strategies implemented in the field are undertaken almost entirely and exclusively as a result of local initiative.	The SEA has plan(s) that identify priority goals, reforms and strategies, but may be vague about the connection between them. The plan(s) articulate strategies and give a sense of the hoped-for scale of implementation. The plan(s) articulate a general connection between strategies and desired outcomes, with some attempts to estimate impact. The SEA's plan(s) have substantial but uneven influence over the day-to-day work of the agency and its interactions with the field. Many LEAs and schools align their core practices to SEA priorities.	The SEA has plan(s) that coherently articulate and show the connection between its priority goals, priority reforms, theory of action and strategies. The plan(s) clearly show how each priority strategy will reach the field at the necessary scale to have a strong impact on outcomes for students. The plan(s) use evidence to estimate how the priority strategies, implemented together, will add up to significant impact on the State's priority goals. The SEA's plan(s) dominate its understanding of its core work and its interactions with the field. A critical mass of LEAs and schools adopt strategies that are aligned with the SEA's priorities.	The SEA has plan(s) that articulate its priority goals and reforms, theory of action and strategies so well that they serve as the basis for communicating and engaging stakeholder groups about the SEA's work. The plan(s) give detail on the scale of each individual strategy, but also show the interdependencies between strategies and how they will be addressed in implementation. The plan(s) use evidence to estimate how the priority strategies will build on and interact with one another to cause the State to achieve its priority goals. The plan(s) are living documents that form the basis for dialogue and partnership between the SEA, the field and stakeholder groups about effective implementation of priority reforms. A critical mass of LEAs and schools are active contributors to and participants in the SEA's strategies.	SEA plan(s) exist, and SEA leaders, staff and other key stakeholder groups often quote them. Plan(s) specify a defined, high-priority number of strategies; the plan(s) are aligned with any competing alternatives (for example, legislative mandate, State board strategic plan). Plan(s) use what evidence is available to make educated estimates of the impact of each strategy (for example, by combining projected impact and scale, by using research on similar strategies conducted elsewhere, by testing estimates against what benchmarks suggest are possible). SEA staff and others responsible for implementing plan(s) refer to them as the most significant guidance that they use in their work. The SEA has recently updated plan(s) (for example, within the last 3–6 months) to reflect current realities. LEA and school-level plans contain implicit or explicit references to SEA priority reforms and strategies; SEA encourages this (for example, by streamlining planning requirements to focus on priority strategies, creating a menu of options for LEAs and schools, aligning funding streams, providing guidance on developing their own theories of action and strategies).

B. Alignment of Resources (People, Time, Technology and Money)

3. Performance Management > B. Alignment of Resources (People, Time, Technology and Money)

i. Direct resources to priority reforms					
Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Does the SEA consistently align the vast majority of its resources—people, time, technology and money—to priority goals and priority reforms? • Does the SEA understand what resources it will need to sustain its priority reforms over time? • Does the SEA regularly act to ensure that its resources are aligned to these needs?	The SEA has little understanding of the resources it needs to continue implementing key reforms and has no plan to build that knowledge. The SEA has no reliable way to assess the alignment of current resource allocation to priority reforms.	The SEA is working to understand its resource needs for sustaining priority reforms. The SEA is also identifying all of the resources at its disposal and redirecting some of them towards implementing priority reforms.	The SEA has assessed the agency's resource needs for sustaining each of its priority reforms, as well as the landscape of current resources available to meet these needs. The SEA has developed and successfully implemented a plan to reallocate resources to meet these needs.	The SEA regularly reviews its resource needs and resources available. The SEA continuously adjusts the allocation of resources to meet immediate needs of priority reforms, all in the context of a longer-term plan for meeting these needs over time.	The SEA has a needs assessment document that clearly shows the resource needs for each priority reform over a long period (for example, 5 years). The SEA has catalogued all of its resources available (for example, Federal and State funding streams, FTEs, systems) along with a clear knowledge of how flexible/fungible each source is. The SEA has developed protocols for reviewing programs/activities in terms of their contribution to priority reforms, and uses these to determine alignment. SEA leadership demonstrates a willingness to end programs/activities that are less aligned to priority reforms in order to redirect resources to a better use. Staff are nimble in response to assignment shifts, and minimal time is lost during staff transitions. Leadership has a system for tracking and reallocating staff based on priority reform needs (for example, FTE is a standing agenda item at cabinet meetings, mid-level managers have an efficient process to request additional FTE, SEA human resources office works closely with content and administrative leadership to understand and support ongoing staffing needs). The SEA rigorously identifies institutional, policy and political barriers that hinder resource reallocation and have mitigation strategies to address those barriers.
	The SEA assesses or adjusts staffing assignments without considering priority reforms; staffing efforts include many competing considerations besides who is best for the job.	The SEA assesses and/or adjusts assignments of high-level staff in support of the SEA's priority reforms, but this may not be done thoroughly or in a timely manner.	The SEA assesses staffing needs and adjusts staffing assignments throughout the agency so that necessary staff capacity is allocated in support of the SEA's priority reforms and the changing needs associated with them.	The SEA matches staffing assignments to support priority reforms on an ongoing basis, with continuous assessment and readjustment as needs and circumstances change; staff are willing and able to continuously adjust their day-to-day work to contribute to these reforms.	

