



State Education Agency Funding and Staffing In the Education Reform Era

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This report was written by Nancy Kober, a CEP consultant, and Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's director of national programs. Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO, provided advice on the report. Bruce Haslam and Beth Sinclair of Policy Studies Associates worked with CEP to develop and administer the survey and compile survey data.

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Introduction

Cuts in state funding for elementary and secondary education in recent years have taken a toll in many vital areas, including teaching jobs and student services. State budget cuts have also affected a less visible target—state education agencies (SEAs), which are responsible for supervising elementary and secondary education in each state and which play a crucial role in advancing education reform.

Many SEAs are being asked to do more with less. While the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided much-needed economic stimulus money to save or create teaching jobs and continue momentum on education reform, it also placed new demands on SEAs at a time when their own operating budgets were often shrinking. Now that the stimulus funds are coming to an end, SEAs must still follow through on a series of education reform-related assurances in their ARRA applications. In addition, most states are transitioning to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for student learning in English language arts and math—a complex undertaking that requires corresponding changes in curriculum, assessment, teacher professional development, data systems, educator evaluation systems, and other areas.

What is the status of SEAs' operating budgets, staffing, and expertise in the wake of ARRA? And do SEAs have the capacity to support key education reforms? This report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) seeks to answer these questions with data from a survey of state deputy superintendents of education or their designees conducted in October through December of 2011. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia, which is counted as a state in the tallies in this report, responded. The names of participating states have been kept confidential to encourage frank answers.

Other topics covered by the survey—including waivers of Elementary and Secondary Education Act requirements, state implementation of the CCSS, the status of general state funding for elementary and secondary education, and state efforts to address the ARRA assurances—are discussed in other CEP reports (CEP, 2011b; 2012a; 2012b).

The 2011 survey was the second CEP survey on these topics, including state capacity. Findings from the first survey, conducted in fall 2010, are described in the 2011 report, *More to Do But Less Capacity to Do It: States' Progress in Implementing the Recovery Act Education Reforms* (CEP, 2011a). In general, that report concluded that as a result of shrinking or stagnant operating budgets for SEAs, states could have insufficient capacity in 2011 to fully and effectively implement a range of activities critical to the ARRA reform agenda.

This current report focuses specifically on state funding for SEA *operations*, as opposed to general state funding for public elementary and secondary education, which is discussed in a companion CEP report (2012b). In addition, this report deals only with SEA operational funding from *state* sources. Our findings do not pertain to any additional funds for state administration that states receive from federal education programs. An appendix explaining the survey methodology is available on CEP's Web site at www.cep-dc.org.

Key Findings

Our analysis of state funding for SEA operations revealed several key findings:

- **Although the state funding outlook for SEA operations appears slightly better in school year 2012-13 than in school year 2011-12, very few states expect increases in their SEA funding for 2012-13.** Thirteen of the states responding to our survey project decreases in the state portion of their SEA operating budgets for 2012-13, half as many as had decreases in 2011-12. But just four survey states anticipate increases in state

funding for SEA operations in 2012-13, fewer than in 2011-12. Twenty-one states—the majority of those surveyed—expect their SEA operating budgets to remain the same in 2012-13.

- **Many states are looking at two consecutive years of decreases in state funds for SEA operations.** Of the 26 states that experienced cuts in their SEA operating budgets in school year 2011-12, 13 also anticipate cuts in school year 2012-13; the other 13 expect these budgets to stay the same.
- **State cuts in SEA operating budgets projected for school year 2012-13 tend to be somewhat smaller than those made in school year 2011-12.** Nine survey states made cuts of more than 5% in their SEA operating budgets for 2011-12, but no responding state expects cuts of this size in 2012-13. Rather, cuts anticipated for 2012-13 tend to be in the 2.5% to 5% range.
- **Most of the 26 survey states that cut their SEA operating budgets for school year 2011-12 are compensating by reducing SEA staffing costs in various ways; fewer states are cutting services to school districts.** Twenty-four of these 26 states responded to survey questions about how they were making up for 2011-12 cuts in state funding for SEA operations. All 24 are taking one or more of the following actions to reduce personnel costs: leaving vacant SEA positions unfilled, terminating or furloughing SEA staff, or offering early retirement to staff. Seventeen of the 24 responding states are reducing or eliminating professional development and/or technical assistance services to school districts in one or more of six areas, and 8 or fewer states are reducing other types of school district services.
- **States appear to be making an effort to maintain, and in some cases increase, SEA staff assigned to carry out key education reforms.** In the past year, most responding states maintained or increased the level of professional and technical staff assigned to such key reform areas as assisting low-performing schools, developing educator evaluation systems and statewide data systems, or implementing new content standards. In the coming year, the majority of survey states expect to maintain SEA staffing in these areas, although fewer states anticipate staffing increases than in the previous year.
- **More states reported having adequate SEA expertise to carry out key reforms than had adequate staffing levels or fiscal resources for these activities.** Between 20 and 28 survey states reported having adequate SEA expertise to develop and/or implement internationally benchmarked standards, longitudinal data systems, new assessments, and new educator evaluation systems, and to support efforts to improve low-performing schools. But fewer states said they have enough staff or fiscal resources to carry out these responsibilities.

