Collaborating with States
on Professional Development Planning

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Daniella Molle and **Christy Reveles**

During 2012, the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium piloted a coaching project with representatives from state educational agencies (SEAs) to enhance the quality (and in some cases the quantity) of the professional development offered by states to their educators. This report highlights the benefits to SEAs, factors in the pilot's success, development of WIDA staff as coaches, and recommendations on how to improve the delivery of professional development coaching to further build the capacity of SEAs.

Background

WIDA chose six states to participate in the pilot based on criteria that included length of time in the WIDA consortium, geographic region, and expected willingness to collaborate in the project. WIDA recruited a diverse group of states that were relatively new to the consortium as well as veteran states from different regions of the country. WIDA engaged as partners state representatives who were enthusiastic about the possibility of receiving guidance in planning professional development.

The pilot paired SEAs with a WIDA coach. In all cases but one, the WIDA coach worked with a team of two or more SEA representatives. The pilot involved a cycle of several (usually five or six) monthly coaching sessions, although this schedule was often adjusted due to conflicting commitments by the SEAs and WIDA staff. The sessions were conducted by phone, with one face-to-face meeting during the third or fourth session. Most of the coaching was completed by July 2012, although the collaborative relationship continues, with the SEA members able to request a session with their coaches.

Christy Reveles, co-author of this report, trained WIDA staff members to be coaches. Prior to the collaboration with SEAs, Christy conducted two professional learning sessions of 3 days each in Madison, Wisconsin. All WIDA coaches participated in practice coaching sessions with a peer. These took place over the phone, with Christy observing and providing performance feedback to the coaches. She held five group debriefing calls (one debriefing session took place face-to-face). She also engaged in one-on-one coaching sessions with WIDA staff when requested.

The WIDA research team collected data on the pilot project from both SEAs and WIDA staff. The data include reflection logs that staff completed after each coaching session with their SEA member, summaries of the information during each session that WIDA staff discussed with SEAs, and professional development plans for each state participating in the pilot. In addition, the researchers interviewed some SEA representatives individually and held a group interview with others, and they interviewed WIDA staff members individually. The researchers asked SEA representatives to complete a survey about the professional development they made available to educators in their states during the 2011–12 and 2012–13 academic years. The purpose of the survey was to highlight how the coaching process may have resulted in positive shifts in the

professional development provided. Four of the six participating SEA teams completed the survey. Finally, the researchers collected notes that Christy Reveles took after her one-on-one sessions with WIDA staff, as well as notes from the group debriefing sessions.

Findings

The authors analyzed the data individually and then discussed emerging common threads and differences between cases. We not only focused on topics of importance to WIDA but also on themes that seemed relevant to more than one case. The data analysis was iterative as we systematically coded the data only after first reviewing and discussing them.

Our most immediate major finding was that reactions to the coaching process were overwhelmingly positive. Although several SEA participants suggested ways in which the process could be improved, only one SEA team felt that the pilot was of limited value. Our analysis suggests, however, that the collaboration process had more benefits to that particular SEA team than the members may have realized. Below, we discuss the ways SEAs benefitted from the collaboration process.

Benefits to State Representatives

Shifts in Professional Development Offered

Our data analysis reveals that the coaching process improved the professional development states provide to their educators. We define positive change with reference to principles for high-quality professional development outlined in the literature (Elmore, 2004; Putnam & Borko, 1997; Wilson & Berne, 1999). At the end of the coaching cycle, states' professional development plans had enhanced cohesion, deeper content, wider reach, and more direct connection to practice in comparison to what SEAs had offered or had planned to offer to educators prior to the pilot.

We documented important changes in the topic, format, audience, and/or duration of the professional development offered in the states involved in the pilot project. Table 1 shows the types of positive shifts for each state (for more details, see the appendix). The differences illustrated in the table below are mostly due to dissimilar needs and priorities of the SEA teams rather than to divergences in the coaching style of WIDA staff.

Table 1. Shifts in professional development across states

	Topic	Format	Audience	Duration
State A	X	X	X	X
State B	X	X		
State C	X		X	
State D	X*	X	X*	
State E	X		X	
State F			X	

*Shift not mentioned by the SEA team members but described by the WIDA coach subsequent to the coaching and evident in the professional development plan.

As Table 1 illustrates, the professional plans that SEAs collaboratively designed with their WIDA coach illustrated a shift in topics as compared to previous years. SEAs changed the focus of most trainings they provided to educators working with English Language Learners (ELLs) from workshops focused on assessment (such as ACCESS[1] administration and score interpretation) to offerings emphasizing the use of English Language Development (ELD) standards in the classroom (such as language differentiation in States A and C, integration of the ELD standards with the Common Core State Standards in State D, and lesson planning in State E). We describe this shift as positive because it represents a prioritization of classroom practice over compliance. Standards and assessment meet in instruction; thus, professional development workshops that focus on curriculum and classroom planning allow educators to engage more deeply with the topic of language differentiation and language development. In State B, the shift in topic was positive because it represented an increase in coherence supported by a unifying thematic focus for the planned professional development.

The change we were able to document in terms of the format of professional learning had to do with the use of technology to disseminate content. Prior to the pilot, State A had offered professional development predominantly in the form of webinars. The plan crafted during the pilot, however, documents a wide array of professional learning opportunities, including offerings specifically designed to guide educators in working locally with teachers of ELLs (such as academies and train-the-trainer offerings). For States B and D the shift was in the opposite direction: they had not previously made content available to educators via the web and began to do so. Both shifts represent efforts by state representatives to increase the reach and availability of professional development opportunities.

