

State Support Team Network:

Improving Achievement in Low Performing Schools

February 2003

I. DRAFT REPORT

COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Division of State Services and Technical Assistance

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We also thank the following consultants who so graciously brought us their expertise: **Sofia Aburto**, Senior Research Associate, WestEd; **Susan Card**, Program Consultant, Center for Educational Services; **Janice Dole**, Associate Professor, University of Utah; **Linda Eberhart**, Maryland Teacher of the Year 2002; **Diego Gallegos**, Assistant Superintendent, Albuquerque Public Schools; **Matthew Hornbeck**, Senior Program Consultant, Education Quality Institute; **Ronald Houston**, Director for School Improvement, Delaware Department of Education; **Phyllis C. Hunter**, President, Phyllis C. Hunter Consulting, Inc.; **Elsie Cureton Leak**, Director, Division of School Improvement, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; **Phyllis McClure**, Independent Consultant; **Linda McCord**, Regional Title I School Support Coordinator, Region 2 Educational Service Center (ESC), Texas; **Jack McCoy**, Director, Instructional Support Services Division, New Mexico State Department of Education; **Basha Millhollen**, Senior Research Associate and Literacy Projects Director, WestEd; **Mark Moody**, Assistant State Superintendent for Planning, Results, and Information Management, Maryland State Department of Education; **Elizabeth Primas**, Change Facilitator, DC Public Schools; **Sara Nosanchuk**, Managing Director, School Funding Services, New American Schools;

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Linda McCord wrote this document under the direction of Burton Taylor and Julia Lara. We are indebted to Ms. McCord for the substantial efforts she has made to document the work of the SSTN.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the work of the *State Support Team Network* (SSTN), identifies outcomes of the work of the Network and provides recommendations of general applicability for action by state education agencies to improve systems of school support for low-performing schools and districts. The SSTN was created and administered by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) under Contract Number: ED-01-CO-0040 with the U.S. Department of Education.

The purpose of the Network is to provide states which are committed to strengthening their systems of school support with an important opportunity to access technical assistance to aid them in this endeavor. Major goals of the Network are to equip state staff with the skills and knowledge needed to develop effective structures and systems to provide high quality support to low performing schools and districts, to use data-based decision-making tools to identify school improvement needs and, based on the results of these analyses, to develop or adopt instructional practices and programs that improve student achievement. Particular attention was given to identifying and adopting researched-based instructional approaches in reading.

The Network was formed by sending an invitational letter to all chief state school officers describing its purpose, how it would operate and the types of representatives who should be included on a state team. The District of Columbia and six states responded positively to the invitation: Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, South Dakota, and West Virginia.

The major work of the Network was accomplished in a series of meetings. Initially, three meetings were planned, but that number was reduced to two due to financial constraints. During these meetings, expert consultants provided assistance to the seven teams in the following areas:

- Analyzing the current support system for low-performing schools and districts, including what kinds of support are provided, who provides it, how it is provided, how it is financed, what results have been achieved and what means may be employed to strengthen it;
- Devising processes that may be used to support teachers, principals, and district staff in using data to examine the root instructional issues influencing student achievement;
- Developing measures to provide schools technical assistance on research-based approaches to changing classroom instruction, specifically in reading instruction;
- Using a web-based tool for improving data-based decision making; and
- Reallocating fiscal resources to create more effective support systems.

Key recommendations for states improving their statewide support teams emerged from the work of the SSTN as follows.

State education agencies (SEAs) should:

1. Align assessments to clearly established standards that permeate the system of public education.
2. Ensure that assessment data are readily available to classroom teachers and assist teachers to understand how these data may be used to improve instruction.
3. Build support systems that facilitate ongoing, sustained assistance to low-performing schools and districts.
4. Extend improvement efforts across all departments or divisions of the state agency.
5. Focus on the goals and desired outcomes of statewide support efforts.

6. Join forces with external facilitators to strengthen their efforts to improve the statewide support system.
7. Ensure that those charged with school improvement are well grounded in the kinds of processes that effectuate instructional change.
8. Infuse into low performing schools research-based programs and professional development that improve reading instruction.
9. Create and implement a strategic, consolidated, all-inclusive plan focused on school improvement.

The report, which follows provides detailed information about the background and purpose of the SSTN, including its goals, the state teams which participated, the framework of the working conferences and an overview of the presentations. This report also describes the benefits the teams attribute to their participation in the State Support Team Network, and key findings and recommendations for states to improve their support systems for low-performing schools.

The Council of Chief State School Officers is pleased to announce that the U.S. Department of Education has recently awarded them an additional grant under which the work of the State Support Team Network will continue.

I. BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

In 1994, under the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965 as amended by the *Improving America's Schools Act*, all states receiving Title I funds were mandated to design and implement statewide assessments and systems of support. These systems of support had as their primary purpose assisting high-poverty schools in their efforts to improve the performance of all student populations in achieving the state's challenging content and performance standards. Although evidence exists indicating that some high poverty schools are progressing in their efforts to reach all students, data also suggests that the gains are minimal and that they are occurring at a rate detrimental to far too many students. These include, the intended beneficiaries of Title I and of other federal education programs — minorities, English language learners, students with disabilities, and migrant students.

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, states have a greater sense of urgency to develop and expand statewide assessment measures and to provide highly effective support to high-poverty, low-performing schools. At the same time, states are facing a greater degree of accountability for providing support to increased numbers of low-performing schools and districts.

In an effort to assist states in developing or strengthening their systems of support to turnaround low-performing Title I schools, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) launched the State Support Team Network (the SSTN). Through invitational letters sent to all chief state officers, CCSSO outlined the proposed work of the initiative, as well as the desired composition of the teams, including both state and local education officials (See *Appendix I: Invitational Letter*). The District of Columbia and six states responded positively. Those states are Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, South Dakota, and West Virginia. (A listing of team members is contained in Appendix II.)

As team participation was being solicited, CCSSO identified expert consultants who would provide assistance to the state teams through SSTN meetings. The primary goals of the SSTN were finalized to assist state teams in the following areas:

- Analyzing the current support system for low-performing schools and districts, including what kinds of support are provided, who provides it, how it is provided, how it is financed, what results have been achieved, and how it might be strengthened;
- Devising processes that may be used to support teachers, principals, and district staff in using data to examine the root instructional issues influencing student achievement;
- Developing measures to provide schools technical assistance on research-based approaches to changing classroom instruction, specifically in reading instruction;
- Using a web-based tool for improving data-based decision making; and
- Reallocating fiscal resources to help create more effective support systems.

Once teams were identified and consultants enlisted, CCSSO set out to identify the needs of each state through the use of a questionnaire provided to state team leaders. This questionnaire focused on collecting information on each state's existing support system for low-performing schools, its use of data to assist schools with improvement, and its assistance to schools to implement research-based reading practices. (See *Appendix III: Questionnaire for Support Team*

Initiative and Appendix IV: Summary of Challenges). Completed questionnaires were forwarded to all consultants to assist them in understanding each state's existing system and the challenges each faced.

Over the course of two planned working meetings, state team members, in collaboration with expert consultants, explored various designs of support systems and processes for facilitating the use of data. The SSTN participants also explored measures to assist schools in implementing research-based practices in reading and possibilities for reallocating resources for strengthening improvement efforts. Built into each of the SSTN meetings were presentations by experts, team consultation sessions with consultants, and team planning meetings. The structure of the meetings is described in more detail below.

Plenary and Concurrent Sessions. Expert consultants who have been actively engaged in supporting low performing schools shared practices and resources on what works best in providing assistance to identified schools. Teams members divided themselves among the different concurrent sessions to ensure that the team benefited from the perspectives of each workshop.

Consultation Sessions. Consultation sessions provided opportunities for state team members to meet with the experts and their colleagues to raise concerns, to identify barriers, and to engage in problem-solving discussions focused on the topics addressed. State teams were divided into groups of two or three states for each of the consultations. These sessions segued into the individual team meetings.

Individual Team Planning Meetings. These meetings provided an opportunity for team members to continue to talk about their specific systems, points made by experts, and points raised during the consultation sessions. These sessions also provided team members time to discuss the work they must undertake in their home states to improve their systems. At the discretion of the state team members, experts were invited to assist them in problem-solving and planning measures for improvement.

