

The Oklahoma State Department of Education:
Mission, Organizational Structure,
Administration, and Staffing

A Report Submitted to Gerald Hoeltzel,
State Superintendent of Public Instruction,
and to the Oklahoma State Board of Education

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Principal Investigator

July 26, 1990

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PROLOGUE

Education, educational processes, and the educational efforts of society both merit and receive enormous amounts of attention and study. They also receive immense investments of emotion, affection, dedication, and resources. Education may be subjected to philosophic, sociological, psychological, pedagogical, economic, political, and other varieties of analysis. Through a wide-angle lens, education may be viewed in terms of its significance to the individual and his self-fulfillment, to the economy and its expansion, or to society and the enhancement of the quality of life. Education may be examined also in terms of its institutions, methodologies, resources, and services.

-- Friedman, 1971, p. 1

Man is, after all, the only animal which forces change on himself.

-- Bolman, 1970, p. 589

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The Oklahoma State Department of Education has a long history of service to the students, educators, and people of the State of Oklahoma. It has provided support for instruction through its curriculum and accreditation sections; for administration through such units as state aid, transportation, and school plant; and for policy development and planning through data services, legal, and research departments. Whenever educators at the local, state, or federal level were in need of information, advisement, or other support, the State Department was the entity to which they turned.

However, the Oklahoma State Department of Education has in recent years both assumed and been given additional functions. The massive increase in federal involvement in elementary and secondary education, particularly in special education and other compensatory programs, has placed a great demand upon state education agencies for regulatory and supervisory actions. There has also been growth in regulatory functions at the state level, including those in such traditional areas of responsibility as teacher certification, accreditation, and transportation.

The reform measures which have been enacted into law during the past decade have also created new demands upon State Department of Education personnel. These innovative Oklahoma programs have included new responsibilities associated with assistance to entry-year teachers, staff development, teacher evaluation, and student learning outcomes. Finally, an increased demand for accountability has led to programs such as the Oklahoma Cost Accounting System (OCAS) and the Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP). The recent enactment of H.B. 1017 has created still more areas of responsibility for the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Purpose of the Study

These recent changes in the mission and functions of the Oklahoma State Department of Education (the Department) created a need for an evaluation of the administration, organizational structure, and staffing of the agency. With limits on the number of available staff, and increasing demands for such positions by competing units, it became apparent that the need existed for a comprehensive study of the Department. It was perceived that, if it was to best meet the needs of local, state, and federal constituents, the Department may indeed need to be reorganized to reflect the changes in functions and priorities which had occurred over the past decade.

This report, therefore, is the product of a contract which was executed with the Oklahoma State University College of Education. Under the terms of that agreement (see Appendix A), Dr. Gerald R. Bass was assigned as the principal investigator to examine the current state of the Department and to make recommendations to the Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction and to the Oklahoma State Board of Education. A current copy of the professional vita of Gerald Bass is provided in Appendix B.

The following questions were used to guide the resulting study.

1. How has the mission of the Oklahoma State Department of Education been historically defined, what is perceived to be the current mission, and how should that mission be defined for the near future?
2. What are perceived to be the most important issues or problems regarding Department leadership, including the related topics of communications and morale?
3. What are the functions of each individual unit within the Department and how are these units and functions related?
4. How has the organizational structure of the Department changed over its history? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current structure? How might the organizational structure be changed to more effectively enhance the accomplishment of the mission of the Department?

5. What are the perceptions of state leaders regarding the Department? How do local educators perceive the functions and effectiveness of the Department? How do Department staff and administrators perceive the agency?

Method

This project was designed primarily as a management assessment rather than as a research study. The qualitative methods were therefore focused primarily on interviews with numerous representatives of departmental units, as well as with external constituents of the agency; a review of pertinent documents; and an analysis based upon the investigator's professional knowledge and experience. From the research questions, four major themes were identified: mission, leadership, organizational structure, and staffing.

The interviews were focused on the broad view of the Department's mission, the more specific functions and responsibilities of individual units, the relationships between units, and suggestions for change that would enhance the agency's ability to function in a more effective manner. Those interviewed within the Department included the State Superintendent; all of the deputy, associate, and assistant superintendents; and other administrators who had primary leadership responsibility for individual units (see Appendix C for a complete listing).

Other interviews were conducted with representatives of SDE constituent groups. These included officials of professional education organizations, legislative staff members, leaders of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, the immediate past state superintendent, and a declared candidate for that position (see Appendix D for a complete listing). It had been intended to conduct additional interviews with representatives of other professional organizations, leaders of the Oklahoma State Senate, the Oklahoma Secretary of Education, and superintendents and other local educators. The interviews with local educators were not completed due primarily to time constraints which prevented the conduct of a sufficient number of interviews to provide a representative sample. It was assumed that, through class discussion, attendance at various professional meetings, and individual conversations in a variety of settings, the investigator had acquired a broad perspective and understanding of the perceptions of the local educators in regard to the Department. Interviews with the other selected constituent representatives were not conducted because of a number of factors, including unwillingness to be interviewed and incompatible schedules of the investigator and the potential interviewee.

Additional data gathering efforts were focused on the collection of pertinent documents, including current and past organizational charts of the Department; previous studies of the functions and structure of the Department; and available

studies and charts from other state education agencies, particularly those in similar-size states. A review of relevant professional literature produced appropriate conceptual material for application in the analysis phase of the study.

The data analysis activities were focused on a determination of the current responsibilities and functions of each unit in the Department; the interrelationships among those units; the changing demands upon the Department, particularly as evidenced by the provisions of H.B. 1017 and the perceptions of both Department staff and external constituents; and comparisons with other state education agencies in terms of staffing, structure, and mission.

