

Leveraging the Bully Pulpit: Optimizing the Role of the Chief State School Officer to Drive, Support, and Sustain School Turnaround

from *The State Role in School Turnaround: Emerging Best Practices*

Lauren Morando Rhim and Sam Redding

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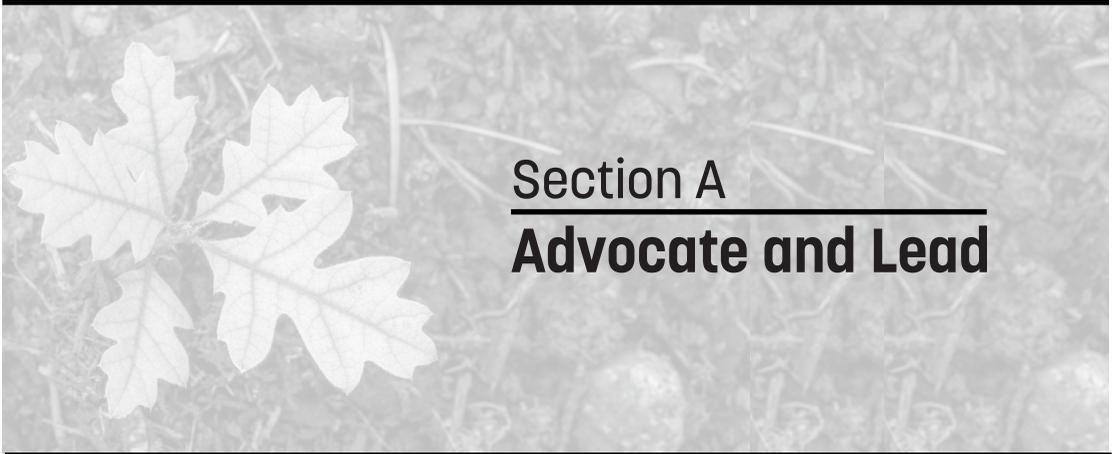
Rhim, L. M., & Redding, S. (2014). Leveraging the bully pulpit: Optimizing the role of the chief state school officer to drive, support, and sustain school turnaround. In L. M. Rhim & S. Redding (Eds.), *The state role in school turnaround: Emerging best practices* (pp. 31-48). San Francisco, CA: WestEd. Retrieved from http://centeron-schoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Leveraging_the_Bully_Pulpit1.pdf

About the Center on School Turnaround

The national Center on School Turnaround focuses on providing technical assistance to, as well as building the capacity of, states to support districts and schools in turning around their lowest-performing schools. The Center is led by WestEd in partnership with the Academic Development Institute, the National Implementation Research Network, and the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia.

Focus Areas

- Developing SEA Staff Capacity and SEA Organizational Structures
- Building District Capacity
- Creating Policies, Incentives, and Partnerships to Ensure a Pipeline of Turnaround Leaders
- Promoting Cooperative Labor-Management Relations
- Promoting the Use of Expanded Learning Time
- Creating Systems and Processes to Ensure a Pool of High-Quality Turnaround Partners
- Ensuring the Availability and Use of Data Systems at the SEA Level
- Supporting Schools and Districts in Establishing a Positive School Climate
- Monitoring and Evaluating School Turnaround Efforts
- Improving Capacity of School Boards to Support Turnarounds
- Engaging Families and Communities
- Building Political Will for Dramatic Change



Section A

Advocate and Lead

Leveraging the Bully Pulpit: Optimizing the Role of the Chief State School Officer to Drive, Support, and Sustain School Turnaround

Lauren Morando Rhim and Sam Redding

*The bully pulpit can set the agenda, express national goals, and frame education issues, proving at times to be a powerful force for reform. Presidential pronouncements and commissions have elevated issues of equity and student achievement, shifting political lines and sending school systems onto a new course. Examples of such agenda-setting include the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, which alerted the country to the poor performance of American schools; the NCLB-era emphasis on testing and accountability; and the Obama administration’s advocacy for school turnarounds, charter schooling, and teacher evaluation. Federal policies and rhetoric can provide cover for leaders at the state and local levels to enact controversial policies, making it easier for them to pursue goals that would otherwise foster fierce backlash. As Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, summarizes, “Washington is often at its best when a president is using the bully pulpit to highlight national educational and civil rights challenges and then tying them to our shared goals.” (Hess & Kelly, 2013, p. 4)*