Our data analysis also documented changes in states' plans in terms of the audience for the professional development provided by the state to educators working with ELLs. Unlike the year before, State A included general education teachers as a target audience for professional development related to language learners in 2012–13. We consider this shift to be a positive one because it has the potential to foster a sense of responsibility for the teaching of ELLs among all staff: a factor that has been described as essential for the academic success of language learners (Coady, Hamann, Harrington, Pho, & Yedlin, 2008). Other states placed greater emphasis than previous years on building the knowledge and expertise of district coaches (State C), regional coaches (State D), and teacher leaders (State F) who serve as resources for language teachers in schools. This is an opportunity for states to create support for teachers of ELLs that follows recommendations for high-quality professional development and is consistent, coherent, job-embedded, and tied to classroom practice. In the face of high teacher turnover, investing in coaches and teacher leaders may help schools and districts keep valuable knowledge and expertise related to teaching ELLs available to educators. Finally, State E began considering how

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[1] ACCESS for ELLs is WIDA's summative language assessment taken annually by students designated as ELLs in all WIDA states. W-APT is WIDA's diagnostic language assessment, given to ELLs when they first arrive at a school and no record of their English language proficiency exists or can be located.

to differentiate its professional development offerings for different audiences, including ESL/bilingual teachers, general education teachers, and administrators. Such differentiation is supported by research that suggests that professional development is most effective when it is closely tied to the everyday practice of educators.

The only state that increased the overall amount of professional development provided during 2012–13 was State A. This shift may be due to the fact that during the pilot State A was able to plan for all of the professional development days it receives as a member of the WIDA consortium.

Focus on Individual State Needs

The collaboration between WIDA and state representatives shaped both the outcome (the professional development plan) and the process of planning for professional development. Our data analysis reveals that a major benefit of the pilot for states was that it fostered a change in the way in which both SEAs and WIDA staff approached the topic. In the past, SEAs had turned to WIDA for guidance and received recommendations based on what tends to work well for *other* states. The coaching process, however, turned this relationship on its head. *It allowed SEAs to clarify their own needs and determine how the WIDA professional development offerings fit those needs.* The coaching process changed the focus from the WIDA menu to the state's needs. Both state representatives and WIDA staff viewed this shift in a positive light. We see at least two important implications of the change we documented:

- it will push WIDA to create new professional development offerings in response to a state's needs; and

- it may encourage a different relationship with WIDA professional development staff.

As one WIDA coach put it:

[S]ometimes we err too much on the side of the boilerplate even though we each have our own styles of delivering. But I think if we communicated more, and we can do so through this collaboration, coaching, that we can really convey the message that it doesn't have to be what is on, you know, on paper as you see the data and you can't do anything, and boy, I just see it big time with states that have been with WIDA a longer time.… In this instance, [the SEA's professional development plan] was around formative—it is around formative assessment from different perspectives. Well, there is absolutely nothing in the list of [WIDA] offerings that is even remotely similar to that….

I think we need to be better at just acknowledging our individual talents and just understanding that we can really do different presentations as long as it brings in the WIDA standards. As long as that is an important piece of what we do, I think we can do all kinds of things independently.

Long-term Planning

The collaboration process also provided the participating SEAs the opportunity to plan professional development over the long term, and to situate that long-term plan within a vision for the professional learning of educators in their state. Only two of the participating SEA teams (States C and D) had an existing professional development plan or framework. The representatives from State D attributed the least value to the coaching process. By contrast, State C found it constructive and made significant changes to its plan. We thus conclude that states can benefit from the coaching process regardless of whether they have an existing professional development plan or not. The collaboration with states that have a plan, however, unfolds differently than the collaboration with states that do not have a plan. The existence of a plan is an important factor that shapes the coaching process and impacts the components of the coaching cycle.

For the four SEA teams that did not have a plan, the coaching process provided a longed-for opportunity to focus on something that they believed was important (and were passionate about) but never had time to accomplish. One sentiment shared by many other SEAs was, "[W]e were forced to think though all the things we were doing and figure out what our goals were. And part of it was just having the time to focus and just the process alone was so valuable to have that time to focus." The coaching process created the space in which states could put together a professional development plan a year in advance, and anchor that plan in a concrete vision for professional learning: "It helps us also to think about the big picture. We try to think about the big picture but you know it's easier for [the coach] to be a couple of steps removed to help us think about the big picture and also about how, how WIDA training might contribute to our bigger picture."

By the end of the coaching cycle, all SEAs (except State D, whose collaborative sessions focused on finalizing important details related to the remaining WIDA professional development days from the 2011–12 academic year) had put together a coherent, actionable, and detailed professional development plan for the 2012–13 academic year. Some states had ideas for the following years but they were not concrete. Two advantages of having a plan included designing "a much better program … for this year that was a result of that collaboration than we had for last year" and feeling less "anxious and worried about what is going to happen [next] year because dates are now set."

The four SEA teams that began the coaching process without a professional development plan in place were able to design a plan only for the following year. This finding calls into question whether having SEAs work on a 3- to 5-year plan is a feasible goal. We suggest that it may not be. For the first coaching cycle it may be best to focus on designing a 1-year plan that is anchored in a powerful vision. We suggest that the coaching cycle during Year 2 of the process should have a different focus: evaluation of the effectiveness of that plan. Such a focus may guide states in revising their plan for future years based on data they collect. The goal of the coaching process may thus shift from designing a 3- to 5-year plan to working with SEAs on a plan-evaluate-revise cycle of design.

Collaborative Relationship and Dialogue

Another benefit of the coaching process for SEAs was that it (a) fostered a collaborative relationship between the WIDA coach and the SEA team, and (b) created a space in which the members of the SEA team could work together. Both aspects of collaboration (working with a WIDA partner and working with one another) seem equally important outcomes.

Benefits of the collaborative relationship with the WIDA coach. Several state representatives highlighted the importance of having a "sounding board," someone past whom they could run ideas. As one coach put it, "I think perhaps the best thing that I provided was I was an echo." This role was made possible by the emphasis that all WIDA coaches placed on listening to their SEAs and being present and attentive to what their partners were saying. This is a difficult skill and one whose development many coaches saw as an important accomplishment.

Another aspect that was much appreciated by states was that they had guidance, someone "to lead them" in their thinking. The WIDA coaches worked very hard to stay within the coaching role and their guiding questions were valued greatly by SEAs. (As two of the WIDA coaches pointed out, the coaching process highlighted for them how important and at the same time difficult it is to learn to ask constructive and powerful guiding questions.)

Also, the trust that goes along with a good collaborative relationship helps validate the strategies the states developed and the practices they were carrying out. The SEAs felt surer of their plans when an external partner confirmed their decisions. During a short debrief at the end of a coaching session, the SEAs in one state described a positive outcome of the session as: "We are on the right track; you are helping us validate our thinking."

