Chapter 9

The Swedish Context Bringing Support Structures to Scale: The Role of the State and School Districts

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Abstract This chapter explores the “theory of action” underlying the Swedish government’s national school improvement program called Cooperation for Better Schools. We discuss particularly the assumptions about the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, including schools, school districts, and universities. Our analysis focuses on the issue of institutional capacity for sustained system improvement. In this regard, our approach draws on the perspectives associated with contemporary policy analysis, which includes greater attention to qualitative and interpretive methods to understand the complexity of policy-induced change in contemporary society. We start by describing the project structure and our method. Thereafter, we analyze the government’s understanding and arguments for why it is important to help underperforming schools, before we give examples about how involved actors define problems and solutions in project documents. In the conclusion, we highlight strengths and deficits in the improvement process.

Keywords Underperforming schools · Restructuring · External support · Government initiatives · Quality assurance · Self improvement

Introduction: Cooperation for Better Schools

The purpose of a Swedish government project that started in 2015, Cooperation for Better Schools (CBS), is to improve academic results and increase equality of those results within and between schools. The participating schools are those that have poor academic results and too many students who do not complete the Swedish

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basic education program. This paper explores the “theory of action” underlying the CBS program, particularly the assumptions about the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, including the schools, school districts and universities. Our analysis focuses, in particular, on the issue of institutional capacity for sustained system improvement. In this regard, our approach draws on the perspectives associated with contemporary policy analysis, which includes greater attention to qualitative and interpretive methods to understand the complexity of policy-induced change in contemporary society (Hajer et al., 2003; Stevenson, 2016; Roberts, 2004).

The CBS project is ongoing, but there are good reasons to map, analyze and learn from the work and initiatives that have occurred. We examine the efforts that are being made to help them, and how the efforts are described and justified. Finally, it is also important to make an initial estimate of the extent to which the initiatives are adequate given the aspirations of the Swedish government’s remit. Our contribution will, thus, shed light on the difficulties to bring interventions to scale in an accurate manner. In this paper, we will examine information from 78 CBS schools with a full program of basic education (through 9th grade), along with information from the 44 municipal school districts responsible for those schools.

We begin by addressing the motivation underlying the policy problem and the government resolution concerning CBS. The first part of the analysis is based in part on written documents from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, regarding the processes between the schools, the school districts, the Swedish National Agency for Education, and the universities. These documents comprise the Inspectorate’s school reports and subsequent decisions about the schools, action plans from most of the schools, as well as descriptions in those cases where they are not included in the action plans. It also includes any associated appendices, as well as the subsequent contracts between the Swedish National Agency for Education and the participating universities with regard to their efforts within CBS.

Rather than driving our analysis of the documents with a pre-existing theoretical framework, our approach was to engage with the emerging narrative suggested by the documents. That is, we approach the documents as if they held a story of how the complex (but weakly articulated) process of stakeholder engagement envisioned by the National Agency for Education would tell us which voices were reflected, how they framed the interventions, and the degree to which the collaborative ideal was achieved (Riessman, 2005).

The study concludes with summarizing reflections.

The Policy Problem – According to the Government

The Swedish Education Act (2010:800) contains provisions that are intended to guarantee equal access to education for all children and students. Efforts must be made to weigh differences in the conditions and assumptions surrounding children and students in assimilating their education (Chapters 1 § 4), and to ensure equal access to education in the school system regardless of geographic place of residence

or social and economic conditions (Chapters 1 § 8). The Act also outlines that the instruction provided in the school system must be equivalent within each type of school and after-school center regardless of its location in the country (Chapters 1 § 9).