Limitations

The generalizations and recommendations of this report may be limited by the following factors.

1. The project was conducted over a limited period of time, from May 21, 1990, through July 26, 1990. There was thus not sufficient time to design, validate, distribute, collect, and analyze data from any type of survey instrument.

2. Interviews within the Department were limited to the State Superintendent; all of the deputy, associate, and assistant superintendents; and other administrators who had primary leadership responsibility for individual units. Other Department staff members were not interviewed due to limits on

time, difficulty in identifying a truly representative sample, and concerns over the validity of responses because of possible demands for administrative accountability and loyalty.

3. While there were major efforts to obtain data from representatives of both the Department and its external constituent groups, a major focus of this study was on an analysis of the mission, administration, organizational structure, and staffing of the Department from the perspective, assumptions, knowledge, and experience of the investigator. Therefore, the conclusions and recommendations of this study were not entirely based upon, nor are they necessarily consistent with, the data obtained.

4. The study was focused primarily upon the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the State Superintendent as chief executive officer of that agency. The Oklahoma State Board of Education and its role relative to the Department was not a major focus of the study, although it is impossible to consider all aspects of the Department operation without being cognizant of the State Board.

Summary

While the Oklahoma State Department of Education has a long history of effective service to public education in the State, a variety of factors have caused its size, ability, and mission to be questioned. This study is a by-product of that

inquiry and was designed to review the Department's mission, leadership, organizational structure, and staffing in order to provide the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education with observations and recommendations regarding those topics. The primary method of the study was to gather data from interviews with Department staff and with representatives of the agency's constituent groups.

This report is organized in the following manner. The next chapter provides background information obtained from the literature review and from Department and other documents. The third chapter of the report contains the findings of the investigation. The final chapter of this report provides a general summary, followed by the conclusions and recommendations which were identified by the investigator. A series of concluding remarks completes the formal report. Appendices are attached to provide a variety of more detailed information pertinent to the study.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

One of the activities associated with this report was a review of relevant literature pertaining to state education agencies. This chapter contains a brief summary of the findings from that review. The material is organized around the four themes of mission, leadership, organizational structure, and staffing.

Mission

As described in the literature, there is no clear consensus on a single mission for state education agencies. Rather, while there is some general agreement that the mission should be described in terms of either regulation or service (or some combination of both), there is no agreement as to which of these two should be seen as having a higher priority. A more recent addition to the literature has been an emphasis on leadership as a primary agency mission.

Layton (1967) noted that the mission of the state agencies shifted to regulation during the early decades of the 1900s.

When SDE representatives sought to bring local districts up to acceptable standards, they were acting as agents of the state government, and they

were often following the rather specific directives included in state codes and constitutions. SDE's [in that era] began to have coercive powers vested in them and had means of forcing wayward districts to comply with state regulations (p. 8).

For those who have viewed the state education agency's mission as regulatory, one basis for such a mission is generally considered to be the state's constitutional and/or statutory responsibility for public education. The Council of Chief State School Officers (1963) noted that "regulatory responsibilities are a direct consequence of state authority for education" (p. 11). Another basis stems from the many regulatory aspects of three milestone pieces of federal legislation: the National Defense Education Act (1957), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975) (McGivney, 1989). A still different perspective considered the education reform movement and other contemporary trends.

Some of the tensions increasing the centripetal (centralizing) forces include top-down mandates for greater accountability and efficiency; demands for expenditure reductions; legislative bodies encouraging (even mandating) common sets of school outcomes; demographic changes such as declining school enrollments and an aging teaching workforce; a movement toward packaged staff development where all in the system are subjected to a common training regimen; a belief . . . that there exists "One Best Model" for running schools effectively (Conway & Jacobson, 1990, p. 185).

Although it was focused entirely on the preparation of school leaders/administrators, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987) directed a portion of its recommendations to state policymakers. The

recommendations could easily be perceived to have a regulatory focus.

Each state should have an administrative licensure board to establish standards, examine candidates, issue licenses, and have the authority to revoke licenses. . . . Licensure should depend on the completion of a state-approved program . . . (pp. 25-26).

The only additional recommendations that were not focused on licensing were concerned with retirement systems, professional development, and recruitment and placement of minorities and women (and even in this latter recommendation, the state's role was to "develop policies"). Perhaps it was these types of state regulations that Layton had in mind.

State and federal statutes clearly spell out that state departments are to regulate many aspects of the programs, plants, and administrative procedures of local school districts. For example, curricular and teaching standards must be met, school construction and school buses must be safe, civil defense drills must be conducted, and funds must be accounted for. . . .

No serious student of state educational systems questions the desirability of state regulation of local school systems. Questions do arise regarding how such standards are formulated and how regulatory procedures are enforced (Layton, 1967, p. 12).

Wise (1979), certainly a "serious student of state educational systems," did question the desirability of state regulation, at least to the degree that it was conducted 20 years after Layton's observations. However, while not personally supporting the position, Wise conceded that "educational policy is more and more being determined by the states . . . rather than by the schools" (p. ix).

Layton (1967) noted that "services are playing an increasingly more significant role in the SDE's total output" (p. 13). He attributed this change in emphasis to the provisions of two milestone federal laws: the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1957 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (it is interesting to note that these were included in the earlier listing by McGivney of legislation that had prompted a regulatory mission!). These each included funds by which state education agencies were able to add curriculum and other support specialists to their staffs. "State departments of education are noticeably different today than they were when the [ESEA] became law" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1983, p. 47)

It is clear that the service activities are generally well regarded by the vast majority of SDE employees and are attuned to the image SDE's have of themselves. Unlike regulations, services entail no coercion and thus involve no unpleasant confrontations between the departments and local school districts (Layton, 1967, p. 13).

