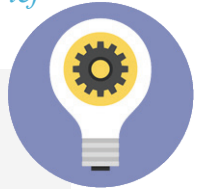# An Introduction to the Regional Capacity Assessment (RCA)

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The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of the Regional Capacity Assessment and provide resources for additional information and learning.

Introduction

State education agencies (SEAs) are accountable for supporting the quality of education in all the local education agencies (LEAs; districts) in the state education system. In the United States, there are 50 states and about 15,000 districts. An "average state" has 300 districts to support, an unmanageable ratio.[1] Simply put, there are too many districts in a state and too few state level staff. This is a major impediment for any attempt to help each LEA support educators' use of evidence-based interventions and strategies in their classrooms. To counter this dilemma, many states have formed regional agencies – Regional Education Agencies (REAs) – that serve as intermediaries between state and local education agencies.

A **REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAM** (RIT) IS COMPRISED OF 3-5 INDIVIDUALS CURRENTLY WORKING IN INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE STATE (INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS, COOPERATIVES, REGIONS) WHO ARE ACTIVELY WORKING WITH DISTRICTS AND ARE WILLING TO DEVELOP AND APPLY KNOWLEDGE OF ACTIVE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORKS IN THEIR SUPPORT OF DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS.

The *Regional Capacity Assessment* (RCA; St. Martin, Ward, Fixsen, Harms, & Russell, 2015) was designed to operationalize and assess REA capacity to perform the critical intermediary functions between SEAs and LEAs. The RCA is a 27-item assessment completed by leadership of the REA and leaders of district change initiatives. The RCA provides the REA with a regular measure of its capacity to support districts' full and effective use of evidence-based interventions and strategies (implementation capacity). At the same time, data and discussion that arise during the administration of the RCA prompt the development of a Regional Capacity Action Plan. Additionally, the RCA serves as part of a feedback structure that informs state leadership (e.g. members of the State Management Team) about their work supporting the REA. Notably, the RCA provides an avenue for collecting data to guide, monitor, and feed into the development of an infrastructure to support the full and effective use of evidence-based interventions and strategies to benefit all students, including students with disabilities.

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[1] http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resources/scaling-brief-5-leveraging-change-state-education-systems

The RCA includes items drawn from the implementation science research and *Active Implementation Frameworks* (Fixsen et al., 2005; http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/learn-implementation) and extensive experience with organization and system change. The AIF are evidence-based approaches to adult learning and systemic change in school and district organizations that support the consistent use of evidence-based interventions and strategies with high fidelity so that positive student outcomes are achieved (Fixsen et al., 2013). "Implementation capacity" is defined as a cascading system of linked implementation teams that align, integrate, and leverage existing resources to purposefully support districts and schools (Ward et al., 2015). Four overarching areas (subscale scores) emerge from administration of the RCA: Leadership, Competency, Organization, and Stage-based Functioning (see Table 1).

Table 1. Regional Capacity Assessment (RCA) Subscales

SCA Scores
<u>Subscales</u>
Leadership – 7 items that address active involvement in facilitating and sustaining systems change to support use of evidence-based interventions and strategies through strategic communication, decisions, guidance, and resource allocation; promotes vision, visibility, priority, and policy.
<u>Leadership</u> – Includes items assess the development of a Regional Implementation Team (RIT), participation in meetings, and resources available and used to support implementation capacity at the regional and district levels. <u>Action Planning</u> – Items reference existence of a regional implementation action plan that is reviewed continuously.
Competency – 8 items that address strategies employed to develop, improve, and sustain educators' ability to use implementation science to support the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies as intended to achieve desired outcomes.
<u>Fidelity – Performance Assessment</u> – Address existence and use of a data system to operationalize and measure the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies as intended. <u>Staff Selection</u> – Examine the use of a selection protocol that includes behavior rehearsals and a plan to continuously evaluate and improve the selection process <u>Training</u> – Items assess the use of a training plan, behavior rehearsals, and collection of training effectiveness data to improve the training process <u>Coaching</u> – Items assess the use of a coaching service delivery plan, and collection of coaching effectiveness data to improve the coaching process

Organization – 9 items that address establishing structures, roles, and processes to support the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies more precisely and to collect, analyze, and use data in ways that result in continuous improvement of systems and supports for educators.