The remainder of this report documents the specific work of the SSTN to date including the following information:

- Summary of SSTN conference presentations
- Key findings and recommendations: Rethinking systems of support for low-performing schools
- Final Observations

II. SUMMARY OF SSTN CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

The following provides a summary of the presentations offered to state teams to enrich their statewide systems of support to low-performing schools and districts. This summary sets the context for the following section, *Key Findings and Recommendations: Rethinking Systems of Support*, which is an outgrowth of the work of the SSTN. (Detailed agendas for the two SSTN Working Conferences may be found in Appendices V and VI.)

The first working conference of the State Support Team Network was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, May 8-10, 2002. The opening day of the SSTN meeting was conjoined with the closing sessions of the High Poverty Schools Initiative's (HPSI) Conference *Implementing ESEA: States and Districts Sharing Best Practices*. Thus, the audience extended beyond SSTN teams to include participants attending the HPSI conference.

During this first SSTN conference, state teams participated in sessions regarding the implementation of support systems, using data to drive instructional improvements, and research-based reading approaches and programs. A brief description of these sessions follows:

A. *State and District Support to Low Performing Schools*

Expert consultants from SEAs, regional service centers, and local districts presented four concurrent sessions. They shared their experiences in designing and operating systems of support to low-performing schools with emphasis placed on issues of resources, staffing, appropriate supports, school choice, and supplemental services. Four presentations were made by five consultants well versed in school improvement efforts: Thomas Peterson, Associate Commissioner, Kentucky State Department of Education; Elsie Leak, Director, Division of School Improvement, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; Linda McCord, Regional Coordinator for Title I School Support, Education Service Center, Region 2, Texas; and Jack McCoy, Instructional Support Service Director, New Mexico State Department of Education with Diego Gallegos, Assistant Superintendent, Albuquerque Public Schools.

The key points on implementing successful support systems gathered from these four sessions include the following:

1. Successful support teams include personnel at the state education agency (SEA) charged with providing support to Title I schools, other SEA personnel across programs and divisions, staff from regional educational service agencies/centers/cooperatives, practitioners from the classroom and school administrative officers, staff from higher education institutions, successful retired educators, personnel from comprehensive technical assistance centers, and staff from regional education laboratories (Peterson, Leak, McCord).
2. To ensure consistent, sustained support to low-performing schools, support team members engage in a comprehensive professional development process. Topics of professional development include site-based decision making, facilitation skills, research-based instructional practices, development of school improvement plans that address identified needs, and teacher and administrator evaluation for effectiveness (Peterson, Leak, McCord).

3. Divisions within the SEA collaborate to design the state’s system of support, not just Title I staff (Kentucky and North Carolina), and collaborative efforts include service providers from the regional level, where available, and personnel from districts and schools (Texas).
4. Effective support systems have clearly defined structures for providing ongoing assistance to the schools they serve, including procedures such as: entering into collaborative efforts with schools, assisting schools in analyzing its data and developing a hierarchy of needs, linking those needs to effective research-based strategies and professional development, and observing and analyzing teaching and learning (Peterson, Leak, McCord).
5. Support teams have measures in place to evaluate the impact of their support efforts and the effectiveness of the support team members as facilitators of change (Leak and McCord)
6. Support teams strive to build the capacities of the district leadership, school leadership, and the school staff in sustaining their own continuous improvement efforts.
7. Effective support teams work in an atmosphere of trust with the schools and their communities to design collaboratively a plan of assistance that is tailored to a school’s specific needs (McCord).
8. State, regional, and district support teams provide their team members resources necessary to work with the schools in an ongoing effort, including incentive pay, travel expenses, materials and resources.
9. In some instances, the state’s support system is funded through multiple sources – federal and state funds appropriated by the state legislature. A coordinated single system of support extends beyond federal requirements and embraces state requirements (Peterson and Leak).
10. Support provided to low-performing schools is ongoing and sustained over extended periods of time – in some instance for periods up to three years (Peterson).

B. Using Data To Drive Instruction

In three concurrent sessions, experts focused on how data gathered at the state, district, school, and classroom levels can be used to help improve student achievement and to close the achievement gaps among subgroups of students. Presenters also focused on identifying areas of low performance and on measures to determine their root causes. These three presentations were offered by four experts: Sofia Aburto, Senior Research Associate, Northern California Assistance Center at West Ed; Diana Nunnaley, Project Director, TERC; Lani Seikaly, Project Director for the School Improvement in Maryland Website along with Mark Moody, Assistant Superintendent, Maryland State Department of Education.

For using data to impact instruction and lead schools in continuous improvement, experts offered these key points:

1. Data may be gathered from multiple sources for multiple uses: to align curriculum to standards, to gauge student progress toward attaining standards, to

rank schools in an accountability system, to design and implement intervention strategies for students, to gauge the effectiveness of a program, to identify the causes of poor academic performance, and to design improvement plans (Aburto).

2. Data linked to standards changes the focus from how well teachers teach to how well students learn what is taught. As such, data that is not linked to clearly defined standards is not useful for school improvement (Moody).
3. For students to achieve mastery of standards, teachers must understand the standards, know what good performance is, know how to monitor student performance, and know what to do if students are not progressing satisfactorily (Moody).
4. To improve instruction, data should be the catalyst for teacher discussions on student learning, conditions that facilitate high achievement, and teachers' beliefs about students' abilities (Nunnaley).
5. Schools must have systematic processes for gathering data and analyzing the data, for formulating learner-centered problems, for setting measurable student learning goals, for implementing action plans to address learner needs, and for monitoring student work (Nunnaley).
6. Posting assessment data to a statewide website is insufficient for bringing about changes in instruction. Teachers and instructional leaders must receive training on analyzing data to understand its direct connection to students learning the state's standards (Moody and Seikaly).
7. Teachers and principals need training in how to align curriculum to standards, how to assess mastery at the classroom level, and how to modify instruction based on classroom level assessments linked to the standards (Nunnaley, Moody and Seikaly).
8. Teachers and instructional leaders need to understand how students are assessed for each standard, what constitutes proficiency, and why gaps in achievement occur, including item analysis for subgroups of students and for individual students (Moody and Seikaly).
9. To assist Maryland teachers and instructional leaders, the State has included on its website an online course, *Using Data to Improve Student Achievement*, which helps educators to understand the state's standards and provides guidance for using classroom data to monitor individual student progress, and improve daily instruction (Seikaly).

C. *Research-Based Reading Programs and Practices: Screening for Quality and Implementing What Works*

During a plenary session, Phyllis Hunter, president of Phyllis C. Hunter Consulting, Inc. presented an overview of practices and conditions schools must address to ensure that children learn to read. Hunter also highlighted research-based reading programs. In subsequent concurrent sessions, three experts discussed scientifically based instructional

approaches to reading in the elementary grades. The three experts who facilitated these sessions included Basha Millhollen, Literacy Projects Director, WestEd; Janice Dole, Associate Professor of Education, University of Utah; and Elizabeth Primas, Change Facilitator, District of Columbia Public Schools.

To assist schools in implementing research-based practices for improving literacy, experts identified the following key points:

1. Schools must have knowledgeable, caring teachers in every classroom, and every teacher must assume the role of a reading teacher, especially at middle and high schools (Hunter).
2. Instructional approaches should reflect individual student's needs, including smaller, flexible, heterogeneous groups; individual tutoring; extended learning time; and integrated curriculum across all classrooms (Hunter).
3. Teachers must know and be able to provide explicit and systematic instruction in the five areas/dimensions of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Millhollen, Dole, and Primas).
4. Schools must evaluate reading programs with regard to how well these programs reflect reading research. Schools must also go beyond what the "in house" research program designers offer regarding the effectiveness of their programs to include research conducted by independent evaluators (Primas).
5. Teachers must use reading assessments regularly to screen, to diagnose, to monitor student progress, to determine student mastery, and to design intervention strategies (Millhollen).
6. Professional development should focus on helping teachers to understand the dimensions of reading, effective strategies to teach each dimension, assessment measures for diagnosing reading difficulties, and designing instruction based on the assessments (Millhollen and Dole).
7. Appropriate assessment measures for determining the needs of English language learners must be in place to address the needs of this rapidly growing population. (Millhollen).

CCSSO sponsored its second working conference in Washington, D.C., July 15-17, 2002. Building on the recommendations of SSTN team members from the first meeting held in New Mexico in May 2002, CCSSO and expert consultants offered sessions to address the recommendations. A summary of these sessions follows:

D. A Framework For Creating A Comprehensive System of School Support

In this session Ronald Houston, Director of School Improvement at the Delaware Department of Education, shared the basics of Delaware's statewide system of support as follows.