Other sources do not reveal as clear a distinction between regulation and service. For example, a 1963 report by the Council of Chief State School Officers noted that

state departments of education are responsible for enforcing laws and administrative rules and regulations that require local school districts to meet particular standards and comply with specific conditions. In carrying out this responsibility, state departments are exercising state-wide regulatory controls. State departments are likewise responsible for providing professional and technical assistance to local school districts to help them meet and exceed the standards prescribed by state law and administrative rules and regulations (p. 10).

In his 1971 book, Friedman appeared to be advocating first one, then the other mission priority for state education agencies. Early in the text, Friedman wrote that "the agency is a vehicle for delivery of services" (p. 2). Later, Friedman described three responsibilities, which appear to be regulatory in nature, of such agencies as they seek to fulfill their mission.

1. To advise state government on the conditions which government should require and should expect to prevail within the statewide educational system, and on the public policies, priorities, standards, criteria, and actions needed to produce those conditions.
2. To ascertain whether the conditions stipulated by state government actually are being met in each school, school system, or other entity within the state education agency's purview.
3. To assure, by taking suitable actions, that unsatisfactory conditions are corrected wherever and whenever they are found to exist (p. 16).

Beach and Gibbs (1952) proposed a three stage evolution of state education agencies, each stage encompassing a changing mission. The first stage, which they considered to have ended about 1900, was focused upon statistics, which were gathered, compiled, and published by the agencies. As agencies matured and entered the second stage, from about 1900 to 1930, their principal focus shifted to the enforcement of standards. During this "inspectoral stage," Beach and Gibbs certainly considered regulation to be preeminent. However, in the third, or leadership, stage of agency development, they identified a shift to service. "State departments became more involved with consultation and making available their exper-

tise to local school districts" (Layton, 1967, p. 6). It must be noted that this chronology of development preceded the current era of education reform, during which agencies may be evolving to yet other stages of maturation.

Even though Sroufe (1967) agreed that the mission of state departments of education had been changing, he noted that "regulation has been a principal activity" and that "although persons writing about departments in recent years have emphasized service activities, we found no evidence that regulatory activities have diminished" (p. 20). In other words, the service mission had been added to, rather than having superseded, the regulatory mission. Sroufe distinguished regulatory and service activities, in part, by origin; activities which were initiated at the state level were considered to primarily regulatory while those done at the request of local school system members were categorized as service activities. He also noted that "professional personnel in SDE's tend to make a distinction between regulation and service, always emphasizing the importance of the latter in their work" (p. 21).

Layton (1967) described the activities of state departments of education as encompassing five missions: operational, regulatory, service, developmental improvement of services, and public support and cooperation. He considered the regulatory mission to "essentially arise from specifications

of state constitutions and codes" (p. 10) while the service mission was "based on [the] department's expertise" (p. 10).

Campbell and Sroufe (1967) suggested that the mission emphasis of state education agencies should be shifted away from regulation, but not specifically to service. Instead, they emphasized a shift to a mission of leadership, with an emphasis on planning and interagency cooperation. The Council of Chief State School Officers (1983) noted that this change is perhaps occurring.

State departments of education have gradually moved through traditional statistical, regulatory, and supervisory periods into new roles of leadership. Such leadership has been considerably strengthened in recent years with the willingness and ability of state level education policymakers and administrators to respond to challenges both within the educational communities, and those from the larger society (p. 121).

Leadership

While it is unlikely that anyone would argue that there should be no leadership in regard to educational policy at the state level, it is equally unlikely that there is widespread agreement on just who ought to provide that leadership. While many consider that state boards of education and chief state school officers were historically perceived as responsible for state leadership on educational issues, that was not always the case. In fact, "once the state superintendency was created, it was not destined to play a very dynamic role in most states for many years" (Layton, 1967, p. 7). There were

then, and there continue to be, others who would assume such a position of leadership.

Other groups besides boards, departments and chiefs shape educational policy, sometimes complicating the leadership efforts of individual groups. State legislatures make education policy. Governors interested in education can choose to be strong leaders, by setting up task forces and study commissions, for example and otherwise playing important roles in shaping policy (Flakus-Mosqueda & Burnes, 1983, p. 1).

Flakus-Mosqueda and Burnes (1983, p. 2) asserted that, "even though [state] boards [of education] have broad authority, other state policy makers tend not to view them as significant in the policy arena" and explained this by quoting "a former director of the National Association of State Boards of Education".

First, they have lost prestige. While state boards once were at or near the center of state education policy making, their position has been increasingly eclipsed by activist state legislatures. . . .

Second, many state boards have found themselves saddled with mounting administrative responsibilities. More and more often, boards are spending a high percentage of their time on three duties: (1) assuring compliance with mandates issued by the courts, Congress and state legislatures; (2) handling appeals on civil rights questions; and (3) sitting in judgment on personnel issues which cannot be settled locally. . . .

Finally, and most importantly, a large number of boards have found themselves confronting a serious authority crisis. . . . State boards have come under mounting pressure to act on a wide range of policy issues. Yet, at the same time, they are finding it difficult to mobilize effectively. . . . If they defer on important issues, they will eventually be regarded as politically irrelevant. But if they act on issues without adequate support, they not only will be regarded as arbitrary, but also will run the risk of having their decisions countermanded elsewhere (Wilken, 1981, p. 4).

Despite these problems, it is imperative that leadership be provided by those within the general structure of the state education agency.

