

Turning Points in the Growth and Development of AESA

by

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Perhaps the most fulfilling experience a human being can have is to watch one's own child develop from a helpless, fragile baby to a full grown, autonomous adult. Not equal to this experience but analogous to it in both the process and the emotional satisfaction is the opportunity to witness an organization of which one is a part start out as a very rudimentary entity and develop into an international association that is capable of meeting the multiple needs and interests of its clientele.

The authors of this article have had the privilege of being part of the Association of Educational Service Agencies for many years. One of us (Stephens) was part of the original meetings in 1974-75 to initiate what was first known as the National Association of County, Intermediate, and Educational Service Agencies, officially established in 1976. (Its name changed to the American Association of Educational Service Agencies in 1979 and then to the Association of Educational Service Agencies in 1999 to reflect an embryonic growth of participation by educational service agencies in Europe).

We have written this article to achieve several purposes:

- To update and expand the history of this organization written in 2001 by Lee Christiansen, a former executive director of the Association who helped initiate a number of initiatives described in this article.
- To create an awareness, and pride, among the organization's current members of the wisdom and vitality of the membership in growing an organization from a small group of like-minded Educational Service Agency (ESA) chief executives into an international

organization that provides targeted training for new and aspiring service agency leaders, sponsors and publishes research about best practices in service agencies, offers meetings and conferences that respond to development needs of all agency members from board members to consultants of various interests and disciplines and responds quickly to previously unforeseen needs of its membership.

- To energize the membership to continue the growth and diversification of the organization that must respond to unprecedented changes in educational financing, technology implementation, political conflict, and public expectation for achievement by all students.

We began by attempting to define what we mean by “turning points” in the growth and development of AESA. For us any change in the structure, delivery system, programs and/or significant behavior of the organization deliberately chosen by the membership constitutes a turning point. Such turning points usually represent a break with the past that significantly improves the ability of the Association to serve the interests of its member organizations. Obviously our choices are subjective; others may have chosen additional or different turning points. We do feel comfortable, however, that the relative youth of our professional organization permits a kaleidoscope view of the history of AESA and assures that the choices we made are justifiable even if others might not have made all these choices. We present our views in roughly chronological fashion, not in order of importance.

Organization of the Article

The remainder of the article includes the following sections:

- The list of “turning points” that satisfy the criteria used to warrant consideration as actions taken by the Association that represent a significant improvement in the body of services or programs designed to expand the professional capacities of members in the Association.
- A discussion of each of the “turning points” and the rationale for why it was selected.
- Other observations.
- Concluding comments.

The Turning Points

Thirteen actions taken by the Association are judged to meet the standard of a “turning point” as this construct is defined here, and shown in Table 1, along with the year when initiated. As cited previously, the 13 are listed in roughly chronological order in which they impacted the work of the organization; no attempt has been made to list the 13 according to the relative importance of each. While it is likely that an interesting debate would result from an attempt to reach consensus in the ESA community on the questions of relative importance, all 13 are here regarded to be “first among equals.” This is so because each represents a decision made by a fledgling, small national professional association beginning in mid 1976 to build, incrementally, a comprehensive menu of services and programs in response to the needs of its membership.

Table 1
The Turning Points

Turning Points	Year Initiated
Formation of the Association	1975
Membership Based on Agency, Not Individual	1975
Restructuring of the Annual Conference	1991
Establishment of the Government Relations Committee	1991
Establishment of the Association Website	1993
Advocacy for Passage of Goals 2000: Educate America	1994
Publication of First Issue of <i>Perspectives</i>	1995
Formal Adoption of Strategic Planning	1997
Creation of the Association as an Organization Separate from AASA	1997
Decision to Expand Cooperative Relationships With Businesses	1997
Sponsorship of First Annual Summer Conference	1999
Advocacy for Passage of No Child Left Behind	2000
Programs to Recruit and Train the new Generation of CEOs	2004

Discussion

A brief discussion of each of the “turning points” is provided below, along with the principal reason(s) each was labeled significant in furthering the mission of the Association.

