THE INSTRUCTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING ROLE OF THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY: LESSONS LEARNED IN KENTUCKY WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Across the United States the state education agency (SEA) is a "sleeping giant" with untapped potential to build instructional capacity in our nation's 110,000 public schools. Perched at the top of the education infrastructure as the operational arm of each state's legislature, the SEA interacts with all parts of the state public school system. The SEA is, or should be, capable of coordinating reform efforts of teachers, principals, parents, local agencies, policymakers, legislators, and reform groups toward developing school-level instructional capacity. In other words, the school is nested within the district that has legal obligation to the SEA that is, in turn, accountable programmatically to the federal government. The SEA is positioned to build the system-wide synergy requisite to achieve the unprecedented school-level student outcomes mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The extent to which each SEA can restructure itself to tap its capacity-building resources may ultimately determine the success or failure of NCLB.

In this article we illustrate this system-wide potential of the SEA by using the case of Kentucky, based on interviews with its immediate past commissioner, Gene Wilhoit. Wilhoit envisions a radical shift within the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) from its traditional regulatory mindset to a partnership (Seeley, 1981) with districts and schools that supports school change and develops instructional capacity, which is defined as the "the collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement school wide" (Newmann, King, & Young, 2000, p. 261). According to Wilhoit, KDE officials should model the collective need for all public education players to take proactive responsibility for improving student outcomes. Absent this radical shift from regulatory to supportive action, Kentucky will continue to face insurmountable odds in achieving high standards with all learners, particularly in the inner city of Louisville and in the state's remote rural communities. As long as agency officials play the compliance role with local education agencies, administrators and teachers will continue to point fingers and blame state officials for their interference and meddling (e.g., "This is what the state is telling us to do") instead of sharing the responsibility for student outcomes.

Wilhoit's partnership vision for the SEA has implications for other states. Kentucky's monumental reform act presaged the broad policy framework of NCLB. Kentucky educators have been accountable since 1990 for school-level annual increases in student outcomes as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) requirements. Kentucky legis-

lators designed a state system unparalleled in the history of public education that blends centralization (testing and accountability) with decentralization (school council autonomy to make instructional decisions). By the early 2000s, expenditure per student for the most part had been equalized throughout Kentucky's 176 school districts (Adams & White, 1997; Haselton & Keedy, 2002). According to state assessments, Kentucky students have progressed steadily from 64.6 across all schools in 1999 to 79.2 in 2006 (personal communication with Lisa Gross, KDE Communications Department, February 2, 2007). Perhaps more important, Kentucky's students have demonstrated equally steady improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress from 1990 to 2006: in Mathematics fourth grade scores moved from 215 to 231 and in eighth grade from 257 to 274; in Reading fourth grade scores went from 213 to 220 and in eighth grade from 252 to 254; and in Science fourth grade scores improved from 152 to 158 and in eighth grade from 147 to 153 (NAEP, 2006). Legislators have provided for professional development, extended school services, and student assessment aligned with learning standards for producing high-quality teaching and enriching curricula for all students across the Commonwealth (Clements, 2000; David, 2000). Kentucky's landmark legislation has propelled this state along the school revitalization path now being encountered under NCLB by the 49 other states: holding individual schools accountable for adequate annual progress.

In making our case for the system-wide potential of the SEA for instructional capacity building, we first provide the methodology for our study. Then we trace the political contexts that influenced how the three chief state school officers serving under KERA envisioned the operations of the KDE. Third, we showcase how Wilhoit learned that school capacity building was a systemic problem. Fourth, we detail his strategies for restructuring KDE into the partnership model to implement his capacity-building vision. Last, we provide some policy implications for all state agencies facing No Child Left Behind.

Research Method

The data for this qualitative study were collected through interviews conducted from October 2004 through June 2005. In the first semi-structured interview we asked Wilhoit three questions: (a) "How did the political contexts influence how the three commissioners serving under KERA related to KDE personnel?"; (b) "What have been the chief challenges to your administration?"; and (c) "How do you define your personal vision for laying Kentucky's policy groundwork in ways that can help teachers and administrators in its 1,238 schools reach the proficiency standard for all students by the year 2014?"

