



SLDS Spotlight

State Approaches to Regional Service Centers

A regional service center (RSC) can be a significant link between state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs), and can also support data sharing with other agencies and organizations across the P-20W spectrum (early learning through the workforce). Depending on the state, LEAs, and infrastructure, an RSC can perform a wide range of duties, which includes (but is not limited to) collecting, organizing, validating, and analyzing quality data for longitudinal data systems (LDS); designing and implementing professional development and other educational programming; and encouraging learning related to statewide efforts (as depicted in figure 1 on the next page).

In some local settings, educational programs and services may be too costly or too limited in demand for individual districts to implement on their own. In these cases, RSCs can create significant efficiencies by allowing LEAs to combine resources and collaborate to achieve shared goals. This product takes an in-depth look at the relationship between states and their RSCs, and the benefits that result. (Note: The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program).



According to Iowa legislation passed in 2010, the role of the area education agency (AEA) (Iowa's version of the RSC) is to "provide a statewide infrastructure for educational data to create cost efficiencies, provide storage and disaster mitigation, and improve interconnectivity." Iowa's nine AEAs are considered "partners in education" and act as the liaison between LEAs and the SEA.

Professional Development and Training

A centrally-located AEA, called AEA 267, reaches out to the Iowa education community with the main goal of improving schools and student learning. Along with providing districts with several types of support (professional development, curriculum planning, best practices, technology planning, etc.), AEA 267 has partnered with the Iowa Department of Education to train users in EdInsight, a web-based, state-wide educational data warehouse. AEA 267 also hosts several other applications including Iowa Pages, which helps educators create professional websites; and Online Survey Tool, which allows AEA 267 districts to collect school improvement data.

AEA 267 also engages with and trains staff in all other AEAs, following a "train the trainer" approach. According to Mr. Pennington, Chief Bureau of Information and Analysis Division of Communication and Information, Iowa Department of Education, the ultimate goal of AEA 267 is to get one person trained in every district by the end of 2011, starting with education service directors and superintendents, and one person trained in every building by the end of 2012.

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For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program or for support with system development, please visit <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds>.



