

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

I. Brief Overview of the Laboratory

SEDL is a 33 year old Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) currently undergoing renewal. It serves five states: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, which includes some of the most diverse as well as some of the most disadvantaged populations in the nation. The Board of Directors has charged the REL to serve five concentrations: rural, urban, the delta, the border area, and the Indian Nations. The REL is part of the overall SEDL organization, and constitutes approximately 60 percent of the organization's revenues.

The primary work is research, development, and dissemination, (RDD) which is now conceived as an integrated effort, typically involving a field-based research and development process. The centerpiece of most RDD projects is professional development, to change teacher practice, create professional learner communities, and in some cases extends to mobilizing and training more varied groups, as in the Community Action Teams to enhance family and community involvement in education. A key feature of this process is co-development with practitioners at the field sites. Training co-developers is a core strategy for promoting scale-up of initiatives and program models. Its efficacy is yet to be tested.

Each RDD effort is designed from a research-base, and is also intended to contribute to an enhanced knowledge base of its specific area. Thus each includes an evaluation component, most of which have an evaluation framework based on knowledge utilization (i.e., assessing "level of use" of the new knowledge or information). Improving student success undergirds the RDD efforts and measuring student success or effects on students is typically included as well.

SEDL serves its region in ways that can be characterized as both depth and breadth. The depth dimension includes field-based intensive and ongoing training and professional development, facilitation, assistance, and capacity building in a select number of intensive sites (typically schools, sometimes a group or cluster of schools) spread across the region in the five concentrated areas. This includes 38 (soon to be 48) sites that are participating in development projects of the REL, and about an equal number in other program areas in SEDL. The intensive relationship with these sites typically involves multiple SEDL staff and spans over a number of years.

The breadth dimension includes policy work in the five states (supporting the work of Chief State School Officers and other policy-makers in the region) and dissemination of information throughout the region. A newsletter, SEDL Letter is sent to every school in the region every quarter. About 25,000 copies of each issue are distributed. Another publication, SEDL Links is distributed to present and former board members, and other key decision-makers six times a year. The SEDL website is another strategy for disseminating information, including catalog product availability, region-wide as well as nationwide. The entire web-site got 132,655 hits in April, 1999. List-serves are frequently set up as communication tools for particular groups and networks related to SEDL ongoing projects and goal areas.

SEDL is staffed by approximately 100 people. There has been substantial turnover in the last two years, with over 30 departures and about 50 new hires. An intensive program review and restructuring took place in 1997 (described below) which resulted in many changes both programmatic and philosophical. However, the goal areas remained the same and include:

1. Enhancing family and community involvement in education
2. Addressing diversity, language and culture (this is also the REL's specialty area)

3. Aligning and supporting policy development
4. Promoting instructional coherence
5. Applying technology to restructuring and learning
6. Strategies for insuring school success.

Following the program review, a new position of Chief Operating Officer was created to have a full-time person act as director of the REL contract. Some staff were moved to different positions. At present, two key management positions remain vacant.

SEDL is governed by a 20 member Board of Directors, with four members from each state in the region, including the Chief State School Officer or designee. The full board meets twice a year. There is also a five-person executive committee and other committees.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the REL doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

There have been some deviations from what they proposed in content, form and timelines, following the turnover in leadership during the second year of the contract. A priority of the new leadership and of the board was to conduct a comprehensive Program Review which resulted in some restructuring of the organization, substantial changes in staff, and some revisions or adaptations in projects that were described in the proposal. For example, goal 5 was modified (Applying technology to restructuring and learning). The original plan was for a "technology planner", and it was revised to focus on instruction. In general, they turned to more of a focus on research, although according to the director, not at the expense of site work and their strong emphasis on training and technical assistance. Further revisions or adaptations were

made in individual projects as they became implemented by new staff with the oversight of new leadership. For example, in the Community Action Team (CAT) project, they refocused the content of the training; Similarly, changes were made in the Organizing for Diversity Project. Some changes were also made because the proposed projects "just didn't work", such as the bi-national projects in the Language and Cultural Diversity Program.

The review process definitely slowed them down and there have been delays overall (and these have been part of contract modifications for Year 4). Some goal areas are closer to being on target schedule-wise and others are catching up. The signature program on Community Action Teams is one example of a project that began site work in the second year, close to the original target date. Others are experiencing more delays, but in the case of the Technology Assistance Program, the management has invested more FTE staff in the project, double what was originally planned in order to catch up. The language and diversity area has completed approximately 75 percent of what was intended by this time in the contract, and is probably most behind, although the scope of work has changed.