Introduction

Chief state school officers—typically referred to as Commissioners, Superintendents, or Secretaries of Education—are responsible for leading their respective states’ public education systems. They work closely with their states’ legislatures, state boards of education, and governors to lead their state education agencies (SEA). As the leaders of the system, they have the bully pulpits from which they can articulate and drive their agendas. When it comes to school

turnaround efforts, chiefs can use the position to catalyze, support, enable, and sustain school turnaround efforts. Given limited resources at their disposal, effectively optimizing their bully pulpits is a key tool in state chiefs' toolboxes. This chapter explores the role of the chief state school officer in today's education policy climate and draws lessons from chiefs who have attempted, not always successfully, to leverage the position as a platform to drive an agenda to turn around the lowest performing schools. The chapter also outlines key action principles chiefs should consider to optimize their position to support focused turnaround efforts.

Chief in Charge

Chief state school officers' authority, roles, and responsibilities vary across the country. Moreover, the selection process for a state chief influences the position's authority because the path is linked to the constituency that secures the position and the extent to which the chief is subject to political pressures. Nationwide, there are three paths to the chief's office (National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 2013):

- State board appoints or recommends state chief (23 states)
- Governor appoints state chief (15 states)
- Residents of the state elect chief state school officer (12 states)

Appointed state chiefs avoid the divisiveness of a statewide election but may be subject to the whims of governors and state boards. Conversely, elected state chiefs may enjoy some degree of security stemming from public support of voters but are subject to the distraction that elections can present.

State chiefs play different roles in the broader state governance structure. In some states, the chief is a member of the governor's cabinet and leads the SEA (e.g., Tennessee). In other states, the governor appoints a cabinet-level secretary of education to function as policy executive and a commissioner of education to manage the SEA (e.g., Massachusetts). The limited research on state chiefs does not identify the optimal manner of appointment, parameters of authority, or governance structure (Brown, Hess, Lautzenheiser, & Owen, 2011).

Legislatures hypersensitive to directing funding to local districts and schools have historically relegated the SEA to the role of compliance monitor and provided notably limited resources relative to overall responsibilities. A recent analysis of eight state education budgets documented that SEA resources are spread very thin relative to overall K-12 public education expenditures. Furthermore, many of the resources allocated to the SEA are provided through federal categorical programs (e.g., Title I of ESEA, special education, school nutrition) and are therefore highly regulated (Murphy & Oujidani, 2011).

Regardless of the manner in which state chiefs obtain the position, how states configure the state chief's role, or the resources over which they have control, they have the potential to leverage their authority to significantly influence the

direction of public education in their states (Brown et al., 2011). An in-depth case study of the implementation of standards-based reform in two states in the 1990s found that “implementation of complex school reform seems to require a more activist definition of the Commissioner’s and the department’s role” (Lusi, 1997, p. 158). Chief state school officers and staff members more directly charged with driving the SEA’s turnaround agenda have the opportunity to catalyze turnaround efforts by developing an intentional activist strategy to leverage the chief’s bully pulpit. Of particular value for school turnaround efforts, they can bring attention to the need for dramatic change and cultivate critical buy-in to make the difficult changes required for organizational turnaround (Rhim, 2013). In addition, they can demonstrate their commitment by developing relevant policy and directing resources to support turnaround. The extent to which chiefs fully leverage their authority differs by state and the individual occupying the pulpit (Brown et al., 2011).

Relationship With the State Board of Education

The state chief is the professional charged with leading SEA. The state board fulfills state constitutional responsibilities related to providing citizens with access to public education (NASBE, 2011). Similar to the state chief, the state board members are either elected or appointed. They are responsible for advocating for education, serving as a liaison between citizens and education policy makers, building consensus, and developing policy. In practice, these responsibilities translate to actions such as establishing 1) curriculum standards, 2) graduation requirements, 3) professional credentialing requirements, 4) statewide testing programs, and 5) district accreditation standards. They are also responsible for appropriately implementing federal statutes (NASBE, 2011). Ideally, the state board and state chief work in concert with their state legislature to adopt policies and allocate resources to support agreed upon priorities.