A state's board, superintendent, and department of education . . . appear to have both the best opportunity and the greatest obligation to remain abreast of educational needs and developments in the state, and consequently to play a major educational leadership role within the state. . . .

Logically, therefore, the state education agency is the point at which a state's governmental attention to education may be concentrated. No other educational institution or local agency, public or private, is so well situated with respect to all aspects of the educational design within all parts of the state (Friedman, 1971, pp. 7-8).

The Council of Chief State School Officers (1963) shared this same view, indicating that "the state department of education should be the leadership center of the state system of education" (p. 13). The Council's report went on to say that "effective leadership contributes significantly to the improvement of state and local programs" (p. 13).

In examining the nature of educational leadership, an American Association of School Administrators (1988) publication quoted former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare John Gardner. In his book The Nature of Leadership, Gardner noted that leaders

- **Think longer term** -- beyond the day's crises, beyond the quarterly report, beyond the horizon.
- **Look beyond the unit they are heading** and grasp its relationship to larger realities -- the larger organization of which they are a part, conditions external to the organization, global trends.
- **Put heavy emphasis on the intangibles** of vision, values, and motivation; and understand

intuitively the non-rational and unconscious elements in the leader-constituent interaction.

- **Are outstanding managers with the ability to set priorities.**
- **Have the communications and political skills to cope with the conflicting requirements of multiple constituencies.**
- **Think in terms of renewal for the organization and its people (AASA, 1988, p. 7).**

The manner in which leadership can be acquired and exercised has been a matter of some speculation and study. Some have tied the acquisition of leadership to past performance.

"Leadership almost inevitably will accrue to a state education agency which performs so well that it is acknowledged to be fulfilling its three-way mission. . . . If an agency offers advice to the state legislature, and if the legislature finds that advice so wise and compelling that it merits adoption, that agency may come to be seen [by state legislators and other policymakers] as a "leader." . . . If the agency then undertakes to cause deficiencies [in school districts] to be corrected and if its efforts are successful, that agency will come to be seen [by local educators] as a "leader" (Friedman, 1971, pp. 24-25).

In a related context, the Council of Chief State School Officers (1963, pp. 10-11) concluded that "the experience of state departments of education has indicated that most educational improvement is a direct consequence of leadership." Bakalis (1974) argued that such leadership for positive change should not be avoided.

In reaching for new standards of excellence in education, the only impediment is a fear of change. The future is not a menace, if its inevitability is accepted. And the forces of change can be effectively harnessed, if what is done is based on a sound assessment of future needs and is not totally lacking in logic, cohesion, and direction (p. 238).

This returns the focus reported previously and attributed to Campbell and Sroufe (1967): that of changing the mission from regulation to leadership. As the Council of Chief State School Officers indicated in 1963, "leadership activities and focus may be appropriately identified in five broad categories: Planning, Research, Consultation, Public Relations, and Inservice Education" (p. 13).

Organizational Structure

The literature on the organizational structure of state departments of education tends to focus on either lengthy categorization of functions, duties, responsibilities, and/or activities or to examine one specific aspect of such structure. This section of the chapter will provide, first, some perspectives on the many functions of state departments and will then focus on some, but not all, of those specific functions.

A number of the studies reviewed attempted to identify the various elements of the organizational structure of a single agency, a set of agencies, or of all state agencies nationwide. Obviously, these studies found a wide variation in the structure and with the specific elements contained with each organization.

There is no single plan for grouping programs of state departments of education into major structural divisions that would be satisfactory in every state. Nonetheless, there are certain common-sense guidelines that can be followed by the chief state school officer in developing a sound plan to coor-

dinate the operation of all department programs. These guidelines follow:

1. Programs should be clearly defined in official department plans developed to substantiate budget requests and to justify expenditures subsequently made under the operating budget.
2. The responsibility for each program thus identified should be delegated to a single administrator.
3. Related programs should be grouped within formally structured divisions and subdivisions to facilitate the internal government of the department (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1963, p. 38).

An attempt to classify the activities of modern departments [of education] is not an easy task. In the first place no two state departments are exactly alike, and historical circumstances within a state have molded particular departments in peculiar ways. Another difficulty in coming to grips with what SDE's do is that they are dynamic organizations. They do change, and descriptive statements about the activities of SDE's are bound to be quickly dated (Layton, 1967, p. 9).

Friedman (1971) identified a limited set of seven major functions of state education agencies.

1. *RESEARCH* is performed and its products are digested and utilized, to indicate or identify directions for improvement in educational policies, priorities, standards, criteria, and actions.
2. *INFORMATION AND STATISTICS* are generated, assembled, and published, to describe and depict education and its characteristics, prospects, and problems, both statewide and in suitable detail by locale, hence to supply further bases for the agency's use in indicating or identifying directions for improvement.
3. *DISTRIBUTION OF FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL RESOURCES* is accomplished so that resources are distributed--to and within each educational entity--in amounts and in ways which advance the achievement of stipulated policies and priorities and which make it feasible for the desired conditions to be met within the statewide system.

4. *ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE* (professional and technical) are provided to schools, school districts, and other entities, when and if needed to improve instructional and other aspects of educational operations so that the stipulated conditions can be met statewide.
5. *REGULATION AND LICENSING* are performed to assure that qualitative and quantitative standards are met or exceeded.
6. *SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND FACILITIES*, in attention to matters of statewide concern that merit or require temporary or perennial state conduct, are satisfactorily maintained, whether by state education agency staff, directly under agency supervision, or otherwise.
7. *INTERNAL MANAGEMENT* of the state education agency is effectively performed, so that the board, the superintendent, and the staff do constitute a dependable instrument for state government to employ in pursuit of the fulfillment of government's constitutional obligations in matters of education (pp. 21-22).