1. Formation of the Association (NOCIESA)

Educational Service Agencies existed long before the creation of the National Organization of County, Intermediate and Educational Service Agencies (NOCIESA). It can be said that such entities have been in place in one form or another since the 1840s (Stephens & Keane, 2005, pp 9-10).

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, ESA leaders would get to know one another at AASA or other national meetings. When their conversations turned to the programs or services that they provided to their member school districts, it was inevitable that someone would say, "I need to know more about that." These leaders realized that they had much to learn from one another. It seemed silly to re-invent the wheel when adoption or adaptation could be far more efficient.

A second major topic of discussion was the need to encourage the inclusion of ESAs in federal legislation as grant eligible entities. This would provide a new revenue stream for ESAs, particularly in the area of program and service development.

With the help of a dedicated group of ESA leaders as well as staff from the US Office of Education, AASA, Bob Stephens and others, NOCIESA was born. There were 85 educational service agencies as charter members of the fledgling organization. Today, AESA has some 535 ESAs in membership. The goal of the organization was to be inclusive. For example, the choice of the initial name was an attempt to be inclusive as it incorporated county units as well as intermediate units and educational service agencies – each a term that was in use across the country. With this step, ESAs came out of the wilderness of standing alone and into a professional organization. Now they could learn from and support one another.

2. Membership Based on the Agency, Not Individuals

The decision in 1976-77 to base memberships on an individual agency rather than on an individual chief executive of an agency clearly honors our working definition of a “turning point.” Most national organizations enroll individuals but the ESA leaders structured their membership so that all in the ESA – whether employee or board member – would be covered under the membership.

There were many benefits resulting from the decision:

- * It represented an awareness that many potential member organizations are quite diverse in their programming mix and subsequent staffing profiles, and that all must find value in the Association if it is to be successful.
- * It represented an awareness that the single most critical non-fiscal organizational asset of a service agency is its collective human capital assets and that the exposure of the full staff of an agency to the work and products of the Association, would be an enriching experience for not only the service agency staff but the Association as well.
- * It did not place the Association in competition with the largely single- purpose national professional associations with a mission to serve leadership personnel in content-specific areas employed in the nation’s elementary- secondary schools who might choose to maintain their individual memberships in their respective professional groups.
- * It was anticipated that leadership and staff specialists of a service agency would likely find numerous instances where they would expose the mission and value of their type of organization to others as a result of making presentations at state and national conferences, or writing articles, or through networking.

3. Restructuring of the Annual Conference

For the first few years after the establishment of the National Organization of County, Intermediate, and Educational Service Agencies (NOCIESA) the organization was viewed as a member agency of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), which assisted with communication and support for this new entity. One of the early forms of support was organizing and managing an annual national conference of chief executives of the membership.

As the organization began to grow significantly, members asked for more and more features for the annual conference. These requests put an almost unsustainable burden on the one AASA staff member carrying out this function and other AASA-related tasks as well. In 1991 one of the members of what was now called AAESA offered to take responsibility for organizing the annual conference and this change was approved by the board.

Having an agency member of the association take responsibility for the content of the national conference brought about several advantages:

- The burdens of carrying out all the details of holding a conference (identifying a site, developing a theme and soliciting presentations that carried out the theme, registering participants, identifying and inviting guest speakers, etc.) could be shared among several people at the responsible ESA.
- Involving planners at several levels of the host agency in designing the conference brought about requests of program presentations that spoke to training needs for all levels of staff, thereby reinforcing the notion that the conference was designed to be for everybody within each member agency, even board members, not just chief executives.