State Funding for SEA Operating Budgets

Our survey asked states about the status of state funding for SEA operations in school year 2011-12 compared with 2010-11, and in school year 2012-13 compared with 2011-12. States that reported decreases in their SEA operating budgets for 2011-12 were also asked how they are making up for these cuts in state funding.

Status of State Funding for SEA Operations

State funding for SEA operations declined in school year 2011-12 in a majority of the states surveyed. As shown in **figure 1**, SEA operating budgets for school year 2011-12 decreased in 26 states, remained the same in 3 states, and increased in 8 states.

These trends in SEA operating budgets for school year 2011-12 are less positive than the trends in states' general K-12 education budgets for fiscal year 2012 described in a companion report (CEP, 2012b). Both sets of trends are based on data from the same survey, which enabled us to analyze whether SEA operating budget trends and general K-12 education budget trends are moving in parallel directions within the same states. We found that of the 20 states that anticipated increases in state funding for K-12 education for fiscal year 2012, just 4 also reported increases in state funding for SEA operations for school year 2011-12. State funding for SEA operations actually *decreased* in 14 of the 20 states with general funding increases and remained the same in 2 states. It appears, then, that many states with growth in their K-12 education budgets are using the additional funds for priorities other than increasing their SEA operating budgets.

The outlook for school year 2012-13 is only slightly better. On one hand, 13 states project decreases in their SEA operating budgets for 2012-13—half the number that experienced decreases in 2011-12. On the other hand, just 4 states expect increases for school year 2012-13—fewer than had increases in 2011-12. The majority of the responding states, or 21 states, expect their SEA operating budgets to remain the same for 2012-13.

It is noteworthy that 29 states—a majority of those responding—said their 2012-13 projections for SEA operating budgets are likely to change.

Figure 1. Number of states reporting decreases, flat funding, or increases in state funding for SEA operations in school years 2011-12 and 2012-13