Reform Support Network

ii. Establish clear leadership of priority goals and reforms

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Has the SEA assigned clear and accountable leadership for each of its priority goals and reforms? • Do these leaders have a working relationship with the chief that facilitates their leadership? • Do these leaders marshal the necessary resources (people, time, technology and money) to carry out their responsibilities?	The SEA has not assigned clear roles and responsibilities with respect to its priority goals or reforms, creating confusion and bottlenecks in decision-making. Authority for final decisions is not reliable; decisions on implementing priority reforms are made ad hoc by the chief, various members of the leadership team and others in the agency. Leaders' use of resources is mostly dictated by the functions that exist within their organizational units.	The SEA has articulated roles and responsibilities for leaders in the agency, which are largely aligned with priority goals and reforms. The chief and her/his leadership team have established clear lines of decision-making. Leaders in the agency direct a substantial portion of their resources towards achieving those parts of the priority reform agenda for which they are responsible.	The SEA has assigned a single accountable leader for each of the SEA's priority goals and/or reforms. The chief relies on, empowers and supports each of these leaders to do what is necessary to carry out their responsibilities. Each leader uses all of their available resources to implement priority reforms and achieve priority goals.	In addition to their individual responsibility, leaders of the SEA's priority goals and/or reforms form a coherent team that takes collective responsibility for implementation. The chief relies on, empowers and supports this team to work collaboratively to achieve priority goals and implement priority reforms. Each leader collaborates with their colleagues to draw resources from throughout the organization to implement priority reforms and achieve priority goals.	SEA has organized its leadership around priority goals (one leader per goal), priority reforms/strategies (one leader per priority/strategy, with collective responsibility for goals), or both (one leader per goal, each working with a team of priority/strategy leaders). SEA leadership, agency staff and LEA leaders can name the accountable leader for each priority goal and/or reform. The chief has a support and accountability relationship with each leader that is anchored on the priority goal or reform for which they are responsible. Leaders are assigned so that the most (but inevitably not all) resources necessary to their work are within their lines of authority. There are protocols in place for communicating with the chief, having access to his/her time and getting decisions made. Agency staff provides positive feedback on the culture of collaboration in the agency.

