Appendix G
Kentucky SSOS Priorities for Improvement

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A Summary of Results of the SSoS Assessment and Planning Process
March 15, 2010

From January through March 2010, a self-assessment team from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) held a series of meetings to examine Kentucky's statewide system of support (SSoS). The endeavor was facilitated by staff and consultants from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC) at Edvantia. The self-assessment team consisted of deputy commissioners and associate commissioners of the two bureaus and eight offices that are at the head of the organizational structure of KDE. A broader group of approximately 50 KDE staff engaged in examining the findings of the self-assessment team and adding to their conclusions at one of the meetings, which was held on February 22, 2010.

During initial meetings, the team assessed the Kentucky Department of Education across six functions of the state education agency (SEA) identified by Redding and Walberg:[1] (1) provide information, (2) set standards, (3) distribute resources, (4) monitor compliance, (5) assist with district and school improvement, and (6) intervene to correct deficiencies. The team also considered the level of internal and external coordination of the SSoS, and then discussed in some depth the effectiveness of the SSoS in implementing several specific indicators of the functions of an effective SSoS identified by Redding and Walberg:

- State incentives for improvement
- State opportunities for improvement
- Building systemic capacity
- Building local capacity
- The SSoS's monitoring of its own operations and effectiveness

The results of those initial discussions describing the current functioning of Kentucky's SSoS were summarized in the report to which this document is appended—*Statewide Systems of Support (SSoS) Self-Assessment Report: Kentucky.*

The SSOS self-assessment process includes rating the system's functioning in a number of areas, prioritizing areas of need, and developing a plan for strengthening the SSOS. The Kentucky self-assessment team completed all steps of the process, but determined that rather than develop a detailed plan with objectives, action steps, benchmarks, and target dates, it would be more useful to the Department to summarize major themes and priorities. This decision was based on several factors. First, the Department had already begun a somewhat parallel process as it developed its Race to the Top application (i.e., revising its mission statement, identifying goals and objectives, etc.). Second, the KDE team perceived that the SSOS report and this summary would provide the data needed to inform the Commissioner's initiatives to consider reorganization within the

[1] See the companion documents that provide the framework for the self-assessment process that was implemented: *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*, and *Strengthening the Statewide System of Support: A Manual for the Comprehensive Center and State Education Agency* (2007), Sam Redding & Herbert J. Walberg, Editors, Center on Innovation & Improvement, Lincoln, IL: http://www.centerii.org/

Department. Finally, team members were concerned that one of the final stages of the process created a "priority/opportunity index score" that eliminated, as potential priorities, those SSOS functions that had been rated as "functional implementation but no evidence of impact" in favor of the functions that were rated "limited development or partial implementation" or "no development or implementation." Team members were reluctant to omit some of these functions from their planning.

Given these considerations, this report does not share a specific improvement plan, but summarizes major themes and priorities generated by the KDE self-assessment team and additional KDE staff members through the series of meetings, documentary evidence, and e-mail exchanges with ARCC staff over a 2-month period. The report is organized as follows:

- Overview of current status of the Kentucky SSoS
- "Quick-Win" priorities for strengthening the Kentucky SSoS (i.e., areas that are relatively easy to address)
- Longer-term priorities (more difficult to address; may require changes in current policy/budget)
- Other potential priorities (areas that did not emerge as top priorities, but about which team members expressed concern)

Within each of the "priority" sections, priority areas are first summarized in chart form. Then each priority area is described in terms of the current situation, areas to be strengthened, and possible strategies for change. These potential change strategies were generated primarily during the February 22 meeting with about 50 KDE staff members, but were not developed in detail.

Overview of Current Status of the Kentucky SSoS

This section briefly summarizes perceptions of the KDE Self-Assessment Team and additional KDE staff about strengths and areas of need in Kentucky's SSoS, as well as major themes that emerged during the 2-month self-assessment process. Table 1, which is taken from the initial report, summarizes strengths and areas of need in Kentucky's current statewide system of support, based on two meetings with the KDE self-assessment team, documents provided by the team, interviews with four local educators, and a February meeting with a larger number of KDE staff.