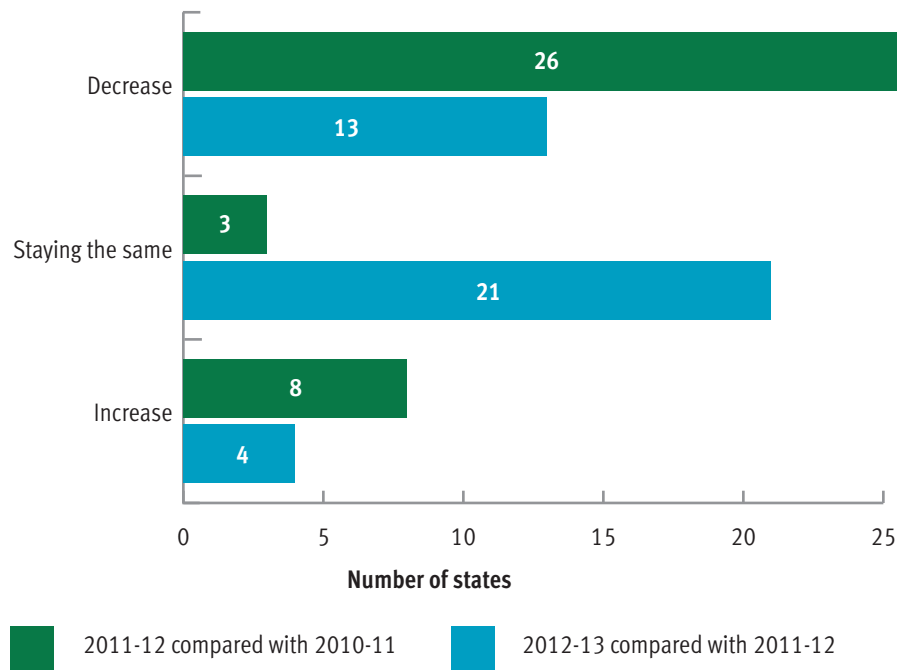


Figure reads: In 26 of the states responding to a CEP survey, state funding for SEA operations decreased for school year 2011-12. Thirteen states anticipate a decrease in state funding for SEA operations in school year 2012-13.

Note: Not every state that participated in the CEP survey responded to this question.

Size of State Funding Increases and Decreases for SEA Operations

Our survey asked states to estimate the size of any changes in their state budgets for SEA operations by choosing the percentage along a continuum that best described their funding levels. **Table 1** displays the continuum, which ranges from decreases of more than 10% to increases of more than 10%, and also shows states' responses.

In school year 2011-12, some SEAs experienced substantial reductions in state funding for agency operations. These cuts exceeded 10% in five states, equaled 10% in three states, and amounted to 7.5% in one state. In addition, seven SEAs lost 5% of their state operational funding in 2011-12, and ten states lost 2.5%.

Of the eight SEAs with increased state funding for their 2011-12 operations, the increase amounted to 2.5% in four states, 5% in one state, and more than 10% in three states.

The cuts in state funding for SEA operations projected for school year 2012-13 tend to be somewhat smaller than those in 2011-12. None of the responding states expects a cut of more than about 5% in 2012-13, while seven states anticipate decreases of 5%, and six more expect cuts of 2.5%. Of the four states that project 2012-13 increases in state support for SEA operations, two expect increases of more than 10%, one projects a 7.5% increase, and one anticipates a 2.5% increase.

Table 1. Number of states reporting increases or decreases of various sizes in state funding for SEA operations for school years 2011-12 and 2012-13^T

	Decrease					Remain the same	Increase				
	More than 10%	10%	7.5%	5%	2.5%		2.5%	5%	7.5%	10%	More than 10%
2011-12	5	3	1	7	10	3	4	1	0	0	3
2012-13	0	0	0	7	6	21	1	0	1	0	2

Table reads: In school year 2011-12, five states reduced state funding for SEA operations by more than 10%, three states made cuts of 10%, one state had a 7.5% decrease, seven states had 5% cuts, and ten states had decreases of 2.5%.

Note: States were asked to select the response from the continuum in the table above that best described levels of state funding levels for SEA operations. Not every state that participated in the CEP survey responded to the 2011-12 portion of this question.

We analyzed the data to see whether some states are facing cuts in state funding for SEA operations in both school years 2011-12 and 2012-13. This indeed was the case. Of the 26 states that experienced decreased state funding for SEA operations for the 2011-12 school year, 13 also projected cuts for 2012-13, while 13 indicated their 2012-13 funding would remain the same. No state with a decrease for 2011-12 reported an increase for 2012-13. The three states in which state funding for SEA operations stayed flat in 2011-12 also expected state funding in this area to remain the same in 2012-13. Of the eight states that had increases in state funding for SEA operations in 2011-12, four expected another increase for 2012-13, while the remaining four anticipated flat funding.

Impact of 2011-12 Funding Cuts on SEA Operations

Of the 26 survey states that had decreases in their SEA operating budgets for the 2011-12 school year, 24 responded to a survey question about personnel actions they were taking to make up for these cuts. All 24 respondents reported taking one or more of the four personnel actions listed in the survey. (States could select as many responses as applied.) As shown in **table 2**, 23 states are leaving vacant positions unfilled, 8 states are terminating staff, 7 are furloughing staff, and 3 are offering early retirement to staff.

Table 2. PERSONNEL ACTIONS: Number of states that are taking various actions to reduce SEA personnel costs in response to cuts in state funding for SEA operations in school year 2011-12

Leave vacant positions unfilled	23
Terminate SEA staff	8
Furlough SEA staff	7
Offer early retirement to SEA staff	3
<i>Total number of states taking any personnel action to make up for cuts in state funding for SEA operations</i>	24

Table reads: Of the 24 states that responded to a survey question about compensating for 2011-12 SEA funding decreases through personnel actions, 23 are making up for these decreases by leaving vacant staff positions unfilled, while 8 are terminating staff, 7 are furloughing staff, and 3 are offering early retirement to staff.

