SEA Change

A Blueprint for Future-Ready State Education Agencies

What Is SEA Change?

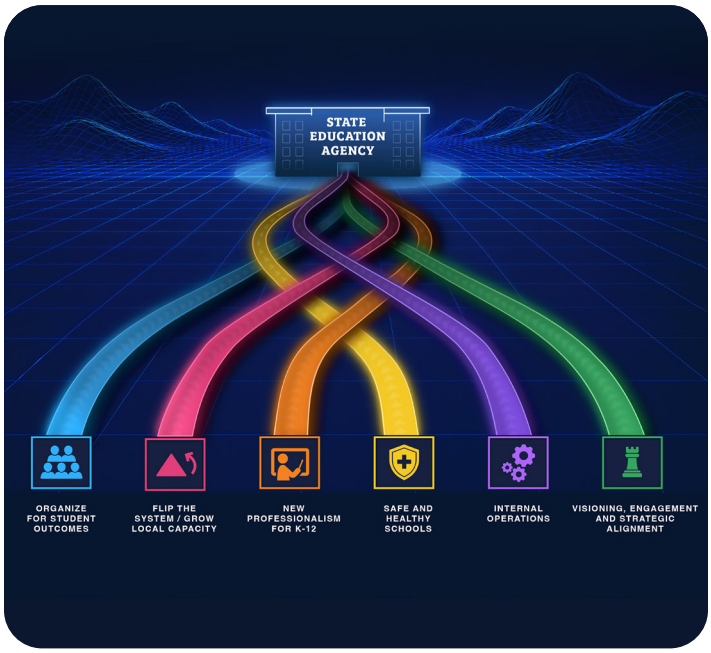
SEA Change is a functional blueprint for how a high-capacity, future-ready State Education Agency (SEA) must operate to improve student outcomes. Inspired by the "Portrait of a Graduate," SEA Change applies that same logic to the SEA as an institution — defining the competencies it must possess and the functions it must perform to lead effectively across policy, implementation, innovation, operations, data, and public trust.

Developed with current and former state chiefs across varied policy contexts, it centers on three core commitments:

Centering the agency's work on student learning and long-term outcomes

Embedding innovation and responsible AI-enabled improvement as expected practice

Building the capacity and agency of local leaders, educators, and communities



Why It's Needed

Public education is entering a new era, but many of the systems responsible for leading it were designed for a different time. Over the past fifteen years, student outcomes have declined even as schools have taken on increasing complexity: evolving workforce demands, rapid technological change, widening outcome gaps, and rising public expectations. Decades of layered compliance requirements have often pushed SEAs toward administration over responsiveness — process over learning.

Today's challenges require SEAs to become more proactive leaders of coherent, adaptive learning systems. If learning happens locally, SEAs cannot improve outcomes by directing change from afar. They must increasingly organize around enabling local leaders, educators, and communities to do their best work — while maintaining coherence, accountability, and strategic direction across the system.

How to Use SEA Change

SEA Change is intentionally ambitious and should not be approached as a checklist. It is designed as both a field-level blueprint and a practical leadership tool. States may use it to:

- **Assess** organizational strengths and capacity gaps
- **Clarify** priorities and sequencing across transformation efforts
- **Align** leadership teams around a shared vision for the agency's role
- **Guide** modernization, organizational redesign, and talent investments
- **Inform** investments in talent, data, technology, and operations
- **Structure** conversations with policymakers and external stakeholders
- **Support** continuity and shared direction across leadership transitions

The blueprint is divided into six sections, each of which speaks to a core SEA responsibility. Within each section, it defines the competencies a future-ready SEA must possess (the "what") and the functions that operationalize them (the "how"). Together, the six sections constitute a comprehensive picture of what modern state education leadership looks like — and what it will take to get there.

SEA Change

The Six Domains of SEA Function

1.0 Organize for Student Outcomes

Structures, systems, and culture aligned around a single north star: strong outcomes for every student.

- **Define** student outcome standards anchoring policy, programming, and resource decisions
- **Establish** transparent performance systems that measure, disaggregate, and publicly report progress
- **Administer** school performance tiers with clear criteria, intervention protocols, and incentives
- **Build** a knowledge base of proven practices, curricula, and innovations for local use

2.0 Grow Local Capacity and Agency

Calibrated transfer of authority to districts and schools, paired with the support they need to use it well.

- **Define** new SEA–local roles, with earned autonomy tied to demonstrated capacity and outcomes
- **Advise** the legislature and conduct regulatory audits to expand local innovation authority
- **Operate** statewide R&D programs and cross-district collaboration networks
- **Employ** an effective intervention program for persistently low-performing schools

3.0 New Professionalism for K–12

Talent systems, evaluation frameworks, and professional pathways built around student learning impact.

- **Define** educator and leader effectiveness in terms of demonstrated student learning outcomes
- **Design** evaluation protocols generating reliable feedback and professional growth plans
- **Administer** a professional echelon system recognizing differences in educator effectiveness
- **Ensure** preparation programs align to effectiveness standards; enforce conduct and licensure

4.0 Safe and Healthy Schools

Standards, systems, and supports ensuring safe environments, student wellbeing, and civil rights protection.

- **Establish** and monitor standards for facilities, transportation, health services, and nutrition
- **Provide** frameworks for student behavior, school climate, and emergency preparedness
- **Investigate** civil rights complaints; ensure Title VI, Title IX, and Section 504 compliance
- **Protect** student data privacy and enforce FERPA compliance, including vendor oversight

5.0 Internal Operations

The systems, talent, fiscal stewardship, and data infrastructure that allow an SEA to deliver on its commitments.

- **Design** and administer funding formulas that distribute resources transparently and equitably
- **Conduct** financial audits and ensure accountability for state and federal funds
- **Align** organizational structures and staffing to strategic priorities
- **Build** modern data systems and AI-enabled analytics to inform decision-making

6.0 Visioning, Engagement, and Strategic Alignment

Leadership, communication, and coalition-building that sets direction and sustains the will to transform.

- **Develop** and operationalize a Theory of Action grounded in student learning and local enablement
- **Build** agency wide ownership of the shift from compliance-directing to capacity-enabling
- **Cultivate** coalitions with business, higher education, advocacy, and civic leaders
- **Operate** as a learning organization using evidence and structured reflection to improve practice

Learn More

SEA Change is supported by a full suite of implementation resources, including diagnostic tools, AI enablement examples, and emerging state practices. Scan to explore the complete framework.

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