We had these data transcribed and, using inductive analysis, began organizing the data into four tentative themes. We then formulated sever-

al additional questions for Wilhoit at the follow-up interviews to confirm these themes and to contextualize them with further probing questions. Wilhoit, for example, was asked (a) how the political climate in the legislature evolved under its last three commissioners; (b) how he had changed in his thinking about conceptualizing school capacity from top-down state directed to school-based, bottom-up initiative; and (c) how his vision for a partnership role for KDE connected to school capacity building.

Finally, Wilhoit provided a "member check" by critiquing and verifying our study's analysis and by correcting any factual inaccuracies. To avoid the tediousness associated with the traditional "question-and-answer" interview format, we present this article in narrative form: Quoted material from Wilhoit alternates with other paraphrased data. Both data sources then were edited to make the article "flow" thematically.

The Political Contexts That Influenced How KERA's Three Commissioners Envisioned KDE

In 1989 the late Chief Justice Robert F. Stephens of Kentucky's Supreme Court declared Kentucky's public system of education null and void and charged the legislature with reinventing the state's education system. Reflecting on the outcome of the 1989 case *Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc.,* Stephens said: "The General Assembly could have botched the whole job but instead did a surprisingly thorough fundamental redesign of the education system" (in personal communication to D. S. Seeley & J. L. Keedy, October 24, 2000).

Following the passage of KERA, Kentucky, according to Wilhoit, found itself thrust center-stage as the experimental flagship for comprehensive state reform in the U.S. This total revampment of state public education in Kentucky was totally new ground for all its reform players. When Tom Boysen was appointed as the first commissioner under KERA on January 1, 1991, no one knew what guidelines were necessary to implement this revolutionized system. Boysen became on-the-spot interpreter of laws to state and local agency educators needing quick answers to problems.

Wilhoit recalled that Boysen held the system together and built KDE into a "top-down" monitoring machine with himself as dictator for the entire system as it came under attack from all quarters: many of Louisville's African Americans who, mobilized under Project CLOUT, opposed the "whole language" approach to the teaching of reading; religious conservatives in rural communities who saw KERA as a secularized movement; and geographically remote Appalachian coal communities in Eastern Kentucky who resented Big Government intrusion. Boysen established a framework for operationalizing KERA and then exercised expert timing when he left Kentucky.

Wilmer Cody became KERA's second commissioner in 1995. While Boysen had managed to hold KERA on course, Cody shifted the

political strategy to low-keyed entrenchment in order to buy time to implement "enabling" machinery to make KERA goals attainable. Several reform structures were added, including:

1. The Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), a performance based system, which evolved into the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) in 1998;

2. Legislation creating school councils to decentralize decision making;

3. Regional Service Centers providing localized area services;

4. The Kentucky Leadership Academy providing additional school level leadership support; and,

5. Consolidated Planning focused on improving student outcomes through analysis of student test data.

Wilhoit was appointed by the state board as KERA's third commissioner in 2000. The political context of Wilhoit's term differed sharply from that of his two predecessors. The reform act was then in its tenth year. Much of the political furor over the implementation of KERA had abated. Yet many of the early legislative supporters of KERA, such as David Karem (co-chair of the Commonwealth Task Force on Teacher Quality appointed by then-governor Paul Patton) and Jack Foster (a key legislator on the Task Force on Education Reform appointed by then-Governor Wilkinson), had moved on to other things. A Republican majority had emerged in the U.S. Congress (the 1994 "Gingrich revolution"), and part of their platform was downsizing the role of Big Government (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Kentucky, which after 1998 had two conservative Republican senators (Mitch McConnell and Jim Bunning), was no exception to this trend.