In line with their larger responsibilities, state boards can also play a substantive role in establishing goals and supporting the state chiefs in their efforts to drive, support, and sustain school turnaround. By way of example, the Utah Board of Education outlined the problem facing public education in the state in the following simple but powerful terms and developed a strategic plan that outlined specific quantifiable goals:

As of 2012, only 43% of Utah adults had a postsecondary certificate or degree. On average, only 58.5% of Utah high school graduates enroll in college....By 2020, increase percentage of Utah high school graduates who have a postsecondary certificate or degree to 66% and increase percentage of students proficient in reading and math in the third, sixth, and eighth grades to 90%. (Utah State Board of Education, 2013, p. 2)

Clear acknowledgement of the challenges, articulation of the pressing need for change, and identification of explicit goals provide a simple and specific focus

for educators working across the state. Furthermore, the message communicates what the board and presumably the state chief see as priorities.

While setting goals is the essential first step to driving any agenda, it is arguably the easy part. Once state boards identify goals, they charge state chiefs with developing and implementing policies and funding programs to achieve the goals.

In considering the value of and strategies to leverage the role of the chief, it is relevant to acknowledge that state boards and chief state school officers operate in a political environment with diverse constituencies advocating their particular agendas (Ujifusa, 2012). For instance, decisions to prioritize the lowest performing schools, including allocation of additional resources to these districts and their respective schools, can trigger an outcry from constituencies in higher performing districts. In light of this political reality, efforts to advocate for school turnaround must be embedded in broader efforts to ensure that all students have access to quality public schools; neither state boards of education nor chief state school officers can overlook the majority of schools in the process of prioritizing schools identified for turnaround (i.e., the lowest 5% according to performance on state standardized assessments). They must juggle a dynamic portfolio of districts and their schools in a manner that provides incentives for successful schools while simultaneously providing supports for struggling districts (Redding & Walberg, 2007). To accomplish these ambitious goals, the state chief must engage constituents, including the state board, and solidify relationships in order to build political capital essential to driving ambitious change agendas (Brown et al., 2011).

Leveraging the Bully Pulpit

Heightened attention to issues such as turning around low-performing schools, fixing state data systems, and improving teacher evaluations all require state education officials to play a new and far more demanding role, often under the scrutiny of the media spotlight. (Brown et al., 2011, p. 1)

In a seminal book on federal policy development and implementation, Kingdon (1984) refers to “policy entrepreneurs” as the individuals who are willing to advocate for high priority proposals and demonstrate a willingness to use political influence to advance their agendas (p. 191). Effective policy entrepreneurs are individuals with education, resources, and connections—all key attributes of individuals who serve as chief state school officers. Examples of resources policy entrepreneurs expend are time, energy, reputation, and money. State chiefs committed to turning around the lowest performing schools should consider themselves entrepreneurs charged with identifying practical and sustainable solutions (i.e., solutions that build long-term capacity) to vexing problems. Reflecting the complexities inherent in public schools that are largely

governed by local school boards resistant to centralized efforts to drive change, effectively leveraging their bully pulpits to drive their agendas can increase state chiefs' probability of influencing local practices (Malen & Muncey, 2000).

Redding (2012) charges the state chief and the chief's leadership team with the central role in initiating change and innovation in the SEA and through the districts and schools:

Because of the strictures placed upon them by federal and state statutes, mandates, and regulations, SEAs may adopt reactive postures. The divergent interests and legitimate authorities of local districts further complicate SEA action. For SEAs to meet their gargantuan challenges in a shifting landscape, however, a proactive tack is required. SEAs must be able to innovate—to change in constructive ways. To fulfill their purposes within the limits of their resources, they need sound management practices, including processes for implementing innovation. To harness the talents and ingenuity of all their personnel, they must inspire individual striving and collective endeavor. SEAs need change leadership. (p. 9)

Change is not a comfortable or easy process for any organization, and the state chief must effectively manage the SEA, protect it from ill-conceived and unproductive initiatives, and identify and enact necessary changes consistent with the SEA's mission and goals.

By way of example, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan embarked upon a "Back to School Bus Tour" in the fall of 2013 to articulate his priorities. The tour entailed visiting cities across the country and giving speeches at schools. During a stop in Albuquerque, Secretary Duncan articulated his agenda as follows:

We have a set of folks, myself and the President included, who think education is an investment. It's the best investment we can make....But every time I go testify over at Congress, there is a set of folks who are telling me education is an expense, and we should be cutting back....Are we going to educate our way to a better economy, or are we going to cut back....We need pressure across the political spectrum on political leaders to invest in education. (Montaya Bryan, 2013).

This speech is notable not just for its content and clear indication that the speaker has the full support of the President, but also for the fact that Secretary Duncan did not issue a press release from Washington, DC. Rather, he physically travelled to a variety of smaller cities to articulate his agenda directly to constituents. Direct communication has both symbolic as well as substantive value as it indicates that the topic is important enough for the speaker to devote time to travel to advocate directly for his agenda.