Decision Support Data Systems – Items assess access to relevant data that are used for decision making

Facilitative Administration – Items represent RITs use of an effective meeting process, presence of a written plan for selecting evidence-based interventions and strategies, communication, and a plan to address internal barriers.

Systems Intervention – Assess the use of a process to report policy relevant information to the State Education Agency and provide on-going status updates on capacity development to stakeholders is assessed on this subscale.

Stage-based Functioning – Three items that address RIT's engagement in a purposeful approach to building capacity

Stage-based Functioning – Items examine RIT's engagement in exploration, installation, or initial implementation work with districts

Like other capacity assessments (e.g., District Capacity Assessment, Ward et al., 2015; State Capacity Assessment, Fixsen et al., 2015), the RCA is an action assessment. Data from the RCA are used to guide action planning and next steps to close discrepancies between what is reported by regional leadership and RIT members and the capacity needed to develop infrastructures that support implementation capacity development at district and building levels. Importantly, the RCA is not considered to be *completed* until an implementation capacity action plan has been developed and/or reviewed. Specifically, the Regional Capacity Action Plan guides REAs as they identify and select areas on which to pursue their focus in development of a functional infrastructure and system for work across their region.

THE ESSENTIAL PURPOSE OF REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAM IS TO DEVELOP, IMPROVE, AND SUSTAIN EFFECTIVE SUPPORTS AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL SO THAT REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS CAN SUPPORT BUILDING IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS THAT SUPPORT TEACHERS WHO ARE DELIVERING INNOVATIONS OR PRACTICES IN A SCHOOL.

A Cascading System of Implementation Supports

As shown in the graphic below, the infrastructure supporting implementation consists of linked Implementation Teams that align, integrate, and leverage existing resources in a state education system. Beginning in school buildings, *Building Implementation Teams* (BIT) are developed by both the *District Implementation Team* (DIT) and *a Regional Implementation Team* (RIT) working together. The BITs assure the full and effective use of the *Active Implementation Frameworks* (AIF) in support of the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies in schools and classrooms. The AIF are evidence-based approaches to adult learning and systemic change that support the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies with high fidelity so that positive student outcomes can be achieved (Fixsen et al., 2013). To achieve the consistent use of evidence-based interventions and strategies, a RIT is charged with developing implementation capacity in a DIT. The outcomes and performance of a RIT are the responsibility of the systems, activities, and resources developed and supported by the state (e.g. SMT).
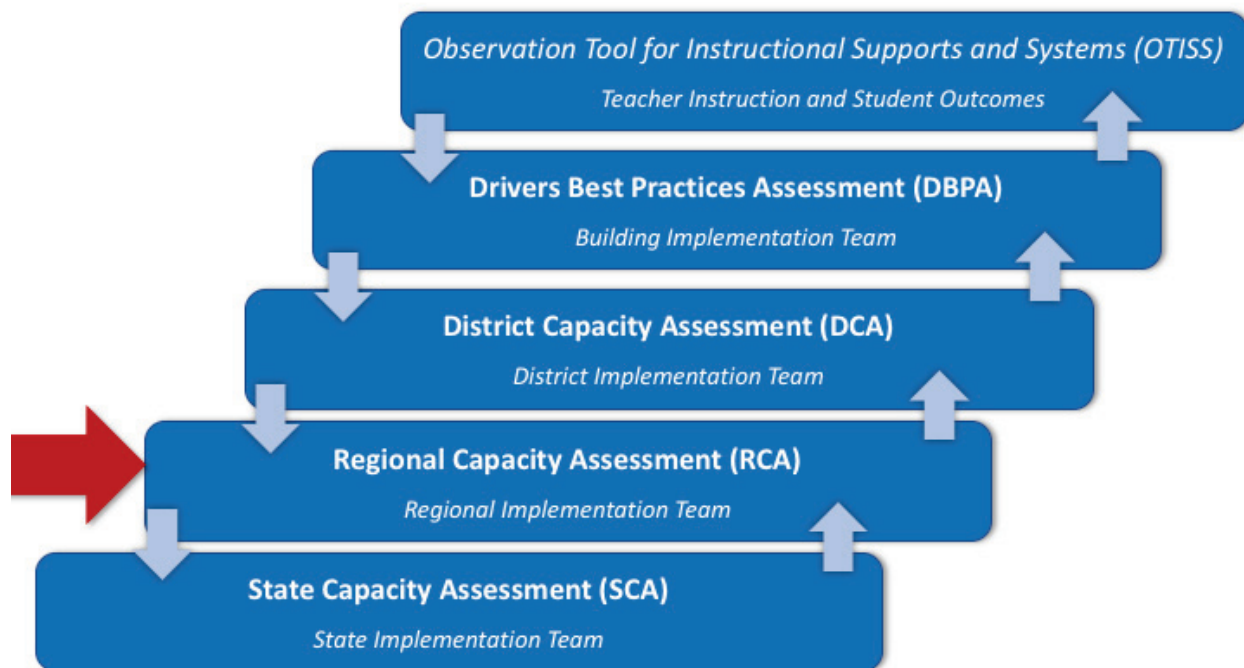