Many state legislators now viewed KDE itself as part of the problem and not part of the solution. They saw KDE as an entrenched bureaucracy, as captured by Wilhoit's characterization of the General Assembly:

> The legislature was in a far different political mood than in the early 1990s when KERA was fighting for its existence and many leaders were content in protecting KDE as the operative education arm of the legislature. Now legislators were quick to criticize KDE if things went wrong. It was expected that the state agency would be very different, in terms of being more responsive to constituency needs. If we didn't implement different practices we would be called before the legislature to answer questions as to why not. There were lots of questions coming from legislators as to "Why can't we do this?" "Let's think differently!" "Do you have any ideas about how we could do these things?"

A new mindset was endorsed by Kentucky's more aggressive legislators: KDE must operate more entrepreneurially and less bureaucratically.

There was a second reason for the more demanding legislative mood: accountability of public education for improving student outcomes.

KERA was in large part a response to a lawsuit filed by plaintiff school districts claiming that their students were getting an inferior education because they lacked the local revenue of wealthier districts. Although by the early 2000s, as noted above, expenditure per student for the most part had been equalized throughout Kentucky's 176 school districts (Adams & White, 1997; Haselton & Keedy, 2002), legislators now were demanding that all students—whether from the Bluegrass suburbs of Lexington, from the economically-disadvantaged West End of Louisville, or from rural Appalachia—achieve high academic standards. Yet the gap between the student academic outcomes in the poorer plaintiff districts who filed the 1989 lawsuit that led to KERA and the wealthier non-plaintiff districts seemed to be widening (Haselton & Keedy, 2002).

The Kentucky Department of Education in the early years of KERA had operated largely as a management tool under the first two commissioners. But Wilhoit was under heavy pressure to help districts and schools to meet unprecedented student outcomes mandated by KERA. The renewed vision for reconfiguring KDE remained dormant until Wilhoit realized that adequate yearly gains in student outcomes (or in KERA's language: "All children can learn") ultimately depended upon developing school-level instructional capacity.

Wilhoit's Analysis:
Lack of School Capacity in Kentucky Was Systemic

Wilhoit recalled that Kentucky's legislators and reformers in the early days of KERA had assumed that merely holding schools accountable for student results would motivate educators to improve their instruction in response to this policy pressure. Many teachers and administrators, in contrast, had hoped that KERA like many of the previous reforms would simply go away. After KERA's implementation, the accountability "heat" at first had been quiescent: In the early to mid 1990s many schools in Kentucky had scored so low in establishing their baseline scores that small annual increments were sufficient to meet their annual benchmarks. But as the years mounted up, meeting yearly-mandated improvement goals has become far more difficult.

To be precise, all 1,238 schools in Kentucky have until the year 2014 to reach the CATS score of 100. Every two years each school's score is adjusted by subtracting its previous two-year score from 100 and dividing the difference by the number of years remaining until the year 2014. High-poverty Brookfield Elementary School, for example, struggled to attain a 70 in 2006. Subtracting this score from 100 produces the difference (100 – 70 = 30). There are 8 years remaining until 2014 (2014 – 2006 = 8). Dividing 30 by 8 means that Brookfield should score a 73.75 (70 + 3.75) in 2007 and a 77.5 (73.75 + 3.75) in 2008 to be on track in attaining the 100 index score by 2114. Schools like Brookfield now find the going

much harder because high-powered instruction is required to make up the remaining thirty points and every year more students must score higher on the standardized tests.

The situation in Kentucky with KERA parallels that of the 49 other states struggling with NCLB. NCLB also uses student outcomes based on two-year intervals and requires adequate yearly progress (AYP). For schools receiving federal Title I anti-poverty funds that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years, students must be given an opportunity to attend another school. Schools missing three consecutive years must provide free tutoring, and schools falling short of AYP for four years have four options, including replacing staff members or appointing an outside advisor (Olson, 2006). Like KERA in the 1990s, NCLB assumes that pressure from accountability mechanisms will be sufficient to force improvement in student outcomes. Yet many expert observers of school reform, including Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, and Wendy Puriefoy, head of the Public Education Network, disagree with this flawed assumption (Lewis, 2007).