From another perspective, Friedman (1971) listed the 12 management processes, which he had identified within state education agencies, as anticipating futures, planning, programming, financing, budgeting, controlling, organizing, staffing, administering, evaluating, relationship building, and institutional development.

Beach (1950) had categorized functions into three classes. Regulatory functions were focused on accreditation, licensing, and certification. Operational functions included provision of service, operation of schools, and management of institutions or programs, while leadership focused on planning, research, advice and consultation, coordination, and public relations.

The Council of Chief State School Officers' 1963 publication presented perhaps one of the most comprehensive lists

of activities likely to be incorporated within the administration of a state department of education. A summary of that content is contained in Appendix E of this report.

In reviewing the preceding lists of activities or functions, "it should be noted that many of the functions traditionally performed by state departments of education may now be carried out by other organizations" (Campbell & Sroufe, 1967, p. 81). One type of organization which has assumed some of the duties of the state education agency in a number of states is that of the regional educational service agency, an intermediate unit which embraces multiple school districts and which goes by a variety of names.

E. Robert Stephens produced an Educational Research Service monograph on these organizations in 1975. He first identified four structures for the provision of specialized and/or high cost educational programs and services: (1) larger local district administrative units, (2) cooperative arrangements between two or more local districts, (3) state agency provision of programs and services, and (4) special intermediate districts or regional service agencies. Among the states which have selected the last option (and which have formed such units) are Colorado (Boards of Cooperative Services -- BOCS), Georgia (Cooperative Educational Service Agencies -- CESAs), Iowa (Area Education Agencies -- AEAs), Minnesota (Educational Cooperative Service Units -- ECSUs), New York (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services -- BOCES), and

Texas (Educational Service Centers -- ESCs). While the specific details of organization for each of the state's intermediate units vary to some degree, the units are generally governed by a board selected from the participating school district governing boards or administrations and are generally funded by a combination of state appropriations, local district membership assessments, and service contracts with local districts. Stephens identified the issues or problems of these agencies as falling into three categories. Political problems focused on such issues as whether membership would be mandatory or voluntary, how the new unit would affect existing cooperative or similar units, and the manner in which a financial support base would be established. In the area of administration, issues concerned the impact on school district organization (consolidation), the addition of another layer of government, and the relationship which the unit would have with local districts, particularly whether the unit would be seen as serving or competing. The final area of concern dealt with program issues, including the degree to which the new unit would acquire state agency regulatory or service functions and the degree of local control over regional programs. Stephens (1975) listed the benefits of these regional units as (1) facilitating the provision of supplemental and/or high cost support services to local districts; (2) facilitating the development and provision of required programs, if local districts were unwilling to provide those programs (or

preferred that they be offered regionally); (3) equalizing educational opportunities; (4) providing programs and/or services in a cost-effective manner; and (5) enhancing networking and planning among neighboring school districts.

One element of this topic of organizational structure deals with the manner in which governance is facilitated by structure. Regardless of the precise functions of the agency, and the manner in which they are organized,

it can be argued that "neat and tidy governance" of the agency is . . . essential to the success of agency efforts addressed to statewide tasks and that "sloppy" internal governance invariably is disruptive, hence destructive of the agency's ability to perform (Friedman, 1971, p. 67).

Friedman (1971, p. 68) cautioned, however, that "economy and efficiency in internal governance are valuable only insofar as they facilitate or hamper performance."

Similarly, Campbell and Mazzoni (1976) studied the relationship between organizational structure and various outcome [their term] measures of state department impact (i.e., state expenditures for education and perceived influence of the department). While they concluded that "change in structural arrangements alone may not appreciably alter the process of policy making within a state" (p. 432), they also noted that, "even if changing structure does not guarantee desirable changes in behavior, the fact that it might encourage such changes seems to be sufficient inducement to consider structural arrangements" (p. 433).

Staffing

The number of staff, including chief state school officers, who were employed in state education agencies rose from 177 in 1900 to 36,100 in 1983 (Flakus-Mosqueda & Burnes, 1983). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (1983, p. 56), "changes in staffing of state departments of education have occurred over the years for a variety of reasons." Some of those reasons were the change in mission, as noted previously, in that it takes more people to provide regulatory oversight than to accumulate statistics and that it similarly is more labor intensive to provide service than oversight. Growth in the number of state department employees since the 1950s was attributed almost entirely to growth in the number and the size of federally subsidized or mandated programs.

While the number of state agency positions has grown, studies have shown that there has not been a corresponding diversification in the requirements for or the qualifications of those holding such positions. Kirby and Tollman (1967, p. 34) found that "the vast majority of [state agency employees] have had similar kinds of experiences."

The typical state department of education [employee] is one who received his bachelor's degree from a state teachers college within his own state, and then obtained his master's degree from the main state university. Once out of college he first entered the public school system as a teacher. It is at this point that the first dispersion takes place, although this dispersion must be considered at least partially a function of age. Some went on

to superintendencies and principalships before entering the state department, while others went directly into the state department from teaching positions. This division was probably not a conscious decision by the [individuals], but rather each person took the opportunity to join the state department as it presented itself--it came at different times for different people (Kirby & Tollman, 1967, p. 34).

They also found that two thirds of the top level state agency administrators had been in positions as local superintendents at the time they were first hired by the agency.

In recent years the staffs of state departments have doubled or tripled in numbers, but the characteristics of department personnel -- rural background, teaching or administrative experience in rural or small-town schools, in-state residency -- look much the same as they did some thirty years ago. . . . In short, the department staff seems to be too homogeneous to represent many of the viewpoints and technical skills now needed in an education agency (Campbell & Mazzoni, 1976, p. 272).