Last, but definitely not least, the collaborative process created a space in which new ideas could be generated. The guiding questions and the listening ear that the coaches provided, along with the opportunity for the SEA team members to sit down in a room together for a length of time, created the right conditions for innovative thinking. As one SEA put it, "I think once you go through that process and you start thinking of new things: how can I reach this audience, or how can I reach that audience."

Benefits of the dialogue among SEA team members. The coaching process created a space for dialogue within the SEA team. SEAs participants were able to hear other perspectives on the same issues and together arrive at new and better ideas about professional development. They greatly valued the opportunity to "lock themselves in a room and be sequestered for more than 5 minutes" and "put their heads together." The coaching process provided a treasured opportunity for SEA teams to think "separately, as well as together." They appreciated that the coaches "didn't try to tell us what it was we needed to do. [The coach] kind of let us talk it through, which I thought was very good." The coaches recorded feeling superfluous sometimes as the team members engaged deeply in conversation with each other: "Many times I did not need to ask questions as they worked together."

Connection to the Field

Use of data was an important component of the coaching cycle. In five cases out of six (the exception being State D), SEAs made data-informed decisions. Three SEA teams took advantage of the needs-analysis survey that WIDA made available to them and used it either as their sole source of information about the needs and wishes of practitioners related to professional development, or in conjunction with other data sources (such as school visits or discussions with regional trainers). In all three cases the survey provided the impetus for many of the shifts in professional development plans discussed earlier. It also gave those SEAs an important resource for gathering data to which they can resort time and again. In cases in which data collection had been informal and sporadic, the survey helped formalize the feedback process.

Two of the SEAs did not use the needs-analysis survey provided by WIDA because they had gathered sufficient data through other means (such as a federal audit). Even in those cases, however, incorporating data in the planning process was important to both SEAs and WIDA staff. Whether or not SEAs used the WIDA-designed needs assessment had no ramifications for the coaching cycle, and the collaborative discussions around data were relevant to all collaborative partners.

Awareness of Existing Options

The coaches were important sources of information on different aspects of professional development trainings provided by WIDA. All SEAs stated that they benefitted from becoming aware of the types of professional development that other states found useful. In some instances (as in the case of State D) this involved a new training format (webinars). In other cases SEAs found that they could expand what they could provide because WIDA coaches revealed trainings that were in development. State D, for instance, was interested in the early childhood work currently being carried out at WIDA. In other cases still, the flexibility in WIDA's professional development offerings allowed SEAs to tailor those offerings to the needs of their state (for instance by having a training be brought to the state rather than being conducted at WIDA Central).

The benefits to the SEAs discussed in this section focus on recurring themes. There were other benefits specific only to one state, which are not discussed here. It is also very likely that there are additional benefits to SEAs that neither they nor the WIDA coaches brought up in interviews. In addition, we would anticipate that the benefits of the coaching process would change as the collaborative relationships evolve and different topics are discussed in subsequent coaching cycles. Benefits to the WIDA coaches will be discussed in the Coaches' Development section.

Factors that Support the Collaboration Process

At the end of the first coaching cycle, five of six states had constructed with their coach an actionable professional development plan for the following academic year that was anchored

in a vision for the professional learning of educators working with ELLs. Our analysis highlights a number of factors that supported the success of this process (defined both as leading to the desired product and engendering a positive relationship between SEAs and WIDA staff).

Collaborative Relationship

Several features emerged as crucial to a positive, sustained, and constructive partnership between WIDA coaches and SEAs. The first such feature was a *clear understanding by both parties of the purpose of the process and the role of the coach*. Several WIDA coaches explicitly discussed WIDA's goals for the collaboration and the role that they would play during the first and second collaborative sessions with their SEA partners. For many SEA participants, this seemed sufficient to get the process started. Yet, all coaches felt a constant tension between being a coach who guides the planning process and being a consultant who advises and points to solutions. The coaches resolved this tension in different ways, such as reminding the SEA team of their role as a coach, inviting another WIDA staff person to join the coaching call with the purpose of serving as a consultant, and/or being explicit about the instances in which they shifted roles and became consultants in response to the needs of the SEA. All coaches considered staying out of the consulting role as a major accomplishment.

The significance of a shared purpose and a clearly defined role for the coach has several implications. First, establishing such a shared purpose should be a priority for WIDA when engaging in initial conversations with SEAs about the coaching process. Second, the intake interview conducted by WIDA staff during the first collaborative meeting can be revised to emphasize the purpose of the process and roles of the coach to a greater extent. Third, the evolving understanding of the role of the coach by the SEA should be one of the topics addressed at each coaching session.

The second feature that supported the success of the coaching process was the ability of the coach to *hold SEAs accountable* to the collaboratively constructed timeline and focus. Some coaches struggled with this because they were uncertain about the extent to which they should hold busy, overstretched SEA participants to their coaching commitments. The SEAs, however, overwhelmingly valued being held accountable for participating in coaching sessions and working on their professional development plan. They appreciated being "forced" to come together and think about professional development. As one SEA participant put it,

> You don't really hear things sometimes until they're beat into you a couple times. I think [our coach] had to work really hard to keep bringing this back for our follow up. And, you know, we left that room hoping to have a 5-year plan in place, but we didn't because we had so many "ifs" and "whats" and things we had to follow up on. And then just having to keep bringing us back and say, "Okay we had all these great meetings and now you've got all these great ideas. But we still don't have on a piece of paper what our 3-year plan is." You know, and so just very, I don't want to say rigid because we don't work well rigidly, but sometimes we need that.… Because if you don't bring me back to what I've committed to … then it's you I'm going to be unhappy with, not me.

The third important feature was the *flexibility of the coach*. All WIDA staff involved in the coaching pilot had to adapt, and coaches found themselves forced to (a) alter the timeline for the process as a whole and for the sequence of the steps in the coaching cycle based on the organization and availability of the SEA partners, (b) adapt the session protocols developed by Christy Reveles based on the conversations during the coaching sessions and the needs of their state partners, (c) adjust their expectations of the outcomes based on the SEAs' ways of processing information and priorities, and (d) change their notions about what the process was going to be like and what their role was going to be. All these transformations highlight the importance of ongoing support for coaches.