One area that has been modified under the new leadership is the role or activities of the board. In order to get the board members to be more involved in the work of the REL and enhance their capability to advise the staff, the new director requested each board member to choose a particular goal areas (projects) for more intense concentration. Board members are invited to "research" the goal area, visit sites or activities, and make presentations of their findings to the full board.

1. Strengths

There is new and apparently strong leadership team that has tried to create a new organizational climate and culture. In particular, it has tried to create an organizational ethos that

is client-centered rather than contract-centered, (which was the way the previous SEDL director was perceived), with a strong emphasis on both research and service. Fifty new staff members have joined the organization in the last year and a half which has brought to the Lab personnel with varied expertise and past experience that seem to fit well with the content and approaches of the Lab's priorities.

The leadership, and with the support of the Board of Directors have engaged in a very extensive Program Review beginning in the second year of the contract period (discussed also below). Despite the fact that the resulting reorganization and revisions to scope of work, as well as staffing changes, caused delays in several goal areas, the strength is that the leadership refused to allow the status quo to continue, if it was not deemed effective.

The new leadership also reflects a major change in management style. According to board members, he has a "willingness to take hold of some of the issues, hold people accountable, has a willingness to listen and deal with big change, and no idea goes unattended or unheard."

Substantial energy has been expended to meet contract requirements to the degree possible, although some have been changed following program review and with contract modifications. Because of some gaps in staffing, consultants have been engaged, (e.g., in the Language and Diversity Program) to strengthen the ongoing work. Intense work is being carried out in all goal areas, as documented in the Progress Reports of the Lab.

The REL Planning Process appears to have been well conceived and well designed; The Quality Assurance Process also seems well conceived and implemented, which has also allowed for more interaction across program or goal areas than would have otherwise taken place, since most professional staff are involved in reviewing the work of other products and service

initiatives.

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

While there are major attempts to "catch up" and complete contract requirements in the present contract period, there is still concern about the REL's ability to do so, and these are expressed for example, in OERI's response to the Fourth Year Plan.

Staffing: The vacancy in leadership of two major areas of the Laboratory's work (i.e., goal 2, task 7 -- Language and Cultural Diversity, and Evaluation) is a serious concern at this stage of the contract period. This is not to suggest that work is not being accomplished in those areas, but the vision and coherence that an assigned leader would attend to is visibly lacking in the work of those groups. A full-time program manager would more likely insure that the issues of language and cultural diversity would permeate all projects and REL activities, including issues of staff recruitment and staff training to work in the field with diverse populations.

Because of the "lateness of the hour" in this contract period, and the possible difficulty in hiring a senior person so late in the contract period without assurances of continuation, the Lab might want to consider trying to get a Professor on leave from a university to head up Goal 2/Task 7 for a year or more, give the program coherence, and perhaps help attract an appropriate permanent staff member.

In the evaluation area, the work would benefit from a quality assurance type of oversight in areas like the following: for the research component of each field development project -- are the right research questions being addressed, and is the methodology appropriate? Is the evaluation appropriate and timely to meet the needs of the sites as well as the development project? Overall, across the different projects and goal areas, is the research agenda of the REL being met? In other words, it could have been more of a coordinated cross-Lab focus.

There appears to be insufficient linkage and communication across goals or program areas in ways that would enhance the work. While some examples were given of cross goal communication or assistance (e.g., Language and Diversity staff contributed the Spanish translation of materials for the CAT teams), more overlap or interface would make the work stronger. While informal communication takes place (e.g., between the people who developed the Learning Communities Framework and those that worked on the CAT framework), it may be easier to change the organizational culture by initiating some more structured interaction opportunities.

Recommendation: Have less fragmented staffing groups. Try either more communication across projects, or a staffing design that promotes having each staff member be assigned for at least some of his/her work time another related project, over and above time spent on the quality assurance process.

Although the REL has documented some examples of alliances with other organizations, the field (i.e., the work both at SEDL and elsewhere) would probably benefit if the Lab took even greater advantage of resources and potential alliances with other organizations either in the region or nationally.

B. To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

The Laboratory engaged in an extensive program review that resulted in some reorganization, change of staff assignments, creation of a new position to head the REL contract, and hired new staff. All staff and a consultant participated in the review process, and all projects and plans were reviewed. The Program Review resulted in modification of several projects, in response to reflection following feedback from reviewers. The change also included a

"paradigm shift", or a change in focus from the Lab's traditional contract-centered focus, to more of a client-centered focus.