1. The school improvement process revolves around a philosophy based on data-driven decision making models, a needs based assessment system, and measurable objectives to implement programs.
2. Each local education agency (LEA) submits a consolidated application, which shows the SEA what the LEA will do to improve schools.
3. The SEA conducts a Consolidated Quality Review to assess the schools' improvement activities—programs being implemented and how well they are being implemented.
4. The SEA maintains a system of technical assistance and professional development through state assigned liaisons, each filling three responsibilities: assisting with the application, assisting the LEA with its review plan, and brokering services from SEA personnel as needs indicate to support local school improvement.

E. Creative Use of Funds To Serve Students in Low-Performing Schools

Phyllis McClure, an Independent Consultant, focused on sources of funds available to SEAs and LEAs in addition to Title I that can be used to provide support to low-performing schools. Her major observations were that:

1. Under NCLB, the majority of federal money available for school improvement is allocated to the districts, *not* to the SEAs.
2. Several federal fund sources might be utilized to support low-performing schools at the district level. These include Title I, Part A; Title I, Part F; Title II, Parts A & D; Title III; Title V, Part A, Subpart 3; and Title VI, Part A, Subpart 2, which allows the transfer of 50% or 30% of several federal funds to Title I, depending on the improvement status of the school.
3. With a large portion of the school improvement funds residing at the LEA level, state teams should consider, as part of the solution, becoming brokers of technical assistance, rather than providers of technical assistance. The SEA might become more of a manager overseeing a network of entities capable of providing support to increased numbers of low-performing schools with districts using their funds. The SEA would also exercise a strong leadership role by ensuring the delivery of high quality services by technical assistance providers, fidelity and compliance with NCLB; and cross-district exchanges of promising practices.

F. The Data-Based Decision Making Web Tool: A Tool for Using Data To Guide School Improvement

Jan Sheinker, Coordinator of Comprehensive Assessment Systems (CAS) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS), and John Ross, AEL Web Designer, presented an interactive session for SSTN members on a web-based tool. Support providers could use the first part of the tool to assist low-performing schools. The second part of the tool enables a technical assistance provider to continue to support and stay connected with a school without actually being on site. The website, supported by the U.S. Department of Education, will be piloted with the SSTN states.

During this session, SSTN teams participated in hands-on experiences with the web-based tool. The ultimate goal of the tool is to provide job-embedded assistance that is key in institutionalizing the practice of data-based decision making and improvement. Each of the areas included in the tool provide school staff and technical assistance providers “how to” strategies and resources they might utilize in their improvement efforts. The following six areas are available on the web tool:

- Establishing a school improvement team
- Monitoring progress and documenting success
- Developing a data-based plan
- Using data
- Gathering data to assess needs
- Developing an hypothesis

G. *Facilitating the Use of Data at the School Level To Improve Student Learning*

This session involved SSTN teams in a collaborative inquiry process that support teams may use to assist schools in analyzing their data to improve teaching and learning. The session was facilitated by Susan Card, Program Consultant, Center for Educational Services; Linda McCord, Regional Title I School Support Coordinator, Region 2 ESC, Texas; Mark Moody, Assistant Superintendent, Maryland State Department of Education; and Lani Seikaly, Project Director, School Improvement in Maryland Website.

This session elaborated on the seven-step process of collaborative inquiry summarized below. Throughout this session, Susan Card and her colleagues engaged teams in activities similar to those that school teams would use to apply data to improving instruction:

- Be committed to student learning, a clear vision, and standards
- Collect and analyze student learning and other data (Each state team had an opportunity to review data during this session– their own or data supplied)
- Formulate learner-centered problems and explore additional data as needed (State teams constructed a learner-centered problem in response to data analyzed)
- Set measurable student learning goals, referred to as SMART goals - **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elated to student learning, and **T**ime-bound (State teams constructed a sample SMART goal)
- Develop a learner-centered systemic action plan
- Take action
- Monitor results

As dialogue is the ‘engine’ that drives the collaborative inquiry process, Card clarified three phases that form the basis of data-driven dialogue.

- *Activating and Engaging* – This phase occurs before data is explored. Teams activate prior knowledge and make predictions to create readiness to talk about the data.
- *Exploring and Discovering* – This phase occurs when actual data is explored. Without linking to “because” statements, teams formulate fact-based statements from observation of the data (e.g., What important patterns exist? What patterns are

emerging? What is surprising, unexpected? What questions arise? How can we discover answers?)

- *Organizing and Integrating* – This phase occurs after reviewing data. Teams begin to formulate explanations (causation) with the understanding that more data may be needed to generate solutions (action) and guide implementation.

In addition to helping schools understand the collaborative inquiry process to use and understand data, experts recommended that state teams should provide learning opportunities for school staff to do the following:

- Disaggregate data
- Triangulate data
- Track cohort groups of students
- Study longitudinal data sets, and
- Build their capacities to understand the differences between inferences and data.

H. *Teaching That Works*

Linda Eberhart, Maryland's Teacher of the Year from Mount Royal Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland, shared the steps she and her colleagues under took to turn around their previously low performing school. Mount Royal, serving a predominately minority and low-income student body with high proportions of new and provisionally certified teachers, has been recognized as one of Maryland's highest performing schools, particularly in the area of mathematics. Eberhart outlined a number of measures used to transform this once low-achieving elementary school.

- The teachers worked together to collectively understand the state's standards.
- Teachers were actively involved in aligning the curriculum to the standards and ensuring that the aligned curriculum was consistently taught.
- Teachers created classroom materials to ensure that instruction directly aligned to the standards, rather than simply teaching from the textbook
- Teachers collaborated to individualize math instruction based upon specific students needs. Pre-assessments, diagnosis, individualized instruction, and reassessments were used to monitor student performance.
- The school extended learning opportunities for students: after school, before school, during school, and on Saturdays.
- The school incorporated looping, a scheduling strategy that enables students to remain with teachers beyond one year to strengthen student-teacher relationships.
- The school installed telephones in every classroom to enable teachers to stay in touch with students and parents.
- Teachers designed interdisciplinary units of study based on *real-world applications*, such as constructing miniature golf courses and applying geometry to building gingerbread houses.

- Teachers remained connected with their students via the Summer Pen Pal Program where, by mail, teachers sent assignments to their students, and the students sent completed assignments back to their teachers. Then, teachers scored the work, provided feedback and returned the graded lesson with a new lesson to the student.

At the close of her session, Eberhart identified four key principles that she attributes to Mount Royal's success:

- Believe all students can achieve at high levels;
- Know what to teach;
- Provide more teaching and planning time; and
- Change instruction, based on individualized instruction, repetition, and application.

I. Rethinking the Role of Assessment in Program Planning and Instructional Delivery

Basha Millhollen, Senior Research Associate for the Northern California Comprehensive Assistance Center (NCCAC) at WestEd, provided state teams information to guide their thinking on the use of assessments to improve reading instruction. Millhollen argues that to use assessments as a tool to improve student performance, educators need to discern the differences between state and district assessments *of* learning compared to classroom assessments *for* learning. Broad state and district assessments are used to assess the performance of schools, grade levels, and groups of students relative to meeting a standard. Classroom assessments for learning, however, are formative and used by teachers to drive instruction. Ultimately, it is ongoing, formative assessments in the classroom that are useful for improving student learning.

To plan effectively for reading instruction, teachers must use assessments that are valid and reliable as:

- Screening assessments that identify children who need additional instructional interventions and assist teachers in beginning to design appropriate interventions;
- Diagnostic assessments that determine what specific reading skills have or have not been mastered and to design specific instructional supports that address identified needs;
- Progress monitoring assessments that determine whether students are acquiring the skills being taught and to modify delivery based on the assessment
- Grade-level assessments that determine whether students are meeting or are predicted to meet expectations for reading proficiency on the state assessment (e.g., through benchmark assessments)

To administer meaningful reading assessments, Millhollen further suggests that schools:

- Schedule time to assess for each of the four assessments mentioned above;
- Train teachers to administer and interpret assessments;
- Guide teachers in using the information to plan instruction and interventions; and
- Schedule regular sessions for teachers to discuss student results.