Many of the coaches' adjustments are unavoidable given the *evolving nature of the coaching relationship*. Coaches shared that it took several sessions for them to understand the SEA team members' communicative styles and adjust their own styles accordingly. One of the coaches stated: "In my last couple of conversations … we have been spiraling back to the same ideas, which initially felt as though we kept going around and around in circles, but now I can see that every time they revisit these ideas, [the SEAs] tighten and refine them." In addition, coaches unfamiliar with the SEA context needed time to "understand the SEA role more in order to really understand coaching in the capacity of our position at WIDA." Finally, it took time for WIDA staff to establish a relationship of trust and understanding with their SEA partners, which in turn enabled them to take greater ownership of the coaching process: "I felt the most confident during and after the face-to-face visit. I felt like we were able to truly establish a relationship that is essential in a coaching model.… After this time, my last two calls felt more natural and I tossed the script."

Coaching Process

The last quote hints at a significant feature of the coaching process: the *face-to-face meeting*. The coaches considered this a crucial point in their relationship with the SEAs, and this was echoed by several of the SEA participants. For those coaches who did not have an existing relationship with their SEA partners, the face-to-face meeting enabled deeper trust and understanding. Even those coaches who had an established relationship with their SEA partners valued the face-to-face meeting because of the direct contact. Most of the coaches cited communicating over the phone as a challenge. Moreover, the face-to-face meeting was important to all coaches because of its productivity. Being longer, it was the point at which the SEAs professional development plans took shape.

Another key feature was the *support provided to coaches by WIDA*. Support from the community of other WIDA coaching peers was essential for the self-confidence of coaches, who found themselves forced to make numerous adjustments to their expectations, plans for each session, and timelines. The existence of a community allowed coaches to swap stories and share resources. In addition, the coaches had access to individuals, such as Christy Reveles (who answered their questions about the coaching process), Mariana Castro (WIDA director of teaching and learning, who answered questions, provided feedback, and was a guest during coaching sessions), and Jen Aleckson (WIDA professional development delivery manager, who

helped with the needs-analysis survey and with scheduling professional development for the state partners). The amount of support that WIDA coaches received was invisible to SEAs but essential for the success of the collaborative process.

SEA Teams

Two features of the SEA teams seem particularly important in the success of the coaching process. The first is a SEA team's *experience and familiarity with collaboration*. The process went most smoothly for those SEAs that had a history of partnering with each other as well as with other educators. The experience with and commitment to collaboration greatly facilitated the coaching process even if the SEAs had no experience with coaching per se. It may be that this commitment and experience make SEAs more open to different types of relationships and a willingness to learn with others. Whatever the specific reasons for the connection between a SEA's history of engagement in collaboration and the success of the coaching process, we believe that it is no coincidence that the most challenging coaching relationship was with a state in which the SEA team members did not collaborate on a regular basis and which has a history of a top-down relationship with districts.

The SEA team's *commitment to the coaching relationship* also supported the success of the pilot project. Some SEAs were highly committed to the process from the beginning because they had experienced the benefits of collaboration in the past. Others were committed because they had a passion for professional development and/or an urgent need for guidance and support from WIDA in planning professional development. This commitment to the process, whatever its origins, made SEAs responsive to being held accountable. It also facilitated their preparation for the coaching calls and the site visit. As one WIDA coach pointed out, "So much of the collaboration process … is at the mercy of the SEA's schedule and priorities." Therefore, each SEA's willingness to commit to the process, despite the obstacles, is the foundation for the kind of reciprocity that is at the heart of any successful partnership.

Coaches' Development

While the primary purpose for the coaching pilot was to support SEAs in their strategic long-term planning for ELL-focused professional learning, the WIDA coaches also benefitted. In our analysis of the data, four noteworthy themes surfaced: (a) the coaches' evolving understanding of the collaboration process; (b) the dual focus and purpose of the collaboration relationship (capacity building as well as logistics); (c) the need for structure and flexibility within the collaboration process; and (d) the ways in which WIDA coaches grew professionally and personally as a result of this project.

Evolving Understanding of the Process

Two of the WIDA coaches came to the collaboration process with experience in instructional coaching at their school sites. They thus had specific expectations of what collaborating with SEAs would entail. The new process, however, forced them to rethink what coaching could look like. One of the experienced coaches reported:

I struggled at times … to reconcile what I had previously done and thought of as "coaching" with what I was doing in this pilot. At times, [the SEA] would ask me to consult as they are a new state and had some questions that did require an "expert"; I tried to make each role transparent. However, I felt that most of the time I was being a reflective listener and giving [the SEA] the time and space to collaborate.

The other experienced coach reflected in a similar vein:

I think for me … the accomplishment has been picking the old coaching that I kind of understood … and then applying this new system and then using I think both of them kind of simultaneously.

All WIDA coaches gained a deeper understanding of and experience with the new coaching role. Typically, WIDA staff members serve as *consultants* who have the answers, provide solutions, and advise their SEAs regarding professional development options. As *coaches*, though, WIDA staff use a partnership approach to help the SEA create a long-term vision and professional development plan that advances the SEA toward a capacity-building professional development model. The coach is not there to tell people what to do, but rather to engage in reflective dialogue that supports the SEAs in developing solutions and strategies that will best serve each SEA's context and needs. For example, the coaches reported engaging with SEAs to "collaborate to solve problems," "provide feedback on ideas or situations," and to "provide new or different perspectives." As one coach reflected:

I knew that it might be easy to start brainstorming possible PD activities that would "fix" or "solve" the problem. I wanted to make sure I stayed focused in my collaborator role to ask reflective questions that would encourage my partners in exploring all possibilities: green light thinking.

Similarly, a second coach reported, "I think I'm in the process of accomplishing a better understanding of how to ask questions and how to stay out of the way. In other words, discern at several levels the difference between being a consultant and being a coach." Another coach reflected on this change in roles this way: "I think the other part for me, too, was letting go. That if you don't know, it's okay to say I don't know." This represents *a notable shift in the role WIDA staff have typically played in working with SEAs.*

Several staff found it necessary to be explicit about the differences between a coach and consultant. One coach found it helpful to her and her SEA to be transparent about which role she was playing and when. For example,

Sometimes I would step out and say, "Okay, I can put on my consulting hat right now." Just in terms of [the realm] that we offer, or what that meant, or why we recommend certain numbers for certain PD experiences … they really needed to know some of those whys and hows and things like that. So then you know I'd have to switch back and forth between roles.

