

*Section 5 –
Education Issues –*

Assistance and Support to
Local School Districts

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Government Services Management Consulting
for
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Issue Statement

The objective of this issue paper is to evaluate how effectively the Department of Public Instruction performs one of its primary functions, that of assistance and support to the schools and school districts in North Carolina. In this study we evaluated a number of issues, including the types of assistance, the methods of delivery, the use of technology in the delivery of services, and the issue of centralized versus decentralized service delivery.

Background

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is responsible for administering the State's \$3.25 billion public education program. DPI currently employs 840 employees that monitor and provide support to the State's 133 Local Education Agencies (school districts) and 1.1 million students.

DPI's mission has traditionally described as twofold: regulation and assistance. This is typical of almost every Department of Education in the nation. However, the statewide emphasis in North Carolina on centralized control and the strong role that the State has assumed in education has resulted in a Department of Public Instruction which has placed its focus on control, regulation and monitoring strong on control.

DPI Services

Work performed by DPI staff can be divided into four major categories: administrative activities, compliance activities, development and coordination and monitoring, and assistance activities. A definition and examples of each category follows:

- **Administrative activities:** general administrative and secretarial activities that support other employee activities and support the internal operations of DPI. Examples include general supervision, typing attendance at DPI meetings, budget preparation.

Compliance

- **Development activities:** activities related to planning and development of state and federal programs, policies, and procedures. These core activities benefit all school districts. Examples include planning and development of educational programs, selection of instructional materials, development of student assessment tools.
- **Coordination and monitoring activities:** activities that help school districts implement and monitor state and federal programs, policies, and procedures. These activities benefit all school districts but are responsive to individual school district requirements. Examples include coordination and implementation of educational programs, state and federal law compliance checks.
- **Assistance activities:** activities that help individual school districts with specific needs and requests. Examples include technical assistance and training provided for specific educational or facility needs.

Technical Assistance Centers

One of the primary way to deliver DPI services is through the Technical Assistance

Centers. In addition to employees that are located in DPI's central offices in Raleigh, DPI has six Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) that are located throughout the state. TACs are located in Canton, Wilkesboro, Charlotte, Williamston, Jacksonville, and Raleigh. Each TAC is staffed by a director, 12 consultants, and four to five clerical employees. A total of 105 positions are authorized for the TACs.

In 1991, TACs were organized to increase student achievement and performance. Consultants work with school districts and schools in their region. They provide assistance regarding core curriculum classes that are tested and courses where high dropout rates exist. They also work with school districts on new teaching and school district training strategies.

Prior to 1991, regional service in North Carolina was provided through Regional Centers. Eight centers were staffed with consultants that reported to the Center's director and a corresponding program area in Raleigh. Curriculum & Instruction, Early Childhood, Middle Grades, High School, Vocational Education, Student Services, Exceptional Children, School Finance, and Personnel Relations units in Raleigh all had representatives located at most, if not all, Regional Centers.

When Regional Centers were converted to TACs, approximately 50 consultant positions were eliminated. Today, TAC consultants are stand alone units and do not report to any content area units located in DPI's headquarters. In addition, consultants are not assigned to a specific area of expertise.

TAC consultants work in teams as "generalists" to identify student performance needs and develop plans to address these needs for school districts in their region. During plan implementation, the "specialist" skills of each consultant are utilized. Any needs that do not directly relate to student performance issues, for example technical assistance with a vocational education class or a group of exceptional children, are handled by consultants in Raleigh.

Regional Service in Other States

Some states fund and operate regional educational centers like North Carolina in its funding of the TAC's. Other states have regional centers that are organized and operated by school district cooperatives or other private initiatives. Regional centers that are not operated and staffed by the state sometimes receive partial state funding; others are funded entirely by the school districts. In addition, some states have more than one system of regional centers.