The first ESA managed conference was held in 1991 and planned and managed by staff of the Oakland Schools ISD in Michigan. Attendance was doubled to over 100 participants. Subsequent conferences saw exponential growth in participation and a new feature: involvement by businesses that sought to display their products and services to ESAs since they served a regional clientele of local school districts and, in some cases, other non-profit agencies as well. By 1998 attendance at the conference exceeded 1000 agency personnel partially due to the expert leadership provided by the Hamilton County (Ohio) ESC and its superintendent Dave Distel.

4. Establishment of the Government Relations Committee

During the creation of NOCIESA there was concern raised that educational services agencies were not defined in federal legislation. This concern continued over the years and was

often voiced at the *We Care* conference, held in Washington, DC in conjunction with AASA. Without the definition, ESAs were not eligible for federal grant dollars.

As a result of the AESA Executive Council's first strategic plan, a specific initiative was established to address federal advocacy. Under the leadership of Joe Marinelli (NY) and Joe Lagana (PA), this group established the committee structure, operating principles, and a set of beliefs with respect to public policies and then secured representation (Bruce Hunter and the AASA legislative staff) to carry out its mission.

This action represented two turning points for AESA. First, the important matter of governmental relations was addressed. Subsequent efforts led to the definition of ESAs in federal law as well as ESA inclusion in many specific funding programs. Second, the organization put forth a system wherein each state was asked to provide a representative to annually help create the AESA legislative agenda. This reach into the membership for broad based involvement represented an important step to encourage the active and ongoing participation of the membership.

5. Establishment of Association Website

The first AESA website was created in 1993. At various times over the ensuing years additional features have been added and plans are well underway at the present time to further enrich this important resource for member agencies.

Usage statistics for the period 1993 through the early months of 2013 are not available. However, for the months of April 15 to July 15, 2013 the website was visited approximately 6,500 times by approximately 4,000 individuals. Some 21,000 pages were viewed.

The website addresses all four of the components of AESA's mission statement to "support and strengthen regional educational service agencies." Benefits to both the membership

and to the effectiveness of the work of the Association are current features of the website and include the following:

- The ability of the Association to inform member agencies and receive instant feedback on urgent legislative issues.
- A “Resources” section that provides the membership with easy access to a variety of content (e.g., AESA publications, a membership directory, sample documents on the work of educational service agencies, information about the AESA Foundation and links to agencies listed by state).
- A separate “ESA Research” section devoted to research reports commissioned by AESA, those completed by staff of member agencies, and those completed by others in which educational service agencies are featured.

Further planned enhancements include the following:

- A Digital Archive Library that will include state and national research studies completed since the early 1970s as well as prior annual conference material.
- An ESA Forum, a place for peer-to-peer discussion of issues, and the sharing of lessons learned in both programming practices and in organizational and governance topics.
- The use of website survey tools to collect member views on current issues.

We are indebted to Geannie Wells, AESA Web Mistress, for her assistance in publishing materials from which the summary shown here was developed.

6. Advocacy for Passage of Goals 2000: Educate America Act

The specific importance of the passage of Goals 2000: Educate America in 1994 to be stressed here is that for the first time an educational service agency was defined in a comprehensive federal law, in this case the new reauthorization of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965. The law defines an educational service agency as a “regional multi-service agency authorized by state statutes to develop, manage, and provide services and programs to local educational agencies.” (Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994).

Success for the inclusion of the definitions is largely due to the work of the

Government Relations Committee, chaired by Joe Marinelli, (NY) and Joe Lagana (PA).

7. Publication of First Issue of *Perspectives*

Anything that is important to citizens is subject to study and formal research. If an organization is currently doing good work, then there is a desire to find ways to make it even better. The Masters of Business Administration (MBA) degree is a good example of how the private sector seeks to study itself and use the products of that study to make business more efficient and effective.

Though elementary and secondary education have been around for centuries and subject to study a good part of that time, service agencies are a relatively new entity on the education landscape and relatively unique in their organization and function in the several states. Not all states have service agencies. Therefore, the idea of studying service agencies never rose to top of importance for the AAESA in its earliest years. However, as the organization grew and more and more research was being brought to the national conference by member agencies, the board of AAESA realized that it was important to take leadership for promoting research about ESAs for the benefit of the members and also to define ESAs as an important education phenomenon to be studied by professors and educators throughout the United States.