The introduction to the Act makes it clear that the term “equivalent” does not mean that instruction is identical, but rather that the quality of the education must be sufficiently high that the established national goals can be achieved regardless of where the education is being provided (Government Bill, 2009/10:165 p. 638). Thus, the equivalent education requirement does not require conformity in practices or that the school resources must be distributed in the same way. Instead, consideration must be given to the differing circumstances and needs of the students, and the school has a special responsibility for those students who, for various reasons, are having difficulty in achieving their educational goals (Government Bill, 2013/14:160 p. 20). The Act further outlines that municipalities must distribute resources for education within the school system based on the differing circumstances and needs of the children and students (Chapters 2 § 8a).

Despite the requirements of the Swedish Education Act, national and international reports and metrics indicate that equality within the school system is not being maintained. In particular, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s inspections and reviews indicate that such is the case. Many school districts and schools are seeking support for their continued development in accordance with the reports of the Inspectorate. The issue of inequitable school experiences and outcomes was also noted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in its report, *Improving schools in Sweden: An OECD perspective* (2015).

According to a study by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) 2011, socioeconomic background still plays a major role in academic performance in mathematics and science. The results of OECD’s *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) 2012 study show that Swedish 15-year-olds’ skills in mathematics, reading comprehension and science continue to deteriorate. The decline in mathematics is of equal magnitude among both low- and high-performing students, but in reading comprehension and science, it is mainly the low-performing students who have lost the most. IEA’s *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) 2011 notes that Swedish students with well-educated parents outperform those whose parents have less education.

National studies reinforce the results from international tests. According to the Swedish National Agency for Education’s 2012 status assessment (Report, 2013:387), there continues to be a strong correlation between socioeconomic background and scholastic success. According to the Agency, the discrepancies in the average results for elementary schools have doubled over the last 20 years, albeit from what was previously a low level from an international perspective. In earlier reports, such as *Resource Allocation based on Circumstances and Needs?* (Report, 2009:330); *Resource Allocation to the Elementary School – Principals’ Perspectives* (Report, 2011: 365) and *Municipal Resource Allocation to Elementary Schools* (Report, 2013:391). The Swedish National Agency for Education has also shown that the compensatory element in resource allocation by school districts is relatively

weak, and that the municipalities do not always allocate based on need. In its status assessment, the Agency noted that the increased differences in scholastic results require robust remedial measures at the national and municipal levels if equality in the school system is to be maintained.

Upon completing elementary school or corresponding types of schooling, nearly all young people in Sweden (99%) embark on a gymnasium (upper secondary school) education. At the same time, only some 70% of those who began such a program in 2011 received their diploma or school completion certificate after 3 years. The proportion receiving a final report card increased by roughly 5% after a fourth year. The Schools Inspectorate's quality review One in Two to the Finish Line (2009:1) reviewed the ability of the gymnasium schools to get all students to complete their education. The review indicates in part that schools lack goal-based initiatives to get all their students to complete their education, have weak oversight over their results and the quality of instruction, and that major differences exist between the reviewed schools in terms of adapting instruction to the individual student.

The Schools Inspectorate conducted a quality review of the instruction provided in the introductory programs vocational introduction and individual options, which is programs for students with low academic results who are in need of extra support. The Instruction in Gymnasium School Introductory Programs (2013:6) report states in part that the instruction being given is planned based on the needs of the school rather than the needs of the students, that teacher treatment of students has a major impact on their learning, and that inadequate support in the form of, for example, scholastic or vocational guidance or student health, limits the opportunities available to the students. The Inspectorate's Instruction in Vocational Programs (2014a:5) report indicates that, at just over half of the schools reviewed, students in need of special support were not the targets of measures that were customized based on their particular needs. The Inspectorate also found that the expectations of the students were too low.

Of particular relevance to this paper is the Inspectorate's recent focus on the role of municipalities (and districts).[1] In its Municipal Resource Allocation and Work Against the Negative Effects of Segregation in the School System (2014b:01) report, the Schools Inspectorate states that most of the municipalities reviewed could improve their strategies for counteracting the negative effects of segregation. The review encompassed 30 municipal school districts, which means that it is not possible to draw general conclusions at the national level from the report. However, the review offers examples of schools that improved their results dramatically when the municipality provided significant resources in combination with the schools having converted those resources into a long-term and quality-based development initiative founded on research results. The review also offers examples of municipalities in which a deliberate and long-term development initiative was carried out at the school district level, resulting in improved goal fulfillment for the municipality as a whole. This report sets the stage for the development of the government's approach to the design of the CBS initiative.