C. Collection and Use of Data

i. Ensure quality data on performance

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Do the SEA, the field and the public have access to valid, frequent and useful data on performance against priority goals? • Are there clearly defined processes and systems for collecting, verifying, analyzing and reporting these data? • Does the SEA generate actionable insights in its own analysis of these data? • Do stakeholder groups trust in and use these data?	SEA leaders are not deliberate about prioritizing their data needs; they may take a "systems-first" approach to data and view it as an IT problem.	SEA leaders are identifying data needs that bear some relationship to priority goals.	Using their priority goals as an anchor, SEA leaders have prioritized a set of performance indicators to collect, verify, report and analyze.	The SEA's priority indicators of performance include both lagging and leading indicators drawn from the State, district, school, classroom and student level.	Those leading the SEA's priority goals and priority reforms take responsibility for defining data needs and collaborating with IT staff to meet them. The SEA has a data governance structure that includes stakeholder groups and makes decisions about data collection, analysis, reporting and reliability. The SEA has found a systems solution that includes and reconciles different State and local data sources (for example, through common data standards, linked or common systems). Data in systems include indicators normally only available at the local level (for example, attendance and behavior, courses and grades). Anybody can log on to the State's data system and have access to data on performance that are easy to understand and manipulate. Stakeholder groups widely anticipate State data releases. Access statistics suggest heavy and widespread use of data systems across the State. The SEA and/or partners routinely conduct reliable independent analyses of SEA data to inform research on new and established issues to share with the field.
	The SEA has disorganized and poorly defined systems and processes for data collection, verification, analysis and reporting; they are also burdensome for LEAs.	The SEA is beginning to improve the efficiency and minimize the burden of its systems and processes for data collection, verification, analysis and reporting, but may or may not link these systems to data needs.	The SEA works with LEAs to shape its systems and processes for data collection, verification, analysis and reporting around these prioritized indicators.	The SEA has built the necessary interoperability between its systems and those of LEAs in order to facilitate the collection, verification, analysis and reporting of these indicators.	
	Current systems provide data that are incomplete, invalid or unreliable; they are generally limited to results required by Federal or State law.	These systems make performance data available at least once a year, but they may or may not be user friendly.	These systems generate frequent (for example, monthly) and reliable data on these indicators; the data are available to the public in a format that is easily accessible and easy to use.	These systems generate near real-time data on these indicators; the data are available to the public in a format that builds user capacity to analyze and interpret the information.	
	SEA analysis of these data is haphazard, ad hoc and may bear little relationship to priority goals.	The SEA conducts occasional analysis of these data to identify basic patterns or trends in performance, but without necessarily disaggregating the data or connecting them to practice.	The SEA conducts regular analysis and engages in public discussion of the data to identify patterns of performance which can inform discussions on the effectiveness of current practices; the field is regularly engaged in this work.	The SEA's data analyses identify patterns of performance, generate hypotheses for further investigation and analysis and repeat the process until it has isolated the most persistent trends and patterns; the SEA works with the field to supplement its quantitative analysis of the data with qualitative analysis of potential root causes behind these patterns.	
	There is wide internal and external doubt as to the validity and reliability of these data.	Leaders within the SEA trust the quality of the data they receive, but those in the field have mixed perceptions about their validity and reliability.	Stakeholder groups throughout the State view the SEA's data as reliable and valid and view the SEA as a model of strong data use.	The data are fully trusted and heavily used in the SEA, in districts, in schools and by other stakeholder groups.	