Implementation teams at all levels of the system are charged with developing the infrastructure to support work at school building and classroom levels so that practices can be delivered as intended. For example, gaps noted in capacity development at the district level (e.g. "allocates resources to support the development of district implementation capacity"), provides essential information for decision making by the regional leadership. RCA data provide information about the current status of capacity development, facilitate action planning, and monitor

systems, actions, and resources (e.g., communication, fidelity data, community assets) that support implementation capacity over time across multiple layers of the education system. This is how system functions become aligned and integrated so current resources can be leveraged to attain substantially improved outcomes for all students.

Technical Information

Development of the RCA was informed by an extensive review of implementation science research and Active Implementation Frameworks (Fixsen et al., 2005; http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/learn-implementation) and by the experience of SISEP members and the states they work with in changing structures, roles, and functions in complex systems. Examination of repeated administrations across REAs documents sensitivity to change over time in implementation capacity (see Figure 1). Usability testing has been completed looking at feasibility of administration and analysis and alignment of content. Modifications have resulted in greater clarity and less redundancy of items. Additional analyses are planned to assess item analysis, reliability, and validity (concurrent, predictive, and consequential) in the future.
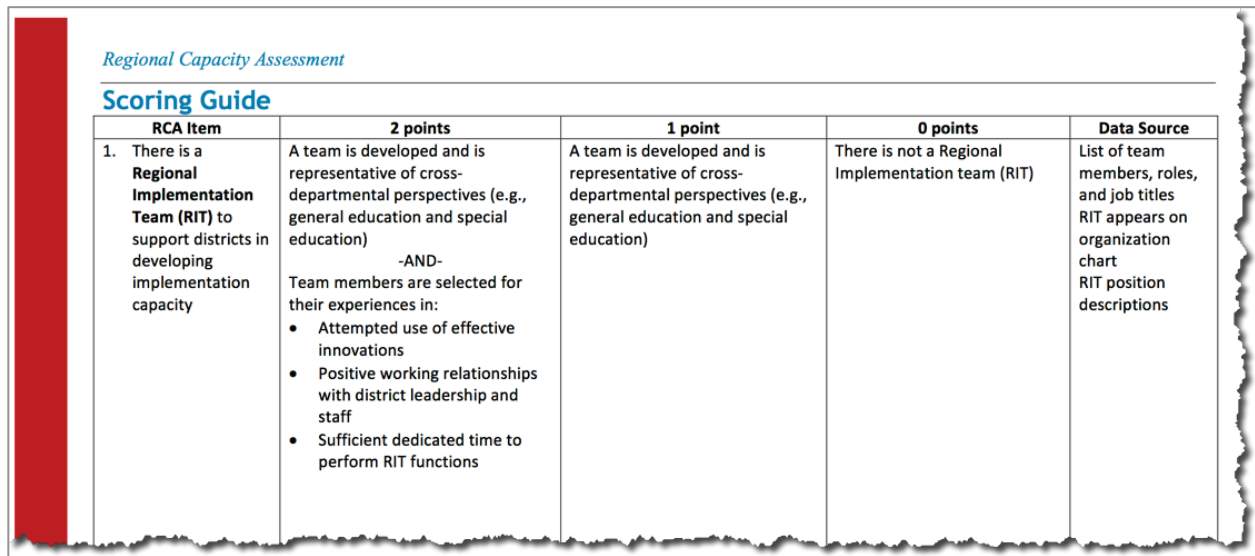
Figure 1. **Repeated Administration of RCA Across Multiple SEAs and REAs**
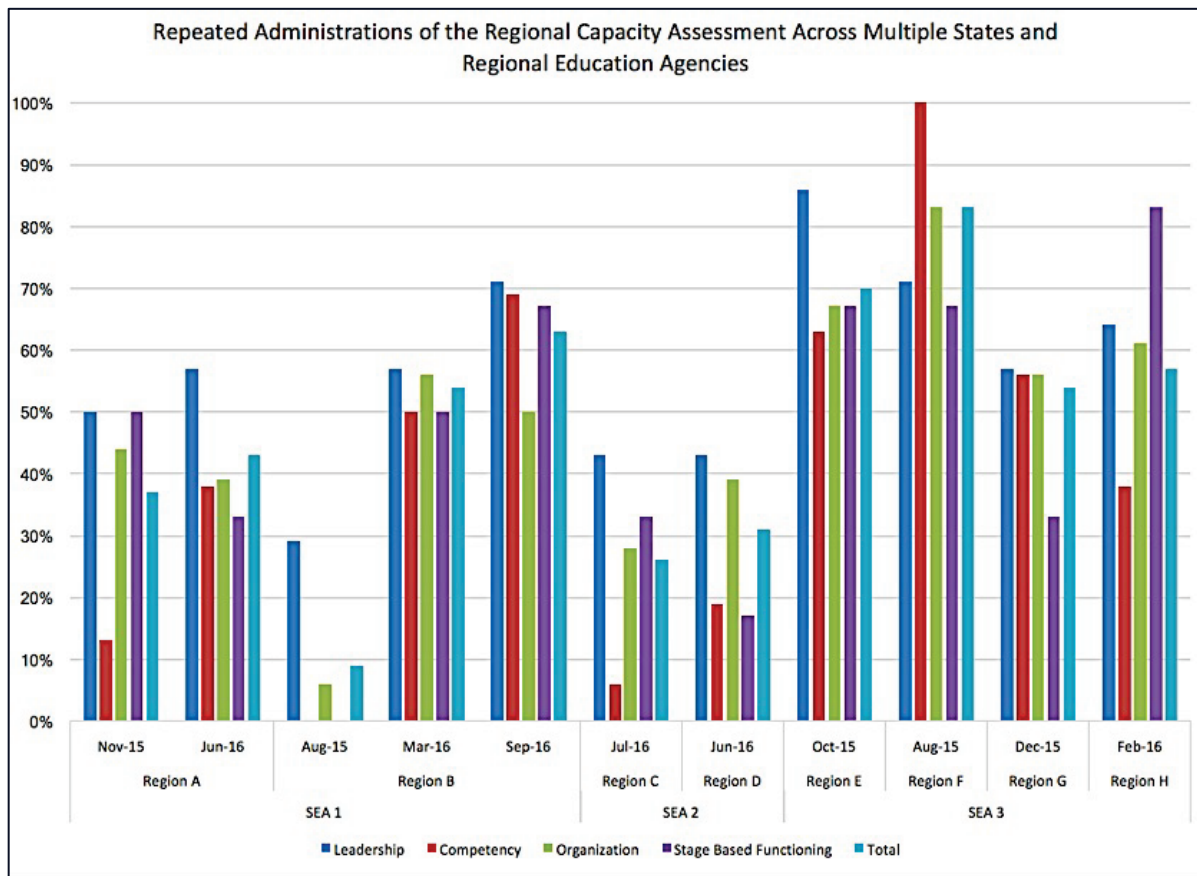
Administration

The RCA takes one to two hours to complete (longer initially, shorter with experienced respondents). It is led by a trained Administrator who guides a meeting of respondents comprised of REA leadership, the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) members, and other staff intentionally selected for their roles in supporting the use of one or more evidence-based interventions and strategies. Additional roles include a Facilitator who contextualizes items for a given region (e.g., provides examples of roles and structures in the current context) and a Note Taker who records scores and discussion. Items are ordered to address broad aspects of the regional agency first, then narrows to focus on RIT roles and functions more specifically. Using a simultaneous voting process, items are scored along a three-point scale with a score of "2" indicating an item is fully in place, a score of "1" reflecting an item is partially in place, and "0" for items that are not in place. A scoring rubric (see Figure 2) provides key indicators for assigning scores.