J. *Using Scientifically Based Reading Research to Select Reading Programs, Strategies, and Materials*

Elizabeth Primas, a Change Facilitator with District of Columbia Public Schools, guided SSTN participants through the nine components of a research-based reading program. They are:

1. *An effective, research-based method and strategy.* The program includes innovative strategies and proven methods that have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics.
2. *A comprehensive program aligned with standards.* All areas of the program, including assessments, are aligned to standards.
3. *Professional development.* The program includes ongoing opportunities that enable school staff to implement the program and sustain it over time.
4. *Measurable goals and benchmarks.* The program has measurable goals for student learning linked to the state's content and performance standards. The program also ensures data collection over time to measure students' learning.
5. *Support within the school.* The entire school community supports the program, thus, enhancing the likelihood that the program will transform teaching and learning.
6. *Parental/Community involvement.* The program provides for meaningful involvement of parents and the community in planning the reform and its implementation.
7. *External technical support and assistance.* The program has technical and professional supports in place for everyone connected to the reform effort.
8. *Evaluation strategies.* The program has an evaluation plan for implementation and measures to gauge its impact on students' learning abilities to meet state standards.
9. *Coordination of resources.* The program has measures in place to coordinate all resources, including funding, to ensure its sustainability.

Primas added that schools seeking a research-based reading reform model must ensure that the model also includes the core areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Finally, Primas cautioned that schools must focus on what should be taught – the research-based components of reading – and advised that some highly touted programs do not address all of the components, nor are they based on scientific procedures for determining their effectiveness.

K. *Providing High Quality Professional Development in Reading*

Janice Dole, a reading expert and Associate Professor of Education at the University of Utah, focused on the principles of quality professional development plans that enable teachers to understand reading content theory and to link theory to instructional strategies which assist children in becoming fluent readers.

Dole outlined eight research-based guidelines for effective professional development. Beginning with questions to frame team members' thinking about what the SEA should do to assist schools with planning and delivering effective professional development, Dole actively engaged participants in discussing each guideline. Summaries of these guidelines follow:

1. *Staff development must focus on students and student performance.* Teaching teachers strategies is insufficient; strategies must be linked to learning theory so that teachers understand how a strategy influences students' learning.
2. *Teachers need to be actively involved in learning.* Strategies to directly involve teachers in learning include study groups, joint planning, and peer coaching.
3. *Professional development needs to be school-based.* In other words, teaching must come out of and feed back into teachers' daily lives in their classrooms. Coaching, mentoring, and teachers observing each other are ways to accomplish this objective.
4. *Teachers need to solve problems collaboratively.* Teaching can be a very isolated activity. Research shows that teaming, study groups, and other forms of collaboration reduce isolation and foster communities of learners.
5. *Professional development needs to be ongoing and supported.* This guideline is the most important one for changing instructional practice. Research shows that change in educational practice is the result of staff development with a three to five-year time frame. Teachers, like students, often require many repetitions of a strategy before they can effectively incorporate it into their repertoire.
6. *Teachers need theoretical understanding.* Teachers should learn the "why" as well as the "how-to." Without the link to understanding the theory behind the components of the professional development; teachers are unlikely to retain or use it.
7. *Professional development must be part of a comprehensive change process.* Without being imbedded in a clear system of reform that supports change and eliminates barriers, professional development is likely to be ineffective. Schools must not use "band-aids" to fix problems. Teachers must have time to learn, and the resources and opportunities for follow-up.
8. *Avoid fads.* Funds must be spent on research-based professional development efforts that relate directly to students learning the standards and the curriculum within a state. Avoid topics solely based on strategies, as there is little evidence to link these to students' mastery of content standards. Focus on academic content. Strategies alone may or may not result in students learning content.

III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: RETHINKING SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Recommendations from SSTN team leaders, observations from school improvement experts, information from participants' discussions and evaluations during the two SSTN meetings and state team actions attributed to the work of SSTN form the bases of the following findings and recommendations. These findings, recommendations, and examples or practical applications are presented to assist states in improving their systems of support to low-performing schools and districts:

1. ***SEAs should align statewide assessments to clearly established standards that permeate the system of public education.*** Using assessments that are aligned to clearly established standards that educators at all levels should know, will increase SEAs' capacities to provide clear guidance to low-performing schools. More importantly, SEAs will experience greater success in assisting classroom teachers – those charged with making informed decisions for teaching each child, with monitoring the progress of each child, and with modifying instruction to meet their needs. The purpose of assessments must be focused on improving instruction, not simply on “grading” schools. Statewide assessments can lead to improved instruction only when they are based on standards that all teachers understand.

A notable example of what can result from the alignment of assessments to standards and their appropriate use is one shared by Linda Eberhart, Maryland's 2002 Teacher of the Year. Ms. Eberhart and her colleagues at Mount Royal Elementary School in Baltimore turned their once low-performing elementary school into one that has recently received some of the highest marks on Maryland's statewide assessments. Mount Royal Elementary School serves a challenging student population that is 93% economically disadvantaged and 99% minority. The staff's success in turning around this high poverty school centers on the *teachers* taking steps to *understand* the state standards, to redesign the curriculum to *include* those standards in daily instruction, and to *assess regularly* each student's progress toward attaining the standards. This school's overall improvement efforts were, and continue to be, guided largely by data produced from the state's assessment system, which is based upon the state's clearly established standards.

2. ***SEAs should ensure that assessment data are readily available to classroom teachers and that measures are in place to help them understand how data can be used to improve instruction.*** For instruction to be improved, SEAs must ensure that the assessment results are reported for each student, school, and district in a user-friendly format that is readily available to school officials, teachers and parents. If teachers are to make data-driven decisions to improve instruction, they must not only be able to access data for their students, they must also know how content standards are assessed and what constitutes proficiency.

Lani Seikaly and Mark Moody, two SSTN consultants from Maryland, demonstrated how SEAs could build websites that support schools and classroom teachers to use data to drive instruction. Maryland has improved its statewide reporting website so that educators from all levels are able to make informed

decisions to improve teaching and learning. Schools and teachers may view the data in a variety of user-friendly visual formats to assist them in determining their schools' and their students' strengths and needs. Additionally, the SEA has made available to both teachers and students online sample assessments. Students may take sample assessments that teachers then score. Through this online system, teachers are provided feedback on the correct scoring for each item with an explanation of the score. And finally, the SEA has included online courses for educators at all levels to build their understanding of how this data may be used to improve instruction. In particular, one module guides teachers through the kinds of assessments and data collection that must occur in the classroom so that instruction is designed or modified to meet the needs of students.

3. ***SEAs should build support systems that facilitate ongoing, sustained assistance to low-performing schools and districts.*** The majority of states, even those that have well established accountability systems, will experience increased numbers of schools in need of improvement under the more stringent requirements of NCLB. Further illuminating the need for improved state support systems is research indicating that support efforts must be ongoing and sustained if low-performing schools are to become successful. States must have in place extensive support systems that include multiple technical assistance providers. Moreover, these technical assistance providers must understand school reform efforts and how to implement them effectively.

To build effective support systems, SEAs should partner with other technical assistance providers. Possible providers include regional education laboratories, comprehensive technical assistance centers, regional cooperatives, regional education agencies, and institutions of higher education, many of which are currently working with schools. Additionally, every state should draw on the resources of practitioners who have been successful in school-wide improvement efforts.

States such as Kentucky, North Carolina and Texas have used resources outside the SEA to build their support systems. In Kentucky, the Department of Education recruits educators, called Highly Skilled Educators (HSEs), through a rigorous application system. HSEs become employees of the state, and each is assigned to a low-performing school. Depending on the school's needs, HSEs may remain at the same school for a period of three years. Similarly, North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction recruits educators through an application process and those selected become employees of the state. These individuals are assigned to support teams, and each team is then assigned to a low-performing school where the team works for a year or more depending on the needs of the school. In both North Carolina and Kentucky, the state legislatures have supplemented federal funding with state funding to implement these systems of support.

Texas has implemented a model that draws on the expertise of consultants in the state's 20 regional education service centers (ESCs). The Texas Education Agency provides fiscal support and professional development to 20 coordinators housed at each of the 20 ESCs. With guidance defined in the ESC's application for funding, each of the ESC coordinators recruits practitioners to provide

support for low-performing schools, yet the ESC has discretion in the formal design of the regional support system. Support team members may include expert consultants from within the ESC, successful regional educators from the region's distinguished schools, retired educators, personnel from institutions of higher education, and others knowledgeable of school reform. Support members, who remain employees of their home institutions, volunteer their time on assigned teams that are formed according to the unique needs of each of the low-performing schools. In all three states, support team members undergo extensive professional development to build their capacities as change facilitators.