Pressured by Kentucky legislators in the early 2000s, Wilhoit also began to question this assumption. What he realized was that most districts and schools had not undergone major transformations in culture, instruction, and structure. Many, if not most, schools in Kentucky also lacked both the skills and collective dispositions to develop the instructional capacity necessary to achieve annual student growth gains. Wilhoit recalled the critical incident that set him thinking in a different policy direction than mere accountability to Frankfort, the state capitol:

> Awareness of the knowledge base of teachers is essential. I remember working with a high school faculty to help them assume responsibility for developing a more robust curriculum. I nearly killed that faculty by asking them to apply skills they had not obtained in college preparation programs. Without that preparation, they were ill equipped to develop a fully-sequenced curriculum aligned with assessment and instructional strategies.

Legislators could mandate centralized changes for districts and schools. But capacity building—defined by Wilhoit as how a school staff identifies problems, works to find answers, and then implements solutions—had to be generated internally on a school-by-school basis. The most important source of knowledge, skills, and expertise to solve problems constructively rested in the people who worked with the children: principals, teachers, and parents.

Could schools develop the capacity to achieve academic success with all students when adequate instructional capacity was not a staple in every Kentucky school? Genuine collaboration by faculty over schoolwide issues like increasing student annual outcomes was hardly the norm in the very schools that needed this instructional capacity, the low-achieving schools, as observed by the commissioner:

Coming together as a faculty is more difficult than simply teaching students everyday. Yet without collaboration it is very difficult for teachers to put all the pieces together. Educators tend to prepare for the next day or week or month quite effectively as individuals. I was asking a faculty to do something entirely new—to look collectively beyond their grade level.

While teachers were often experts with curriculum to be taught in their own classrooms, the lack of collaboration across grade levels and departments sometimes resulted in students "slipping through the cracks." Yet the schools with high percentages of students on free lunch programs that exceeded their academic expectations unfailingly exhibited teacher collaboration within and across departments. (See McDonald & Keedy, 2004, for three principals in high-achieving schools who formed collaborative relationships with teacher leaders; see Murley, 2005, for three high-achieving schools characterized by collegial interactions based on instructional improvement.)

Wilhoit contended that responsibility for developing individual school instructional capacity could often be traced in part to the district's support for school-level capacity building:

It takes enormous support and capacity building for positive change to happen. Some districts in Kentucky stepped up and provided that kind of support early in KERA…but those districts were in the minority. When capacity building was initially provided at the district level, KDE did a pretty good job of helping with the transition to standards-based accountability. But if the responsibility for capacity building was not picked up at the district level, there was a lot of confusion and lost time. A dysfunctional pattern set in that was difficult to overcome.

Districts where building capacity was not supported internally now were paying the price for this pattern. This district-wide lack of school capacity building was clearly visible in the disappointing results of school councils in Kentucky. To make curriculum exciting and relevant to all students, Kentucky's legislature had mandated school councils in an attempt to decentralize decision making to the school level (KRS 160.345). Wilhoit pointed out that councils in under-achieving schools more often than not reflected a misalignment between council norms and school climate. The state of school-generated instructional capacity suffered as a result:

Councils preoccupied with debating the color of cafeteria trays, for example, create negative interaction patterns for the work climate. And when non-academic focus has been the practice for several years, it becomes difficult to transition the conversations to matters directly correlated with teaching and learning. When teachers are comfortable teaching in isolation, it is difficult for them to transition to collaborative work styles.

Several researchers have also found little evidence that school

councils in general are characterized by genuine collaborative decision making on instructional matters. Newton, Keedy, and Winter (2001) found that most teachers who served on councils held the position of council member in low regard and that they continued to rely on their principals for instructional leadership. Wall and Rinehart (1998) concluded that the vast majority of council transactions dealt with non-curricular and non-instructional issues (see also David, 2000).