Tracking articles written by and about state chiefs provides other examples of their efforts to leverage their bully pulpits to advance their agendas. In Oklahoma, in a press release distributed to correspond with the release of state assessment data, State Superintendent Janet Burrese acknowledged gains

and pressed for district and school personnel to remain focused: “So, while I’m pleased with the progress we’ve made, I’m not satisfied. We simply must have more of our students prepared for the rigors of college, workforce training, and career by the time they graduate high school” (2013, para. 7). In this statement, Burrelli celebrates success but emphasizes her high expectations and the ongoing need to stay focused on better outcomes for students.

In light of competing demands, chiefs committed to school turnaround need to be strategic and intentional about how they direct their authority to drive, support, and sustain effective turnaround. To optimize their bully pulpits, they can 1) communicate a sense of urgency and commitment, 2) advocate for policies that facilitate turnaround, and 3) reinforce their agendas by allocating resources in line with priorities. The following sections describe these three actions and provide examples of state chiefs using these levers.

Communicate a Sense of Urgency and Commitment

Rapid and dramatic change is a central component of school turnaround; schools identified for turnaround require dramatic change that will benefit the students *currently* in the school, not just students due to enroll in three to five years. Consequently, communicating a sense of urgency for immediate action (i.e., change is not optional) is critical to successful school turnaround efforts (Public Impact, 2007). State chiefs can communicate a sense of urgency within their states to build buy-in and, to a broader external policy audience, advocate for programs that will support their turnaround goals. The following sections describe examples of internal and external communication strategies and describe the potential role for social media that is emerging as a key means state chiefs can use to communicate directly with constituents.

Internal Communication

Chief state school officers spend their days interacting with a host of constituents. These interactions provide chiefs opportunities to communicate their priorities. National surveys document that the public has a relatively limited understanding of key education policy issues.¹ Yet, voters elect local school board members as well as governors who have significant influence over education (e.g., they allocate resources and appoint state chiefs). State chiefs can use the position to inform their various constituencies of their priorities related to school turnaround given district and school performance levels and instill a sense of urgency for change. This may include speaking at statewide school

¹See, for example, recent Phi Delta Kappa and Gallup (<http://pdkintl.org/programs-resources/poll/>), Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Parent%20Attitudes/AP_NORC_Parents%20Attitudes%20on%20the%20Quality%20of%20Education%20in%20the%20US_FINAL_2.pdf), and 2013 Education Next Poll (<http://educationnext.org/the-2013-education-next-survey/>) for data regarding awareness of Common Core, perceptions about the quality of public schools, and understanding of average cost per pupil.

board conferences in rural states or visiting districts with large numbers of schools identified for turnaround (Rhim & Redding, 2011). The engagements present opportunities to educate citizens about the performance of schools and the need for urgency and provide a context for decisions that will trigger resistance (e.g., implement robust teacher and school leader accountability systems).

In the mid-1990s, Richard Mills, the state chief of New York, effectively leveraged the bully pulpit to draw attention to a two-tiered diploma system wherein some students earned the rigorous Regents diploma while others received the Regents Competency Test diploma. Mills proposed that all students should be encouraged and expected to complete the requirements to obtain a Regents diploma, and this call catalyzed parents dissatisfied with the system to support his agenda for higher expectations for all students (Brown et al., 2011).

Written communication reinforces these priorities. For instance, in the introduction to the Rhode Island Department of Education's 2010–2015 strategic plan, Superintendent Deborah Gist stated:

Our major goal, the primary objective that we are working toward, is to ensure that all Rhode Island students are ready for success in college, careers, and life. We propose that by 2015 at least 85% of all Rhode Island's students will graduate with a Regents diploma which will signify that they have demonstrated proficiency in their core academic subjects and that they are ready to succeed in postsecondary education and in a challenging career.

I want to emphasize to all Rhode Islanders the sense of urgency we feel about the importance of our work. We have a strong foundation in place, and we are building upon it. We are not changing direction, but we are certainly getting more specific and ambitious about our goals. Over the next five years, we will direct all of our resources to focus squarely on these priorities. (2009, p. 2)

In this quotation about her school improvement agenda, Gist strives to instill a sense of urgency and communicates that she will prioritize or “direct all resources” to school improvement efforts. In addition to her formal communication strategies, Commissioner Gist has been creative about how she communicates her priorities in informal ways. For instance, she recently took a high profile skydive with a teacher to celebrate a school winning the state's summer reading challenge, generating headlines announcing, “Rhode Island Education Commissioner Deborah Gist Skydives for Literacy” (Klein, 2013).