Discussions with members of the SSTN reveal that they are expanding their support teams to reflect the make-up of the model states. Specifically, Delaware is exploring the option to include in its statewide support system educators who have successfully reformed their schools. In West Virginia, where the Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) have recently come under the SEA's direction, the SEA has begun to formalize a plan through which the personnel from the RESAs will be largely instrumental in providing sustained support to low-performing schools within their service areas.

4. ***SEAs should extend improvement responsibilities across all divisions of the state agency.*** SEAs must be committed to intra-agency collaboration to build strong statewide support systems. Many of the supplemental federal and state programs include requirements to assist schools that are not performing well. Collaborative efforts of all divisions will enable the SEA to:
- Send out a consistent and comprehensive message regarding improvement efforts. Well integrated services, rather than services that are aligned to a single program, will be more efficient and effective.
 - Increase resources, both human and fiscal, to provide support to schools in need.
 - Provide integrated, coordinated services to schools, rather than duplicated services.
 - Utilize the expertise of multiple individuals toward achieving a common goal.
 - Model the premise of educational improvement that schools are asked to undertake – collaborative, coordinated efforts to improve achievement for all student populations.

The value of both inter- and intra-agency collaboration was evident in the SSTN. On multiple occasions the state teams, including representatives from various divisions of the SEA and districts, engaged in dialogue about how the state could best improve its support system. Participants reported that these collaborative sessions were highly valuable and productive. For example, West Virginia's team, which included federal programs and technology personnel, reported that the team's dialogues on assessments and the use of data resulted in the SEA's technology director offering specific ways her office could improve its system to support federal program units and ultimately the schools they serve. Also, the state team leader reported that West Virginia's team would provide training to staff from across the SEA and initiate dialogue within the department on improving the state's support system.

5. ***SEAs should focus on the goals and desired outcomes of their statewide support efforts and collaborate with those whom they serve.*** The process of improving the state’s system of support should be based on the responses to the following question: “What do teachers, principals, and other local education officials need to know and be able to do to improve teaching and learning?” Focusing on what changes need to occur at the school level to make a difference in student performance will guide the SEA in mapping out what it needs to do to assist low-performing schools. As SSTN consultant Lani Seikaly observed, the SEA should employ ‘backwards mapping’ to determine what it needs to do to improve its state support system. The SEA must first define what needs to happen at the school level and next, what needs to happen at the district level. The response to these questions should inform the design of the state’s system of support with the purpose of enhancing the capacity of districts and schools to improve instruction and learning. Detailed consultations with teachers, principals, and other local education officials are a necessary element of this process.

All state teams participating in the SSTN placed great value in the dialogues and planning sessions they had with school and district level personnel. They reported that these conversations yielded valuable information for guiding state efforts to improve support to low-performing schools. For example, a Delaware representative reported that while involved with school personnel in an interactive session designed to assist schools with data-based decision making, SEA staff realized that the capacities of district personnel to analyze longitudinal data was not at the level the SEA had originally thought. This realization resulted in further dialogue between state and district team members to plan the kinds of professional development the SEA needs to provide to ensure that districts and schools are able to use state data more effectively.

The West Virginia team leader stated that working collaboratively with school district officials has kept the SEA “grounded in the schools’ perspective”. These discussions provided guidance to SEA officials on actions they should undertake to improve support to low-performing schools. Arkansas’ team leader observed that the team meetings not only helped the state officials to understand the schools’ issues, but that the meetings also improved school district personnel’s understanding the SEA’s approach to supporting low-performing schools.

6. ***SEAs should use external facilitators to strengthen their statewide support systems.*** Enlisting the support of an external facilitator is a valued component of change efforts. Research supports this principle and forms the foundation for NCLB requirements that every states’ system of support for Title I schools utilize external technical assistance providers. Expert facilitators can help SEAs define the challenges they face in supporting low-performing schools and explore options to address these challenges.
- The merit of working with expert facilitators was evidenced by SSTN teams’ requests for experts to assist them during their planning meetings. In addition, state teams have sought continued assistance from the experts beyond the formal SSTN meetings. For example; Lani Seikaly and Mark Moody, experts in standards and assessments, were asked to join the DC

team to facilitate its discussion of how it might better align its assessments to its standards. Seikaly is continuing to work with the D.C. team on this issue.

- The Arkansas team requested support from Linda McCord, a Texas regional school support coordinator, to facilitate a planning meeting for all 16 directors of the state's regional cooperatives and SEA staff charged with implementing the state's Title I support system. The purpose of the session was to advise how the SEA might work with the regional cooperatives to increase their capacities to serve low-performing schools across the state.
- West Virginia's team has indicated that it will seek assistance from one of the SSTN data experts, Diana Nunnaley or Susan Card, to plan training for Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) personnel who will be assisting the SEA in supporting low-performing schools.

7. ***SEA, district and school level personnel charged with school improvement efforts should be well grounded in the kinds of processes that effectuate instructional change.*** Being able to disaggregate data and to identify trends are necessary but not sufficient skills, to bring about change in instruction. Many SSTN participants agreed that teachers and other school staff are skilled in understanding data. However, they are often unable to translate that understanding to actions to support appropriate changes in instruction. Further, some of those charged with improvement efforts for schools report that they do not know the processes necessary for making data drive improvement at the classroom level. To build capacities of personnel to implement effective systems of support, SEAs must involve their own staffs in professional development and encourage them to become a community of learners. One such professional growth opportunity was provided to SSTN team members, *Facilitating the Use of Data at the School Level To Improve Student Learning*. This session focused on improving team members' skills to facilitate the collaborative inquiry process that enables school staff to look at their data, determine the root causes of learning, and formulate instructional changes to improve student learning.

8. ***SEAs should enhance reading instruction in low performing schools through research-based programs and professional development.*** The SEA should add to its system of support measures to assist teachers in becoming 'reading teachers.' As research indicates, a considerable gap exists between the skills elementary teachers bring to the classroom and the skills they need to teach children to read. Thus, to support low-performing schools, SEAs should ensure, first, that their personnel understand what research says about effective reading instruction. Then, those responsible for designing and improving the statewide system of support should infuse these topics into their statewide support systems. School officials must be able to make the distinction between reading programs that focus on strategies and those that focus both on content and strategies. Strategies alone will not improve teachers' abilities to teach children to read.

SSTN members acknowledged that many of their low-performing schools continue to implement 'reading programs' which are not founded in research. Reading experts helped the state team members understand the core principles of reading instruction and the kinds of strategies teachers should use to promote student achievement in reading. The experts also described the kinds of

assessments teachers should utilize to gauge students' needs and to modify reading instruction appropriately. These experts further explained how schools might evaluate reading programs and what should be included in teacher professional development to ensure that teachers become competent reading instructors.

9. ***SEAs should create and implement a strategic, consolidated, all-inclusive plan focused on school improvement.*** The provision of a statewide support system for improving low-performing schools and districts must extend across all divisions of the state agency, and support systems must be deeply imbedded in the SEA's strategic plan. Although Title I requires the SEA to have a formal support system in place, supporting low-performing schools is not simply a Title I issue. It should encompass the entire education system. The education performance goals outlined in the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* must be deeply rooted in the goals of the SEA's strategic plan. As one SSTN team leader stated, the state's strategic plan must be one that "marries the goals of ESEA with the best of the goals that already exist in the state plan". It should contain a blueprint to provide schools with the best scientifically based research on reading, with sustained effective school supports, with assistance in using data and providing instruction linked to standards, and with clear guidance on research-based principles of effective professional development.

A summary of recommendations for future meetings is included at Appendix VII.

IV. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Information provided during debriefing sessions and evaluations, as well as information revealed through follow-up conversations with several team leaders, yielded additional insights into the benefits of the SSTN experience for state teams.

The following summary reflects a general consensus among most team members:

1. Participating in team planning meetings gave team members a highly effective vehicle to share information and to consider issues confronting both the states and the districts. These sessions enabled team members to address the implications and solutions to improving state systems of support while remaining cognizant of districts' needs.
2. Having opportunities to learn and gather ideas from other teams on similar issues was very timely and beneficial. In some instances, conversations with others validated the state team's thinking on how the SEA might proceed.
3. Working together with personnel across divisions in the SEA has promoted collaboration among divisions. In some instances, steps are being initiated to create a common interagency support system with both human and fiscal resources from state and federal programs coordinated and integrated.
4. Working with expert external facilitators in consultation sessions expanded the team's thinking on critical issues regarding the state's efforts to improve its support system.
5. Working with experts has increased the repertoire of resources team members may utilize as they continue to strengthen the support systems.
6. Exploring tools and documents has given state teams additional resources that members may use with their support teams or the schools they serve.
7. Participating in sessions as collaborative teams, with SEA personnel and district/school personnel, has increased understanding of the responsibilities each face in their efforts to support low-performing schools.
8. Participating in learning opportunities has guided the state's thinking in the professional development it needs to deliver on a broad basis to all districts and/or schools.
9. Working with other states team members has built collegial relationships among state personnel, increasing leaders' resources for exploring solutions to challenges they might encounter.