Sroufe (1967) speculated that the homogeneity of experience found among state department employees could be the result of the method by which individuals were recruited for such positions. "One of the most interesting aspects of SDE's is that they do not recruit personnel so much as they select them" (p. 24). He found that 77% of all respondents to a survey of state agency personnel indicated that they were encouraged to apply for their first agency position by someone already employed in the agency. Sroufe noted that

in one of the states we were told that positions had been listed [with various employment and placement agencies] at one time, but that they received too many poor applications and so the practice was discontinued (p. 24).

Another factor which was found in several studies to have impacted upon the employment of state department of education staff was the level of compensation. Sroufe (1967, p. 25) noted "that salaries were generally low and not competitive with alternative positions in urban or suburban school systems." He questioned whether "the salary problem, often compounded by civil service requirements, is insurmountable in recruiting candidates from wealthy districts" or whether it "may reflect the reluctance of SDE's to go outside traditional circles for personnel" (p. 25). In other words, do low salaries prevent a wider and more aggressive search for new employees or does a desire to maintain homogeneity in personnel lead to a reluctance to raise salaries?

Concern has been expressed that the salary paid the chief state school officer in many states is no higher than the ceiling of the salary schedule for the state agency's civil service staff. Historically, many chief state school officers and their professional staffs have not received salaries comparable with those of persons having equivalent preparation, experience, and responsibility in other areas of education, such as presidents of state universities and local district superintendents (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1983, p. 27).

The median salary of "chiefs" rose from \$17,000 in 1964 to \$27,085 in 1972 and to \$51,458 in 1982 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1983, p. 27).

The homogeneous nature of state department employees, and the relatively low level of compensation, have created a situation in which these agencies employ relatively few highly trained and educated specialists, other than those in the

curricular areas related to instruction. Friedman (1971, p. 3) noted that in order "to conduct operations and to perform the agency's delivery of public service, the talents of specialists, experts, or technicians may be needed."

The modern SDE requires technicians and specialists who at present are not attracted to state education agencies. It is clear that many personnel difficulties, and state department ineffectiveness, can be traced to present forms of recruitment. SDE's tend to recruit primarily teachers or school administrators; recruitment procedures have not been geared to persons outside education whose skills are increasingly needed to perform complex tasks.

. . . .
In the increasingly competitive job market the qualified specialist can base his employment decision on many factors: not only salary and fringe benefits but also the freedom the position offers to pursue one's work; the nature of supervision; the flexibility of working hours; the challenge of the tasks to be performed. Unfortunately many state departments are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to conditions of work. One of the major needs of SDE's is to work deliberately to overcome their bureaucratic auras, with the accompanying stereotypes of rigidity and dullness (Layton, 1967, p. 16-17).

One aspect of the relatively widespread practice of employing educational generalists is that "service activities are only valuable if the state department personnel are well qualified and, correspondingly, well respected by the clientele" (Sroufe, 1967, p. 22). Similarly, those who are hired for, or promoted to, positions of administrative leadership should have pertinent management skills, acquired through education and training and developed through practice, rather than just experience in schools and state department positions.

Management people as individuals may be experienced professionals who are, in their own right, "ex-

perts" regarding the educational content of particular problems; they even may be inventors of usable solutions. But their *management* obligations center around seeing to it that public services are delivered when and where needed, in useful form, and with constructive impact (Friedman, 1971, pp. 3-4).

Summary

This review of the literature has shown that there are great differences in state education agency missions and organizational structures, as well as in leadership and staffing. There was some substantial agreement that these agencies had evolved, at least into the 1960s and 1970s, from statistical to regulatory to service missions, with some embarking on an emphasis on leadership. While the various elements of organizational structure are quite different in the various states, it can be assumed that the structure has some impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the agency. However, a change in structure does not guarantee an improvement in quality of service or performance.

State education agencies tend to be staffed with individuals who have similar backgrounds and who consider themselves to be educators with generally applicable skills and knowledge. The literature is replete with recommendations for a greater diversification of personnel, with less emphasis on public school teaching and/or administrative experience and greater emphasis on formal education and experience in technical fields such as accounting or public relations. Such diversification is likely to be hindered by the low levels of

compensation and the relatively low status enjoyed by those who work for state education agencies.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

As noted earlier, the basic design of this study was focused on the conduct of interviews and the gathering of documents pertinent to an analysis of the mission, administration, organizational structure, and staffing of the Oklahoma State Department of Education (the Department). Five questions were used to focus the inquiry.

1. How has the mission of the Department been historically defined, what is perceived to be the current mission, and how should that mission be defined for the near future?

2. What are perceived to be the most important issues or problems regarding Department leadership, including the related topics of communications and morale?

3. What are the functions of each individual unit within the Department and how are these units and functions related?

4. How has the organizational structure of the Department changed over its history? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current structure? How might the organizational structure be changed to more effectively enhance the accomplishment of the mission of the Department?

5. What are the perceptions of state leaders regarding the Department? How do local educators perceive the functions

and effectiveness of the Department? How do Department staff and administrators perceive the agency?

In this chapter of the report, the interview findings are first reported, categorized, and summarized. Then the overall findings are reviewed within the same four topics as were used in Chapter II: mission, leadership, organizational structure, and staffing. For each of the four themes, data are reported from interviews, documents, and observations by the investigator, with an emphasis on the former two sources.

Interview Findings

Interviews were conducted with 53 individuals, 41 employees of the Department and 11 representatives of its various external constituent groups. The findings from each group were summarized separately, with emphasis given to those instances where the findings were complementary or contrasting. As with any qualitative data gathering effort, the analysis was subject to a certain degree of imprecision in the interpretation of textual material (for example, the manner in which quotes which differ in specific word use may be placed in similar categories).