Table 1: Strengths and Areas of Need in Kentucky SSoS

Strengths	Areas of Need
Communicating high expectations	
Establishing standards, assessment	Helping districts/schools implement standards and assessment
Data systems	Helping districts/schools use the data
Coordination with external partners	Coordination within the agency
Curriculum and instructional tools and resources available	Helping districts/schools use curriculum and instructional resources
Funding formulas	Guidance/tools to use resources for improvement; ways to determine effectiveness of funding formulas
Disseminating information, especially through designated district staff (e.g., DAC, CIO)	Ensuring information is received and understood in *all* districts/schools
Assisting/supporting/monitoring low-performing districts/schools	Assisting/supporting/monitoring *all* schools, including differentiating services
Technology support and structure	
Student support services for special education, ELL	
Leadership programs for superintendent/principal redesign	Training principals as turnaround specialists
Incentives for improvement: public recognition, consequences for low performance, some funding incentives	Few incentives to work in hard-to-staff districts and schools, or to implement high-leverage strategies
	No system for ongoing evaluation and refinement of SSoS

The following major themes emerged from the four, day-long sessions with KDE staff:

- The entire Department with its external partners—not a single unit within KDE—comprise Kentucky's statewide system of support.
- KDE has been effective in working with external partners, but less effective at coordinating services internally.
- KDE is relatively effective in providing support to the schools and districts with the lowest student achievement, but less effective in supporting other schools and districts—and providing support to those that may be deficient in areas other than student achievement.
- KDE is effective in creating and disseminating information and resources, but less effective in making sure they are used effectively, and in measuring the impact of their use.
- KDE has not been systematic about monitoring and evaluating its statewide system of support.
- Effective communication, both internally and externally, should be a guiding principle of the SSoS.

The following provisos related to potential new directions for KDE were mentioned during the final meeting of the KDE self-assessment team:

- If there is a move to do more monitoring and evaluation in such areas as district/school improvement plans and how districts/schools utilize resources and information, it will be important that legislators understand and support this shift so that they know how to respond when local education leaders, who are accustomed to less oversight, protest about KDE monitoring.
- It will be important to communicate that the purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to help districts critically evaluate their operations and determine how to increase their effectiveness.
- It will be important to monitor and evaluate strategically to ensure that KDE does not get in the way of districts and schools that are doing well; the KDE team wants to ensure that the agency does not return to an era when SEA's were "big, bureaucratic monitoring agencies."
- As KDE changes direction, it will be important to communicate the vision to staff internally, be supportive in assessing the skill sets of staff needed to implement new directions, and provide the needed internal professional development.

Quick-Win Priorities for Strengthening the Kentucky SSoS

The priorities listed in this section are those identified as "quick-win" in the sense that these priorities could be addressed relatively easily without major changes in current policy or budget conditions. The chart below summarizes those priorities, followed by details on each priority area.

SSoS Framework Component	Indicator	Description From SSoS Self-Assessment Inventory
Building Local Capacity	D1a: Organization of the SSoS	The SSoS (1) has one person in charge of its operations; (2) operates with a publicly available organizational chart depicting internal and external office and entities; (3) has a published document describing the role of each person, office, entity within the SSoS; (4) engages personnel in regular written communication about the operation of the SSoS; and (5) involves personnel in regular meetings to coordinate efforts.
Evaluating and improving the SSoS	E1a: Goals, objectives, and benchmarks; E2e: Monitoring and reporting progress	The SSoS operates with publicly available goals, objectives, and benchmarks. The SSoS monitors and reports its progress toward its operational goals, objectives, and benchmarks.
Evaluating and improving the SSoS	E2b: Communication of evaluation and modifications	The SSoS prepares and distributes a written report of its evaluation results and the modifications in its operation made in response to the evaluation.
Evaluating and improving the SSoS	E2c: District and school evaluation of services received	The SSoS includes district and school evaluations of services received as part of the evaluation of its effectiveness.

D1a: Organization of the SSoS

Current situation. While KDE hopes to move to a model in which the entire Department and its external partners function as a coordinated SSoS, the current SSoS is a somewhat disjointed system of KDE employees, external consultants and contractors, regional education cooperatives, and special education cooperatives—plus a number of external partners. The Commissioner of Education has primary responsibility for Kentucky's SSoS. No organizational chart is publicly available for the envisioned SSoS that includes all the cooperating agencies and consultants, nor are there publicly available descriptions of the roles of each person, office, and entity within the SSoS. Personnel included in the SSoS do not receive regular written communication about operation of the SSoS, nor do they meet regularly to coordinate efforts around providing support to districts and schools.