A quotation from the state chief of New Mexico includes a clear signal that her goals align with the governor's goals and provides another example of communicating a sense of urgency related to school improvement:

As the Governor has often said, education reform must be rooted in the belief that every student can learn and must be motivated by a willingness to target our investment in education on proven efforts to improve the achievement of our struggling schools and students. We have an incredibly long way to

go when it comes to raising the reading skills of our third graders, and we should not be satisfied by modest gains. Our high school students are demonstrating how targeted reforms can yield results, so there should be no excuses for why we can't expand successful efforts to every student in every grade in New Mexico. (Logan, 2013, para. 5)

In this statement, Skandera acknowledges tangible challenges students face and then celebrates recent growth, thereby simultaneously communicating a sense of urgency and establishing evidence that change is possible.

An analysis of SEA approaches to implementing the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program documented that outreach by chief state school officers communicated an important symbolic as well as substantive message to districts with low-performing schools (Rhim & Redding, 2011). Of note, chief state school officers' visits to districts and phone calls in addition to written guidance regarding SIG reportedly communicated that school turnaround was a priority in the states. SEA personnel reported that support from their state superintendent reinforced their efforts to generate buy-in at the district level. For example, Deb Halliday, Policy Advisory to the State Superintendent of Montana, explained,

Our superintendent hit the road to personally visit the schools and communities. We [communicated] high levels of support to get them to commit to the change. This involved our state level teachers' union going out on the road, which was pretty phenomenal. We went to very remote parts of Montana to talk to teams about the unique approach, and the union was a big part of this because of the impact SIG would have on collective bargaining agreements and the new teacher evaluation systems. (Rhim & Redding, 2012, p. 35)

Visits to districts embarking upon turnaround efforts can be a high leverage means to build momentum, especially if the visit reinforces that key leaders (e.g., both the state chief and the teacher association leadership) are committed to the agenda. For instance, when rolling out the SIG program in Idaho, the state chief visited districts identified as eligible for SIG funding to encourage them to complete SIG applications. SEA personnel reflected that the state chief used "a lot of political capital to talk to district superintendents about [SIG]." He told them, "We will do whatever we have to do to work with you." The state chief in Arkansas took a similar approach and was very involved with providing support to the seven eligible schools including visiting all of the schools and attending board meetings in each of the districts. In reflecting on the impact of the visits, Arkansas Department of Education personnel noted, "The commissioner's support at the board meetings really showed that this is a collaborative effort centered around improvement at all levels" (Rhim & Redding, 2011, p. 15).

When rolling out their SIG program, chief state school officers in Arizona and Utah participated in the related professional development alongside their districts and schools. SEA personnel from both states reported that their chiefs'

participation sent a strong message to the teams that the SIG training was important (Rhim & Redding, 2011).

In New Jersey, to build support for a new initiative to turn around low-performing schools, state chief Chris Cerf authored a passionate editorial in a regional newspaper and posted the article on the SEA's website. In the editorial, Cerf implores citizens to “work together over the next several years to give all students in New Jersey equal opportunities for success, and let's hope that the support of expert educators in our [Regional Achievement Centers] will help to turn around low-performing schools. But let's also be honest that our children are the most important resource we have and that we must be ready to do whatever we can to give them a fair shot”(Cerf, 2012, para. 12–13).

External Communication

Leveraging their position to advocate for school turnaround is not limited to internal communication. State chiefs can also use their bully pulpit to reach a national audience, an audience comprised of federal legislators, advocacy groups, and private philanthropists who can develop policies and programs and allocate resources to support local efforts. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has historically served as the primary national voice and source of professional development for state chiefs. As a membership organization with diverse members, CCSSO has played a critical role in supporting state chiefs, but it has not typically engaged in particularly controversial advocacy work. Separate from CCSSO, in 2010, a small group of state chiefs interested in advocating for a more aggressive national education reform agenda signed on to participate in a program created by Excellence for Education, Chiefs for Change (CFC), but also remained members and supportive of CCSSO's mission. CFC has articulated a “roadmap” to excellent education, including a commitment to “replace failure with success” which entails:

- providing intense interventions for chronically low-performing schools;
- requiring failing schools to show demonstrable and sustained improvement or face closure; and
- leveraging school and district funding and governance to turnaround low-performing schools and districts. (Chiefs for Change, 2013, p. 2)

In addition to forming coalitions to extend their voices beyond their state borders, state chiefs also testify on Capital Hill in an effort to influence Congress, including advocating for policies that support school turnaround. For example, in February of 2013, the chiefs from Kentucky and New York testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, urging Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (i.e., NLCB; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). By testifying, the chiefs not only had the potential to influence federal policy makers, they also communicated to citizens and employees of their respective SEAs their views about reauthorization

and demonstrated that it is a priority given the extent to which it influences state and local practice.