Tennessee, Kentucky, and Georgia have regional centers that are funded and operated by the state. Virginia has state regional representatives, but does not operate a regional center. Georgia and Minnesota have regional centers that are run by school districts with partial funding from the state. Maryland, and Arkansas have regional centers that are completely funded and operated by school district cooperatives. Regional centers in South Carolina are funded and operated through a private initiative that brings community representatives from business, school districts, and other service organizations together.

Finding 1: Services delivered to individual school districts by DPI employees are fragmented.

Services that are responsive to individual school district requirements include coordination and monitoring activities and assistance activities. One hundred eighty-two consultants in Program Services, Auxiliary Services, and the Technical Assistance Centers spend from 40

percent to 100 percent of their time on these activities. Exhibit 1 identifies where the 182 positions are located. Exhibit 2 shows how the groups of employees spend their time.

Each group of consultants identified deals individually and directly with school districts to address service needs and requests. No person or group in DPI currently tracks or coordinates the service activities that are being provided by the different groups.

This fragmented delivery of services has resulted in the following:

- There is a lack of communication between DPI groups. Each DPI group deals with school districts with little knowledge of other DPI activities that are taking place in the school district. For example, consultants in the TAC rarely communicate with consultants in Program Services.
- School districts have to contact different groups in DPI for different services. - With activities fragmented, the details of service delivery can be confusing for school districts. School districts do not have one person or group they can contact when they have a service need or request. As a result, school districts may make multiple calls before they can find someone to help them.
- DPI assistance activities are not always prioritized. DPI employees, especially employees in TACs, do place priority on service needs and requests coming from schools experiencing performance problems. School districts that are not in warning status, however, can also contact DPI employees for service. DPI employees try to address the needs and requests of all school districts if employees have time and the skills needed.
- Most of the requests for schools that are not on the warning list are treated on a first-come first-serve basis. With assistance provided by DPI employees offered free of charge to school districts, there are no disincentives to limit the number of requests that school districts can make. As a result, DPI employees may not always be working on projects where the greatest needs exists.
- DPI does not have the right resources to meet school district needs. Assistance available to school districts is not only limited by time constraints, but also limited at times by the skill sets of the consultants that are available. Skills available may not always match skills needed.
- With no mechanism in place to evaluate which skills are needed the most by school districts, some DPI employees may be in high demand while others are underutilized or utilized only because they are available not because they are needed.

For example, many school districts in a TAC region have math assistance as a top priority, but the TAC may not have enough math consultants to help all school districts. At the same time, the TAC may have other consultants that are not in high demand because their area of expertise is not a school district priority.

EXHIBIT 1
Consultant Service Positions

Technical Assistance Centers:

Raleigh Education Companies	12
Southwest Education Consultants	12
Northwest Education Consultants	12
Southeast Education Consultants	12
Northwest Education Consultants	12
Western Education Consultants	<u>12</u>
	72

Program Services:

***All Curriculum & Instruction areas
(except Compensatory Education):***

Education Consultants	26
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Vocational Education:

Education Consultants	25
Educational Planning and Development Consultant	1
Education Program Administrator	2
Vocational Education Information Manager	2
Educational Research and Evaluation Consultant	1
Education Program specialists	<u>1</u>
	32

Media & Technology:

Education Consultants	7
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Student Services (Pupil Personnel):

Education Consultants	4
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Auxiliary Services:

Transportation:

School Transportation and Coordinators	5
Equipment Superintendent	1

Plant Operations:

Building Systems Engineers	5
Environmental Engineer	1

School Planning:

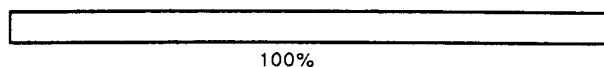
Consulting Architects	4
Building Systems Engineers	4
School Planning Consultants	<u>4</u>
	12

Child Nutrition:

CN Regional Coordinator	8
CN Program Consultant	5
CN Program Assistant	3
CN Facilities and Equipment Consultant	<u>1</u>
	17