Note: Of the 26 states reporting cuts in the SEA operating budgets for school year 2011-12, 24 responded to this survey item.

In open-ended survey responses, some states mentioned other personnel actions they are taking to make up for SEA budget cuts. Examples include moving some positions from being state-funded to being federally funded, reducing the number of deputy superintendents by combining SEA divisions, reducing staff travel, and consolidating information technology staff statewide.

Taken together, personnel actions were a more common response to cuts in SEA operating budgets than were reductions in services to school districts. As shown in **table 3**, 17 of the 26 states that had decreased SEA budgets for school year 2011-12 are making up for these cuts by reducing or eliminating some form of professional development for school districts.

Far fewer states are reducing or eliminating other services to school districts. Eight states are reducing assistance on curriculum development to support the implementation of new state standards, seven states are reducing the frequency and scope of compliance audits, and five states are reducing the frequency of state testing. (Again, states could select more than one response.)

Open-ended survey responses provided additional details about these and other service reductions. For example, states reported suspending assessments in particular grade levels in subjects such as writing and government, eliminating end-of-course tests, and reducing or eliminating spending in such areas as supplies and materials, teacher credentialing systems, or financial reporting systems.

Table 3. REDUCTIONS IN SERVICES: Number of states that are taking various actions to reduce or eliminate services to school districts in response to cuts in state funding for SEA operations in school year 2011-12

REDUCTIONS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	
Professional development and/or technical assistance on implementing the CCSS	8
Professional development and/or technical assistance on implementing new content standards other than the CCSS	8
Professional development and/or technical assistance on improving low-performing schools	6
Professional development and/or technical assistance on educator evaluation systems that hold educators accountable for gains in student learning	4
Professional development and/or technical assistance on establishing or upgrading data systems	4
Professional development and/or technical assistance in other areas not listed above	13
<i>Total number of states that are reducing or eliminating any of the professional development services listed above</i>	<i>17</i>

REDUCTIONS IN OTHER SERVICES TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS	
Assistance on curriculum development to support implementation of new standards	8
Frequency and scope of compliance audits	7
Frequency of the administration of state tests	5

Table reads: Eight of the 26 states that experienced cuts in state funding for SEA operations in 2011-12 are making up for these cuts by reducing or eliminating professional development or technical assistance to school districts about implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Note: Of the 26 states reporting cuts in their SEA operating budgets for school year 2011-12, 24 responded to this survey item.

SEA Staffing Capacity

Our survey also sought to learn more about the staffing levels of state education agencies in key areas of education reform. In particular, we asked state officials whether the numbers of professional and technical SEA staff had changed during the 12 months prior to the time they completed our survey and whether they expected SEA staffing levels to change in the upcoming 12 months. We also asked states whether their SEAs had adequate expertise, staffing levels, and fiscal resources to carry out key education reforms. The reform areas listed in the survey are those that SEAs could address—or, in some cases, must address—to fulfill the reform-related assurances in their applications for ARRA funding.

Past and Future SEA Staffing Levels for Key Reform Areas

During the 12 months preceding our survey, most of the responding states increased or maintained the level of professional and technical staff assigned to key school reform areas, including assistance to improve low-perform-

ing schools, the development of educator evaluation systems, the development of statewide data systems, and the implementation of new content standards. (See **table 4**.)

These findings suggest that although SEA operating budgets declined in a majority of responding states in 2011-12, states have made an effort to protect staffing in areas critical to education reform.

Table 4. PREVIOUS YEAR'S STAFFING: Number of states in which SEA staffing levels in key reform areas increased, stayed the same, or decreased during the past 12 months

Areas of SEA staff assignments (including support to districts)	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	No assignments in this area
Assistance to support the improvement of low-performing schools	18	17	1	0
Development and implementation of new educator evaluation systems that hold educators accountable for gains in student learning	15	17	2	2
Development of statewide data system	12	22	3	0
Implementation of new content standards (including the CCSS, if applicable)	10	20	8	0
Development, operation, and maintenance of state technology infrastructure	9	20	7	1
Development and implementation of new state assessments	6	24	6	0
Development and implementation of educator induction programs	3	23	2	9

Table reads: In the past year, the level of SEA staff charged with providing assistance to improve low-performing schools increased in 18 state education agencies, remained the same in 17, and decreased in 1 state.

