An Introduction to the State Capacity Assessment (SCA)

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

Introduction

State education agencies are uniquely accountable as leaders in the development of an infrastructure to support educators' use of effective practices in their classrooms. An infrastructure consists of linked teams at each level of the education system with capacity to affect meaningful change. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP) Results Driven Accountability both require the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies to education for all students, including students with disabilities. Advances in implementation science provide new information on how to support the full and effective use of evidence-based interventions and strategies so that intended benefits can be realized. The 25-item State Capacity Assessment (SCA; Fixsen et al., 2015) assesses implementation supports for the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies with fidelity at regional, district, building, and classroom levels.

A STATE MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IS COMPRISED OF THE CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICER AND HIS OR HER DIRECTORS OF GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION, AND OTHERS AT THE STATE LEVEL ACCOUNTABLE FOR STUDENT OUTCOMES.

Members of the State Management Team (SMT) complete the SCA and use the results (item scores and discussion notes) for action planning and to monitor progress toward developing an effective infrastructure (implementation capacity) for the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies. The SCA also serves as part of a feedback structure that informs the work of the State Implementation and Scaling up of Evidence-based Programs (SISEP) Center and Technical Assistance (TA) providers who support the SMT and systemic change in states. As such, the SCA helps State Education Agencies (SEA) collect data to guide, monitor, and develop infrastructure to support implementation of evidence-based interventions and strategies in complex state education systems.

The SCA includes items that assess the implementation capacity of a SEA's current roles, functions, and structures in light of implementation science research and the Active Implementation Frameworks (Fixsen et al., 2005). The "implementation capacity" of a state system is defined as systems, activities, and resources needed to support regions, districts, and schools to use evidence-based interventions and strategies with fidelity to reach desired

outcomes (Ward et al., 2015). The SCA addresses critical features of implementation capacity at the state level across three areas: SMT Investment, System Alignment, and Commitment to Regional Implementation (see Table 1).

Table 1. State Capacity Assessment (SCA) and Subscales

SCA Scores
Subscales
SMT Investment – 12 items that address roles and functions of the team, executive leadership, and communication of support.
Roles and Functions – Examines the composition and meeting processes of the SMT.
Coordination for Implementation – Identifies the SMT as providing executive leadership in implementation capacity development with needed resources (e.g., State Transformation Specialists, funding, and access to leadership) to support the work
Leadership – Includes SMT as providing on-going support for implementation and scaling
System Alignment – 5 items that address development of a State Design Team (SDT) that works to transform legacy systems to effective and efficient practices across a state education system
Implementation Guidance Documents – Address transition from a ghost to a host system
State Design Team – Examine the composition and effective meeting processes in a State Design Team
Commitment to Regional Implementation – 8 items that address delivery of support and resources to Regional Implementation Teams
Resources for Implementation Capacity – Allocation of resources to Regional Implementation Teams (RITS) for implementation capacity development
Support for RIT Functioning – Action planning that is based on review of information and data about RIT functioning

Like other capacity assessments (e.g., District Capacity Assessment, Ward et al., 2015; Regional Capacity Assessment, St. Martin et al., 2015), the SCA is an action assessment. That is, data from the SCA are used to guide action planning and next steps in an effort to close discrepancies between the current capacity (as reported by state executive leadership and SMT members) and the capacity needed to develop infrastructures that support implementation capacity development at the regional, district, and building level. As a result, the SCA is not considered to be completed until an implementation capacity action plan has been developed and reviewed. Specifically, the State Capacity Action Plan guides state leaders as they identify and select areas upon which to pursue their development of an effective infrastructure across their state.