The coaches commented on the importance of cultivating basic coaching competencies with their SEA, such as building trust and rapport, active listening, and reflective questioning. There were several revelations in how powerful the act of simply listening was, and then using coaching language to paraphrase, summarize, and probe more deeply to understand what the SEA participants were really saying. As one coach commented: "I felt it was critical for me to actively listen during the first call so the [SEA] team would know that listening is important in the conversations.… We have to build rapport, trust, and to make sure we capture output accurately."

Some coaches reflected on the ways their evolving relationship with the SEAs helped them see the possibilities as well as the constraints of the collaboration process. As one coach put it:

> [I]t was important for me to understand the SEA role more in order to really understand coaching in the capacity of our position at WIDA…. I think it is becoming more clear for me, at least for [my SEA], what this collaboration process really could be as well as what it is, like the reality.

Although WIDA staff received training on being coaches before the pilot began, it was through their engagement in the collaboration process that they really understood what it meant to be a coach. For many of them, this understanding was still evolving when they completed the first coaching cycle. The reflections that WIDA staff shared with us at the end of the first coaching cycle underscore that it takes time to truly understand any new role.

Dual Focus on Capacity Building and Logistics

The coaches appeared to clearly understand their purpose to "partner with [the SEA] to collaboratively create an ELL-focused professional development plan for the coming 3–5 years," and to "serve as a resource and support to the [SEA] team." These tangible goals provided the coaches with a sense of direction as they initiated their work with SEAs. The coaches also acknowledged the need to toggle between the big picture and logistical details. As one coach noted, "Our dialogue was data-focused and continually went back to our overall vision for the ELL professional development plan."

However, as the partnership unfolded, coaches were continually faced with ambiguity and uncertainty regarding how to effectively manage their SEAs' progress. This suggests the *dynamic tension between collaboration and accountability*. One coach reflected on this dynamic: "Are you … kind of like a task master? I don't want to be that. I want to [serve] this supportive listening role but in an accountable way. You know, so how can we make it real accountable talk?" Another coach elaborated further on her feelings about this:

> I think it was just, "What are the boundaries?" I think that was also a really hard part of this too, was figuring out what the boundaries in a relationship are. You know, obviously [the SEAs are] doing this voluntarily, but at the same time, it's not my responsibility to

keep them on task or on target… But at the same time, I never knew how far to go, because I always felt like at some point, [I] might cross the line. 'Cause I'm not their supervisor, I'm not their boss. I'm their co-collaborator, so is it my responsibility to reach out to them, or is it their responsibility to reach out to me?… I think there were just a lot of unanswered questions around that.

As coaches navigated this unknown territory among process, product, and partnership, they learned to connect the coaching skills of managing progress and accountability to the SEA team goals and vision. One coach reflected on how taking on the role of note taker during the SEA collaboration sessions helped to facilitate the "accountability piece." Another coach found that using reflective questioning helped the SEA team link its visionary ideas to forming a feasible plan: "[The SEA team] had all these great ideas, and then I just say, 'But what of those is actionable? What is something you can take action on?' Because I think that's the other challenge of very complex plans, is that it can get away from you very quickly."

The tension evident in the data speaks to the importance of clarity regarding coaching roles, especially in terms of the differences between coach and consultant. Furthermore, this tension suggests that WIDA needs to support its coaches to reconcile their desire to ensure SEA accountability for the process with the role of a supportive collaborator. The coaches understood that their ultimate goal was to help SEAs build their leadership and organizational capacity for visioning and planning. At the same time, they struggled with following up on SEAs' progress in ways that felt supportive and authentic without being perceived as overly directive or controlling.

Need for Structure and Flexibility

At the onset of the initiative, the coaches expressed appreciation of and desire for a high level of structure in terms of coaching protocols and procedures. After all, they were charting unknown waters with their SEAs, so a defined course of action would seem to provide a sense of security. Interestingly, the coaches quickly realized they needed to customize the process to meet their SEAs' needs, priorities, and communication styles. They began to see that the protocols were provided to serve as a guide, and that they could be adjusted and modified according to need. As one coach reflected,

I felt that they [WIDA collaboration program developers] were very responsive initially to our group being, "Oh my goodness, please tell us what to do!" and then when we spent a lot of time looking at these session agendas … many of us just didn't end up using them. It was nice to have a roadmap, 'cause then a roadmap allows you to go bushwhacking if you want to. At least you know how to get back to the road in case you get lost.

Another coach commented similarly,

I think also just kind of feeling like, "Am I doing this right? Am I doing this right?" That was present for the first few calls. And then I also just got over that, too. You know, like,

okay I don't think there's a really wrong way about doing this, except for ignoring it or not caring about what your collaborative partners think, so … I got over that and I think realizing that some of the process was really internalized, so I didn't have to worry.

The coaches' comments suggest a growing confidence both in their skills and in the process as they made decisions about which pathways to pursue with their SEAs. As the partnership evolved, so too did the coaches' ability to respond appropriately to their SEAs' needs using the provided coaching tools, as well as their own customized processes. This suggests a growing sense of ownership as they made the process their own based on their coaching style, expertise, and the needs of their SEA. For example,

I think that the process we learned was perhaps necessarily boilerplate, and connoted the fact that you go from step A to step B to step C. I suspect and I feel that sometimes we have to skip steps or go back, that it's not as clean as a clearly designated process as the way we learned it…. I went with the flow rather than sticking to the agenda—using the planning documents to structure my thinking, but being aware that the conversation could very appropriately move in a different direction as a result of active listening and reflective conversations.

Flexibility on the part of the coach was essential for the success of both the collaboration process and the development of a trusting relationship between coaches and SEAs. One of the WIDA coaches reflected on the tension between structure and flexibility, or between planned steps and in-time adjustments, in the following way:

I didn't want them to feel like they had to conform to this one way of speaking and listening; I really tried to follow where they were going, and I think it's [like] if you're riding or you're leading a horse and you're on a circular track and you're going around the track and all of a sudden the horse decides it wants to go for a walk on the field, how much do you pull on that rein and have that horse come back into that corral again, or do you just go walking with the horse and just make sure it doesn't wander off and hurt itself.