AAESA took several steps to define the importance of research in the development of ESAs of the future:

- The organization created a Research Committee to encourage and promote research as an important ongoing function of the membership.
- It established the annual research award given at the annual conference to a work of outstanding study about ESAs. This award was named for Bob Stephens, a frequent contributor to the research literature on ESAs.
- In 1995 it established an annual publication, *Perspectives*, to promulgate research about ESAs by and among the membership.

In establishing this journal, edited for the first 18 years of its existence by Bill Keane, a retired service agency superintendent from Michigan, the Association sought to create a journal that would meet the highest standards of scholarly publications in all fields. Perhaps the most important characteristic of such a publication is to have an editorial board of prominent service agency leaders who would assess submissions as to their quality and their value to the membership/readers and to advise the editor regarding publication of manuscripts.

The purpose of *Perspectives* was allowed to expand beyond pure research. One reason for this was to allow submissions of opinion about the demonstrated value of service agencies, especially those that might be written by political and policy leaders in the several states.

Over the years the journal featured articles about the need for a national database about ESAs (1995, the first edition), cost analysis studies of ESA programs and services (1996, the second edition), the role of ESAs in assisting failing schools (2004), ESAs as service providers for rural schools (2003), the role of ESAs in developing school leaders (2005), methods of assessing ESA capacity (2008), and the role of ESAs in assisting in school transformation (2011).

Initially the journal was delivered only in paper form but was soon delivered both electronically and in hard copy. Most recently the board has moved the format to an exclusively electronic format. This change will save the organization a significant amount of money, but may reduce the access of non-members to the value of the work contained in each edition.

8. Formal Adoption of Strategic Planning

In the early years of NOCIESA and AAESA, the Executive Council would annually dedicate time to plan the organization's activities for the coming year. During these formative years, much of the effort went into organizing the fledgling organization. As time went by, it

was felt that such planning was more reactive to very current conditions rather than looking to the future.

About the same time, a number of ESA staff across the country had been trained in strategic planning techniques and were offering these services to their member local districts. The Council realized that such planning would be important for AAESA's continued growth and development. With the hiring of Brian Talbott as Executive Director, AAESA entered into strategic planning and adopted its first plan in 1997.

The strategic plan that was put forth involved an environmental scan, a review of past initiatives, input from each committee and the general membership and the publishing of the resulting plan. The outcome of the first plan was so significant that the Council codified the process in their Operating Handbook, and it has been in use ever since.

As a result of the Strategic Planning Process, the Council reinforced the original mission statement of the organization and set forth five objectives that formed the basis of AESA's work to this day.

Objective 1: Completion of our present strategic initiatives:

Initiative #1-We will strengthen our ability to affect education policy through appropriate and effective government relations activities.

Initiative #2 - We will organize and position the organization to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse membership.

Initiative #3 - We will develop relationships and partnerships that promote the vision and agenda of AESA.

Objective 2: Expansion of our membership to include every state that has educational service agencies.

Objective 3: Formation of a planning process that will assure our continued growth into the foreseeable future.

Objective 4: Expansion of our partnerships with educational service agencies in other countries.

Objective 5: Continuing the growth of our newly formed AESA Foundation.

9. Creation of the Association as an Organization Separate From AASA

Organizations often operate like families, with the older entity providing strength and support for the new family member but as the dependent grows older, stronger, and more capable, their previously shared views of the world begin to migrate from each other. This is not a criticism of either one; it is the natural order of things.