Figure 2. **Scoring Rubric for RCA Items**

Scores are entered in an Excel spreadsheet provided by SISEP that gives regional leaders immediate access to graphs and item scores for each administration of the RCA. This allows easy comparison of scores to track progress, and access to items that need improvement to inform action planning.

RCA Used as Intended

The RCA is administered twice a year. Administration of the RCA in February/March can help to inform budgets and planning. A repeat administration about six months later helps to monitor progress and inform action planning to improve regional and district infrastructures for supporting the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies.

Figure 3 depicts RCA data collected over time in one state. RCA scores vary over time. Respondents indicate that scores reflect changes in systems, activities, and resources as well as a greater understanding of implementation capacity as measured by the instrument. Repeated administrations of the RCA mark progress toward thoughtful, effective and sustainable capacity in a state.

The discussion that takes place during the administration as the RCA builds a foundation for action planning and continued development of a district and school infrastructure to support sustained use of evidence-based interventions and strategies with fidelity. A third administration of the RCA in Region 2 documents gains in almost all subscales and total scores in just one year.

Figure 3. **RCA Data Over Time In Two Regional Education Agencies In One State**
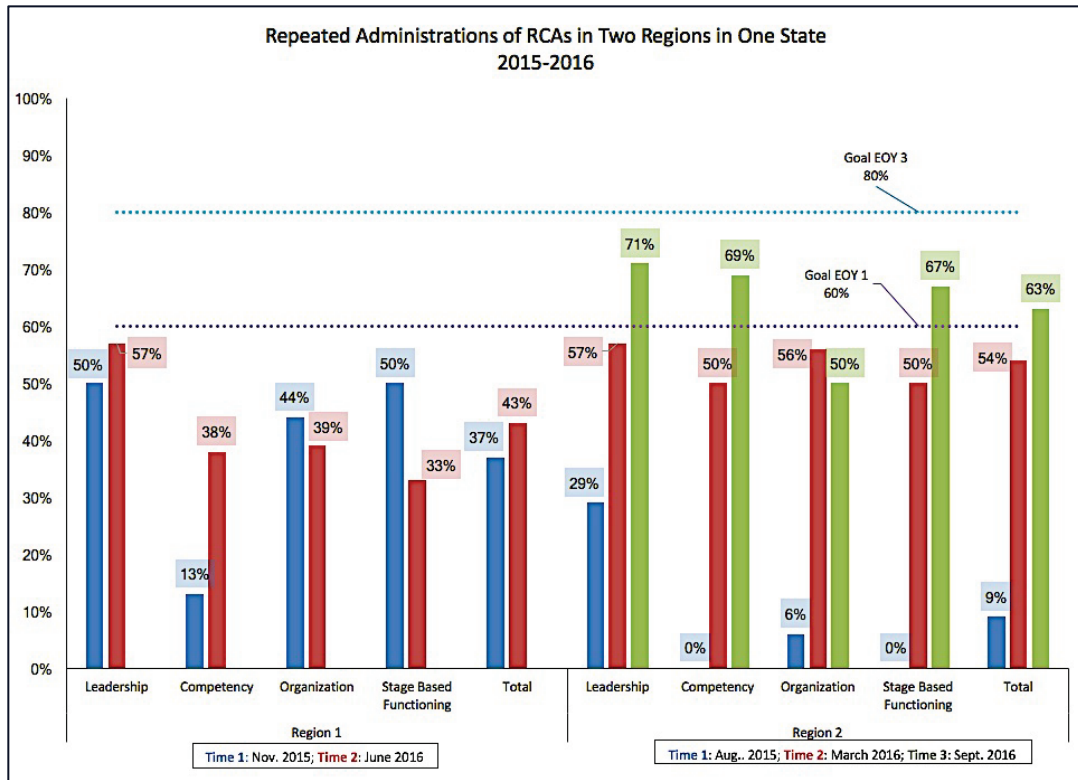
In addition to action planning in regions, data from the RCA inform state education agencies about the impact they are having on the development of implementation capacity at the regional level. Likewise, development of the state's capacity influences regional efforts. Figure 4 depicts a broad view of this relationship. Specifically, it documents growth across three SEAs and their associated regional agencies that received intensive supports from the state and from SISEP. In each of the three states there were increases in SCA scores correlated with increases in regional capacity (RCA) scores. These data provide a starting point for integrated action

plans for identifying and allocating resources and supports so that sustainable use of evidence-based practices across their districts and schools is embedded in the system.