The coaches, overall, seemed more comfortable the longer they worked with their SEAs. They became more nimble in navigating between the structure of the process and the need to be flexible and responsive to SEA needs, goals, and communication styles. This is a hallmark of an effective coach; it demonstrates that the coach recognizes that the true coaching "agenda" belongs to the one being coached. Through deep listening and reflective questioning, the coach supports the coachees to mediate their own learning, choose options, and design courses of action that are best for them, not the coach.

Professional Growth of WIDA Staff

One way in which WIDA staff grew professionally was in the *ability to build trust, rapport, and a positive working relationship with SEAs*. WIDA coaches were concerned about

this issue at the onset of the project because four of the coaches had never met their SEAs face to face prior to initiating this project, and, with one exception, none of the coaches had experience working with SEAs. As they engaged in the collaboration process, coaches expanded their knowledge about the work of SEAs and about their own abilities to engage SEAs in a productive partnership. Several coaches commented both on the importance of a positive relationship for the success of the collaboration process and on their newly acquired trust in themselves as coaches able to build such a relationship with SEAs:

> A big takeaway for me from our face-to-face session was how critically important the relationship building is for collaboration and coaching. It was so great to meet … and get to know [the SEA team] and their personalities. I felt as though we were able to build rapport and trust that made the meeting so much more enriching and productive. I think we all felt much safer to share our thinking and ideas with one another after getting to know each other.… And then another big accomplishment for me is the trust.… I really feel like the [SEA team members] trust me now and I think that's really positive for not only myself but for WIDA.

Another coach, who had been quite concerned initially about her ability to establish trust via conference calls, reported that as she and her SEA partners got to know each other better they built rapport, which in turn helped her feel more self-assured and productive in her coaching. This same coach found that she became more comfortable than she had thought possible in coaching over the phone. At the beginning of the project, she reported feeling hesitant and even resistant to the idea that she could effectively build a trusting relationship via the phone. However, through practice and coach-the-coach support from WIDA, she learned that this was something she could do.

> I feel more comfortable with [interacting by phone], at least in terms of the coaching process just because of the training … provided, and now I know the sequence. And so, to pick up the phone and talk with someone with whom I barely know or don't know well, like I don't think I'll go so far as to say "a total stranger…." [I]t's a more comfortable feeling now and I like that added quality to the [coaching] skill set.

Coaches also developed *effective communication skills, specifically active listening and reflective questioning*. Their comments suggest how acutely aware they were of their role as a mediator of learning, not as an advisor telling SEAs what to do. One coach reflected, "I'm eager to continue the process and to hone my skills at being able to not jump in in a consultant mode and to ask carefully guiding questions that will enable the SEA to think more independently." They came to see how closely connected active listening was to their ability to ask thought-provoking and meaningful, reflective questions. This coach comment underscores how vital these communication skills were:

> It really is an important skill to be able to listen to what's being said and what's not being said … how to formulate questions, how to take stuff that's said and to really formulate

questions. Not just questions that I think of … but questions that would actually be what's needed at that particular moment in the discussion. So it's really hard for me to explain … but one thing I learned throughout this process is it's not as easy as people think to come up with a question.

WIDA coaches also reported that they improved their ability to deal effectively with resistance or difficult coaching situations. For a few coaches, their SEAs provided ample opportunity to practice these skills, particularly when working with teams whose members were "storming." One coach knew that this was going to come up for her in working with her team, as she reflected: "A goal for me was to … continue to build my coaching skills.… It was interesting because I think [this] experience gave me a lot of opportunity to really use everything that Christy taught us on resistance." Being able to deal more effectively with resistance also emerged with another coach:

> I feel so much more confident in my ability to facilitate conversations … around resistance, where people may not be willing to think about an idea or are not acknowledging that they actually may have the resources (within) themselves. I think I'm much more aware—or I feel a little bit braver now, perhaps, taking on situations that might be more challenging from a group dynamic than I was before. I feel a bit more confident there.

This topic—dealing with resistance within the coaching partnership—was addressed during the initial professional development session for coaches. Participants had the opportunity to practice coaching techniques with each other within the workshop setting. The real-life experience in helping to break resistance with their SEAs, however, seems to have been a pivotal learning experience for some of the coaches.

The collaboration process also brought home for coaches how important it is to be organized, and to plan coaching sessions carefully. While WIDA provided coaching protocols, the coaches quickly realized that they would need to modify and adjust these according to the needs of their SEAs. The coaches were highly cognizant of creating value for the SEA. Several of them remarked that they did not want to waste their SEA partners' time, and wanted them to walk away with a high-quality professional development plan. Hence, securing time for preparation and planning became a priority for the coaches. Even if they had to do this while on the road and in airports, they found the time.

Finally, one coach reported an area of growth that was completely unexpected. She reflected that the coaching process actually helped her *become a better professional development facilitator*. She reflected,

> I think the coaching support and instruction that we got … has had a much more profound impact on my facilitation of workshops than it actually has on the coaching relationship with my SEA, my collaborative relationship with the SEA.… So if we're

making a distinction between a facilitator and a coach, I think I am much more comfortable as a facilitator than I am as a coach.

This coach found that using coaching language and strategies to address concerns and queries during her workshop presentations enhanced her skills as a presenter. During one workshop presentation in particular, she found herself suddenly in the unplanned role of process facilitator. She was able to quickly mentally access her "coaching toolkit" and proceeded to work with the whole group. While not easy, the coaching competencies she learned helped her make this quick change from presenter to group process facilitator.

Recommendations

General Recommendations

We recommend that WIDA continue to engage in this type of collaborative process with SEAs and expand the number of states involved. We make this recommendation for a number of reasons:

- The process contributed to shifts in the professional development provided by states to their educators. These shifts were viewed as positive by both SEAs and WIDA staff because they contributed to a number of important changes in professional development offerings, such as a timelier schedule, greater coherence, wider variety, and a stronger connection to local needs.