Though NOCIESA, then to become AAESA, possibly might not have grown into an organization capable of standing on its own without the initial support of AASA, it became clear that AAESA was becoming ready to become independent. Increasing membership, additional funds from exploding participation in the annual conferences and slow but important growth in revenues from business partners showed that the organization now needed its own full-time leadership if it was to fulfill the promise of still further growth as a national organization in the future. Also, the increased role of AAESA in governmental relations led to occasional differences in how AASA viewed certain pieces of legislation and how AAESA viewed the same proposals. Though ESAs are in the same field as local districts – education, they perform quite different roles and need to seek government aid and support sometimes in quite different ways from a local district. Rarely but still occasionally positions on legislation were in conflict.

AAESA officially became an independent entity in 1997. In that same year it hired Brian Talbott as its first executive director and later employed a full-time chief financial officer, Peter Young. A fair assessment of the growth of AESA shows that Talbott was executive director during a substantial number of the turning points listed in this piece. A relationship with AASA

was still maintained as the organization contracted for still needed services such as office space and legislative representation in Washington.

10. Decision to Expand Cooperative Relationships with Businesses

With the first inclusion of exhibitors at the 1997 AESA Annual Conference in Palm Springs, CA, there began a process of building relations with businesses in the educational marketplace. Initially, AESA did not see itself in a prime role with businesses. However, there were those in the vendor community who pointed out the important role that ESAs could play in being a conduit or channel from the vendor to the local districts that the ESA serves.

Bill McKinney, executive director, Region 4 ESC in Texas was a strong advocate for these relationships. While on the Council during the period 2002-2006, he moved this discussion further with the establishment of a due diligence process for identifying business partners. Business partners were to be relatively few in number and would go through a process that would include a full third party review of fiscal strength, legal entanglements, customer satisfaction and other important considerations.

As AESA worked with business entities, the relationship broadened. No longer just satisfied with an awareness/sales channel, vendors began to seek ESA input through advisory groups, reaction panels and other means. ESAs have been sought by businesses to partner in the development and provision of programs and services. An example of this would be the Business Partnership existing between McREL and AESA. McREL's staff evaluation programs were being purchased by school districts. McREL was overwhelmed with requests from these districts for training in the use of the materials. AESA recognized that its members had substantial numbers of staff members who were trainers in a variety of programs. McREL offered to train these trainers in their products and AESA identified ESAs who would be receptive to this

arrangement. This arrangement has worked well for all concerned. Good training was provided for excellent products. Beyond this, ESAs found ways to supplement the training and provide even more services for their members.

Relations with businesses have continued to grow over the years with the result that in fiscal year 2013-2014, AESA will receive \$350,000.00 from its business sources.

11. Sponsorship of First Annual Summer Conference

The first annual CEO conference was held in 1999 in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Don Stevens served as host. The theme of the first event was “Dealing with Change – Changing the Deal.” The format for the first session, a multi-day event, consisted of a series of presentations from both the AESA community and outside experts, panel discussions and opportunities for networking. This same essential format has been followed since. However, responsibility for planning the annual event was assumed by the AESA Foundation in 2004.

The primary motive for the Council’s support for the annual conference was the desire expressed by member agency CEOs to increase the opportunity for more time together, and for the in-depth discussion of the big issues facing their agencies and the schools and students they serve. The wisdom of this decision in part reflected in continually increasing attendance from 1999 to 2012.

12. Advocacy for Passage of No Child Left Behind

As was previously cited, the contributions of the Government Relations Committee in inserting the first definition of an education service agency in the 1994 passage of Goals 2000: Education America Act (P.L. 1129) was all-important, for it facilitated another significant action that benefited the existing and potentially new member organizations, or those that might be formed in the future.

The No Child Left Behind Act (P.L. 107-110), approved by Congress and signed by the president in 2001, represents the latest iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, legislation that continues to be the largest federal aid program targeting K-12 education. Moreover, many of the features of all subsequent versions of this central Congressional legislation for elementary-secondary education are frequently reflected in categorical federal education initiatives as well.