Turning to another key relationship in schools, Wilhoit speculated that the teacher-student relationship tended to mirror the principal-teacher relationship. The teacher as "sage on the stage" (delivering course material exclusively through the lecture format) was not conducive to accomplishing continuous classroom assessment and students' authentic application of academic knowledge. Traditionally-delivered professional development fed into this culture. All too often professional development was still delivered by consultants and other experts brought in from outside the districts. The principal was still up front leading and guiding overall direction as the school's sole instructional leader. Wilhoit viewed the traditional professional development format as part of the overall dysfunctional pattern endemic to the entire state system: "Given this 'stand up and deliver professional development,' expecting teachers to operate very differently in classrooms with students doesn't make sense." The divide between what was modeled for teachers and what teachers were asked to do with students was too wide.

Building school-wide instructional capacity without active teacher leadership skills seemed at best unlikely. Teacher collaboration over instructional matters depended in large part upon the principal as the tone-setter in developing school norms. When teachers were uncomfortable providing peer instructional leadership under control-oriented principals, the lack of a collaborative climate was more often than not also reflected in school councils. Even in Kentucky, with seventeen years of ground-up reform, principals and teachers did not seem to view instructional capacity building as the collective responsibility of the school.

Wilhoit had identified a flawed major policy assumption that state reformers made from the very inception of KERA: that local capacity to achieve high academic results in all schools was there. State policymakers implemented rigorous standards for student academic success through testing and accountability systems in a "top down" approach. Then state leaders moved accountability down to the individual school, in part through school council decision making in curriculum, hiring of principals, student discipline, fiscal expenditures, and professional development – all of which may be considered "bottom up" change.

Although there is now far more autonomy in districts and schools to decide how one educates a child at a local level, state leaders, including those in KDE, have not established the supportive environment that provides more time for and/or more assistance in skill development for educators to build the requisite instructional capacity. There is also some

disturbing evidence that many principals and teachers may lack working knowledge of the systemic nature of KERA. East (2005) interviewed extensively 26 purposively-selected Kentucky principals and teachers with district-wide reputations for leadership on KERA restructuring initiatives. Only three of the nine principals and three of the 17 teachers exhibited clear, persuasive conceptualizations of the systemic nature of KERA. Thus, it may not be just principal and teacher lack of time and skill that inhibits improvement but also possible lack of commitment to school-based instructional capacity building grounded in an understanding of the conceptual systemic underpinnings of KERA reform.

The overall goal of KERA (all students learning to high academic standards), Wilhoit summarized, might be unattainable in those schools that lack the very instructional capacity to succeed with challenging learners. The commissioner viewed the solution as "systemic," that is, originating from within the state infrastructure. Just as systemic energy flows down the state infrastructure in terms of testing, standards, and accountability, energy also must flow up the system in terms of school-level instructional capacity. The Kentucky Department of Education is strategically located at the vortex of the state infrastructure. As the operational arm of the legislature, KDE's function is to carry out legislated policies and statutes up and down the system in coordinating the efforts of administrators, teachers, parents, reform groups, and legislators to create a synergy transcending its individual parts.

Wilhoit's Vision: KDE Partnering With all Reformers to Build Instructional Capacity

Unless KDE provides this partnership role up and down the state education hierarchy, many of Kentucky's 1,238 schools may not break the 100 CATS index threshold. Wilhoit's vision for KDE, as stated below, also has clear implications for the 49 other SEAs across the U.S. under NCLB. Similar to the impetus for KERA, student outcomes across the U.S. also are stagnating. Although many state-level accountability systems with state standards linked to state exams are reporting rising scores (Hancock, 2004), the assumption that these state tests are valid is questionable. Despite these state-reported test results, the National Assessment of Educational Progress data have shown stagnated fourth grade reading scores with declines for eighth grade, and slowing growth in math for both fourth and eighth graders (Foote, 2007). Also similar to Kentucky's predicament under KERA since the 1990s is the growing difficulty that all our nation's schools with low socioeconomic status are experiencing under NCLB as the year 2014 approaches. The going is getting tougher as schools must have more students every year achieving adequate yearly progress results never-before attained.