EXHIBIT 2 Consultant Time Allocations

Technical Assistance Centers: **

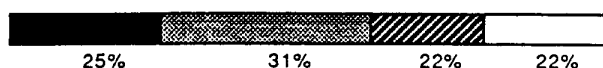


Program Services Division:

Curriculum and Instruction *



Vocational Education *



Media Services *



Student Services *

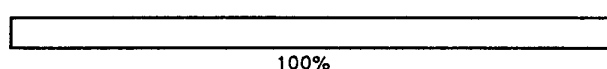


Auxiliary Services Division:

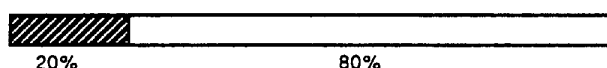
Transportation *



Plant Operations **



School Planning **

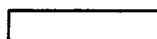


Child Nutrition *



LEGEND:

Assistance Activities



Development Activities



Coordination and
Monitoring Activities



Administrative Activities



* Time allocations based on interviews with employees in these groups.

** Time allocations based on an activity analysis study conducted that had employees identify and allocate time to activities that they perform.

Recommendation 1: *Employees that deliver services to individual school districts should be located at the TACs. Assistance activities should be customer-driven services that school districts purchase from DPI or other organizations. Coordination and monitoring activities should continue to be provided free of charge to the school districts.*

Allocation of Consultants

Development activities should continue to be performed at DPI's central location in Raleigh. Coordination and monitoring activities and assistance activities should be decentralized and performed at the TACs.

TAC should offer "one stop shopping" for school districts. This will require TACs to coordinate the different service groups. TACs should also serve as the first point of contact for services not directly located at the TAC. For example, school districts could contact TACs for service needs relating to exceptional children. The TAC would then contact consultants in the Exceptional Children section of Program Services to deliver service.

Funding of Consultants

Activities that are provided to all school districts should continue to be funded by DPI. Assistance activities that focus on specific school district needs and requests and are not provided to all school districts should be funded by the school districts that choose to use these services.

Dollars currently linked to the assistance activity positions should be distributed to the school districts. With these funds, school districts will be able to "purchase" service from DPI. School districts should also have the option to use the dollars to buy assistance from organizations external to DPI. We recommend that this funding transfer be implemented over a three year period so that the TACs have time to develop marketing plans and approaches.

Consultant Support Staffs

Managerial positions associated with the consultant positions should continue to be funded by DPI at this time.

Clerical positions that support the consultant positions should be subject to the same clerical:professional ratio used in the issue paper on DPI organization and staffing. Clerical positions that remain after the ratio is applied should be divided between DPI-funded activities and self-supporting activities. Clerical positions that support self-supporting consultant positions should also be self-supporting.

IMPLICATIONS

Implementation of this recommendation should result in more effective use of over \$5 million annually in DPI resources. This will be accomplished by the transfer of support activities closer to the customer or user, the local school district, and by focusing those support activities on the prioritized needs of the schools and school districts. This recommendation is not designed to save dollars as we expect that less necessary activities will be replaced by more important assistance activities.

The most significant aspect of this recommendation is that implementation will change the mind set of DPI from a regulatory bureaucratic model which believed that it "knows" what is best for schools and school districts to an entrepreneurial model which will be focused upon meeting needs of districts that they demand. It will also make the districts more accountable for performance as they will be making decisions about the type and amount of assistance needed.

Staffing Implications: Table 3 details the recommended allocation of consultant positions for different activities. The number of consultant positions that should deliver each type of activity are identified in the table. Time allocated to administrative activities has been allocated to these categories.

Financial Implications: Table 4 identifies the salary dollars associated with the self-supporting consultant positions. To calculate salary dollars for each area, the average salary of all consultants identified in group was calculated and multiplied by the number of positions designated as assistance activity consultant positions.

There will be a need to reassign and in some cases transfer of employees from Raleigh to the outlying TACs. These costs should be minimized by allowing employees to rotate assignments. In limited cases there will be moving and relocation costs which should be borne by the State.