The following provision of the No Child Left Behind Act is of critical importance for the education service agency community, both existing agencies as well as new agencies formed after 2001:

...retained a definition of an education service agency but revised a definition of a local education agency to include three additional entities that could qualify for education status in implementing provisions of the Act: education service agencies, consortia of education service agencies, and state education agencies.

Support for the critical role of ESAs as in the implementation of the legislation was quite prominent in a communication to all state education agencies by the then U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige. In one memo, the Secretary stated that states should:

- Consider providing professional development and technical assistance through education service agencies.
- Where education service agencies do not exist, the state is to consider providing these through other cooperative agreements such as consortia of local education agencies. (April 18, 2003.)

The full impact of the support of the U.S. Department of Education is difficult to ascertain, but judged to be highly significant. That is, it does seem reasonable to assume that the intent was to promote collaboration in a provision of two central pillars of the legislation: the provision of professional development and of technical assistance to local districts. Additionally, by stressing the definition of an educational service agency as an eligible unit, indeed a preferred

unit, to participate in the legislation, among other benefits, clearly removed any concerns that state decision makers might have regarding service agency eligibility for federal funds.

The success of the Association in some measure no doubt was due to the support of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, a former superintendent of the Houston, Texas Independent School District. In his prior position he became familiar with the role and function that a service agency can perform, in this case Region 4, Education Service Agency in Texas that serves over 50 school districts that annually enroll approximately one million students, including his former large school district.

13. Programs Designed to Recruit and Train the Next Generation of CEOs

The “graying” of leadership personnel who are so vital to the success of the nation’s schools is a phenomenon also affecting the educational service agencies. In recognition of this issue, the Association has taken several steps. The first was the sponsorship of an Executive-In-Residence Program, the brainchild of Twyla Barnes, Superintendent, Educational Service Center 112, Vancouver, Washington and Lee Warne, the CEO of the South West/West Central Cooperative (MN), and now AESA Executive Director. Twyla Barnes served as coordinator of the initiative since it was launched. Joe Crozier, Grant Wood AEA (IA) assumed the Coordinator role in 2013. Those who participate in the program must currently be a full-time employee of an agency, be approved by their home agency and the host agency. Successful candidates spend one month on-site at the host agency. All expenses are assumed by the home agency. The participants are required to provide a report on their experiences, and are recognized at the Annual Conference upon completion of their program.

Since the first years of the program through 2012-13, 33 individuals have been selected as an Executive-In-Residence. A number of service agencies across the country have served as

host agencies. Though the number of participants is relatively small, the program is viewed to be relatively unique among national professional associations in the field of education. It stands as evidence of a commitment by the Association and the participating agencies to address an increasingly important issue facing the service agency community.

Also, the success of the Executive-In-Residence program likely has contributed to two other closely related initiatives, one launched this year while the second is well into the final planning stages.

The related program started this year is the New CEO Orientation program, a multi-day professional development experience for CEOs in the first or second year in their position. The first meeting was held in Denver where nine CEOs attended; the second was held in Cincinnati where eight attended. Susan Leddick served as coordinator for both events. The Association is also in the first stages of a new mentoring program that also should be of great benefit, especially for newly employed agency CEOs.

The long-term impact of these three initiatives has yet to be realized. However, by raising awareness that consideration of secession planning is urgent, the Association has provided a valuable service to its membership, and furthermore, has invested resources to help facilitate the priority.

Other Observations

Additional Significant Events

There have been other actions initiated by AESA that, though they may not rise to our defined level of a “turning point,” had their own significance in the organization’s history. Three of them that seem especially worthy of notice are the following:

** Assumption of the sole sponsorship of the Educators' Call to Action and Federal Advisory Conference* (formerly offered in association with the American Association School Administrators).

One of the principal functions of the conference is sharing of position papers developed by the Government Relations Committee. The 2012 conference concentrated on those current issues of particular importance to member agencies: federal funding, especially the then-likely action of sequestration; the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and educational technology.