In explaining his vision, Wilhoit pointed out that KDE personnel needed to understand that they were as much the problem as the solution.

The state agency historically operated in a "separate but equal" approach toward federal and state programs. Monies that could be combined to provide better services for students, for example, were kept separate because KDE program managers and, consequently, local practitioners did not realize opportunities for blending resources. The commissioner recalled how districts viewed KDE in 2000:

> Districts saw the state agency as being regulatory, top-down, and rigid in terms of how we looked at schools. The local education agency had never experienced the systemic pressure for high stakes accountability exerted by KERA, but now local officials had every reason for coming to the department with requests to do things differently: "Be more of a partner with us; remove some of the barriers; be more collaborative in the relationship with districts than in the past." So we now have to involve districts in decision-making processes and the KDE must set the example.

Implementing the partnership model might never happen if KDE's mindset remains mired in compliance to rules and procedures. Wilhoit pointed out that having a teacher or principal comply with agency rules and regulations was very different than helping her to reach a higher level of excellence. Many professionals at KDE were very knowledgeable about narrow areas of education reform and could effectively carry out relationships with local personnel around programs assigned to them. But there are a mind-boggling number of state and federal programs:

> Imagine what's happening at the local district level? You have the Title I person telling you how to comply with Title I. You have the Extended School Services [ESS] person telling you how to use ESS money. The Site Based Decision Making person tells you how to operate a local system. There are often mixed messages on how to meet regulations and how to implement reform goals.

KDE personnel, Wilhoit reasoned, unintentionally complicated the intended implementation of KERA as a systemic policy framework by perpetuating myopic administrative oversight. They were missing the big picture. A KDE specialist might say, "I'm going in there so teachers and administrators know how to do Title I or ESS." Wilhoit's response now was, "No you're not. Federal or state regulations are just compliance to rules and procedures defining your own bureaucratic area. Our responsibility is to help educators to better serve students." Wilhoit articulated his vision for KDE personnel working with the districts and schools this way:

> When I came into the agency I saw a need to empower districts that could move ahead, to reward and nurture those districts, and simultaneously to develop a support system for low-achieving sites by providing them with guidance, assistance, and direction. The agency has to do a turn-about—to build up from the bottom, based on individual needs of districts and schools. We have to put in place a whole set of initiatives to support this new partnership

dedicated to achieving student excellence.

Emerging programs in state agency leadership development were now being designed to change the agency mindset. Agency personnel were identifying how their specific program requirements could be implemented with authentic application by local educators. Wilhoit explained the need:

> We had a series of very traditional programs, such as the super-intendent's orientation in which first-year superintendents must participate per KERA statute: a year-long training delivered by KDE designed to acquaint them with their role and to help them function. We had six modules based on what we thought superin-tendents needed to know: sessions on law, school finance, and so forth.…But nobody had ever asked these superintendents whether the program was meeting their needs.

As is often the case with many state agencies, KDE sometimes continued with the established practices despite the very different needs posed by KERA. Wilhoit discovered that the required six superintendent training modules represented standardized knowledge acquisition and recall. This level of instruction and assessment were modeling exactly what Kentucky teachers were being asked not to do with students.

In modeling for district personnel the needed role expectations, KDE personnel under Wilhoit sat down with first-year superintendents and asked: "What do you think is valuable in these modules?" Wilhoit re-called their reaction:

> The superintendents told us three things in no uncertain language: "We need something more than just facts; we can read so don't waste our time sharing written information. We are not sure KDE personnel are the best instructors. Some local superintendents are outstanding. Why not use them as resource people? Why don't you build a natural sequence of training matched with a timeline for responsibilities of the job?"

