

Functions of the State Education Agency

The statewide system of support does not replace the traditional functions of the SEA; it expands the SEA's functions and must be structured for compatibility to fit within the broader functions of the SEA and integrated within those functions.

The SEA's Functions

Though state education agencies vary in organizational structure and how they relate to districts and schools, they commonly perform the following six functions:

1. provide information
2. set standards
3. distribute resources
4. monitor compliance
5. assist with improvement
6. intervene to correct deficiencies

Variance in Function

America is a nation with a history of local control of schools. The balance of authority among the school, the local district, and the state has evolved differently within each state, and the state's own traditions influence the type and degree of state involvement in each of the functions listed above. The way the state organizes its interface with districts and schools—directly or through intermediate agencies and/or external partners, for example—affects the manner in which the state supports districts and schools. For instance, in states with an existing infrastructure of regional extensions of the state education agency, a ready framework is available on which to embed a statewide system of support. By contrast, in states with no regional structure or with semi-autonomous regional units, SEA leaders must build a more coordinated infrastructure while simultaneously engaging LEA (local education agency) personnel to ensure their receptivity to an evolving state role. Further, the size of the district and the nature of the school—elementary or high school, regular or charter school, for example—also impact their relationship with the SEA and the degree to which the district appreciates the potential value of a statewide system of support.

Purposes and Processes

Within each of the six primary functions of an SEA, several processes are required to fulfill each function's purposes. Table I outlines each function's processes and expresses the purposes as questions that are answered through the process. For example, an SEA provides information to LEAs through the processes of notification, expectation, announcement, and enrichment, answering the questions: How does the SEA notify districts and schools of state statute and policy requirements? How does the SEA communicate its expectations of districts and schools that go beyond those requirements? How does the SEA announce services, opportunities, and resources that are available to schools and districts? How does the SEA provide evidence-based "how to" information for districts and schools?

TABLE 20.1 SEA Functions, Processes, Purposes

SEA Function	Process	Purpose: Answer to the Question ...
Provide Information	Notification	How does the SEA notify districts and schools of what state statutes and policies require of them?
	Expectation	How does the SEA communicate its expectations of districts and schools that go beyond what is required?
	Announcement	How does the SEA announce services, and opportunities that are available to schools and districts?
	Enrichment	How does the SEA provide evidence-based "how to" information for districts and schools?
Set Standards	Certification (input)	What is required for a person to hold an employment position such as teacher, principal, or superintendent? How are districts and schools accredited by the state?
	Programming (output)	What programs must districts and schools provide; for whom, for how much time, and in what manner?
	Assessment (outcome)	What are students expected to learn, and how is their learning assessed?
Distribute Resources	Prioritization	How does the SEA determine district/school eligibility for specific funds or resources?
	Conditioning	How does the SEA determine the conditions under which the districts/schools receive and use funds or other resources?
	Allocation	How does the SEA determine which districts/ schools receive how much money or other resources?

TABLE 20.1 SEA Functions, Processes, Purposes

SEA Function	Process	Purpose: Answer to the Question ...
Monitor Compliance	Assurance	How does the district/school assure the state its acceptance of responsibility for the mandate of the statute/policy and guarantee compliance?
	Documentation	How does the district/school report that it has complied with the statute/policy?
	Confirmation	How does the SEA monitor compliance and check the accuracy of
Assist with Improvement	Status Assessment	What is the district/school doing?
	Gap Analysis	Where do the district's/school's actions fall short of the operational standards?
	Planning	How does the district/school plan to meet and exceed the operational standards?
	Organizational Development	What district/school policies, structures, and procedures must change to meet and exceed operational standards?
	Training/Prof. Development	What improvements in skills and knowledge of district/school staff are necessary to meet and exceed operational standards?
Intervene to Correct Deficiencies	Remediation	How does the SEA intervene to address the district's/school's deficiencies in compliance?
	Corrective Action	What actions does the SEA take when the district's/state's outcomes are inadequate?
	Restructuring	What actions does the SEA take when the corrective actions do not result in adequate outcomes by the district/school?

Differentiation of SEA Functions

While many of the SEA's functions apply to all schools and districts in the state, some focus primarily on schools and districts that demonstrate inadequacy on operational indices and/or performance outcomes. Thus, the SEA's functions are differentiated in their application, according to the status of the district or school, as shown in Table 20.2. Ideally, the statewide system of support targets and differentiates its services to schools and districts according to their level of need, as also shown in Table 20.2.

TABLE 20.2 SEA Functions, Processes, Supports

A "performance zone" may be applied to a school or district according to its current performance and rate of improvement in both operations and outcomes. Shaded areas indicate NCLB-related statewide system of support, and the degree of shading symbolizes the kind, intensity, and duration of support. Schools and districts in the Green Zone operate and perform well above the minimum expectations of the state. Schools and districts in the Yellow Zone make progress at a rate that is close to the line of minimum expectation, or cross the line in one direction or the other from year to year. Schools and districts in the Red Zone consistently operate or perform below the minimum expectation of the state.

Function	Process	Green (Safe) Zone		Yellow (Caution) Zone		Red (Danger) Zone	
		District	School	District	School	District	School
Information	Notification						
	Expectation						
	Announcement						
	Enrichment						
Standards	Certification						
	Programming						
	Assessment						
Resource Distribution	Prioritization						
	Conditioning						
	Allocation						
Compliance	Assurance						
	Documentation						
	Confirmation						
Improvement	Status Assessment						
	Gap Analysis						
	Planning						
	Organizational Development						
	Training/Prof. Development						
Intervention	Remediation						
	Corrective Action						
	Restructuring						