Areas to be strengthened. The Department has begun to move toward organizing itself as an SSoS; weekly planning meetings have begun to be more focused on coordination of efforts. Currently, however, systematic coordination of efforts to support districts and schools is confined mostly to low-performing districts and schools

Possible strategies for change.

- Cross-agency teams (such as those created to develop the RTTT proposal)
- Regional teams that focus on districts/schools in their assigned regions
- Teams organized by level of intervention (such as universal team, targeted intervention team, intense intervention team), grade-level or subject-area teams
- Become "resource managers" instead of consultants; KDE staff can't take on every request or task but rather should know when and where to refer customers
- Become a professional learning community; KDE should model what is preached

E1a: Goals, Objectives, and Benchmarks

E2e: Monitoring of Goals, Objectives, and Benchmarks

Current situation. The SSoS (broadly defined as the entire Department providing support to all schools in Kentucky) has established goals/strategic priorities through the Kentucky Board of Education—although they have not established benchmarks. The goals are monitored annually.

Areas to be strengthened. Thoughtful attention to the agency's mission and purpose, and how to frame goals and objectives of the SSoS accordingly. Goals need to be established soon.

Possible strategies for change.

- Refocus KDE priorities, thinking in terms of who is our audience, what is our purpose, what is our customer service model, and how do we deploy those services?

E2b: Communication of Evaluation and Modifications

Current situation. Progress toward KBE goals is monitored and reported at annual Board retreats. The SSoS also monitors and reports the progress of low-performing districts and schools in assistance, as well as the progress of all districts with regard to their use of technology.

Areas to be strengthened. Ineffective communication has long been an issue at the Department. Effective communication needs to be a guiding principle of the effort to strengthen the SSoS.

Possible strategies for change.

- Modernize communication tools.
- Define roles within KDE to enable communication and coordination.

E2c: District and School Evaluation of Services Received

Current situation. There is currently no system in place to regularly evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the SSoS except in terms of statewide student achievement results.

Areas to be strengthened. KDE staff would like to have a great deal more feedback from schools and districts about the effectiveness of support from the SSoS.

Possible strategies for change.

- Administer customer surveys after every service provided.
- Employ an intentional focus on evaluation across all functions of the SEA (feedback for continuous improvement).

Longer-Term Priorities

SSoS Framework Component	Indicator	Description from SSoS Self-Assessment Inventory
Building local capacity	D1d: Support teams D2b: Intensity/duration of service D2c: Type of service	Support teams are groups of SEA staff, intermediate agency staff, organizational partner staff, distinguished educators, and other consultants assigned to assist specific districts/schools with improvement. The SSoS offers more intensive services for a longer period of time to districts/schools in greatest need of improvement, using publicly available criteria to determine intensity/duration. Different types of services are provided based on needs assessments, using publicly available criteria to determine the type of service.
State opportunities for improvement	B2b: Pilot or lighthouse schools	State law allows for the creation of new pilot or lighthouse schools as models or demonstrations of innovative practices.
Evaluating and improving the SSoS	E1b: Criteria E1c: Process	The SSoS evaluates its effectiveness using established criteria.

	E2f: Monitoring & reporting progress of districts/schools	The SSoS has completed an evaluation of its effectiveness within the last year. The SSoS monitors and reports the implementation progress of districts and schools receiving its services.

D1d (Support teams); D2b (Intensity/duration of service); D2c (Type of service)

Current situation. Support teams (i.e., ASSIST teams) are in place to support the work of HSEs in low-performing districts and schools, but not at the state level. The type of services provided to districts and schools, and how that is determined, differs by KDE division. Historically, the state has identified districts in need based on student test scores or financial indicators (i.e., districts that do not meet the 2 percent budget reserve requirement). This approach is somewhat effective when the SSoS is defined as providing support to low-performing schools. For instance, the Department prioritizes services to schools based on student performance—giving priority, the most intensive services, and the longest duration of services to those schools and districts in need of improvement. In addition, KDE is developing an intervention matrix that describes different levels of intervention for schools based on their overall performance and achievement gaps. If assessment of school and district need goes beyond test scores, however, more work is needed to establish an effective system for differentiating services. For example, a district might be performing well academically but not using technology effectively. Currently, the only time the state examines all facets of school or district functioning is during the conduct of a scholastic audit.