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, fewer states expect increases in SEA staffing levels in key reform areas than had staffing increases the previous year. As displayed in **table 5**, 10 states expect increases in SEA staff charged with developing a statewide data system, and 9 states project increases in staff responsible for developing and implementing new educator evaluation systems. Fewer states expect SEA staffing to increase in other critical reform areas.

Instead, the majority of states responding to our survey anticipate that SEA staffing will remain the same in all of the reform areas listed. This is consistent with the finding described above that 21 states expect their SEA operating budgets to remain level in school year 2012-13.

Table 5. NEXT YEAR'S STAFFING: Number of states in which SEA staffing levels in key reform areas are expected to increase, stay the same, or decrease during the upcoming 12 months

Areas of SEA staff assignments (including support to districts)	Increase	Remain the same	Decrease	No assignments in this area	Too soon to tell
Development of statewide data system	10	26	0	0	1
Development and implementation of new educator evaluation systems that hold educators accountable for gains in student learning	9	23	1	0	3
Assistance to support the improvement of low-performing schools	8	24	3	0	1
Implementation of new content standards (including the CCSS, if applicable)	7	25	3	0	3
Development and implementation of new state assessments	7	26	2	0	1
Development, operation, and maintenance of state technology infrastructure	6	22	4	1	4
Development and implementation of educator induction programs	3	23	3	3	5

Table reads: In the next year, the level of SEA staff charged with developing a statewide data system is expected to increase in 10 states and remain the same in 26 states. No state projects that SEA staffing levels for the development of a statewide data system will decrease, but one state said it was too soon to tell what would happen with staffing for this activity.

Adequacy of SEA Expertise, Staffing, and Funding Resources in Key Reform Areas

More states reported having adequate expertise in their state education agencies to carry out various reform activities than reported having enough staff or fiscal resources. This finding has been consistent over the three years that we have been surveying states on their implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

As shown in **table 6**, the majority of states responding to our survey—from 20 to 28 states—reported having adequate SEA expertise to support the development and/or implementation of internationally benchmarked standards, a longitudinal assessment, a new assessment system, and new educator evaluation systems. Twenty-two states said they have adequate SEA expertise to support efforts to improve low-performing schools. But only 8 to 16 states, depending on the activity, indicated they have adequate staffing to carry out these responsibilities, and just 7 to 12 states reported having adequate fiscal resources for these tasks.

Table 6. Number of states with adequate SEA expertise, staffing levels, and fiscal resources to fulfill key reform responsibilities

Dimensions of SEA capacity	Adequate staff expertise	Adequate staffing levels	Adequate fiscal resources	Not currently a state priority
Capacity to support implementation of internationally benchmarked standards (including the CCSS, if applicable)	27	13	10	2
Capacity to support development and implementation of a new assessment system	23	12	10	2
Capacity to support development and implementation of a longitudinal data system	28	16	12	1
Capacity to support design and implementation new educator evaluation systems	20	8	7	3
Capacity to support efforts to improve low-performing schools	22	11	10	1

Table reads: Twenty-seven states reported having adequate staff expertise to implement internationally benchmarked standards, while 13 states said they have adequate staffing levels and 10 said they have adequate fiscal resources for this activity. Two states responded that implementing internationally benchmarked standards is not currently a state priority.

Note: Thirty-five of the 38 states responding to the CEP survey answered at least some of the items in this question about adequate state capacity.

We examined each dimension of state capacity shown in table 6 to determine whether any states believed they had adequate state capacity in all three of areas of capacity—staff expertise, staffing levels, and fiscal resources. We found only a small number of states that reported having adequate capacity in all three areas for any of the following five dimensions:

- Implementing internationally benchmarked standards (9 states)
- Developing and implementing a new assessment system (8 states)
- Developing and implementing longitudinal data systems (7 states)
- Improving low-performing schools (6 states)
- Designing and implementing new educator evaluation systems (5 states)

Conclusion

Most of the states participating in our survey expect state funding for SEA operations to remain flat or decrease in school year 2012-13. States with cuts in their SEA operations are compensating for cuts in 2011-12 by reducing staffing costs in various ways while trying to protect services to school districts.

