

## Organizational Structures: Introduction

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*Center on Innovation & Improvement*

Organizational structure is the framework within which decisions are made and executed, lines of authority are defined, communication is channeled, and institutional intent is made graphic. Designing or changing organizational structure is typically the opening act when an SEA or LEA tackles the challenge of persistently low-achieving schools. Not only do the schools require structural change (or reinvention), but the SEA and the LEA must alter the way they are organized in order to initiate and manage the interventions applied in these schools.

This chapter provides explanations, references, and resources for new organizational structures at the SEA and LEA levels, creation of turnaround offices, as well as new ways in which schools are organized in keeping with the provisions of the SIG program—establishing new school models, restarting with a charter school, restarting with an education management organization, and establishing community-oriented schools. In addition, this chapter addresses the ultimate organizational change—school closure.

Because high schools are typically large, organizationally complex, multi-faceted, and inclined toward inertia, this chapter deals specifically with a variety of ways to re-organize and re-program high schools: dual enrollment, learning academies, credit-recovery programs, re-engagement programs, and smaller learning communities.

Student learning is most strongly attributable to “proximal variables”—the influences closest to the student, such as the teacher’s instructional practices and classroom management, the curriculum, the peer group, and teacher-student interactions. Organizational structure is not a proximal variable, but is a pre-condition for improving proximal variables and for sustaining the improvements.

Organizational structure signals how authority and accountability are distributed within a system of education, from SEA to LEA to school to classroom. The clear message of the SIG program is that both accountability and authority reside close to where the proximal variables for learning reside—in the classroom and in the school. The SIG program calls for greater school-level flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting; at the same time it encourages strong school-level accountability for results. Organizational structures within the SEA, LEA, and school (including those of the bodies governing the school) matter greatly in properly apportioning accountability and authority, which together create a focal point of responsibility for the learning success of each student.

Just as organizational structure can facilitate or obstruct constructive decision making and actions in the school and classroom, changes in organizational structure do not automatically lead to better learning outcomes for students. Again, a change in organizational structure is a pre-condition to improved learning but does not, itself,

produce the desired results. Operational changes must follow structural change. People must act with greater competence and with greater devotion to the job at hand. Much of the rest of this *Handbook* deals with the practices internal to a school that are linked to improved student learning. This chapter introduces several organizational structures that the SIG program proposes as likely pre-conditions to rapid school improvement.