The Program Review was more staff-driven than client driven, -- although staff were also responding to what they perceived as the needs of their client populations. The review was also board-driven as the process began when the board charged the new director to conduct a compensation study, driven by the perception that the organization was too top heavy with highly paid managers. The result of that study was to make changes at both ends of the pay spectrum. The prior system was to bring all new staff in at the same level of payment, making it harder to attract new staff at appropriate pay levels. A new compensation policy was established. At the same time, the entire structure and scope of work was reviewed and a number of changes were made. Here too, the board and management shared the concern that it was time to invest in new emerging issues out in the community. They also shared an interest in holding staff accountable. As a board member said, "the concerns of the board were easier to deal with when they were shared by the new directors."

The REL sends out evaluation surveys to clients who have been the recipients of services and products. It collects and publishes performance indicator data annually.

1. Strengths

- The Lab has a well-developed and well-implemented Quality Assurance process that is used for all products, including web-sites. That process includes peer review as well as management review, and sometimes includes external review if the program manager or director thinks such expertise is needed. This is typically done for literature reviews, as was done in both of the signature projects that were reviewed.
- Services and product development is typically customized in response to expressed customer needs. Feedback from the intensive sites, including pilot and field test sites, is listened to and staff is very responsive to their requests and feedback.
- According to board members, people out in the field are more involved in identifying issues of need, and board members are also sources of information in needs sensing.

Ongoing needs assessment and environmental scanning is carried out during the contract period.

- A major strength in this area has been the heavy investment in the Program Review and its influence on opening up the culture of the REL, making it more client and student-focused.
- The REL also knows when to end projects, as when they are not seen as opportunities for producing more learnings (e.g., closing out the Exchange Project), or when there are too many barriers to starting them (as with the bi-national projects in Goal 2).

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

The Lab may rely too much on internal input and review in its development and quality assurance process. Although external review is sometimes utilized, it may be useful to include outside experts or consultants in the early and later stages of a major project or a major product. They may want to consider external advisors, or advisory committees for select projects or activities.

III. Quality

To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?

The sample of products that were examined include training modules, literature reviews, occasional papers, resource guides, reports to practitioners, and evaluation plans. Services include professional development, facilitation and assistance, and provision of information, in print, phone, and through technology. All are subject to a quality assurance process. It is the opinion of this reviewer that the products are competent, if not exemplary. Others are at least adequate, e.g., the literature reviews of the signature products may have omitted some relevant sources that this reviewer would have included. (But clearly, this is always the case!)

1. Strengths

- A major strength is in the field-based development projects, especially the co-developer process, professional development and facilitation. These projects appear to be well grounded in theory and research. Literature reviews are conducted in the early stages of the development process. Research questions are built in, and extensive field notes and documentation are carried out.
- The Lab carefully distinguishes and attends to the different kinds of audiences and different purposes of the products, e.g., those for training, guides, resource materials, etc. They are tailored to the specific kinds of audiences and uses. The preparation of the materials is enhanced by the Quality Assurance process implemented in the Lab. A substantial number of staff development and training modules have been completed.

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

- With the full understanding that the products (written reports) of the research or evaluation components of the RDD projects are not deliverables until later in the contract, these components do not seem to be as well executed as the development and service component. While the idea of integration of research, development, and service is very good, more emphasis may need to be given to the integration of the research or evaluation work with the projects and with the REL's overall research agenda. This was particularly noted by some disjuncture in what was described as research questions in the presentations of the signature projects, and what was written as research or evaluation questions in the written evaluation plans for those projects. Since the evaluation plans stated that the program staff would be gathering some of the data, the disjuncture in presentation raised this reviewer's concerns.
- On the one hand, the REL's flexibility and willingness to tailor field-based development and service to local sites' needs is commendable and responsive; however, the question can be raised: in an RDD setting, does the customizing get in the way of designing a "model" that can be disseminated elsewhere, especially without the intensive and expert facilitation that SEDL provides? The question is -- what constitutes a coherent model -- with integrity? When does it become just a series of adaptations? This may have serious implications for the potential of scale-up, unless there are clearly framed models that are appropriate in well defined settings. For example, in Indian Nation settings; in border communities, etc.
- Some of the products and services were said to build on earlier work as well as similar work of other Labs or agencies. However, they could probably build on other work to a greater degree than was documented or described. It was hard to tell how much reinventing of wheels took place, with the full recognition that adaptations and refinements are required to fit regional needs and circumstances. The best example of adapting other work to regional needs is the project to adapt comprehensive school reform models for Latino English Language Learners.