Figure 4. **SCA and RCA Data Over Time Across Three States and Multiple Regions**
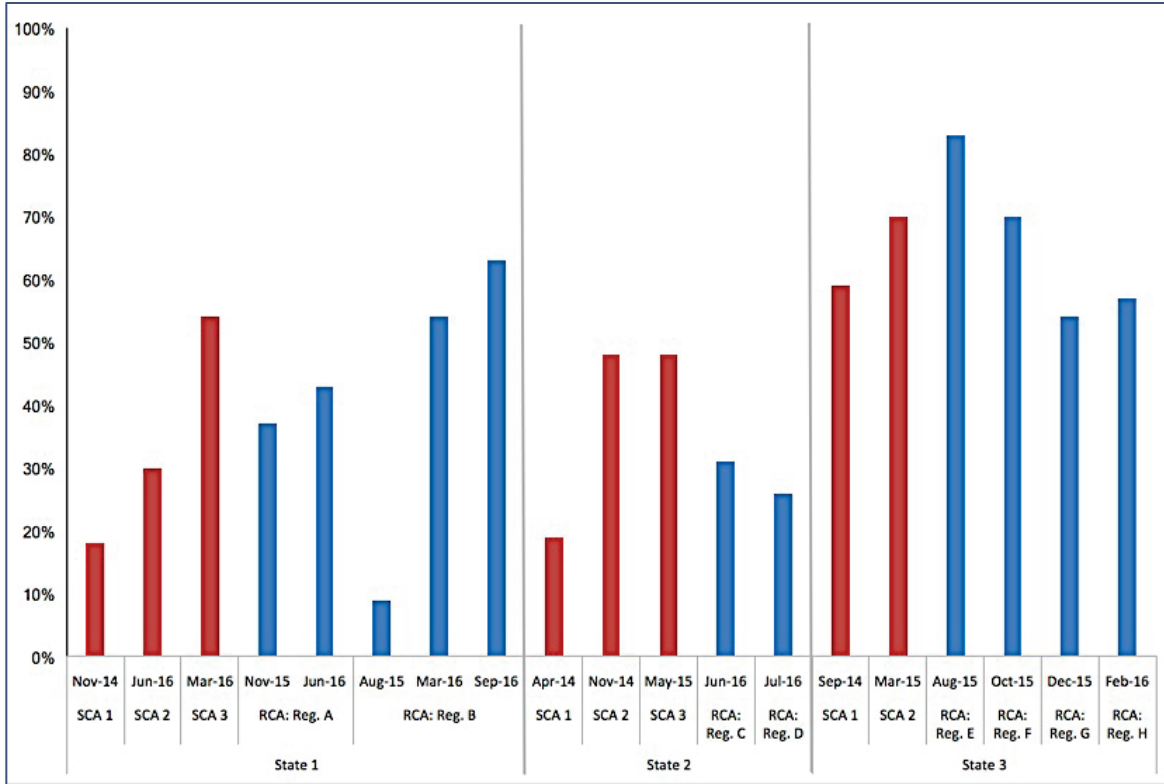
Summary

Data from the RCA serve a critical role in informing and developing support along a Cascading System of Implementation Supports. The RCA administration process allows regional and state leaders, SISEP, and TA providers to reflect on their processes and practices in supporting an infrastructure for capacity development. Information from the RCA informs action planning to establish regional, district, and building level capacity to use and sustain evidence-based interventions and strategies with fidelity, a requirement of important large-scale Federal programs (e.g., the Office of Special Education Program's State Systemic Improvement Plan). This task would be difficult, and perhaps impossible, without capacity assessment tools such as the RCA.

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