Service Implications: By moving implementation and assistance activities to the TACs, employees providing these services will be physically closer to the school districts they help. Close proximity should allow employees to become more familiar with and responsive to individual school district and their needs.

By making assistance activities self-supporting, it will be in DPI's own self-interest to make their services responsive to school district needs and requests. Under this arrangement, school districts will also have an incentive to evaluate and prioritize their service needs and to seek the best available resources to meet their needs.

This recommendation does not cut positions or services. However, DPI's ability to "afford" assistance activity employees will depend on "demand" from school districts for consultant services.

If current support services provided by DPI are important to school districts and are delivered at rates below the market, DPI should be able to effectively market its services to school districts and maintain the current consultant staffing levels. Market demand might even necessitate the hiring of additional consultants. If market demand is weak or school districts choose to seek service elsewhere, DPI will have to adjust its employment levels accordingly.

Regardless of where school districts choose to seek services, school districts should continue to be accountable to DPI and the state for school and student performance.

IMPLEMENTATION

Assignment of Consultants

Implementation and assistance activity consultant positions should be moved to the TACs within the first year of implementation. We have not identified specific positions or

individuals within every group to be moved. This will give the areas affected flexibility in moving and determining staff assignments.

If current staff members do not have the right mix of skills needed, employees may have to be replaced. For example, if the greatest need for support services at a TAC is related to math assistance, the TAC will need to adjust its skills mix accordingly.

Service Marketing Plan

A marketing plan for assistance activities that will be offered by DPI consultants should be developed in the first year of implementation. This plan will have to be updated periodically to be responsive to changing school district needs and requests.

The marketing approach for support services should be gradually implemented over a three year period. In the first year as the marketing plan is being developed, we recommend that all state funding associated with assistance activities continue to remain at DPI. In the second year, 25 percent of the state funds should be transferred. By the fourth year, all DPI assistance activities should be self-supporting with all state funds going to the school districts.

EXHIBIT 3 Recommended Consultant Staffing Patterns

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Development Activity Consultants</u>	<u>Coordinating & Monitoring Activity Consultants</u>	<u>Assistance Activity Consultants</u>	<u>Number of Consultant Positions Identified</u>
TAC			72	72
Program Services:				
Curriculum & Instruction	13	6	7	26
Vocational Education	14	9	9	32
Media Services	3	1	3	7
Student Services	2	1	1	4
Auxiliary Services:				
Transportation		3	3	6
Plant Operations			6	6
School Planning		3	9	12
Child Nutrition	2	8	7	17
Total	34	31	117	182

Notes:

- Three Transportation consultants and eight Child Nutrition consultants are already located at the TACs.
- Three School Planning consultants have been left in Raleigh to review and approve school plans in accordance with state law. Reviews that are not specified in law should no longer be provided without charge.
- Core service activities remaining in Plant Operations should be assumed by the Plant Operations Chief Consultant.
- Plant Operation consultants have technical backgrounds and concentrate in specific areas of expertise. As a result, this group can continue to remain centrally located in Raleigh to maintain its diversity of specialization.
- Student Services can also keep its positions in Raleigh in order to provide service coverage for the six TACs.

EXHIBIT 4
Salaries Associated with Self-Supporting Consultant Positions

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Number of Consultants</u>	<u>Average Salary</u>	<u>Salary Total</u>
TAC	72	\$44,200	\$3,182,400
Program Services:			
Curriculum & Instruction	7	\$42,300	\$296,100
Vocational Education	9	\$41,550	\$373,950
Media Services	3	\$42,875	\$128,625
Student Services	1	\$45,900	\$45,900
Auxiliary Services:			
Transportation	3	\$41,600	\$124,800
Plant Operation	6	\$46,900	\$281,400
School Planning	9	\$50,750	\$456,750
Child Nutrition	7	\$33,250	\$232,750
Total	117		\$5,122,675