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by the Laboratory useful to and used by customers?

The clients in intensive sites, as represented in the sample of clients interviewed for the signature products, seem to find the services and products extremely useful. They appreciate the follow through assistance, and scope of the relationship (although they would like even more on-site assistance). Substantial testimony was given of satisfaction, important changes for teachers and students (in the case of TAP), and for the school, parents, community and families (in the case of CAT). Statements were made such as "they gave us direction"; "They helped us develop the vision of the school"; "they helped us take our (curriculum) units and stretch to make them better units". "They had an impact on the quality of instruction, collaboration among staff, which aroused interest by others because of the excitement of our students and staff."

Surveys based on performance indicators also demonstrated utility, but not in as high a degree as the personal testimony. This may be function of the type of survey and the type of respondent.

1. Strengths

The REL is very client-focused and appears to be able to tailor services and products that make them most useful, or sense the real needs of clients, thereby able to provide usable products and services. As a result, there appears to be a high degree of client satisfaction, particularly in intensive sites.

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

It is hard to assess levels of usefulness to the wide population of recipients of services, products and information. The Performance Indicator data are limited in scope, and based on

low response rates to surveys. Web-site hits measure access but not usefulness. If this question is to be addressed adequately, other data collection tools, strategies and methodologies need to be employed.

According to board members, there is a constant concern about "how to get the word out" (regarding the work of SEDL) and the potential for use of the products and services. The REL is improving in its outreach and dissemination, but it is still expressed as an issue of concern.

B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

As stated above, the REL is very client-focused with regard to its overall program, its work in intensive sites, and its work with policy makers. A Chief State School Officer who was new to the Board, said that the Director was unique in that he "showed up immediately", explained the mission of the REL, but also offered assistance to him in his new role as CSSO. In developing training modules, as in the TAP project, training is customized to the knowledge level of the campus.

1. Strengths

- The Lab did extensive needs sensing from the Board and other sources for its environmental scanning.
- The Lab is sensitive to customer needs in areas like language, for example, presenting materials to the CATs in Spanish in relevant settings.
- The Lab is very responsive to client conditions, and customizes much of its services to the local sites conditions.

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

- In the words of some board members, the REL "needs more visibility. They should know about us." This is improving with the distribution of SEDL Links and the increased use of the Web-site.
- With the exception of certain goal areas and key staff, (e.g., Goal 6, Strategies for Student Success), the REL may be more sensitive about client needs, than it is to the needs of the greater R&D community, i.e., contributing to the knowledge base on

comprehensive school improvement or increasing student success. The REL needs to strengthen its attention to the knowledge building and knowledge dissemination area, and to work synergistically across lab programs to maximize the impact.

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the REL's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

It is important to note that while service-oriented, the focus in most intensive implementation sites is on professional development of staff or other adults. Staff claim that the bottom line for all the work is improved student success, but those are the ultimate outcomes rather than the short term outcomes that could be expected during the contract period. Nonetheless, the COTR has made it clear that he wants documentation of how projects have improved student achievement, or at least have improved teaching.

1. Strengths

- Management and staff repeatedly claim that the underlying goal of all of its work is improving student success. All of the work that was examined appears to conform to this principle, although some are more distal than others (e.g., CAT).
- The Lab has in place a method for documenting what is happening in the intensive field sites. Intensive field notes are kept, and pre-and post measurement of relevant dimensions are typically administered. At least some of the major projects (e.g., TAP) have the potential for contributing to improved student success during implementation. Most projects attempt to collect student indicators as part of their evaluation, since an underlying theme of all of its work is improving student success. The very process of assembling data on student indicators does sensitize both the REL staff and the site staff that student success is the primary goal.

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

- The REL may need to maintain and reinforce the focus that the underlying goal of all of its work is improved student success (or well-being, as in the case of some CAT sites). It must therefore be vigilant in insuring that outcomes for students are documented. This may include but is not limited to improved classroom experiences.

- The REL might also consider, in its field-based efforts, the importance of building the capacity of the local sites to examine school and student indicators before, during, and later in the life of a project. Some needs for evaluation data were expressed by clients that were interviewed. The REL must attend to its own research and evaluation needs, some of which parallel what local sites need. It may also be important to encourage sites to develop habits of looking at and using data on their own. One goal area, (Strategies for Insuring Success), is promoting the idea of "looking at student work". While this is a strategy for encouraging teachers to change practice, it is also a good way of focusing on student success, as well as understanding and assessing the work and the degree to which the goals for student success are being achieved. Building the capacity of looking at student work into several of the REL's projects may be a good addition.