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, a Building Implementation Team (BIT) is developed by both the District Implementation Team (DIT) and a Regional Implementation Team (RIT) working together to bring about full and effective use of the Active Implementation Frameworks (AIF). 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). As accountability rolls upward, a RIT is charged with developing implementation capacity in a DIT. The outcomes and performance of a RIT are then linked to the systems, activities, and resources developed and supported by the state (e.g. SMT).
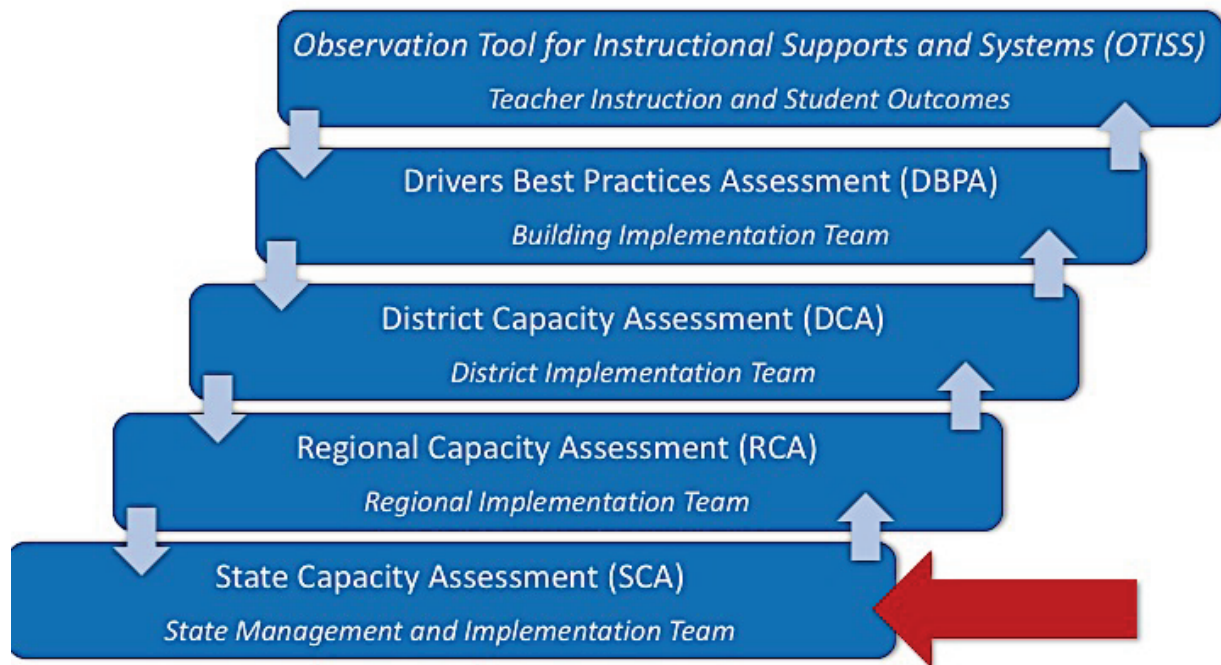

Implementation teams at all levels of the system are charged with developing the infrastructure to support work at the school building and classroom levels so that evidence-based interventions and strategies can be delivered as intended (i.e. DITs primarily support BITs; RITs primarily support DITs; SMTs primarily support RITs). For example, gaps noted in capacity development at the regional level (e.g. "allocates resources to support the development of district implementation capacity"), inform the state leadership of their current efforts to develop capacity in regions, districts, and schools. State leaders look to the SCA to determine areas for improvement and focus. SCA 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.