Even with cuts or flat funding, most of the survey states have managed to maintain, and in some cases increase, the number of staff assigned to carry out important education reforms.

In the next few years, most states will need to ramp up their efforts to transition to the Common Core State Standards. Many of the changes involved in this transition, including the implementation of new assessments aligned to the CCSS, will require leadership, coordination, and technical assistance from SEAs. As these state responsibilities increase, SEA staff with relevant expertise are likely to be stretched very thin. It remains to be seen whether SEAs will have the funding and staff to effectively carry out these responsibilities.

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Appendix: Study Methods for Reports Based on CEP's Fall 2011 State Survey

The findings presented in this series of reports are based on responses to a survey that the Center on Education Policy (CEP) and Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (CEP's contractor for this project) administered to the deputy state superintendents of education between early October 2011 and late November 2011. The survey team invited the deputies in the 50 states and the District of Columbia to complete the survey.

Following consultation on item development with staff in the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and consultants, the survey team sent initial letters to the deputies that explained the purposes of the survey and invited them to participate. The team distributed the survey to each state via email and followed up with non-responders at approximately weekly intervals by phone and by e-mail. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia submitted surveys for an overall response rate of 75 percent.

The survey, titled "Survey of State Fiscal Conditions, Reform Capacity, ARRA Reforms, Implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and Changes in ESEA, Fall 2011," included 34 questions, divided into the following five sections.

State fiscal environment for elementary and secondary education. Questions in this section asked about changes in funding for elementary and secondary education in the state as well as changes in funding for the state education agency (SEA). States that reported decreases in funding were asked a second series of questions regarding personnel actions or reductions in services to districts as a result of the budget cuts.

SEA staff and capacity to carry out current and planned reforms. Questions in this section asked SEAs to describe shifts in staffing levels in a number of areas over the past 12 months as well as shifts anticipated in the coming 12 months. SEAs were also asked to indicate whether they felt they had adequate staff expertise, staffing levels and fiscal resources in five areas of SEA capacity.

State efforts associated with each of the four American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) assurances. In this section, states were presented with a series of questions about implementation of strategies associated with the four ARRA assurances as well as whether these assurances had affected the state's reform agenda and what impact ARRA and EduJobs funds had on elementary and secondary education.

State adoption and implementation of the CCSS. The questions in this section asked about the impact of the CCSS within the state, anticipated challenges, and the communication strategies the SEA was using to prepare for statewide implementation. States were also asked to indicate areas in which they would need to make changes to their P-20 policies and practices and when they anticipated that the CCSS would be fully implemented.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and state plans to apply for waivers. Questions in this section asked states to indicate whether and when they anticipated they would apply for a waiver of certain ESEA requirements, in which of the 10 areas outlined by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) they anticipated requesting a waiver, and the current status of the state's efforts to address ED's four principles for improving student academic achievement and increasing the quality of instruction.

Most of the questions in the survey asked respondents to select a response (or multiple responses in some cases) from a set of options. Seventeen questions provided respondents with space to insert comments or explanations regarding their responses. The approach was slightly different for the four questions relating to the ARRA assurances (in the third section of the survey). Each of these questions provided a list of reform strategies related to an assurance and states were asked to indicate whether each of the reform strategies was planned or underway in the state. For all strategies that were SEA activities, states were asked to indicate the expected school year of full implementation. The study team coded the implementation year information into three categories: *Implemented* (the state had implemented the strategy prior to the end of the 2010-11 school year), *Implementing this year or later* (the state was implementing the strategy starting in 2011-12 or later), and *Ongoing or unknown date* (the data of full implementation was unknown or the strategy was one the state engaged in on an ongoing basis).

The survey team used statistical analysis software to store, clean, and analyze the survey data. The team handled missing data in one of two ways. In most cases, if a respondent completely skipped a question, the response was counted as missing but not reported in the totals in this series of reports (this is why not all of the response totals sum to 38). Some items asked respondents about specific changes or reform activities and the year in which the changes or reforms are expected to be completed. In these cases, if a respondent indicated that a change or reform was expected but did not indicate an anticipated year of completion, the response was counted in the frequency totals and the year was coded as unknown. Finally, because there were very few responses to open-ended items, the survey team did not include these responses in any statistical analyses or frequency calculations. However, the report authors did review the open-ended responses and inserted them in the text where appropriate to help illustrate key points and findings.