B. To what extent does the Laboratory assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

Much of the work of the REL is designed with the objective of assisting state level policy makers and program staff, and localities, in the arena of comprehensive school improvement strategies. A more limited set of projects assist in implementing those strategies. For state level policy-makers, the work involves providing information to help inform policy-makers on comprehensive reform. In particular, SEDL's REL has provided leadership and assistance to the five states in the region, all of which have received funding for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. SEDL has coordinated workshops and model developer fairs. SEDL compiled and distributed information on CSRD as well as other policy instruments and strategies. It is also developing a data base on reform model selections and is a national leader in this activity. All of this assists in adoption decisions.

At local sites, much the REL's work with intensive sites does include assistance in implementation of comprehensive school improvement strategies, mostly at the level of staff training. This includes the TAP, Applying Technology to Restructuring and Learning, which can be defined as a comprehensive strategy because of its instructional focus on constructivist

learning environments. Much of the work of Task 6 (Strategies for Increasing School Success) is directly targeted to the objective of implementing comprehensive school improvement strategies.

1. Strengths

- Assisting in the arena of comprehensive school improvement strategies is a major strength of this REL:
- Some major projects (e.g., TAP) are designed to assist localities in implementing comprehensive school improvement strategies. This assistance is often customized to meet the local site needs and conditions.
- The REL has paid attention to issues of scale-up of its efforts through training of co-developers (e.g. TAP) and training for shared leadership and facilitation (CAT).
- The REL has prepared and disseminated publications to enhance the capacity of localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies. It also does so through its data base on CSRD and its web-site.
- The REL has acted as a resource to the region by providing information, such as sponsoring workshops to showcase successful school improvement efforts.

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

The REL needs to concentrate on more ways to facilitate scale up; be more creative in promoting networks that can promote dissemination as well. It will be extremely important to document and analyze the co-developer model, and assess its potential for promoting scale-up. If the model works, it will be a major contribution to the field.

C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

The REL seems to have a commitment to this specialty area because of its location and the nature of the population in its region, and because of its history of involvement in bi-lingual education and curriculum development. However, its past history was in practitioner oriented service, training and technical assistance, and not in research and development, and it has had some difficulty making this transition. The difficulty is enhanced by the problems they have had

in recruiting a program manager that the leadership thinks would be most appropriate for the role. The individual that they really wanted for the job decided not to relocate and accept the position. Another chose to accept an academic position instead. They claim there is a lot of competition for highly qualified staff for this type of position.

Despite this, the staff of the language and diversity program have moved along with the work, under the direction of the overall director of the REL contract, who is also serving as interim manager of this goal and program. However, she is not an expert in that field, nor does she have the time to give it the attention that is required. Some of the work of the original contract has been completed, e.g., the Exchange Project as well as the publication on Native American Resources for the Southwest Region. Some projects have been dropped because there were too many impediments to getting them started, such as the bi-national projects between some border schools and Mexican schools, that were planned in response to changes associated with NAFTA. Other projects continue (e.g., Organizing for Diversity) or have begun (CSRD projects and their applicability for different cultural groups). Organizing for Diversity, a training program for teachers (predominantly Anglo) who work with students who are of different cultures and languages, has the potential for becoming a major contribution to the field. But the specialty area has not yet reached a state of coherence and prominence that would give it national or major regional attention.

Some attention is given to language and cultural diversity issues in the context of other goal areas. For example, the staff of the signature program on Applying Technology to Restructuring and Learning said, in response to a question about the issues of language of cultural diversity, "we are learning from the teachers about what sort of things work in different population settings; we have conversations about language and communication patterns; people's

cultural backgrounds are a filter for each project; models will look different in different environments." But it is not clear that the lessons from the projects in the different goal areas are specifically communicated to each other, or that there is a synergy across projects in different goal areas that would solidify and consolidate a state of the art knowledge base in this area.

The REL seems to have pulled back from exerting leadership in the cross-lab collaboration in this area; we have some evidence that staff make conference presentations, but on a list of over 200 presentations, less than 10 percent related to this area of work. Similarly in the list of 24 selected staff publications, four were in areas related to language. None were published in refereed journals.