Technical Information

The SCA is based on key indicators from the fields of implementation science, system dynamics, and organizational development (Fixsen et al., 2005; http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/learn-implementation) and by the experience of SISEP members working with States to change structures, roles, and functions in complex systems. Repeated administrations of the SCA within a state document changes over time in implementation capacity (subscale scores increase and decrease depending on progress and setbacks in a state; see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Repeated Administrations of the SCA from 2009 to 2016 in One State
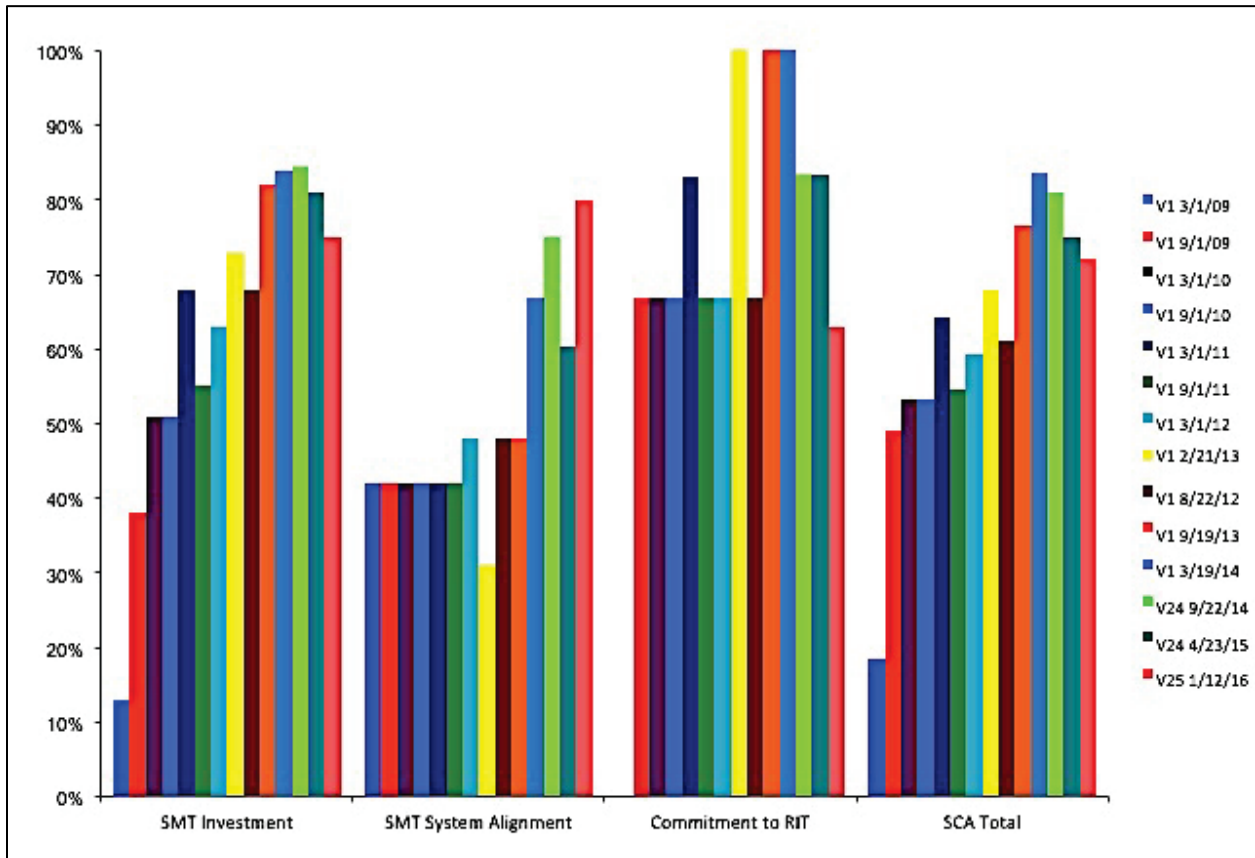
Usability testing has been conducted for feasibility of administration and alignment of content (see repeated measures in Figure 1). Additional analyses are planned to conduct tests of items, reliability, and validity (concurrent, predictive, and consequential) in the future.

Administration

The SCA 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 state executive leadership (SMT) and other staff intentionally selected for their roles in supporting the use of one or more effective innovations. Additional roles include a Facilitator who contextualizes items for a given state (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 first address broad aspects of the state department, then focus on the SMT, State Implementation Team, and State Design Team 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.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STATE DESIGN TEAM (SDT) IS TO DEVELOP A COMMON APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION TO HELP DEFRAGMENT SYSTEMS AND MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE SEA AND ITS FUNDED INITIATIVES TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT.

Figure 2. A Sample of Scoring Rubrics for SCA Items

Scoring Guide

Item	2 Points (Fully in Place)	1 Point (Partially in Place)	0 (Not in Place)	Data Source
1. There is a State Management Team to provide leadership for the State Education Agency (SEA).	The SMT includes the Chief State School Officer (CSSO) and/or Deputy CSSO and State department of education decision makers who provide leadership for general education, special education and management	The SMT includes the Chief State School Officer (CSSO) and/or Deputy CCSO and some State department of education division leaders	The SMT includes the Chief State School Officer (CSSO) and/or Deputy CCSO and others who are invited as needed	SMT meeting minutes
2. The SMT meets frequently to provide leadership.	The SMT meets frequently (at least twice a month) to provide leadership for the State department of education	The SMT meets frequently (at least monthly) to provide leadership for the State department of education	SMT meets on occasion	SMT meeting minutes
3. The SMT meeting agendas focus on implementation capacity development	At least one SMT meetings each month includes sufficient time (typically one hour) to focus on implementation capacity development (e.g. implementation functions; organization and system change methods; implementation related data)	At least one SMT meeting each month includes some time (at least 30 minutes to focus on implementation content (e.g. implementation functions; organization and system change methods)	SMT meetings do not include implementation capacity development as a standing agenda item	SMT meeting minutes

Scores are entered on www.sisep.org, a national data base that gives state leaders immediate access to graphs and item scores for each administration of the SCA. This allows easy comparison of scores to track progress, and access to items that need improvement to inform action planning.