SDE Administrators

An attempt was made to conduct interviews with the head of each administrative unit within the Department. One senior administrator was on leave, pending retirement, and was

unavailable for an interview. One section administrator failed to attend a scheduled interview and another interview could not be arranged at a mutually agreeable date. Otherwise, interviews were conducted with the State Superintendent and with all other deputy, associate, and assistant superintendents, as well as with the heads of other administrative units. A total of 41 interviews were thus completed, with lengths of from 30 minutes to nearly 90 minutes. In some instances, followup interviews were scheduled to clarify or expand upon topics established in original meetings.

Among the topics raised in the interview were the functions of the specific unit for which the individual had responsibility, the interactions between the administrator's unit and other Department units, the most critical perceived problems or issues facing the Department, and the administrator's greatest "wish" for the Department. Following are summaries of the findings of those interviews.

As shown in Table I, the most frequently mentioned problems were lack of staff and lack of coordination between units and/or divisions. Leadership and the related topics of morale and communications were next in the frequency with which they were mentioned as problems, issues, or concerns in interviews with SDE administrators. While such simplification was not done, it might be possible to group related items listed in Table I. For example, "common goal" and "vision"

TABLE I

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PROBLEMS, ISSUES, OR CONCERNS,
AS IDENTIFIED IN EMPLOYEE
INTERVIEWS

Problem, Issue, or Concern	No. of Employees Responding
Insufficient number of staff	19
Lack of coordination between units	15
Departmental leadership	9
Employee morale	7
Communications within the department	7
Time spent on telephone requests for assistance	7
Mistrust	6
Shift to more emphasis on regulatory mission	6
Lack of planning	5
Lack of common goal(s)	5
Insufficient equipment	5
External criticism of the department	5
Public relations (explaining departmental needs and/or positions)	4
Organizational structure/chain of command	4
Decline in camaraderie among staff	4
Lack of vision	3
Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs)	3
Lack of research effort and support	3
Lack of formal education/training by staff	2
Lack of field experience by staff	2
Political pressure	2
Frustration by employees	2
Lack of, or inaccessibility to, data	2
Territoriality	2
Inconsistent interpretation of rules/regulations	2
Quality of staff	2
Understaffed and undertrained audit section	2

might be seen as related, or even identical to some. However, in interviews there often were distinctions, particularly the tendency to link goals with departmental processes and vision with the individual leadership of the state superintendent. Similarly, while there may be relationships between mistrust, external criticism, and political pressure, those topics were not explained in identical ways during the interviews and, in fact, could have each been attributed to the same individual.

Table II shows an attempt at categorization of the issues, problems, and concerns from Table I. The frequency count in Table II is a duplicated count, meaning that it is a total of the individual tallies from Table I and, therefore, might include multiple references to a single individual. Nevertheless, it is of some interest to note which categories of perceived problems were most widespread.

Nearly all of the problems, issues, or concerns could be categorized among the four themes presented in the previous chapter. Issues related to organizational structure were mentioned in more interviews (33.3%) than any other category. Staffing issues were mentioned in 28.1% of the interviews with the Department administrators. Leadership issues were next in frequency (21.5%), followed by staffing (14.1%) and then mission (13.3%). The only issue which was not seen as being associated with one of the four themes was that of inadequate equipment, mentioned by 3.7% of those interviewed.

TABLE II

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PROBLEMS, ISSUES, OR CONCERNS,
CATEGORIZED FROM EMPLOYEE
INTERVIEWS

Category of Concern	No. of Interviews
Mission Requests for assistance, common goal	18
Leadership Leadership, mistrust, external criticism, public relations, vision, political pressure	29
Organizational structure Coordination, communications, planning, organizational structure, RESCs, research, data, territoriality, interpretation, audit	45
Staffing Insufficient number, morale, camaraderie, education, experience, frustration, quality	38
Other Adequate equipment	5

External Constituents

As noted previously, a total of 11 interviews were conducted with representatives of external constituencies of the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Those interviewed (see Appendix D) included three representatives of professional education associations, four legislative staff members, two

legislators, the immediate past state superintendent, and one declared candidate for that post. As noted in Chapter I, attempts had been made to interview others, including representatives of additional associations, leaders of the Oklahoma State Senate, and the Oklahoma Secretary of Education.

Table III contains a tabulation of the concerns, problems, and/or issues, regarding the Department, which were mentioned during these interviews with constituents. It should be noted that there were major differences among the interviewees. For example, although two individuals raised the issue of field staff, one thought there ought to be fewer such employees while the other was concerned that there were not enough. In an even clearer example of the differences of opinion, four individuals noted that the mission of the Department had become too focused on regulation while four others criticized the Department for having become too focused on service. The thematic analysis in the latter sections of this chapter point out more of these differences.