Leverage Social Media

Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, topical blogs) provides an efficient means to communicate directly with stakeholders absent filters or delays inherent to more traditional media (e.g., live news, newspaper articles). A recent survey found that 72% of all online adults are using social media (Pew Internet, 2013). A powerful example of the potency of social media to communicate information is the 2011 revolution in Egypt. Organizers used Facebook to create coalitions and Twitter to keep the public informed, both in Egypt and across the globe, of the evolving revolution against the Egyptian government in spite of focused efforts to limit communication. Commentators described the phenomenon as a “leaderless revolution fueled by social media that transcended national boundaries, religion, economic class, and helped overthrow a 30-year old repressive regime” (Kamal & Meenalochani, 2012, p. 343). In large part due to the impact of social media on events such as the revolution in Egypt and Occupy Wall Street in the U.S., the Foreign Services now requires all diplomats to receive training in social media (Kamal & Meenalochani, 2012).

Many state departments of education, and specifically the chief state school officer in the state, leverage social media to communicate directly to constituents regarding their priorities. For instance, New York’s Commissioner John King maintains a Twitter account and has more than 5,000 followers. He uses the page to make announcements, publicize speaking engagements, and highlight school and student success stories. In Tennessee, Commissioner Kevin Huffman regularly tweets about performance data, school success, and his official activities. In Michigan, State Superintendent John Flanagan tweets information about school performance and regularly posts quotes reflecting his outlook and priorities.

Effectively utilizing social media requires some basic training; once posted, information becomes a part of the public record. Nevertheless, when used strategically, it has the potential to provide state chiefs with an efficient means to communicate their priorities and reinforce more formal communication methods.

Drive School Turnaround Policy Agenda

In addition to communicating a sense of urgency related to school turnaround, state chiefs can utilize their position to introduce and advocate for policies to foster effective and sustainable school turnaround efforts. State chiefs have used this authority to change policies that impede turnaround efforts and promote policies that foster and sustain turnaround.

Address Policies That Undermine School Turnaround Efforts

State education code typically reflects an evolution of thinking regarding public schools and regulations developed to ensure that local districts comply

with the code. However, the patchwork nature of policy making can lead to policies that trigger unintended consequences. For instance, as demonstrated by the debate about superintendent qualifications in Connecticut stemming from concerns about a district hiring a superintendent without required administrator credentials, certification requirements designed to address cronyism and nepotism can tie the hands of school boards interested in hiring nontraditional candidates (Strauss, 2013).

State chiefs can advocate to extend both the SEAs' and districts' flexibility to optimize talent management. For instance, SEAs frequently struggle to hire and retain qualified personnel; in most instances, professionals can earn more working at local districts than working for the state (Brown et al., 2011). However, the state chief has the opportunity to seek waivers or reconfigure positions to make them more attractive to highly skilled applicants and maximize the value of key personnel at the SEA. In Arizona, state chief Lisa Graham Keegan worked to change the status of SEA personnel to provide her with more discretion, and she successfully leveraged staff promotions to change the conditions of employment; each time an employee was offered a promotion, she negotiated greater flexibility in their contracts to ensure she could develop the staff she needed and hold them accountable for performance (Brown et al., 2011).

In August of 2013, New Mexico Governor Susan Martinez announced an initiative to award teachers an additional \$5,000 a year to work in struggling schools or to help students earn Advanced Placement credits (Martinez, 2013). The initiative had practical implications in that it could increase the labor pool interested in low-performing schools. It also had symbolic value; it communicated that Governor Martinez was committed to improving a targeted group of schools, and she was willing to commit resources to support the work.