APPENDIX I: INVITATIONAL LETTER

December 21, 2001

Chief State School Officer

Title

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear Chief State School Officer,

I write to invite you to consider participating in a new Council network to help increase states' capacity to work with districts to improve academic performance in low-performing, Title I schools. This activity, which is funded by the U. S. Department of Education (USED), is an extension of the Council's longstanding *Initiative to Improve Achievement in High Poverty Schools*, the major work of the Resource Center on Educational Equity. The broad objective of this initiative is to improve outcomes for students in disadvantaged settings who have been historically ill-served by the nation's education system.

The network, known as the *State Support Team Initiative*, presents states which are committed to strengthening their systems of school support with an important opportunity to access high quality technical assistance to aid them in this endeavor. Particular attention will be given to Section 1117 of the newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, *School Support and Recognition*. The network will consist of a limited number of teams composed of state and local education officials and possibly others who will work together over a period of several months to develop or strengthen state systems of school support. (More information about the composition of the teams is provided below.)

The network will meet three times for two and one-half days per meeting commencing in Winter 2002 and ending in the Summer. Team members will be expected to participate in all of these meetings. The meetings will focus on the use of data to examine root instructional issues influencing student achievement and how instruction can be changed to improve achievement. With respect to instruction, we intend to concentrate on reading in grades K through three. Major goals of the network include:

- Equipping state and district staff with the skills and knowledge needed to use data-based decision-making tools to identify school improvement needs and, based on the results of these analyses, to develop or adopt instructional practices and programs that improve student achievement

- Identifying and adopting researched-based instructional approaches in reading

I invite you to assemble a quality team from your state to participate in the initiative. Each team should have a minimum of five members including:

- the coordinator or director of Federal Programs, Title I or the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program
- the official charged with producing school and/or district level reports based on state assessment and accountability data
- the official responsible for the state's system of school support
- at least two representatives from large urban districts who have major responsibilities for school improvement in low performing schools.

In addition, you may wish to include staff from regional assistance centers, parents, community representatives, and school officials and teachers including those who work with limited English proficient students.

Unfortunately, funding provided by USED does not enable us to pay for travel, lodging and related incidental expenses for team members. We estimate the cost of participating in the three meetings to be \$3,600 per person, but this amount may vary depending primarily on variations in the cost of airfares.

We expect to hold the first meeting in March 2002. Meeting topics will include:

- a review of well-developed state systems of support to low performing schools (including financing, staffing, type of supports, and results achieved)
- how to access information on practices and programs which have been proven to be most effective, specifically with respect to reading in the early grades
- an overview of various types of data and how to use them to identify areas in which improvements are needed and to develop improvement plans
- an introduction to a web-based decision-making tool to increase the capacity of teachers, principals and parents to use data in school improvement activities

A draft agenda is being developed and will be available in the early part of next year.

To commence network activities in March, we need to know no later than *January 31, 2002* whether you are interested in participating and are prepared to form a team as outlined above. To be considered, we need to have a letter from you naming your team members and indicating their commitment to participate in all three meetings. Please use the attached form to identify your team.

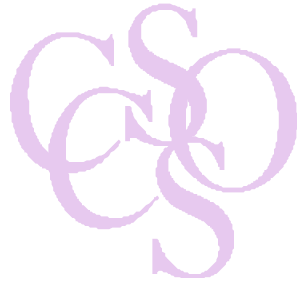
We recognize that you may have questions about the network which you or your staff may want to discuss with us before you make a decision whether you wish to participate in it. Please feel free to contact Julia Lara, Acting Director of the Resource Center on Educational Equity or Burton Taylor, Senior Consultant in the Resource Center. Ms. Lara may be reached at julial@ccsso.org or 202-336-7042. And Mr. Taylor reached at burtont@ccsso.org or (202) 336-7043. Of course, please feel free to contact me as well.

We look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, please accept our best wishes for a joyous holiday season and a healthy new year.

Sincerely,

G. Thomas Houlihan
Executive Director

Cc. State Title I Director
State CSRD Coordinator
Director of Federal Programs



State Support Team Network: Improving Achievement in Low Performing Schools

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**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR
STATE SUPPORT TEAM INITIATIVE**

State: _____

Date: _____

Note: If the specific numbered questions do not provide an adequate framework to describe your state's system or programs, feel free to modify them or provide additional information. Also, you may respond by referring to existing documents where appropriate. We believe that this may be particularly applicable to section I, School Support System. In addition, please refer to the section beginning on page 10 of *No Child Left Behind: A Description of State Responsibilities* for a list of state responsibilities to support districts and schools in need of improvement.

I. School Support System:

A. Describe the current system of support to low performing local education agencies and schools:

- 1. Are support teams used? If so, how are team members recruited, trained and compensated? What is the composition of these teams?**
- 2. What are the roles of state and local educators in the school improvement process?**
- 3. Do distinguished educators participate in the support system? If so, how? How long do they serve and how are they compensated? How much of their time do they devote to this function?**
- 4. Are there any other methods or resources used to provide support? If so, describe them.**
- 5. What types of support are provided?**
- 6. What are the sources and amounts of funds devoted to the support system?**

B. Please identify any web sites or other sources of information which explain the support system.

C. What issues do you want to focus on to improve the support system in your state?

II. Use of Data for School Improvement

A. Describe the current data system:

1. What data elements are used to identify low performing schools?
2. What data elements are used to improve student achievement in these schools?
3. Who collects these data? State Districts
4. What data are provided by the state to districts?
5. Which data elements identified above are required to be collected by the state?
6. Are data disaggregated? If yes, by what groups? (Check all that apply.)

Economically disadvantaged

Race & ethnicity

Students with disabilities

Limited English proficient students

Gender

Migrant
students

Other (please specify)

7. What tools does the state provide to analyze these data?
8. What is the state's role in analyzing these data?

9. What is the district's role in analyzing these data?

10. For what specific purposes are the data analyzed?

11. What kinds of actions are taken as a result of these analyses?

12. Does the state publicly report data? If so, what data is reported and how is it disseminated?

B. Please identify any web sites or other sources of information which pertain to the questions listed above.

C. What issues do you want to focus on to improve the use of data to identify and improve educational achievement in low performing schools?

III. Reading Instruction in the Elementary Grades

A. Describe the current system to improve reading achievement:

1. What role does the state play in improving reading achievement in low performing elementary schools in general?

2. What role does the state play in improving reading achievement for English language learners in low performing elementary schools?

3. Describe briefly any approaches to reading instruction that the state requires or advocates.

4. Identify any specific instructional programs that the state requires or advocates.

5. What criteria were used to select these approaches and programs?

B. Please identify any web sites or other sources of information which pertain to the questions listed above.

C. What issues do you want to focus on to improve reading achievement in low performing elementary schools?

APPENDIX IV: SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES STATES IDENTIFIED

In preparation for the SSTN working conferences, state team leaders were asked to identify the issues each faces in providing effective statewide systems of support, including the organization and operation of the system, using data for school improvement, and improving reading instruction in the elementary grades. Challenges identified include:

Statewide Systems of Support

1. Expanding support teams to provide services to an ever-increasing number of schools that are identified for improvement
2. Building the capacity of state department staff, support team members and technical assistance providers to ensure the delivery of effective, ongoing and sustained support to low-performing schools
3. Coordinating and integrating the work of state education agency (SEA) staff across divisions and categorical programs to blend the resources of each and to capitalize on the expertise within each division for supporting needy schools
4. Building the capacities of district and school leadership to support continuous improvement efforts
5. Evaluating the effectiveness of support providers to help ensure that the assistance they give increases the schools' capabilities to sustain improvement efforts.