As with the interview data from Department administrators, the data from the constituent representatives were further categorized. Table IV shows the results of that analysis. As with the department administrators, the constituent representatives appear to have been most concerned with issues related to the organizational structure of the Department, with a frequency of 30.9%. While the employees were next concerned with issues of staffing, the constituent group

TABLE III

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PROBLEMS, ISSUES, OR CONCERNS,
AS IDENTIFIED IN INTERVIEWS
WITH CONSTITUENTS

Problem, Issue, or Concern	No. of Individuals Responding
Mission (service vs. regulation)	8
Public relations	7
Regional Education Service Centers	7
Selection process for state superintendent	6
Size (number of employees)	4
"Good old boy" network	4
Regional accreditation officers	4
Outdated organizational structure	4
Leadership	4
Qualifications of staff	4
Need for more technical staff	3
Reluctance to be aggressive/take risks	3
Too many local school districts	2
Inaccurate/inconsistent data/interpretation	2
Media criticism of the SDE	2
Legislative interference in SDE operation	2
Number of field-based staff	2

rated issues of leadership as next in importance. This latter group then rated staffing (19.1%) and mission (11.8%) as being of lesser concern among the four themes. Among these interviewees, there were three issues which were not grouped within the four themes. These issues, which accounted for 8.8% of

TABLE IV
 OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 PROBLEMS, ISSUES, OR CONCERNS,
 CATEGORIZED FROM CONSTITUENT
 INTERVIEWS

Category of Concern	No. of Interviews
Mission Regulation vs. service	8
Leadership Public relations, selection process, leadership, aggressiveness/risk taking	20
Organizational structure RESCs, size, regional accreditation officers, outdated structure, data/interpretation	21
Staffing Staff qualifications, "Good old boy" network, technical staff, field staff	13
Others Number of school districts, media criticism, legislative interference	6

the total issues raised by the constituent representatives, were the number of school districts in the state, media criticism of the Department, and legislative interference with Department administration.

These interview data, both in aggregate form and in the form of specific details and quotes, are included in the

presentation, in the next section, of data relative to the four themes of this report.

Mission

The first theme to be considered, and the focus of the first research question, was that of the mission of the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Specific areas of concern dealt with how the Department mission had historically been defined, how the current mission was perceived, and how that mission should be defined for the near future.

Interview data clearly showed a widespread perception that the mission of the Department had historically been one of regulation. Individuals, both internal and external to the Department, shared the view that the mission was changed under the administration of Leslie Fisher. Increases in the number of reading specialists, accreditation officers, and other field-based staff created a clear perception that service was the pre-eminent mission of the Department. In addition, the legislative action to move the Regional Education Service Centers (RESC) staff from local school districts to the Department increased both its number of employees and its image of service.

There was a perception, particularly among Department staff and local school district administrators, that this mission of service has recently been displaced by a renewed emphasis on regulation. The reasons given for this change

were generally associated with legislative actions, particularly such reforms as the Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP), the Oklahoma Educational Indicators Program, and the Office of Accountability, basic curriculum requirements, minimum accreditation standards, and other details of H.B. 1017. The implementation of the Oklahoma Cost Accounting System (OCAS) and the increase in federal monitoring of special education were also associated by some local administrators with an increased emphasis within the Department on regulation of school districts. Typical of this point of view are the following quotes from interviews.

I wish the department would return to service; there are too many FTEs performing regulatory functions and not enough in service.

If there is going to be monitoring by the state department, then it must be seen as a service.

My biggest criticism of the department is that it is not oriented to service any more.

A lot of people need someone to take them by the hand and work things out. If the state department won't do that, then who will?

The state department of education's role has changed because of the legislature. It has thus become more regulatory than service.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that the Department mission has not placed enough emphasis on regulation, particularly in recent years. They cite a lack of accountability to the legislature and to the "people of Oklahoma" as major indicators of a decline in the regulatory mission.

The state department of education's interpretation of service was "we're not going to go look for things that are wrong, but if we do find something, we'll help you fix it." They must realize that the state department of education must be a regulatory agency.

A regulatory emphasis has to be provided because the public wants accountability.

The question ought to be "How can I help you solve your problems?" Too often, the state department's perspective was "How can I help you avoid dealing with your problems?"

There probably needs to be a huge enforcement section since they [local administrators and school boards] aren't doing what they should.

The current mission statement of the Oklahoma State Board of Education reads as follows.

The Legislature has confirmed the responsibility of the State on behalf of the people of Oklahoma to establish, maintain, and continually improve the public schools of Oklahoma. As the designee to carry out the responsibility for the State in implementing this mandate, the State Board of Education initially adopted a regulatory role. But to address the increasing demands for higher quality of education and the needs brought about by the expanded scope of the schools, the Board has added technical assistance and exemplary leadership to its regulatory role. Those three roles vitalize all the philosophy, goals, policies, rules, and regulations of the Board and the State Department of Education so that not only the letter of the law is implemented in schools, but also the very intent of the law which expresses the desires of the people of Oklahoma.

To assure implementation of the mandate at all levels, the State Board of Education has adopted Goals in the areas of Students, Curriculum/Instruction, Student Achievement, School Restructuring, Financial Resources, and Public Support. These goals form a mission for the State Board of Education in which all State citizens can participate and especially those citizens who are involved in the education of children.

The mission:

The Oklahoma State Board of Education, as a representative group of citizens with a special mandate, will provide a cohesive plan of resources to assure that all children graduate and can effectively read, think, and communicate as productive citizens in the 21st Century.

To accomplish this mission the Board will involve the Governor, Legislature, its own Department, the public schools, and all other related educational agencies in the following long-range (by the year 2000) goals and activities (Oklahoma State Board of Education, 1990, pp. 4-2, 4-3).

The Department mission then, as perceived by the State Board, is to plan for the accomplishment of an ambitious list of goals to be met or exceeded by the Year 2000. This planning is intended to focus on the trio of mission elements: regulation, service, and leadership.

Leadership

The topic of leadership was addressed in research question 2 and was a part of the interview protocol for both Department administrators and representatives of constituent groups. Although this was a popular topic, the focus was rarely on the leadership ability, or lack thereof, of specific individuals in leadership positions. Rather, there was more interest in talking about a variety of related subjects, such as vision, public relations, communications, and politics. Typical responses were as follow.

A good superintendent with the support of the board should become a spokesperson for education.