KDE redesigned the superintendent training program so that it was interactive, technology-based, and had practical application through a con-tinuous "case program" where first-year superintendents worked on their own district problems and interacted with mentors on a daily basis. Three of the most highly-regarded superintendents in the state now taught much of the course content. These superintendents incorporated authentic appli-cation of knowledge in the same way Kentucky students should be taught. Mentors helped new superintendents with the real tasks of their position. Assistance often included designing prototypes for working with local board members, identifying significant district and school data patterns for sharing with principals during the "data embargo" period (preparation by schools prior to public release), and crafting statements for the local press. (Kentucky data are first released to districts, then embargoed until districts have time to respond with appropriate internal strategies.)

The importance of deliberately seeking feedback from key reform

players is further illustrated in Wilhoit's recognition of the need for practical, useful information designed to meet constituency needs. Listening is not an end to itself. The agency is positioning itself to make strategic changes based on feedback from Kentucky citizens. Now KDE is partnering with parents in co-designing a website, as Wilhoit explained:

> Our general mindset is that we'll make better decisions if we respect and listen to critical individuals and groups in determining direction. Instead of working as an independent agency and deciding what we at KDE want to share on the website, we sat down with parents [of special education advisory groups] and asked them, "What are the important issues you want on the website? What connections do you need to make?"

Wilhoit instituted several advisory councils representing various role groups (superintendents; principals; assessment coordinators; teachers; minority group representatives; parents; university representatives) that regularly met with the commissioner to provide feedback. The parent advisory group, for example, was comprised of parents of special needs students and representatives from various organized groups working on the needs of those students. Teachers are represented as major constituents on the Commissioner's Educational Equity Council and the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council.

Wilhoit envisioned that the SEA role must change from a compliance role to that of service and coordination. So while Commissioner Boysen set the stage by aligning policy and framing the agenda as KERA was implemented and Commissioner Cody played the role of peacemaker, Commissioner Wilhoit integrated both roles. Keeping his focus on the end product—higher levels of learning for Kentucky students—helped him to engage others to accomplish this vision of KDE as a partnering organization.

Implications of KDE's Partnership Model for Other State Education Agencies Under NCLB

Wilhoit views the local capacity-building situation in Kentucky systemically: The entire state education system needs overhaul (and having now moved on to the Council of Chief State School Officers as its executive director, he has ample opportunity to influence policy at the national level). The challenge to Kentucky's state education agency contours a sharply-etched warning to other SEAs dealing with the demands of No Child Left Behind. All states other than Hawaii have similar governance structures: SEAs responsible to legislators; regional and local education agencies; and teachers, principals, central office administrators, parents, and reform groups as political constituencies and potential partners in the joint enterprise of capacity building. Kentucky has coped with KERA's centralized accountability model based on annual yearly progress and now other states are confronted with similar pressure from NCLB as the year 2014 approaches

and low-performing schools are placed on "red alert." There are lessons to be learned so that other states can benefit from Kentucky's experience.

How might the other SEAs revitalize their infrastructures to generate systemically the collective synergy requisite to local capacity building? The partnership model outlined by Wilhoit generalizes across SEAs because relationships engendered by SEA personnel with schools mirror the organization norms and group beliefs practiced by SEA personnel themselves. State agency personnel need to learn how to "practice what they preach" in modeling and extending collaborative practices within the field (Lusi & Goldberg, 2000). Reformers since the mid 1990s have advocated that SEA personnel relate collegially with their counterparts in schools and central offices. According to Cohen, McLaughlin, and Talbert (1993), for instance, SEA personnel should change how they work with teachers and principals in the field: from the didactic mode (telling teachers what to do) to the constructionist mode (helping practitioners think through how policy intends to impact practitioner work contexts so that the policy intentions may play out authentically in classrooms). People collaborate when they realize, if nothing else, that they need the expertise and resources of others. That time is now.