- The process had different but equally significant benefits for both veteran as well as new WIDA member states.

- The process was highly valued by the majority of the participants in the pilot.

- WIDA staff saw the process as important not only because it helped them grow professionally but also because they felt it provides a service that helps WIDA stand out as an organization.

If WIDA leadership follows this recommendation, however, several key issues need to be considered. The first has to do with the *selection of participating SEAs*. If coaching becomes available to more SEAs, how can WIDA best assess which of the states are ready for the process and which are not? Does that matter? Our data analysis suggests that the "readiness" of an SEA to engage in the process affects the process significantly and can best be described in terms of their history of collaboration with each other, their clear understanding of the purpose of the process, and the power they have to make a professional development plan a reality. The SEA team that expressed least satisfaction with the process was not a collaborative team and did not embrace the partnership that the coaching process offered. Instead, that team consistently saw its coach as a consultant. Another SEA team that benefited from the process ended up being frustrated because its superiors made decisions that undermined the professional development

plan the team had designed. In particular, the timeline for the plan changed and its vision for building capacity was no longer supported.

If WIDA decides to invite other states to participate, it would be important to consider whether the team's ability to engage meaningfully with the coaching process should be a factor in the selection. The team's readiness can be overridden by the team's need for more support. Whichever criteria WIDA decides to use, selection will impact not only the nature of the coaching process but also the materials designed to support coaches as they engage their SEAs.

Another important question concerns the *capacity of WIDA staff*. Many of the coaches thought the process was time consuming, and they were concerned about having the time to coach with other SEAs. As one WIDA coach put it, "I can see where this would be beneficial to other states. I'm not sure how sustainable it is right now. I was sometimes making calls while packing or doing write ups in the airport."

WIDA staff spent a lot of time on the coaching process outside of the coaching session itself. Preparation time ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours. Summarizing the main points from the call took 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. The coaches spent time completing action steps outlined during the collaborative sessions with their SEAs, such as reviewing the needs assessment survey or inquiring about scheduling options for professional development trainings. The WIDA staff spent time practicing with each other, debriefing the coaching experience as a group, and working with Christy Reveles when they needed her support.

This issue is particularly relevant given the length of time partners need to build a trusting relationship and the value that both SEAs and WIDA coaches placed on the face-to-face meeting. In addition, two of the participating states called their coaches with very little notice and did not have coaching sessions scheduled in advance. It thus seems important for coaches to have flexibility in their schedule in order to provide the type of support their partners may need.

Specific Recommendations

In interviews, research participants made remarks that are important for WIDA to take into account when considering the ways in which the coaching process can be strengthened. Based on the remarks, our recommendations include:

Clarify WIDA's role in supporting the professional development plans designed by SEAs. The WIDA coaches participating in the pilot project knew what their role entailed in general terms but needed more clarity in terms of WIDA's role in the professional development plans that their SEA partners created. If the plan was created with WIDA's involvement, was WIDA then committed to support it? If so, in what capacity would WIDA support it? Some coaches felt that WIDA would not have the capacity to support the types of professional development activities included in the SEA's plans. The coaches involved in the pilot felt that clarity on this topic would have helped them better understand the purposes of the collaboration process and helped guide them as they provided feedback on the ideas and plans of SEAs.

Clarify the purpose of the process and the coach's role in it. Given the important role that a shared purpose and a clear understanding of roles have for the coaching process, we recommend the following. First, establishing a shared purpose should be a priority for WIDA when engaging in initial conversations with SEAs about the coaching process. Second, the intake interview conducted by WIDA staff during the first collaborative meeting can be revised to emphasize the purpose of the process and roles of the coach to a greater extent. Third, the evolving understanding of the role of the coach by the SEA should be addressed at each coaching session.

Strengthen new relationships. Based on the great value that WIDA coaches and some SEAs attributed to the face-to-face session in terms of relationship-building, we recommend that coaches and future SEA partners meet face to face at the beginning of the coaching process if they do not have a history of working with each other. The board meeting can provide one opportunity for such face-to-face contact.

Explore implementation in Year 2 of the coaching cycle. We recommend a coaching cycle that consists of a reflect-evaluate-revise cycle of design for the state's professional development plan. As one coaching partner put it, "I guess moving forward it's time to hone in on what really make that plan effective and how we are going to measure the effectiveness and how we are going to do a check halfway whether we're on the right track and are getting it, or we have to provide additional support. Just going through that process and having a sounding board and help is a huge benefit."

Include partnerships as part of the conversation. Partnerships with other organizations (such as regional education agencies and institutes of higher education) may play an important role in the professional development plans designed by SEAs. These partnerships were naturally brought up in some states as teams discussed professional development with their coaches. Nevertheless, some SEAs felt that the issue of partnerships could be incorporated in the planning process more explicitly. It took some time for SEAs to realize that the planning process in which they were engaging did not aim for a WIDA plan but for a comprehensive professional development plan for the state that uses existing infrastructures for collaboration and incorporates current state initiatives.

Increase the emphasis on variability and unpredictability. Many of the WIDA coaches were unsure when they found themselves adapting session protocols and redesigning the general coaching cycle. They needed reassurance that the changes they were making in the coaching process were natural and expected. One of the coaches summed up this sentiment when asking for "more emphasis on the fact that it will be different—that there will be changes and to anticipate them perhaps. Not to know what to anticipate, but to just to acknowledge that … when you are trying to follow a sequence of steps, it is just not going to be possible, that there are going to be bumps along the road and to realize that those are going to happen." This recommendation does not argue for a shift in the training that WIDA provided to coaches but for a greater emphasis on a message that was already there.

Present WIDA professional development offerings differently. The flexibility and variation in WIDA professional development offerings seem to remain hidden for most SEAs. WIDA's offerings on the implementation of ELD standards in the classroom are a case in point. Standards-focused trainings may look very different based on the background knowledge of the audience and the goal for the training; a session on language differentiation for general education teachers may look very different from a session on language differentiation for ESL/bilingual specialists, though both will be based on the WIDA ELD standards. We thus recommend that WIDA move away from a topical way of categorizing offerings to a system that highlights the objective or end result.