Reform Support Network

ii. Ensure quality data on implementation

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Does the SEA know whether its strategies are faithfully carrying out priority reforms and impacting priority goals? • Does the SEA regularly collect feedback from the field on the quality and efficacy of implementation? • Does the SEA use this feedback to generate actionable learning? • Do LEAs and partners understand this feedback and its implications for their work?	SEA leaders do not take a deliberate approach to understanding whether their work has an impact on priority goals; any efforts to do this are limited to longer-term research. The SEA disperses any efforts to collect feedback on implementation throughout the agency; these efforts may overlap and conflict with each other, creating unnecessary burdens for the field. The SEA has limited ability to draw actionable conclusions from feedback data that may be unreliable or anecdotal. LEAs and partners are not widely aware of any feedback that does exist.	SEA leaders may pursue feedback on some key practices linked to priority reforms and have an interest in making these efforts more systemic. The SEA collects occasional feedback on the quality and efficacy of these strategies, but there are no formal systems and processes for doing so. The SEA is learning how to analyze this feedback and mine it for insights on implementation, but struggles just to report the raw information. When it produces this information, the SEA shares it with LEAs and partners, but understanding among them is mixed.	SEA leaders have defined a learning agenda consisting of focused questions about the quality and efficacy of its strategies to implement priority reforms and achieve priority goals. The SEA has developed systems and processes for regularly collecting feedback from the field to answer these questions; these systems generate frequent (for example, quarterly) data that the SEA makes available to staff and the field. The SEA analyzes these data to find insights about the efficacy and quality of implementation of its strategies to achieve priority goals, implications for future work and implications for adjusting the questions in the learning agenda. LEAs and partners trust the feedback from these systems and use it to improve their implementation efforts.	The SEA has integrated its learning agenda with its broader research and evaluation efforts, so that learning takes place on a spectrum of short-term to long-term feedback. The SEA's systems and processes collect this feedback regularly and systemically, so that much of it can be disaggregated by LEA and school; these systems generate near real-time data that can be easily connected with performance data. The SEA and most staff continuously analyze these data to identify patterns that have day-to-day implications for their work and learning agenda; the SEA also uses these data to draw long-term, rigorous conclusions about the efficacy of strategies. LEAs and partners access these systems to analyze their feedback data and draw their own conclusions for practice.	SEA leaders have identified questions for the learning agenda that range from inputs to outcomes (for example, Did implementation happen as planned? Is the field experiencing it positively? Is the field learning what is expected of them? Are they changing practice? Have students learned?). The SEA works with LEAs to develop protocols for collecting feedback from the field that utilizes a variety of feedback loops (for example, surveys, focus groups, interviews, site visits, reviews of artifacts of practice). The SEA develops and continuously refines a set of "standard" analyses of feedback that isolates strategies and estimates their impact on goals. SEA staff do the same in their specific areas of work. There is evidence that LEAs understand these data and analyses and find them useful for their own work. SEA leaders and staff use data on implementation to anchor all of their conversations about their work.

iii. Use data to review progress and make mid-course corrections

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Is the SEA's implementation of priority reforms driven by evidence? • Does the SEA have a set of routine formal and informal dialogues with the right accountable leaders about performance and its implications for their work? • Do the routines use data on performance and implementation quality to arrive at a shared view of current progress? • Do the routines encourage productive problem-solving, learning and collaboration? • Do the routines result in a clear commitment to next steps that move the work forward?	The SEA does not systemically use data to guide its decision making about the implementation of priority reforms. The SEA holds decision-making meetings and may make use of data when it is conveniently available, but there is disagreement about what story the data tell. There is hesitation to surface real challenges from the data because participants fear accountability for results. The SEA rarely uncovers clear next steps from these meetings; It makes real decisions about adjustments to practice, resource allocation, staffing and/or funding in other venues, which reflect power and politics rather than evidence.	The SEA has some routines and processes in place for using data to make decisions, but implementation is sporadic and roles may not be clear. SEA routines use performance and implementation data, but the data are often raw and uninterpreted. Participants spend a significant amount of time in routines trying to understand the patterns in the data, and have less time to engage in problem-solving and learning. These routines result in some decisions that address challenges identified in the data, but accountability may be unclear.	The SEA has established a system of routine conversations about performance between the chief and leaders in the SEA who are responsible for priority reforms and priority goals. SEA routines use analyses of performance and implementation data to paint a clear picture of progress. Participants use this picture as a starting point to dig into the most pressing problems and to learn from each other about how to address them. This problem-solving results in clear decisions about adjustments to practice, resource allocation, staffing and/or funding that build on strengths and address challenges; leaders commit to these decisions and are held accountable for them in future routines.	The SEA's system of routines extends to include critical local leaders at the regional and/or LEA level, and it drives similar practices throughout the units of the SEA, regional delivery systems and LEAs. SEA routines use clear, sharp and consistent analyses of performance and implementation data to bring participants to consensus about areas of strength and challenge. Participants rely on this common understanding to push each other's thinking about what might be possible, to have challenging conversations where necessary and to generate innovative solutions to identified challenges. This problem-solving results in clear decision-making based on evidence and builds strong, productive working relationships within the SEA and between the SEA, regional delivery systems and LEAs; through these relationships, people hold each other accountable for making decisions based on data.	The SEA calendar prioritizes the time of the chief and accountable leaders for routines. The SEA has a schedule of routines that facilitates broad and deep coverage of the SEA's priority goals and priority reforms (for example, rotating in-depth reviews of individual goals and priorities, regular comparative reviews of all goals and priorities, a balance of one-on-one and group conversations). The SEA has developed written protocols and processes for analyzing the relevant data, drawing preliminary conclusions, teeing up key facts and questions for routines and capturing next steps. "Macro" routines drive "micro" routines, as SEA staff apply similar protocols and processes to the management of their own work. The SEA creates written and verbal communication in routines with a direct, open and honest tone. The SEA creates a system of similar routines for its engagement with regional delivery systems and LEAs and connects it to planning and accountability (for example, with all in a small State or with a selected subset in a larger State). For most major decisions on practice, resource allocation, staffing and/or funding, SEA leaders can point to the evidence that justifies the decisions. The self-monitoring in these routines informs the SEA's external reporting on performance (for example, to the State Board, to the governor or legislature, to stakeholder groups, to the public).