Can SEA officials, however, relate as colleagues with professionals in schools and districts as long as NCLB maintains its rigid hierarchy with accountability but little awareness that schools also must have support from their districts and SEAs in order to improve instructional capacity? The way in which NCLB has mirrored KERA suddenly screeches to a halt. KERA has provided ways for instructional capacity to be developed, for instance, through school councils that hire principals; training for parents; professional development; teacher leadership academies for teacher leaders and principals; extra instructional services for economically-deprived students through Extended School Services; and collaboration with the community through the Family Resource and Youth Services Center. These services are offered to all schools with economically-deprived populations before, not after, they are labeled as "deficient." But where has NCLB provided mechanisms for instructional capacity building and empowerment of school staffs anywhere equal to that of its accountability mechanisms? Casserly of the Council of Great City Schools claims that NCLB sanctions have nothing to do with raising student achievement. Puriefoy of the Public Education Network observes that the accountability provisions of NCLB have not helped families to understand how to get better results or how to obtain the resources they need, mostly from the state level (Lewis, 2007, p. 356).

Centralization has dominated decentralization during the 1980s and 1990s, as states ratcheted up graduation requirements and accountability mechanisms and the federal government centralized state efforts through Goals 2000 and NCLB. In the long run, we may have NCLB to thank for positioning steadily improving student outcomes permanently on

the national policy agenda. But as we have learned from KERA, it is not just about centralizing standards and accountability and testing at the top of the hierarchy, whether the state or the national capitol. Policy-wise we must decentralize the education system by empowering localities and individual schools and by providing the opportunities for building instructional capacity. Absent a working synthesis with healthy, blended doses of both centralization and decentralization, as we have in KERA and as advocated by Fullan (1996, 2003), the real danger is that the states and districts in the traditional spirit of localism will merely protect their own political turfs instead of superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents all working together on the common goal of increasing systemic instructional capacity for all learners.

In this trade-off between centralization and decentralization, we are confronted with a major national policy dilemma. Developing local capacity-building through the partnership model between SEA personnel and schools requires considerable autonomy for each school to make its own instructional decisions and then hold itself accountable for those decisions. As NCLB exerts pressure through centralizing assessment and accountability mechanisms at the national level, the fifty SEAs also need considerable "flex" within their entire education systems to partner with schools and districts in building instructional capacity. Can the federal government both maintain the high standards and loosen regulations in its accountability program across the fifty state education systems?

The battleground is heating up. The U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has insisted that the federal government hold all states to standardized accountability procedures across the fifty states. Yet there is opposition to this "one-size-fits-all" approach from states like Utah and Connecticut (Keller & Sack, 2005; Robelen & Olson, 2005). Without considerable "flex" playing out between the federal and state levels in how states implement accountability procedures, how can chief state school officers re-build SEAs around the partnership model and school-level instructional capacity?

If SEAs are forced to play the standardized accountability role with districts and schools, how can they then relate with teacher leaders and principals in ways that ingrain collaborative norms? These norms (Keedy, 1991; Keedy & Achilles, 1997; Keedy & Simpson, 2002) redefine the school work climate by (a) making the curriculum more engaging for students (teacher-student relationship), (b) instituting teacher examination of student work as a basis for classroom instructional decisions (teacher-teacher relationship), and (c) promoting shared decision-making around student classroom needs (teacher-principal relationship). Because SEA officials also must help to "set" collaborative norms as they interact with teacher leaders, principals, district administrators, and reform groups, we need "flatter" organizational structures. But these run at cross purposes with the federal-state-school vertical organization structure generated by NCLB.

Changing or adding new pieces to state and national reform packages causes other pieces of the policy framework to shift and adjust as legislators and reformers challenge our public schools to perform at ever higher levels. Another such policy piece may be the SEA-school partnership. A challenge to chief state school officers is to realign their state infrastructures around this model for generating local instructional capacity to meet national standards. Given more flexibility afforded by the Federal government with NCLB, each state can then produce systemic partnerships among administrators, teachers, parents, and reformers capable of accomplishing what this nation deserves: high-performance results by all students regardless of race, class, and culture.

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