Areas to be strengthened. The comprehensive evaluation of district functioning that occurs as part of a scholastic audit should be part of the district comprehensive planning process. In addition, there is a need to be systematic about providing services to districts/schools with varying levels of need. Lack of sufficient staffing is perceived as a barrier to this. Even within the quadrants that have been developed to determine levels of intervention, the SSoS has not been able to provide support to the least needy quadrant.

Possible strategies for change. (none listed)

B2b: Pilot or Lighthouse Schools

Current situation. State law allows for the creation of new pilot or lighthouse schools such as the Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky (Western Kentucky University), Model Laboratory School (Eastern Kentucky University), The Providence School (Jessamine County), and Commonwealth Middle College (West Kentucky Community & Technical College). Only a few such programs are in place, however, and there has been no consistent effort to work with other agencies to create more innovative programs.

Areas to be strengthened. Although the KDE Self-Assessment Team believes this is an area worth pursuing, members did not unanimously see this as a high priority at present. However, they did generally support encouraging innovation at the district level.

Possible strategies for change. Some KDE staff would like to see a more systematic effort to encourage districts to develop pilot/lighthouse schools, possibly as early as the 2011–2012 school year.

E1b (Evaluation criteria); E1c (Evaluation process); E2f (Monitoring & reporting progress of districts/schools)

Current situation. There is currently no system in place to regularly evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the SSoS, except in terms of statewide student achievement results.

Areas to be strengthened. The KDE Self-Assessment Team would like for the Department to develop a more systemic method of evaluating the work of the SSoS.

Possible strategies for change.

- Employ an intentional focus on evaluation across all functions of the SEA (feedback for continuous improvement).

Other Potential Priorities

Activities listed in this section are those that either (1) did not receive high-priority status using the rating scale of the SSoS Self-Assessment process because they are being implemented at some level—yet KDE staff were concerned about leaving them off the list; or (2) were on the priority list but were not deemed to be as high a priority as those listed in prior sections.

SSoS Framework Component	Indicator	Description from SSoS Self-Assessment Inventory
State incentives for improvement	A3a: Recognition for accomplishment	The SSoS recognizes publicly districts and schools that show improved results in student learning, as well as superintendents in districts with improved student learning, principals in schools with improved learning, and teachers whose students show improved learning.
State incentives for improvement	A3b: Funding contingencies for high-leverage strategies	The SSoS includes grants and other discretionary funding or resource allocations that require districts and schools to adopt high-leverage improvement strategies.
Building systemic capacity	C1a, C1b, C1c: Create, support creation of, disseminate knowledge	The SSoS creates, supports the creation of, and disseminates knowledge relevant to school improvement processes and strategies as well as effective teaching practices.
Building systemic capacity	C4: Channel highly qualified teachers/leaders to districts/schools in need of improvement	The State provides programs to channel highly-qualified teachers and school leaders to districts and schools in need of improvement.
Building systemic capacity	C5: Data system to support school improvement	The State has an integrated data system that reduces redundancy in data collection and reporting for school improvement; provides

		timely, accurate, and integrated data that is readily available to generate customized reports for stakeholders; and provides a web-based school improvement planning process.
Building local capacity	D1b: Organizational partners in the SSoS	The SSoS includes includes state agencies other than the SEA, intermediate educational units or regional centers, universities, professional or business associations, unions, nonprofit groups, businesses, and/or other groups external to the SEA.
Building local capacity	D2a: Selection of schools and districts	The state uses a publicly available rubric to determine which districts and schools receive services from the SSoS and prioritizes the services to give first attention to those in greatest need—with those for which incremental improvement is appropriate receiving different services than those in need of more immediate turnaround.
Building local capacity	D3c: Implementing the plan	The SSoS provides consultation, training, professional development, and/or coaching to assist districts/schools in implementing their improvement plans.

A3a: Recognition for Accomplishment

Current situation. The Department releases student achievement data on all districts and schools annually and publicly highlights both low-performing districts/schools as well as those with improved results.

Areas to be strengthened. The SSoS could be more systemic and intentional, rather than sporadic, about recognizing accomplishment.

Possible strategies for change.

- Implement a more proactive approach to incentives.

A3b: Funding Contingencies for High-Leverage Strategies

Current situation. Some grants and discretionary funds are linked to high-leverage improvement strategies; for instance, Read to Achieve, math achievement grants, drop-out prevention grants, and extended school services program (ESS). In these cases, the Department requires that districts/schools commit to using high-leverage improvement strategies in these programs, but does not require that they identify the specific strategies, nor does the state conduct any monitoring to ensure that high-leverage strategies are, indeed, being implemented. The ESS program is itself considered a high-leverage improvement strategy, but KDE requires only self-report data on whether the strategies are effective.