D. Accountability for Results

3. Performance Management > D. Accountability for Results

i. Link internal accountability to results					
Questions to Consider	**Inadequate**	**Emerging**	**Strong**	**Exemplary**	**Look-Fors**
• Do data on performance and quality of implementation have real consequences for the work of the SEA? • Do they have consequences for units within the SEA? • Do they have consequences for individuals in the SEA?	Most of the SEA's practices exist for historical or political reasons; the SEA rarely uses data to adjust these practices.	The SEA is using data on performance and quality of implementation to inform its practices, but it still struggles to end practices that prove ineffective.	The SEA regularly makes mid-course corrections to its practices— adding, changing or ending them based on data on performance and quality of implementation.	The SEA continuously and rapidly updates its practices as data on their efficacy become available; the SEA works closely with LEAs to test, refine and continuously improve this body of work.	The SEA has processes for modifying strategies and practices to improve outcomes and also terminating practices when they consistently show poor results. There is evidence that strategies and practices have been discontinued based on performance and implementation data. The SEA has processes for making quick staffing, organization, funding and resource decisions based on data (for example, a project team structure for staffing, routines with financial and human resource officers). Information from performance reviews references data on performance and quality of implementation.
	The SEA's staffing, organization, funding and resource allocation change slowly over time, and/ or these changes are rarely driven by data, and/ or they change frequently, but based on personal impulse.	The SEA is making some key staffing, organization, funding and resource allocation changes in response to data on performance and quality of implementation.	The SEA adjusts its staffing, organization, funding and resource allocation in order to accommodate these changes to practices.	The SEA is a fluid entity that continuously and rapidly updates its staffing, organization, funding and resource allocation in response to these changes in practices.	
	The SEA's human capital management is almost entirely disconnected from data on performance or quality of implementation.	The SEA links data on performance and quality of implementation informally to human capital management.	The SEA links data on performance and quality of implementation to formal and informal human capital management of individuals.	The SEA considers data on performance and quality of implementation in all human capital decisions.	