SCA Used as Intended

The SCA is administered twice a year. Administration of the SCA 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 district and regional infrastructures for supporting implementation of evidence-based interventions and strategies.

**Figure 3. SCA Data Over Time in One State Education System**
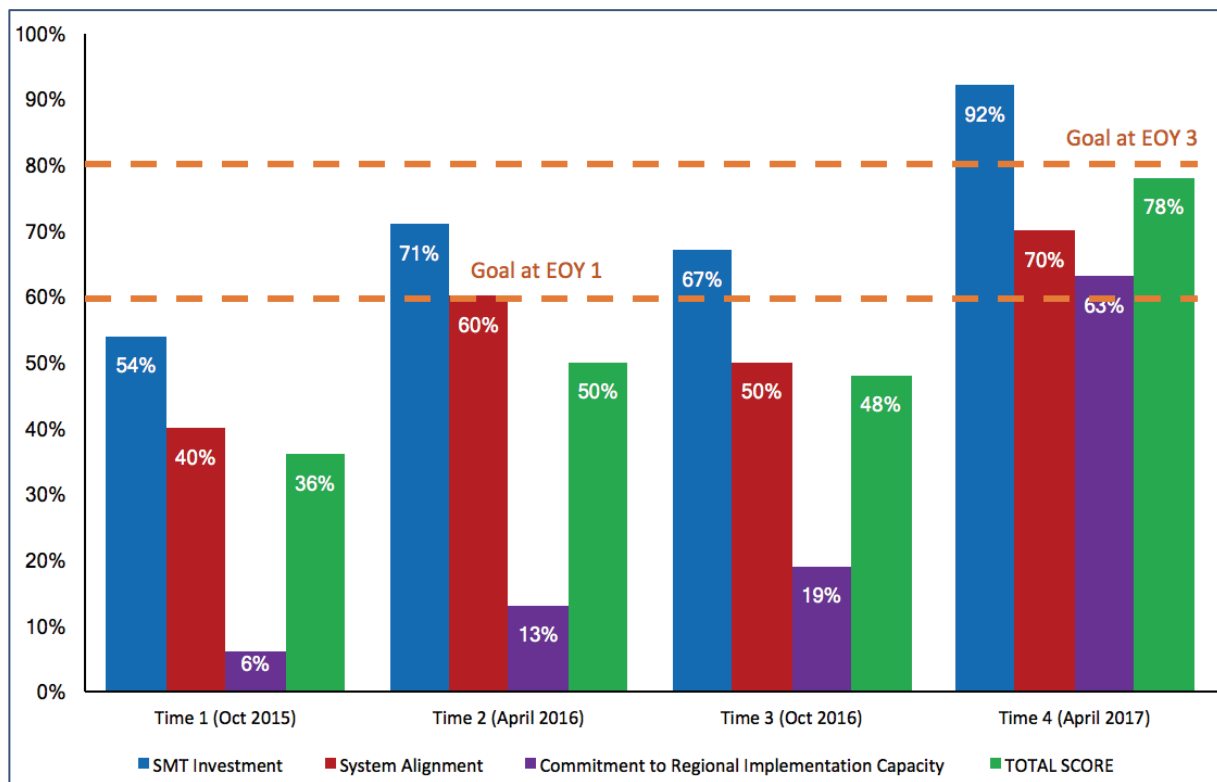
Figure 3 depicts SCA data collected over time in one state. SCA scores can vary over time. Respondents indicate that scores reflect changes in systems, activities, and resources as well as a greater understanding of implementation capacity as measured by the instrument. Repeated administrations of the SCA mark progress toward effective and sustainable capacity in a state.