1. Strengths

The REL has implemented several field development projects in the specialty area and has published several products. It has moved along with the work, despite the absence of a full-time appropriate program manager. It modified the program to fit the perceived needs.

2. Issues of Concern/Recommendations

There is a major need for leadership, more coherence in the program, more outreach, more infusion of the specialty area in the entire REL program. It may be useful to visualize a matrix of the six goals as columns, but with the Task 7 as a horizontal row that cuts across all the goals. (Evaluation would be another row). Given the nature of the target populations of the region, and the nature of the specialty area, someone could oversee that issues of language and diversity permeate all the goal areas in development and implementation.

The REL needs to exert more outreach to position itself as a national leader in this field, to promote itself, and share its accomplishments.

VI. Overall Comments On Total Laboratory Programs, Products, and Services

Assessing the status and level of success of SEDL's REL is not an easy task, because at the same time, it is both a veteran organization, established in 1966, and a relatively new one. Features of its past can be seen as both positive and problematic. It has a history of good relationships with CSSOs in the region, and with some other relevant organizations. It developed some centerpiece products that are still used, such as its bi-lingual early childhood curriculum which just recently was adopted by Harris County Headstart. And its widely used CBAM (Concerns-Based Adoption Model), developed by Shirley Hord (still at SEDL) and others, is currently the basis of the evaluation framework for most of the REL's initiatives, focusing on "levels of use" of new information and strategies.

On the other hand, SEDL had become very "tired", somewhat uninspired, not risk-taking, and set in its ways under the leadership that had been in place for a while, and was still in place at the beginning of the current contract period. An organizational culture was in place that is somewhat hard to change.

However, in 1996, the leadership did change, and the new director set in motion a process of self assessment that resulted in: some changes in structure; many changes in staff; attempts to change the organizational culture and philosophy; modifications of some of the scope of work; extensive negotiation and contract modifications; and consequently some potentially serious delays in completing the scope of work in a timely manner. Thus in some ways, the REL is like a new organization, with some of the same start-up problems that are faced by new REL contracts that have been awarded in this and the prior contract period. These include some problems of staffing, and of starting new initiatives. Perhaps the assessments of its success and accomplishments should be judged using the template for a new REL, rather than a long-

established one. Perhaps the organization and its leadership should be commended for trying to change, and not be overly criticized for not moving fast enough in its work.

This is not to say that some of the issues of concern are not valid. The REL probably should have been more creative in solving the staffing problems in the two management positions that are vacant. The changes in organizational structure may have been too superficial to allow for creative interchange among program staff across goal areas. But there is substantial precedent in the organizational change literature to suggest that it is harder to change an existing organization than to create a new one. The SEDL leadership should be commended for trying, and by all accounts, the benefits to the organization and its accomplishments are notable.

Some miscellaneous issues

The Board of Directors wants the institution to seek additional funds and to diversify, including seeking and acquiring non-governmental funds. Such growth would enable the institution to provide additional services and perhaps enhance its capacity. It would also help insure organizational survival, if the federal REL program would be jeopardized, or if SEDL should lose the REL in the next competition. On the other hand, managing growth can be a problem, and would of course require additional staff. Recruiting and hiring staff has not been easy, in other positions as well as the two leadership positions. And growth would require even more staff..

Another issue that has been raised has been the lack of sufficient diversity among staff of the REL, and that it does not adequately match the characteristics of the populations being served. While the board shares these concerns about insufficient diversity, they feel the bottom line is that people are being served -- in their view effectively and efficiently. Nonetheless, the concern is very valid and warrant some creative solutions.

To summarize the REL's strengths:

- it is client and student-centered and has a strong service orientation;
- it approaches site work with flexibility and adaptability;
- it has developed an effective field-based development model;
- it is willing to examine and change the organization's structure and culture;
- it has institutionalized a quality assurance process;
- it has begun to position itself strongly in certain areas, including work associated with Comprehensive School Reform;
- it has some nascent programs in its specialty area that may also position the Lab in the national spotlight, if it can mobilize sufficiently.
- it has strong capability in the areas of technology and its wide uses in education, and strong capabilities in areas of school change, and teaching and learning.

Areas in need of improvement include:

- an organizational structure and ethos which will move the REL to be a professional learning community;
- better utilization of staff knowledge and resources across the REL's projects;
- more coherence to the specialty area, and more conscious infusion of language and cultural diversity across the REL's projects;
- a more coordinated research/evaluation process that would insure both effective program modification, and a contribution to the field;
- more outreach on the regional and national scene. In other words: "Project yourselves and think big!"