ii. Link external accountability to results

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Does the SEA use data to hold LEAs and other partners accountable for performance? • Does the SEA set clear and specific performance expectations for LEAs and other partners?	The SEA does not translate State level priority goals into clear expectations for LEAs and other partners.	The SEA has set expectations for LEAs and other partners, but it does not make these expectations salient for LEAs or clearly connect them to priority goals.	The SEA has set clear and transparent expectations for LEAs and other partners that are linked to priority goals.	The SEA has worked with LEAs and other partners to set and agree to performance expectations that are linked to priority goals.	The SEA has negotiated and formalized performance expectations with LEAs and partners (for example, through performance compacts, improvement planning, expectations laid out in grant agreements). The SEA has a clear set of criteria and rules for differentiating its approach to LEAs and partners (for example, based on performance, implementation quality, current relationship, intent to cooperate, size, type). The SEA has a clear set of criteria and rules for how rewards and consequences are determined and applied; discretion plays a role but does not prevent the application of the most severe consequences where appropriate. LEAs and partners agree that the system is fair and that the rewards, consequences and supports equip and motivate them to improve performance.
• Does the SEA fairly assess LEA and partner performance against expectations, using data? • Does the SEA have a system of meaningful rewards in place for those LEAs that meet or exceed expectations?	The SEA uses data to assess LEA and partner performance, but it is not clear how the data relates back to LEA performance against expectations.	The SEA uses data to assess LEA and partner performance against these expectations, but its engagement with LEAs may not be driven by this assessment.	The SEA differentiates its approach to LEAs and other partners based on whether they have met these expectations; It prioritizes SEA resources and attention to LEAs that are struggling the most.	The SEA differentiates its approach to LEAs and other partners based on a variety of factors, including data on performance and quality of implementation; it adjusts its differentiation quickly as new data become available.	
• Does the SEA have a system of progressive consequences for LEAs and partners that perform below expectations?	The SEA limits its system of rewards and consequences to policy, without strong implementation.	The SEA has implemented some limited rewards for LEAs and partners that meet or exceed expectations.	The SEA has a well-regarded and well-understood system of rewards that showcase high performance and are meaningful to LEAs and other partners.	The SEA's system of rewards addresses absolute performance, progress and implementation quality; it spurs healthy competition between LEAs to improve.	
		The SEA has consequences available for low performance, but they are blunt instruments that are rarely used.	The SEA has a transparent and easy-to-understand system of interventions and consequences that increase in inverse proportion to the performance of LEAs and other partners.	The SEA has a system of interventions and consequences that is linked to high-quality supports rooted in implementation of the SEA's priority reforms; the most severe consequences are exercised whenever the data warrant it.	

iii. Engage stakeholders about results

Questions to Consider	Inadequate	Emerging	Strong	Exemplary	Look-Fors
• Do stakeholder groups and the public understand and support the implications of current performance for their work? • Does the SEA have a consistent and transparent message about current performance and its implications for the work of reform? • Does the SEA engage stakeholder groups and the public with this message? • Does the SEA hold itself accountable for receiving and implementing feedback from stakeholder groups and the public?	The SEA may release analyses of results, but the implications do not go much further than "good news" or "bad news" for the agency and State. The SEA makes few if any attempts to engage stakeholders about results.	The SEA regularly releases transparent and timely analyses of results and the implications for its own work. The SEA communicates with stakeholder groups and the public using these analyses as part of an effort to build support for its ongoing work. The SEA asks for feedback on its work from stakeholder groups and the public, but may not follow up.	The SEA regularly analyzes results and develops clear messages about their implications at the State and local level. The SEA employs a deliberate strategy to communicate with stakeholder groups and the public using these messages, including a reference to overall priority goals and a clear call to action. The SEA takes feedback from stakeholder groups and the public and regularly reports on how that feedback is changing its work.	The SEA continuously develops and refines its messages about results and implications as information becomes available on outcomes and quality of implementation. The SEA uses these messages to engage stakeholder groups and the public in a consistent and transparent dialogue about the current state of performance and implementation. In this dialogue, the SEA continuously commits to and reports on its use of feedback from stakeholder groups and the public to shape its work.	The SEA includes messages about results and implications in a prominent place (for example, website) and are balanced and rigorous (for example, "We must not tolerate this level of performance, so we must…" "This is a success that we must build on by…"). The development of SEA messages includes a scan of available market research, a review of best practices from other States, input from key audience focus groups and collaboration with the senior leadership of the SEA. The SEA has a written strategy for engaging stakeholders about results that differentiates messages to different stakeholder groups and uses multiple media, including social media; this strategy is part of a broader stakeholder engagement plan if it exists. Feedback from stakeholder groups and the public suggests that they: 1) understand State and (where applicable) local performance; 2) agree with the State's perspective on what must be done; 3) believe that their voices are being heard and reflected in SEA action; and 4) are able/willing to play their part in supporting the SEA's priority reforms.

Glossary of Terms

Terms Referring to SEA Priorities

SEAs use a wide range of terms to describe how they organize their priorities, often with different meanings. For the purposes of this rubric, we use the following terms and definitions to articulate an interconnected hierarchy of SEA priorities.