Using Data to Drive Instruction

1. Improving the capacities of LEA and school staff to use data consistently and effectively to improve teaching and learning
2. Developing processes that assist schools in their use of the state assessment data provided through a state's web site
3. Assisting schools to understand the calculations of *Adequate Yearly Progress* and using this data to improve instruction for all student populations
4. Building the capacities of support team members to assist schools to use data effectively for planning instruction
5. Building schools' capacities to use data effectively for program evaluation.

Improving Reading Instruction

1. Integrating and coordinating Title I school improvement efforts with Reading First and state reading initiatives
2. Providing best practices training in reading instruction to SEA personnel and school support team members charged with school improvement to ensure consistency in school improvement efforts and an understanding of the relationship between school reform and reading achievement
3. Utilizing assessments to recognize students' deficiencies in reading early so that intervention strategies become a part of school reform efforts
4. Using assessment data effectively to implement scientifically-based research approaches to reading instruction for all students including early childhood and secondary students for whom appropriate strategies and practices are unclear
5. Designing and using audit tools to assess the quality of reading instruction, including the use of time, and the effectiveness of teachers and the professional development provided to instructional staff and school leadership

The Council of Chief State School Officers
Division of States Services and Technical Assistance

State Support Team Network: Improving Achievement in Low Performing Schools

Albuquerque, New Mexico

MAY 8-10, 2002

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2002

Note: On this day the State Support Team Network meeting will be held jointly with the Council of Chief State School Officers= High Poverty Schools Initiative conference on *Implementing ESEA: States and Districts Sharing Best Practices*. We are conducting these joint sessions on a one-time basis because it will provide SSTN teams with a foundation for topics we will explore in depth during our three meetings.

| | | |
|--------------------|--|-------------|
| 7:00 am - 5:00 pm | REGISTRATION | Foyer |
| 7:30 am - 8:45 am | CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST and INTRODUCTION Julia Lara <i>Deputy Executive Director, State Services and Technical Assistance Council of Chief State School Officers</i> | Sandia |
| 8:45 am – 9:00 am | OVERVIEW OF THE DAY (BOTH GROUPS) Julia Lara <i>Deputy Executive Director, State Services and Technical Assistance Council of Chief State School Officers</i> | Salon E & F |
| 9:00 am - 10:30 am | CONCURRENT SESSIONS: STATE AND DISTRICT SUPPORT TO LOW PERFORMING SCHOOLS (Team members should divide themselves so members of each team will be represented at each session.) | |

These sessions will focus on how particular states have designed and are operating systems of support to low-performing schools. Presenters will address the issues of resources, staffing, and appropriate supports. Several state and district presenters will describe in detail their systems of support to low performing schools.

| | | |
|--|---|-------------|
| Session I. | Thomas Peterson <i>Associate Commissioner</i> <i>Kentucky State Department of Education</i> | Pecos |
| Session II. | Elsie Leak <i>Director, Division of School Improvement</i> <i>North Carolina Department of Public Instruction</i> | Carlsbad |
| Session III. | Linda McCord <i>Regional Title I School Support Coordinator</i> <i>Education Service Center, Region II, Texas</i> | Salon A & B |
| Session IV. | Jack McCoy <i>Instructional Support Services Director</i> <i>New Mexico State Department of Education</i> | Salon I & J |
| | Diego Gallegos <i>Assistant Superintendent</i> <i>Albuquerque Public Schools</i> | |
| 10:30 am - 10:45 am | BREAK | Foyer |
| 10:45 am - 12:00 pm | CONCURRENT SESSIONS: USING DATA TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENT (Team members should divide themselves so members of each team will be represented at each session.) | |
| <p>These sessions will focus on data gathered at the state, district, school, and classroom levels and the ways it can be used as a lever to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. The sessions will focus on identifying not only areas of low performance but also on determining the root causes of low performance.</p> | | |
| Session I. | Sofia Aburto <i>Senior Research Associate, WestEd</i> | Pecos |
| Session II. | Diana Nunnaley <i>Project Director, TERC</i> | Salon I & J |
| Session III. | Lani Seikaly <i>Project Director</i> <i>School Improvement in Maryland Website</i> | Salon A & B |
| | Mark Moody <i>Assistant Superintendent</i> <i>Maryland State Department of Education</i> | |
| 12:15 pm - 1:30 pm | LUNCH | Salon E & F |
| | G. Thomas Houlihan <i>Executive Director</i> <i>Council of Chief State School Officers</i> | |

1:45 pm - 3:15 pm **RESEARCH-BASED READING
PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES:
SCREENING FOR QUALITY AND
IMPLEMENTING WHAT WORKS** Salon E & F

The No Child Left Behind Act requires state and local education agencies to establish reading programs and support the adoption of comprehensive school reform programs based on scientifically-based research. This session will focus on how states and districts can work with schools to identify and implement research-based programs. Important issues include how to collect evidence of program and practice effectiveness, screen programs for quality, organize and synthesize information on best practices, and present high quality choices which meet district and state needs and help them to make informed decisions about school improvement.

Phyllis Hunter, Independent Consultant
Phyllis C. Hunter Consulting, Inc.

3:15 pm B 3:30 pm **CLOSING REMARKS FOR HPSI GROUP** Salon E & F

Julia Lara

3:30 pm - 3:45 pm **BREAK**

3:45 pm - 5:45 pm **CONSULTATIONS ON SYSTEMS
OF SCHOOL SUPPORT**
(Please see section 4 in binder for instructions, room assignments and guidelines.)

State teams meet in groups with a consultant in the organization and operation of state systems of school support. Each state team will have an opportunity to present issues for the development and improvement of its system and receive consultation from the expert and colleagues from other state teams.

6:30 pm - 7:30 pm **RECEPTION (Cash Bar)** Pecos

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2002

7:00 am - 5:00 pm **REGISTRATION** Foyer

7:30 am - 8:30 am **CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST** Salon E

8:30 am - 8:45 am

OVERVIEW OF THE DAY

Burton Taylor
Senior Consultant
Council of Chief State School Officers

8:45 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.

**CONSULTATIONS ON
DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING**

Salon E

(Please see section 4 in binder for instructions, room assignments and guidelines.)

State teams meet in groups with a consultant to discuss the data-based decision-making tools and processes on which they were briefed, and to receive consultation from the expert and colleagues from other state teams on how they can improve their use of data to improve student performance.

10:45 am - 11:00 am

BREAK

Foyer

11:00 am - 12:30 pm

INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEETINGS

(Please see section 5 in binder for instructions, room assignments and guidelines.)

State teams meet individually to discuss how they may want to modify or develop their system of school support. In addition, they may consider which data-based decision-making tools and processes are most appropriate for them and how they may want to modify current policies and practices for the collection, analysis and use of data.

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm

LUNCH

Salon E

1:45 pm B 3:30 pm

**CONCURRENT SESSIONS:
INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES IN READING**

(Teams members should divide themselves so members of each team will be represented in each session.)

Several concurrent sessions in which specific scientifically-based instructional approaches to reading in the elementary grades are discussed in detail.

Session I. Basha Millhollen Carlsbad
Literacy Projects Director, WestEd

Session II. Janice Dole Acoma
Associate Professor of Education, University of Utah

Session III. Elizabeth Primas Taos
Change Facilitator, District of Columbia Public Schools

3:30 pm - 3:45 pm

BREAK

Foyer

3:45 pm - 5:45 pm

**CONSULTATIONS ON INSTRUCTIONAL
APPROACHES IN READING**

(Please see section 4 in binder for instructions, room assignments and guidelines.)

State teams meet in groups with a consultant to discuss the instructional approaches to reading on which they were briefed and receive consultation from the expert and colleagues from other state teams on how they can improve reading instruction in low-performing schools.

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

FRIDAY, MAY 10, 2002

7:30 am - 8:30 am

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

Salon F

8:30 am - 8:45 am

OVERVIEW OF THE DAY

Salon F

Burton Taylor

8:45 am - 10:15 am

INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEETINGS

(Please see section 5 of binder for instructions, room assignments and guidelines.)

State teams meet individually to discuss how they may want to modify strategies for reading instruction in low performing schools. In addition, they will discuss their reactions to the meeting and develop recommendations for interim activities, and the approach and content of the next meetings.

10:15 am - 10:30 am

BREAK

Foyer

10:30 am - Noon

**DISCUSSION OF THE NEXT
MEETING AND INTERIM ACTIVITIES**

Salon F

Julia Lara

Each team leader provides a report of the team=s assessment of the conference and possible interim activities. In addition, the entire group discusses the approach to and agenda for the next meetings.

