

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Technical Assistance, Analytic Analyses and
Report on the Nature and Extent
of Educational Service Agency
Involvement in Staff Development Services
to Local School Systems

Submitted to:

The U.S. Department of Education
OERI

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A. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

During the spring and summer of 1987, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) held discussions with the director of the American Association of Educational Service Agencies (AAESA), Dr. Walter G. Turner, and education researcher, Dr. E. Robert Stephens. The purpose was to determine how best to identify contributions made in educational staff development by education service agencies.

Education Service agencies are intermediate, county, regional, or cooperative education organizations that serve local districts by providing a range of services and products that are best paid for by groups of school districts, rather than individual systems.

The question of the contributions of educational service agencies, or ESAs as they are known, is particularly relevant in light of the educational reform movements occurring in states. It was the opinion of AAESA, which represents ESAs, and Robert Stephens, who has devoted much of his career to studying them, that their role is significant and has increased with the recent emphasis on reform.

Limited funds required the scope of the study to be modified during the project period. The vehicle for data gathering was the network of state department of education staff in nine states who serve as coordinators of ESA activities. In addition to reviewing distributing and collecting data gathering instruments these officials were also to solicit descriptions of exemplary ESA staff development models. As these tasks proved to be time consuming and demanding for them, few description exemplary models were collected -- in fact too few to include in this report. In addition one state, Connecticut, could not participate due to logistical problems.

Nevertheless, of a possible 150 individual ESA units included in the study, 105 responded to the questionnaires. In some states, 100% of the units responded. Information gathered provides a picture of agencies making a significant response to education reform challenges in their states. The findings

reported here should be of interest to all those seeking to understand how regional and local education agencies provide training to teachers and administrators.

B. INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

There is a long history of Education Service Agency (ESA) involvement in staff development. Virtually all early national profiles of the agencies established the prominence of staff development in the services they provided to schools. Later national and state descriptive studies confirm the continuing centrality of staff development.

Why then did OERI undertake a new probe? The emphasis given professional renewal reform movements in the school excellence and school reform movements required that at the evolving role of the ESA be examined. There has been some evidence that staff development activities of ESAs have accelerated in recent years due to the total or partial assumption of curriculum development and instructional improvement formerly administered by both large and small LEAs (Local Education Agencies) and by the state education agency.

Objectives of the Exploratory Study

There are three objectives to this inquiry: To describe selected organizational features of ESAs; to describe direct staff development activities offered by ESAs; and to identify major issues confronting ESAs in the provision of staff development.

Of nine states were originally included in this study: Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, and Texas completed the study. Connecticut later discovered that logistical problems precluded their participation.

The selection criteria used to determine the state involvement is as follows:

- The use of state networks of all three major forms of ESAs;