Priority goal: A commitment by the SEA to achieve an improved level of performance for a particular student outcome measure (for example, increase the number of students that are college and career ready, improve proficiency or graduation rates).

Target: The quantification of a priority goal that allows the SEA to track progress against it, including:
- A specific, quantitative metric;
- A start date and associated baseline on the metric;
- An end date; and
- A desired level of performance on the metric by the end date.

Priority reform: A body of work that an SEA is undertaking in order to achieve one or more of its priority goals (for example, implementing college- and career-ready standards (CCRS), ensuring quality data systems, implementing new educator evaluation systems).

Strategy: An activity (or set of activities) that an SEA is undertaking in order to implement a priority reform and contribute to achieving one or more priority goals. A strategy has a defined beginning and end; it ends when it has changed something about "business as usual" in the State (for example, teacher practice). A group of strategies will often make up a larger priority reform (for example, if the priority reform is implementing CCRS, and the priority goal is to ensure that more students are college and career ready, a strategy might be to provide professional development to teachers to teach the standards).

Feedback: Process(es) for gathering quantitative or qualitative data from the field and/or stakeholders that an SEA can use to track the implementation of a priority reform, a strategy, or both.

Theory of action: A brief statement that makes a causal connection between the SEA's priority goals, its priority reforms, and the strategies that comprise them. The theory of action justifies the SEA's selection of and focus on priority reforms and strategies by asserting, with as much evidence as possible, how their implementation will help the SEA to achieve its priority goals. A theory of action is often phrased as an if-then statement that describes the work the SEA will undertake and the expected outcomes that will result from those actions (for example, "If we ensure that every student has a highly effective teacher who is teaching to rigorous standards, then we will increase the number of students prepared for college and careers").

Plan: A document or set of documents (for example, strategic plans, delivery plans, project plans) that lay out the SEA's priority goals, priority reforms, strategies, and theory of action. At a minimum, a strong plan:
- Describes at least one priority goal and associated target(s), one priority reform and the strategies that comprise it;
- Clearly shows the connections between these elements through the theory of action; and
- Specifies how each strategy will be implemented at scale.

Other Terms

Data: Information—either quantitative or qualitative—that indicates progress toward the successful implementation of priority reforms and achievement of priority goals. Data are most often collected on the metrics that comprise targets and feedback on the quality of implementation.

Field: The people and entities to whom or through whom the SEA is delivering services and who are directly responsible for implementation on the ground (for example, regional delivery systems, local educational agencies, schools and the leaders and educators in them).

LEA: Local educational agency.

Partner: A person or group of people who have an investment in the project's goals. A partner brings something to the table—knowledge, skills, and/or resources—and stands to benefit from the success of the project.

SEA: State education agency.

State education organization: An organization that exercises formal or informal influence over the statewide implementation of priority reforms. This includes the SEA, policy-making bodies such as the State Board of Education, other State agencies (for example, Higher Education systems, early childhood departments, human services departments), and third-party advocacy and support groups.

Stakeholder or stakeholder group: A person or group of people that has an interest in the SEA's priority goals and/or reforms. Stakeholder groups include State education organizations, but also include non-organized groups of people (for example, parents as a whole, teachers as a whole), the field, and local organizations with influence over local implementation of priority reforms.

Stakeholder engagement: The creation by the SEA of opportunities for one or more stakeholders to participate in dialogue or action for the purpose of arriving at a shared understanding of a particular aspect of reform. This dialogue involves stakeholder(s) in making decisions about the reform effort, creating joint ownership and responsibility for the outcomes of reform and strengthening the relationships between the SEA and stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement can take many forms, the most basic being communication. Communication can be one-way (through print or other media) or two-way (through feedback and/or dialogue gathered through focus groups, social media or other media). SEAs can also provide opportunities for stakeholders to engage by recruiting them to participate in decision-making bodies, technical assistance and communication activities, or as "champions" charged with engaging other stakeholders to advance reforms.

State: A collective term for the State level of a system, including the SEA and other State education organizations, as well as the legislative and executive branches of government.

Reform Support Network