Figure 4 provides data collected across three states receiving intensive support from the State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) Center. A goal is to have the Total Score reach 60% by the end of Year 1 (acquisition) and 80% by the end of Year 3 (proficiency). The SCA data not only inform the states but also provide a snapshot of the impact of SISEP support. Across the two years depicted in Figure 4, states made rather consistent improvements in SMT Investment and Commitment to RIT. System Alignment scores did not increase as rapidly. These data are used by SISEP to change methods for supporting states receiving intensive implementation-informed support. In this way, SCA data help SISEP improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its support for states over time.

Figure 4. SCA Data Over Time Across Three State Education Systems.
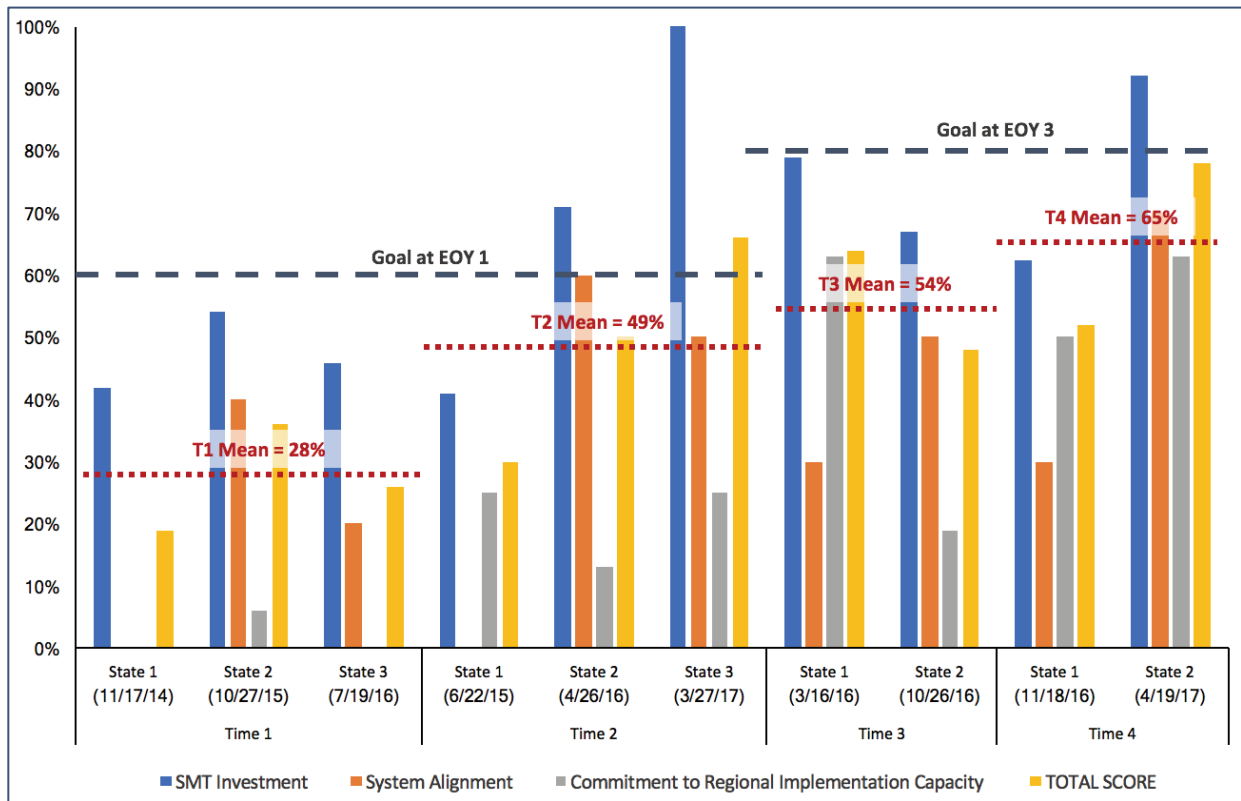
Summary

Data from the SCA serve a critical role in developing a cascading system of implementation supports. The SCA administration process allows state leaders, SISEP, and TA providers to reflect on their processes and practices in supporting infrastructure for capacity development. Information from the SCA informs action planning to establish regional, district, and building level capacity to use innovations 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 SCA.

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- The Active Implementation Hub
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