Areas to be strengthened. Only a small number of grants are contingent on high-leverage strategies, and the Department does not measure fidelity or impact of implementation.

Possible strategies for change.

- Make more grants competitive rather than formula grants.
- Redirect funds for new/different incentives based on currently targeted reform areas.
- Publicize the names of schools/districts that do and do not apply for grants and that do and do not attend technical assistance sessions for writing the grant application. Also publish names of schools/districts that receive grants.

C1a, C1b, C1c: Create, Support Creation of, Disseminate Knowledge

Current situation. KDE creates, supports the creation of, and disseminates knowledge in several areas. Examples include the SISI toolkit, formative assessment information and professional development, teaching tools available on the KDE website, high-quality teaching and learning indicators, the Kentucky System of Interventions that are part of the RTI initiative, SBDM information disseminated through KASC, ELL academies, information and resources on effective professional development, parent/community involvement resources (such as *The Missing Piece...* report), etc. However, the team reported that KDE neither offers much follow-up support for use of this information nor gathers evidence of impact.

Areas to be strengthened. Support districts/schools in using the information and resources that are provided, and gather evidence of impact.

Possible strategies for change.

- Focus on pedagogy/field experience and provide support for High Quality Teaching and Learning characteristics and effectiveness.
- Provide KDE mentors to districts for follow-through (team approach); showcase/encourage innovative approaches.

C4: Channel Highly Qualified Teachers/Leaders to Districts/Schools in Need of Improvement

Current situation. Beyond providing temporary services from HSEs, no systematic efforts are underway to channel highly qualified teachers and leaders to districts and schools in need of improvement.

Areas to be strengthened. This is viewed as an area of need, but KDE staff are unsure whether the Department has the capacity to make this happen at present.

Possible strategies for change. Work through external partners.

C5: Data System to Support School Improvement

Current situation. Kentucky is "getting there" in terms of providing an integrated data system that reduces redundancy in data collection and reporting information related to school improvement. The current data system meets minimum NCLB requirements and offers

standardization in some key data systems such as financial reporting. The system still has minor redundancies, but a data portfolio analysis is beginning in which KDE will try to eliminate them. The KSLDS is expanding, and the current Student Information System (SIS) allows parents and students to access student performance data. The KDE website contains a great deal of data, but the system does not currently provide customized reports. The state recently provided professional development on formative assessment; KDE staff report that 70 percent of school districts are using commercially available interim assessment programs, and that many teachers are incorporating formative assessment (in some cases, facilitated by electronic student-response systems) into their classroom instruction.

Areas to be strengthened. Continue to improve system.

Possible strategies for change. The RTTT proposal includes plans for a continuous improvement system that will provide a web-based system for school improvement planning that includes integrated retrieval of school and student data, as well as suggested resources for addressing areas in need of improvement. If the proposal is not funded, the self-assessment team believes the focus should be on helping districts use what is currently available.

D1b: Organizational Partners in the SSoS

Current situation. Effective partnerships have been formed with external agencies and organizations. However, there is a need to establish expectations for these partnerships.

Areas to be strengthened. Establishing expectations for and monitoring the work of external partners.

Possible strategies for change.

- Set standards of quality for the work of external partners.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the work of external partners.
- Develop/manage agenda and message with partners in the statewide system of support.

D2a: Selection of Schools and Districts

Current situation. The KDE self-assessment team believes the state has an effective process for identifying the lowest performing schools in terms of student achievement.

Areas to be strengthened. More work is needed to identify districts/schools that may need help but are not performing at the lowest levels of student achievement, as well as districts/schools that may need assistance in areas other than student achievement.

Possible strategies for change. (none listed)

D3c: Implementing District/School Improvement Plans

Current situation. The team reported that KDE provides consultation, training, professional development, and/or coaching to assist low-performing districts and schools in implementing improvement plans. However, KDE does not routinely provide such assistance to districts/schools performing above the lowest levels of student achievement.

Areas to be strengthened. Provide support to districts/schools beyond those performing at the lowest levels of student achievement.

Possible strategies for change.

- Provide support and follow-up to districts and schools in developing and implementing improvement plans.
- Create review cycle for schools/districts with triggers for more frequent reviews.