** The establishment of the AESA Foundation*

This body's original purpose was defined as providing "ongoing support for the mission of the Association of Educational Service Agencies" and toward that end has supplied funds for the Association to conduct several research projects on high-interest issues facing member agencies, and since 2004, assumed support for the Annual AESA Foundation CEO Conference. Ron Fielder, the Chief Administrator of Grant Wood AEA, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, served as chair of the Foundation Board for most of its formative years. The CEO Conference provides an opportunity for in-depth multi-day professional development for CEOs of member agencies.

** Fee reductions for state memberships*

The decision was made to encourage, in one small way, the strengthening of state systems of educational service agencies by offering a one-half reduction in Association annual dues for those states wherein all service agencies choose to be members.

** ESA Benchmarking Survey*

ESAs have learned from each other since their inception. At AESA events, there has always been discussion of new programs and services that are being offered. In 2011, this

informal process took on a more focused approach. State Leaders Craig Burford (OH) and Jim Mabbott (OR) along with Susan Leddick of PKR, Inc. and Lee Warne, AESA Executive Director proposed the establishment of a data bank that would allow ESAs across the country to benchmark their ESA against like organizations from across the country.

To populate the data bank, five pilot states performed a self-survey on five data points:

Internal Processes Purpose and Direction

Clients and Stakeholders

Service Impact

Financial

Learning and Growth

The goal of this work is to enable the AESA membership, through a reliable data source, to identify ESA best practices, improve ESA organizational outcomes and, ultimately, to drive increased student improvement and client district outcomes. Once the data bank has been expanded a variety of profiles and reports will be available to ESAs.

One Final Observation

The extent to which the current AESA services and program profiles compare to the typical menu of programming activities engaged in by other national professional associations in the field of education, with an emphasis on those catering to leadership personnel in elementary-secondary education are shown in Table 2. AESA is engaged to some extent in 12 of the 13 characteristics.

Table 2

Programs Compared With Those of Other National Education Professional Associations

Common Staffing and Programming Activities	AESA	Comments
Employ a small full-time professional staff to provide leadership and manage the functions of the Association	Yes	
Have an elected body composed of representatives of members that sets policy for the Association	Yes	
Establish permanent standing committees composed of members	Yes	
Assign planning and conduct of major Association activities to members	Yes	
Publish and disseminate research, best practices, and opinion pieces on topics of high-interest to members	Yes	
Sponsor research on topics of high-interest to members	Yes	But limited
Publish periodic profiles of characteristics of member agencies	Yes	First in 1991; planning for new well advanced
Advocate federal legislation beneficial to members	Yes	
Provide professional development opportunities for members	Yes	Annual conference plus annual member conferences for CEOs
Sponsor a national conference (best practices)	Yes	
Provide technical assistance to state associations of members	Yes	
Maintain a website to facilitate communication	Yes	
Advocate the adoption of standards for professional preparation and practice	No	

This table is based on collective experiences of the authors.

Concluding Comments

The authors of this brief treatment of the “turning points” in the evolution of AESA seek to achieve a number of objectives. On the one hand, it is hoped that the story told here stresses the continuous goal of AESA to be engaged in ways to improve its value to its member organizations and thereby to be relevant to the expanding needs of member organizations. Another goal of this piece, and perhaps the most important one, is to highlight that the success of AESA in addressing the constantly changing needs of a diverse membership can be clearly

attributed to the deep involvement of the membership in setting policy and over-all direction for the organization. Volunteerism, the reliance on members to donate time and energy for the benefit of the ESA community, is central to the past successes of AESA. It is absolutely essential that it continue to be so in the future.

References

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Authors

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*William G. Keane served as superintendent of the Oakland Intermediate School District in Michigan from 1980 to 1994 with an additional seven months as acting superintendent in 2004. He served on the AESA Council from 1991 to 1994 and was President of the organization in the 1993-94 year. He was co-author with Bob Stephens of **The Educational Service Agency: American Education's Invisible Partner**.*