Streamline Planning, Reporting, and Compliance

New initiatives can overburden schools with additional reporting requirements and monitoring. To minimize the adverse impact of cumbersome reporting, state chiefs can solicit input from districts engaged in turnaround to identify reporting redundancies that the state chief can then prioritize to streamline. For instance, one of the specific goals articulated by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) when it created its Texas Turnaround Leadership Academy was to streamline the monitoring and reporting by schools in high poverty areas in order to protect teacher and administrator time (Rhim, 2013). This goal emerged from state SEA personnel observing that schools identified for low performance by federal and state accountability systems devoted onerous quantities of time to hosting officials for compliance visits and completing multiple reports, and said, "one of the challenges that we have been working hard to overcome is redundancy of reports" (Rhim, 2013, p. 7). To address redundancies, TEA officials examined how many times they visited campuses and how they might limit

causing disruptions. Steps TEA took to limit these included coordinating the various teams that “touch the campus.”

Streamlining planning, reporting, and monitoring while preserving accountability for dramatic change efforts was a recurring theme in eight states involved with the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Specialist Program (Rhim, 2013). Time is a precious commodity for schools embarking upon turnaround efforts. A notable benefit of having the SEA, and specifically the state chief, actively engaged in school turnaround efforts is its ability to see the entire state system and take steps to streamline existing requirements, allowing district and school personnel to devote more time to activities more directly involved with improving student outcomes (e.g., instructional coaching, structuring interventions, analyzing data). In Montana, state chief Denise Juneau prioritized flexibility and shifted her department from a one-size-fits-all approach to extending autonomy to districts that were performing well and simultaneously monitoring and supporting districts that were struggling (Ujifusa, 2012).

Create and Activate Consequences for Failure to Change

Successful turnaround efforts require multiple layers and stages of accountability, with multiple stakeholders fulfilling their respective responsibilities. Every stage is dependent upon effective tracking of outcomes to verify successful implementation and progress.

In SEA-initiated efforts, accountability begins with the chief state school officer and ends with the building principal. Chief executives must use their bully pulpits to garner support for investments in turnaround, ensuring states allocate adequate financial and human resources to support the initiative and establish systems that create the conditions for the initiatives to succeed (e.g., streamlined reporting and monitoring).

In Colorado, former state chief Dwight Jones took the atypical step of requiring districts to demonstrate effectiveness in order to access Title I funds, a federal entitlement program with few tangible consequences for ineffectiveness (Brown et al., 2012). The result of these requirements was greater adoption of interim assessments to track student growth.

In 1998, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in Louisiana created the School and District Accountability System that outlined specific academic performance goals and companion sanctions for districts that failed to meet these goals (Smith, 2012). In 2003, the legislature added additional teeth to the accountability system when it authorized the creation of a “Recovery School District” (RSD) authorized to take over persistently low-performing schools. Modeled after U.S. bankruptcy law, the state authorized the RSD to cancel existing contracts in schools eligible for takeover (i.e., schools that had failed to meet performance standards for four consecutive years and were located within a district in which 50% of its schools were failing; Nelson, 2012). Because of these

laws, the RSD currently operates dozens of schools in Louisiana. The threat of these actions and a state actually taking the actions when appropriate apply pressure for change and can instill a sense of urgency.

Allocate Resources in Line With Priorities

Money talks, and allocating substantive resources to support turnaround efforts communicates that this work is worth prioritizing. This allocation reinforces state chiefs' turnaround agendas. An intentional SEA strategy and structure developed to support district turnaround efforts and communicated effectively by the state chief signals that turnaround is a priority. This messaging has substantive as well as symbolic value, and it reinforces other communication related to the importance of addressing low performance. State chiefs have aligned resources to support their priorities by developing structures to support school turnaround and evaluating turnaround efforts in order to cull emerging best practices.

Develop a Structure to Support School Turnaround

States have developed a variety of structures to support turnaround from basic compliance with requirements related to statewide systems of support outlined in NCLB to standalone turnaround divisions charged with operating schools identified as candidates for dramatic change (Bakers, Hupfeld, Teske, & Hill, 2013; Mass Insight Education, 2010). For instance, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Michigan created recovery school districts—separate entities focused on creating conditions to support aggressive turnaround in schools that have long resisted more incremental change efforts. Indiana created turnaround academies and identified lead partners to play a central role in turnaround. Connecticut's state chief created a Commissioner's Turnaround Network to engage external providers to lead turnaround efforts, and Delaware created a Partnership Zone comprised of the lowest performing schools receiving targeted interventions and monitoring (Baker et al., 2013). It is premature to assess the merits of each of these structures, and the results will most likely be variable reflecting a variety of local contextual factors. Nevertheless, they are examples of strategies state chiefs can pursue to prioritize school turnaround efforts.