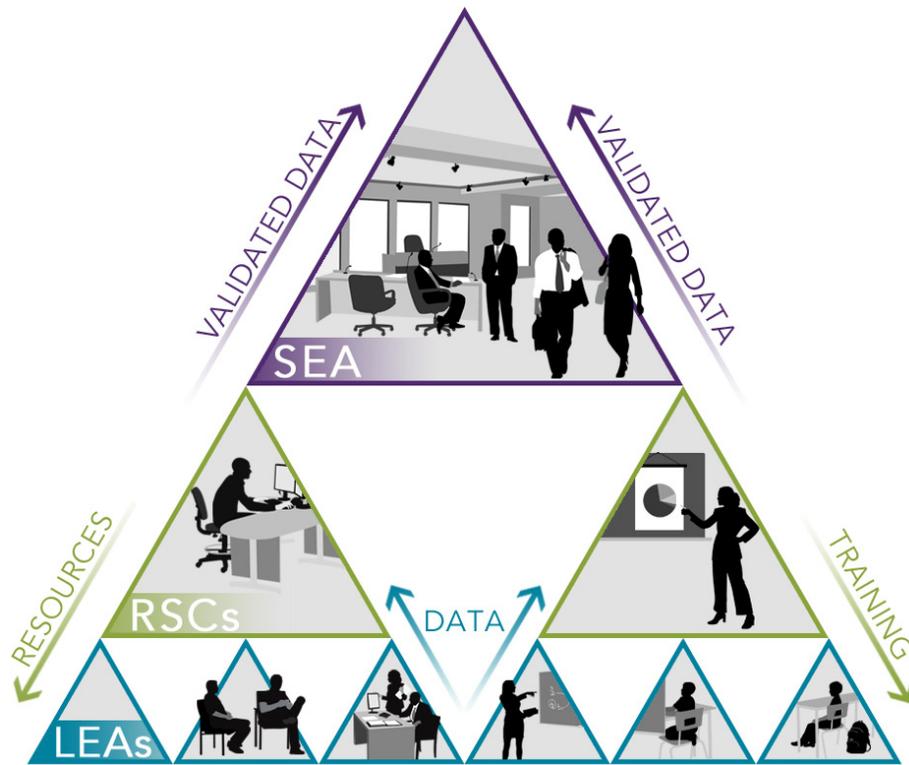


Figure 1. An RSC's relationship with its respective LEAs and the SEA

Disaster Mitigation and Storage

Data backup and disaster mitigation remain critical in preserving quality data, especially in Iowa, a state that experienced record flooding in 2008. Iowa's data are stored in four separate locations: at each LEA, the SEA, and two data bunkers. Housed at two of the state's AEAs, these bunkers are self-contained, fire proof, and can withstand extreme weather. Both bunkers house server equipment and have room to add more technology as the data and technology continue to grow.

Linkages of Quality Data and Improved Efficiency

Iowa has also worked with the AEAs to create and implement an electronic transcript system and student record exchange called the Student Record Exchange and Transcript System (this work was performed as part of an SLDS grant project). This permanent electronic transcript repository is designed to provide a central location for all high school transcripts. This repository, which resides at the state level, is regularly updated after each grading period. The state's system:

- aids in the standardization of data and seamless transfer between institutions;
- facilitates the flow of student transcripts between Iowa high schools and postsecondary institutions as well as the flow of student records between LEAs when necessary;
- reduces the administrative burden for LEAs by automating the electronic transfer of student records;

- encourages the ability to examine and analyze longitudinal data at the K12, postsecondary, and state level; and
- delivers and ensures secure data accessibility that will assist Iowa's Department of Education in meeting state and federal reporting requirements.

New York: Boards of Cooperative Educational Services



Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCESs) (New York's version of an RSC) began in 1948 and are based on a cooperative model, in which the Boards are owned and operated by the members of the Cooperative (LEAs). BOCESs' services are created when two or more school districts decide they have similar needs that can be met by a shared program. Twelve of the BOCESs also include Regional Information Centers (RICs), which provide computer and technology education and training to their region, and act as the main hub of state technology and data policies.

When New York was required to collect data for accountability purposes, the State leveraged the work that had already been implemented by the BOCESs and RICs. From there, New York adopted data warehouse standards and expanded from four to twelve data warehouses throughout the state. Currently, there are 37 BOCESs in the State of New York that cater to the specific needs

of the districts (excluding the “Big Five” city school districts: New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers, and Syracuse).

Efficiency and Collaboration of Resources

Like many RSCs, BOCESs help school districts save money by providing opportunities to pool resources and share costs. Rather than operating separate programs in each school district, BOCESs allow the opportunity for school districts to create customized programs that meet their specific needs. BOCESs differ depending on the needs of the local school districts. New York’s 37 BOCESs provide direct instruction within a classroom setting for a number of BOCES-created programs, including instruction services and professional development, career and technical programs for high school students, services for students with disabilities, and literacy programs and employment training for adults.

Cleaner, Quality Data

RICs are the primary source of data for New York. All data that are required of LEAs by the State are first staged in an RIC before being transmitted to the State. RICs gather data on approximately 3.3 million students. Using a web-based data collection tool, data are first moved out of school districts and into RICs. The RICs “clean” the data by running edits against all business rules and working intimately with the LEAs to ensure that the data gathered comply with state standards. The collected data then move to the state repository. For the BOCESs, this entire process ensures that the data are clean, consistent, and comply with state requirements. In addition to staging and cleaning data, RICs collect additional, non-state required data and use that total set of data to provide instructional reports for the LEAs. RICs also make a wider range of technology skill sets available to school districts. This relationship promotes consistent technical standards, lightens the burden placed on local taxpayers, and levels the playing field so that all LEAs receive adequate resources available for all students, regardless of size.