Be aware of the benefits of the coaching process for WIDA staff. In this report we do not use the professional growth of WIDA coaches as a criterion for the success of the coaching process. Yet, it is important to be aware of the numerous benefits the process gave to WIDA staff. Several coaches felt that the training they received made them much more effective as facilitators. The process also fostered new relationships among WIDA professional development staff. Finally, the coaching pilot led to introspection about the professional development staff as a community. In our view, these are important benefits that should not be ignored when decisions about staff's involvement in the coaching project are made.

Continue the evaluation of the coaching process. The present report is based on data collected during 2012. It is important to keep evaluating the coaching relationships, both for new states and for those states that continue with the partnership. We expect that unexplored benefits and needs will arise as new states become involved in the process and as existing coaching relationships mature.

Differentiate coaching. WIDA coaches expressed a desire for more direction and practice in coaching pairs as well as larger groups.

Conclusion

The collaborative partnership in which WIDA and SEAs engaged took different shapes based on the priorities and personalities of the people involved, but everyone agreed that the process accomplished one major goal: It changed the way WIDA is perceived by its main stakeholders (states). This shift was a positive one and involved a greater awareness among SEAs of the flexibility at WIDA in terms of professional development offerings, and a new understanding of the collaborative spirit in which WIDA sees its partnership with states. Going forward, it is important for WIDA to consider the nature as well as the limits of its flexibility and partnerships. We see the coaching process as an infrastructure that can offer needed guidance to SEAs at the same time as it provides WIDA with feedback on the needs of the field and the extent to which its professional development meets those needs. As such, the coaching process can help WIDA be more attuned and responsive to its members.

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Appendix

Shifts from 2011–12 to 2012–13 in Professional Development by State

State A

The first shift was in the frequency with which a particular training topic was provided; the order of frequency is listed by year:

2011–12

1. ACCESS/W-APT; 2. Data Analysis; 3. Collaboration; 4. ELD Standards; 5. CAN-DO Descriptors; 6. Differentiation.

2012–13

1. ELD Standards; 2. CAN-DO Descriptors; 3. Language Differentiation; 4. ACCESS/W-APT; 5. Collaboration; 6. Data Analysis.

The second shift was in the types of trainings provided:

2011–12

Webinars only.

2012–13

Webinars; Workshops; Train-the-Trainer; Academies; Coaching; and other types of trainings.

The third shift was in targeting general education for training related to ELLs:

2011–12

0–2 hours of training.

2012–13

ESL/bilingual and general education staff in the core areas listed as audiences for the professional development on ELLs provided by the state.

The fourth shift was in duration of overall training, probably due to the fact that State A was able to use all its professional development days during 2012–13:

2011–12

4–8 hours of training.

2012–13

2–3 days of training.

State B

The major shift was conceptual and related to the focus of professional development trainings. Rather than thinking about professional development offerings in terms of different topics, the coaching process guided the SEA in planning theme-based professional development. The theme is formative assessment, and it runs through all the trainings offered by the state during 2012–13 and provides a unifying focus.

Another shift was in format. Based on feedback collected through the needs-assessment survey, the SEA began planning to record professional development trainings and make them available to educators online.

A third shift, and one not reflected in Table 1, is in anxiety level and overall preparedness of the SEA in terms of professional development. For the first time, the state representative was able to plan the state professional development days in advance and provide these to districts.

State C

The first shift was in topics offered:

2009–10
> ACCESS/W-APT.

2010–11
> Scaffolding; Formative assessment; Collaboration.

2011–12
> Collaboration; other.

2012–13
> Language Differentiation.

The second shift was in terms of audience. The SEA team decided to invest in building capacity in district coaches both in terms of their knowledge of the WIDA standards and in terms of their facilitation skills. The team planned to provide a series of trainings that specifically targeted the coaches. This plan was subsequently undermined by decisions at a higher level to return the coaches to the classroom.

State D

State D's team underwent significant changes in the course of the collaboration process. These changes may explain why some of the shifts in professional development that seem evident in the documents we collected were not mentioned by the members of the team we interviewed at the end of the process.

The state's professional development plan documents a major shift in the topics selected for professional development offerings in 2012.

2007–10

Exclusive focus on ACCESS/MODEL[2] training.

2010–11

Emphasis on using data for school improvement, so only Data Retreats are offered by the state.

2011–12

7 professional development days: ACCESS refreshers. 5 days (all planned during the pilot): ELD Standards; ELD Standards and the Common Core; Spanish Language Arts Standards. The state also offered two webinars on Assessments 101 and Data analysis.

The coaching process also seems to have spurred a shift in the SEA team's thinking about the audience for professional development offerings. The coach's interview suggests that she guided the state in prioritizing capacity building by investing in professional development not for teachers but for regional coaches.

Both the SEA team and the coach acknowledged a shift in the format of professional development offerings. Although State D is one of the oldest WIDA member states, the SEA team was unaware of the option to have webinars instead of face-to-face trainings. This option was brought up by the coach and immediately seized upon by the team.

State E

The shift in topics for the professional development provided by the state was as follows:

2011–12

Assessment only (WAPT scores interpretation with CAN-DOs and Performance Definitions; ACCESS test administration and score interpretation).

2012–13

ACCESS in the fall, then ELD Standards; Lesson planning; Curriculum development; 1 day on Score reports.

2013–14

Include more Curriculum Development (2 days); Language Differentiation; Collaboration (2 days); Formative Language Assessment; Data Digging/Data Discovery (2 days).

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[2] MODEL is a diagnostic language assessment similar to W-APT. Unlike the W-APT, however, MODEL can also be used as a benchmark assessment.

The coaching process also seems to have guided the SEA team in targeting different audiences for different professional development offerings. The audiences explicitly discussed in the professional development plan include: experienced ESL teachers, new ESL teachers, general education teachers, and administrators.

State F

The collaboration process did not shift in any way the approach that the SEA team took to their professional development plan. It did, however, help the team see ways in which it could make professional development even more site based. A major shift for the team members was the realization that they could have training on site in their state rather than send a team of educators to attend a general training provided by WIDA in Madison. This new awareness allowed them to see new ways in which they could build capacity in teacher leaders in their state, and made this particular professional development opportunity a much more urgent priority.

There was no shift in topics.