ADJOURN

The Council of Chief State School Officers
Division of States Services and Technical Assistance

State Support Team Network: Improving Achievement in Low Performing Schools

**Washington, DC
July 15-17, 2002**

| |
|------------------------------|
| MONDAY, JULY 15, 2002 |
|------------------------------|

7:00 am - 5:00 pm

REGISTRATION

7:30 am - 8:30 am

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

8:30 am - 8:45 am

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW OF THE DAY

Julia Lara
*Deputy Executive Director, State Services and Technical Assistance
Council of Chief State School Officers*

8:45 am - 9:15 am

A FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF SCHOOL SUPPORT

*Ronald Houston, Director, School Improvement
Delaware Department of Education*

An overview of the necessary elements of state systems of school support, the relationship of those requirements to state accountability systems and some preliminary ideas for developing an effective comprehensive system of support for districts and schools.

9:15 am - 10:00 am

CREATIVE USE OF FUNDS TO SERVE STUDENTS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Phyllis McClure, Independent Consultant

A review of the various sources of Federal funds available to support low-performing high poverty schools and how they can be used most effectively.

10:00 am – 10:15 am

BREAK

10:15 am - 12:00 pm

CONSULTATIONS ON CREATIVE USE OF FUNDS TO SERVE STUDENTS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

(Please see section IV in binder for room assignments and guidelines.)

State teams work in small groups with expert consultants to explore how they can reallocate available federal financial resources in their states to better serve students in low-performing schools.

Phyllis McClure, Independent Consultant
Matthew Hornbeck, Independent Consultant
Sara Nosanchuk, Director, School Funding Services
New American Schools

SARAH TRUELSCH, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

New American Schools

12:00 pm - 1:00 p.m.

LUNCH

1:15 pm - 2: 45 pm

INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEETINGS

(Please see section V in binder for room assignments and guidelines.)

2:45 pm - 3:00 pm

BREAK

3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

THE DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING WEB TOOL: A TOOL FOR USING DATA TO GUIDE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

(Please see section VI in binder)

- I. *JAN SHEINKER, CAS SCASS COORDINATOR*
- II. *JOHN ROSS, AEL, WEB DESIGNER*
- III. *KATHY ST. CLAIR, NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION*

State Teams will participate in training on the Data-Based Decision Making Web Tool which is intended to supplement the work of school support teams and other technical assistance providers to advance school improvement.

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

TUESDAY, JULY 16, 2002

- 7:00 am - 5:00 pm **REGISTRATION**
- 7:30 am - 8:30 am **CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**
- 8:30 am - 8:45 am **OVERVIEW OF THE DAY**

*Burton Taylor, Senior Consultant
Council of Chief State School Officers*

- 8:45 am - 3:15 pm **FACILITATING THE USE OF DATA AT THE
SCHOOL LEVEL TO IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING**

The goals of this session, which will extend to 3:15 pm, are to explore how to facilitate the use of data at the school level to improve student learning and to describe the structures and supports needed to sustain the effective use of data, determine what is in place and what is needed.

*Susan Card, Program Consultant, Center for Educational Services
Linda McCord, Regional Title I School Support Coordinator
Education Service Center, Region II, Texas
Mark Moody, Assistant Superintendent, Maryland State Department of
Education
Lani Seikaly, Project Director, School Improvement in Maryland Website*

- 8:45 am - 9:45 am **OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION TO COLLABORATIVE
INQUIRY AND DATA**

Participants will explore the phases of collaborative inquiry and how data informs the process.

- 9:45 am – 10:30 am **INTRODUCTION TO DATA DRIVEN DIALOGUE**

Participants will experience how to make working with data a positive, productive, and collaborative learning experience.

- 10:30 am – 10:45 am **BREAK**

- 10:45 am – 11:45 am **COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY**

Using actual school-level data, teams will engage in collaborative inquiry and explore a variety of planning tools and data forms.

- 11:45 am – 12:00 pm **DEBRIEF**

- 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm **LUNCH**

*Linda Eberhart, Teacher, Mount Royal Elementary Middle School
Baltimore, MD and President, Teaching That Works*

Ms. Eberhart will discuss the philosophy, methods and approaches she and her colleagues at Mount Royal Elementary Middle School have used to turn a school that was low-performing into one that is high achieving.

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm

**WORKING WITH STATES' DISTRICT AND SCHOOL
LEVEL DATA**

Each state team will work with district and school level data provided from their state to identify student achievement issues and make use of appropriate planning tools and data forms.

2:30 pm – 3:15 pm

SUPPORTS AND STRUCTURES

Participants will reflect on the supports and structures necessary for collaborative inquiry and identify those currently in place and those that need to be created.

3:15 pm - 3:30 pm

BREAK

3:30 pm - 5:00 pm

INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEETINGS

(Please see section V in binder for room assignments and guidelines.)

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

| |
|---------------------------------|
| WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2002 |
|---------------------------------|

7:30 am - 8:30 am

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

8:30 am - 8:40 am

OVERVIEW OF THE DAY

Burton Taylor

8:45 am - 9:55 am

IMPROVING READING INSTRUCTION

(There will be three concurrent sessions each of which will be conducted three times to enable all teams to participate in each one. Please see section IV in binder for room assignments and guidelines.)

**1. Rethinking the Role of Assessment in Program
Planning and Instructional Delivery**

Basha Millhollen, Literacy Projects Director, WestEd

This session will assist participants in rethinking the use and value of assessments in the big-picture and day-to-day planning of reading programs.

2. Using Scientifically Based Reading Research to Select Reading Programs, Strategies and Materials

*Elizabeth Primas, Change Facilitator
District of Columbia Public Schools*

Participants will examine the components of research-based reading programs, discuss the nine criteria for identifying a comprehensive school reform design, and determine appropriate implementation by reviewing the C-bam levels of use.

3. Providing High Quality Professional Development in Reading

*Janice Dole, Associate Professor of Education
University of Utah*

This session will explore the eight research-based criteria for implementing high quality professional development programs at the state and local levels.

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|---------------------|--|
| 10:05 am - 11:15 am | IMPROVING READING INSTRUCTION Please see above |
| 11:25 am - 12:35 pm | IMPROVING READING INSTRUCTION Please see above |
| 12:45 pm - 2:00 pm | LUNCH and INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEETINGS (Please see section V in binder.) |
| 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm | REFLECTION and DISCUSSION OF THE NEXT STEPS <i>Julia Lara</i> |

Each team leader provides a report of the team's assessment of the conference and recommendations for continuing activities.

ADJOURN

APPENDIX VII: MEETING DEBRIEFINGS AND EVALUATIONS

Teams shared their reactions to the meeting and offered suggestions for the approach and the agenda for future meetings. Generally, SSTN leaders expressed their gratitude to CCSSO for the opportunity to come together with experts and their colleagues on the issues presented. Some expressed that, with the magnitude of the funding issues they face, they were unsure that their teams included all of the SEA level personnel and decision-makers who are responsible for making needed changes to their existing support systems. However, teams expressed that they had benefited greatly by the inclusion of district level officials in sessions and almost unanimously that they valued most the individual team planning time. All expressed that the working conference was very timely and relevant to the issues they face and that they look forward to future meetings.

The recommendations that teams offered for future meetings included:

1. Continue and possibly extend individual team meeting time.
2. Give more time for states to share information regarding their systems of support, in particular, those states where resources are very limited.
3. Provide more focus on how to integrate systems – federal, state, and local.
4. Provide more information on training school improvement teams. In particular, teams desire additional information on how to coordinate or combine the work of regional agencies and local school districts; how to bring improvement initiatives under the federal guidelines together with those under the state system.
5. Offer sessions with actual classroom teachers who have implemented research-based reading practices – How did they do it and how did they deal with resistant teachers?
6. Set aside an extended period of time to work with the web-based, data based decision making tool.
7. Share information on ideal cycles for developing school improvement plans aligned with federal and state requirements.
8. Focus on how states will increase their support, via professional development, to increase the capacities of classroom teachers to support children’s reading mastery.
9. Focus on the challenge of utilizing data at the school level along with the mechanisms/processes that connect data to improving instructional practices.
10. Share more information on reading assessment tools in grades K-3.
11. Provide sessions with educators who have been successful in “turning around” low performing schools.
12. Provide assistance in working with the chiefs and state legislators to help them understand the issue of support and to gain their commitment to addressing the issue.