Evaluate and Refine State Support Structures

As states shift resources to support district efforts to turn around low-performing schools, effective evaluation of those efforts is critical to documenting emerging promising practices as well as halting ineffective practices. By investing in systems to track and evaluate the state's efforts, the chief affirms that effective turnaround is a priority and reinforces the importance of robust evaluation. Conversely, absence of effective evaluation systems communicates that change is optional.

The state of Massachusetts commissioned in-depth analyses of SIG schools in 2012 and 2013.² After conducting monitoring site visits to collect qualitative data, the state examined the practices of schools that had demonstrated the largest gains relative to those that had demonstrated the least gains. This process revealed specific differentiating practices, which the state used to inform future guidance to schools embarking upon turnaround (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). In a memorandum to the state board of education, state chief Mitchell Chester highlighted the key findings (i.e., turnaround schools demonstrating large jumps in performance have an “instruction- and results-oriented principal who has galvanized both individual and collective responsibilities”, Chester, 2012, para. 6) and signaled how the data were used to improve practices (i.e., findings were used to alter the focus of targeted assistance to districts; Chester, 2012). The investment in the evaluation of school and district turnaround procedures informed state practice while also reinforcing that turnaround is a priority for the state chief.

Conclusion

As the leaders of their respective SEAs, chief state school officers have the potential to exert significant influence over school turnaround efforts in their states as well as across the nation. While state chiefs must negotiate mandates and regulations from the federal government along with their legislatures and state school boards and navigate a plethora of local politics, they have a distinct perspective that provides many opportunities to influence the quality of public education in every school in their states.

Introducing policies designed to turnaround schools requires upsetting the status quo and securing buy-in from stakeholders who do not necessarily share common goals or agree upon the means to achieve the goals. Consequently, one of the outcomes of chiefs advocating for disruptive change can be loss of support that limits their ability to fulfill their goals or leads to them losing their jobs. For instance, Idaho state chief Tom Luna’s efforts to enact dramatic changes in how public schools operate, including efforts focusing on school turnaround, led to a successful voter referendum to roll back his reforms (Popkey, 2012). In 2012, Indiana Superintendent Tony Bennett lost his bid to continue as state chief due to resistance to his policies, including his policies related to school turnaround efforts (Campbell, 2012).

The extent to which state chiefs opt to fully leverage their bully pulpits varies and may be partially attributed to the state political context in which they operate. It is also a reflection of the extent to which state chiefs are willing to take political risks to accomplish their goals. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the political context, all state chiefs have the potential to utilize their bully pulpits

²To view the 2012 report, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2012-04/item2.html>

to drive, support, and sustain effective turnaround efforts that can lead to better opportunities for students.

Action Principles

Communicate urgency for turnaround

- Drive bold turnaround efforts by communicating a sense of urgency from the bully pulpit. State chiefs have the opportunity to communicate internally to key constituents regarding the need for turnaround and externally to advocate for policies and funding streams that support turnaround efforts.
- Optimize social media to communicate directly with diverse constituency groups.

Drive state turnaround policy agenda

- Propose policies that foster school turnaround (e.g., develop programmatic and financial incentives to encourage actions that drive school turnaround; allocate resources to build district capacity for school turnaround).
- Change policies that hinder meaningful and sustainable change (e.g., rigid certification requirements that limit local hiring decisions, ineffective accountability systems).
- Address regulatory and procedural redundancies that can distract district and school leaders from turnaround work.

Hold districts accountable for turnaround results

- Articulate robust and transparent performance metrics and focus on student outcomes rather than compliance.
- Implement tangible consequences for failure and hold districts accountable on an ambitious timeline (e.g., demonstrate clear measures of behavior change and academic gains within first year).

Develop a structure to support school turnaround

- An intentional SEA strategy and structure developed to support district turnaround efforts and communicated effectively by the state chief signals that turnaround is a priority. This messaging has substantive as well as symbolic value, and it reinforces other communication related to the importance of addressing low performance.

Evaluate and refine state support structures

- As states shift resources to support district efforts to turnaround low-performing schools, effective evaluation of these efforts is critical. By investing in systems to track and evaluate the state's efforts, the chief affirms that effective turnaround is a priority and reinforces the importance of robust evaluation. Conversely, absence of effective evaluation systems communicates that change is optional.

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