Oregon: Education Service Districts



Oregon’s Education Service Districts (ESDs) (Oregon’s version of an RSC) assist school districts and the State of Oregon by providing “excellent and equitable educational opportunities for Oregon public school students,” said Ms. Garrison. In total, there are 20 ESDs that serve Oregon’s 198 districts. In 2005, state legislation expanded the role of ESD to include school improvement, technology, administrative services, and special education. The work of the ESDs also helps to preserve local budgets, minimizes the duplication of services, and assists in initiating and implementing special programs that might not be available otherwise.

Localized Training and Professional Development

Initially, ESDs focused solely on technical assistance, special education, and administrative services. Over time, their role shifted to closing the achievement gap for students in Oregon.

The ESDs were able to further advance their statewide education initiative towards school improvement by joining forces four years ago with the Oregon Direct Access to Achievement (DATA) Project and securing an IES SLDS grant. Together, the ESDs and the DATA Project were able to support a roll-out of initial training in convenient locations, using the framework of the ESDs to add structure to the sessions. These training sessions provided valuable

“The ESDs truly are the backbone of Oregon’s data project implementation efforts.”

—Mickey Garrison
Director of School Improvement, Oregon
Education Enterprise Steering Committee
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training that, otherwise, would have been impractical to carry out on a state level, given the state’s size and geography. The initial training consisted of three prongs: instructional strands, technical training components, and a school board training module.

Instructional strands were attended by teachers and administrators who were trained (among other things) in procuring, organizing, and analyzing data. The ESDs assisted within the instructional strands by focusing on the use of data and providing practical methods for utilizing the information to inform decisionmaking for administrators and teachers at four levels of the education system: district, school building, classroom, and student. The ESDs also analyzed student performance in reading, writing, and math. By tackling all of these components on a local level, ESDs were able to customize training to meet LEAs’ needs.

The technical training component taught data input teams how to build a culture of quality data. By using a framework provided by the ESDs, data input teams designed custom models to meet the need of their LEAs. ESDs and members of the DATA Project then worked closely with the data input teams and districts to implement those models and strategies.

The school board training module, which was adopted by the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA), focuses on the importance of data, how to determine relevant data, and how to use data to advance student learning within their district. This three-fold training successfully addressed the needs within each LEA community, while also engendering a collective effort towards school improvement and a culture of data quality.

District Plans and Sustainable Shareable Resources

After the initial training roll-out, ESDs developed implementation plans customized for the 123 participating districts. The ESDs worked with each district to create a plan that took into account factors at the district, school, and team levels. During this process, the ESDs provided ongoing coaching, support, and training.

These customized plans were then used to develop an online video library of DATA Project resources, which are accessible via the Project's website (<http://oregondataproject.org>) or through the Public Domain Clearinghouse (<https://nces.grads360.org>).

The resources include quality video clips which address specific topics and concerns of the districts, including but not limited to: effective teaching strategies, increasing student engagement, academic vocabulary, interpretation of standards, formative assessment, and effective instructional practices.

Oregon built these components into the DATA Project with the explicit intention of sustaining the statewide effort well beyond the initial roll-out and in-services, and embedding the use of data to improve student learning as a cultural norm at the state, district, school and classroom level.

State Takeaways on the Benefits of Regional Service Centers

As the cases of Iowa, New York, and Oregon show, RSCs can provide many benefits to education agencies and their stakeholders. Regional service centers can enhance:

Data quality, linkage, and security

- Assist in preserving quality data through disaster mitigation and provide additional resources to back up quality data.
- Act as liaison to inform states of LEAs' data quality issues and concerns.
- Allow states to link data to other education institutions.
- Educate key leaders on the importance of data and how the data can help to advance student learning within their district.

Service development and delivery

- Create sustainable, shareable, and customized resources to meet LEAs' needs.
- Act as lead for roll-out training, in-services, and support services.
- Develop programs and resources that may not otherwise be offered by individual districts.

Efficiency

- Lower the administrative burden on states for providing quality programs and services.
- Pool resources and share costs among several districts.
- Improve interconnectivity between LEAs, the state, and partner organizations.