The Government's CBS Resolution as a Response

In Government Resolution (2015/3357/S), the government tasks the Swedish National Agency for Education with undertaking initiatives, in dialogue with school districts, to improve skills results and increase equality within and between schools. These initiatives are intended to target schools with low skills results or high proportions of students who do not complete their studies, and which have otherwise found it difficult to improve their results on their own. The Agency's assessment as to which schools are to be prioritized for participation and the identification of relevant areas for development must be based on documentation from the Schools Inspectorate.

The purpose of the CBS remit is to improve skills results and increase equality within and between schools. The wording chosen by the government is interesting, as it indicates that increased equality should be achieved both within the relevant schools and between schools in the municipality, and that this is to take place in dialogue with the school districts. This perspective and the requirement of collaboration among schools and between schools and districts is new within the Swedish context. Because of its novelty, it raises the question of whether the school districts (or for private school the responsible school owners) have the capacity to independently improve the results at other schools within the municipality if the selected school(s) receive support via the Swedish National Agency for Education together with input from the universities. The question is particularly relevant since, in larger municipalities, only a few schools might be selected as program targets. More specifically, the initiatives are to target:

1. Schools with low skills results or
2. with a high proportion of students who do not complete their studies and
3. that have faced or are deemed to be facing difficult conditions in terms of improving their results on their own.

This means that the schools that are to be supported via these initiatives have low merit ratings or grades, as well as many students who are not meeting the goal fulfillment requirements in the year in which they are chosen to participate in the CBS project, and that the degree of equality between different classes at the school is low. In addition, the schools must be considered to be facing difficulties in improving their results on their own.

The Government's "Theory of Action": A Deliberative Response

The aforementioned policy problem description consists largely of reports and interpretations of the government remit. This problem description (see Fig. 9.1) constitutes the government's perception of reality, in other words how the problem

Source: Inspired by Hans Esping (1980) [Social programs on developing and dismantling public commitments]

Fig. 9.1 Theory of action model in the government remit

is perceived. The government also says that the selection of schools should be based in part on the Schools Inspectorate's inspection reports prepared for those schools, which identify specific problems. Based on these reports, the Swedish National Agency for Education must then prepare a proposal as to which schools should be offered initiatives to improve their scholastic results. The invitation to participate in the project is then sent to the school district where the school is located. The school districts will then, working with the schools, decide whether they view participating in the CBS project as a means to improve their results and increase equality within and between the schools in the municipality. In other words, there was no mandate or requirement for school participation. But during the CBS project period from 2015 very few schools and school districts have declined to participate.

Part of the government's approach was to develop a collaborative relationship from the beginning. If districts and schools decide to participate in the CBS project, they have the opportunity to reshape the government's perception of what the "real problems" are to conform to the school's own problem reality. This response is reported in a document known as a Current Status Analysis.[2] The schools' reports on their current status follow a set structure developed by the Agency, and the document is to be viewed as a support, and is called a Support for Current Status Analysis. The Current Status Analysis includes the following headings:

1. Current Status Analysis based on collected data – Results and documentation at the individual level, process level and structural level
2. Identifying and specifying problems associated with the school's ability to achieve curriculum goals
3. Making assumptions with regard to the causes of each prioritized problem
4. Identifying areas for development, with proposed initiatives

This analysis leads to an additional dialogue with participating universities: Proposed actions and initiatives from the university. We can thus examine the correspondence between the report from the Schools Inspectorate (which was the reason a school was selected) and any feedback reports to the Inspectorate that identify problems, proposed actions and initiatives for school improvement. The recommendations for particular initiatives that derive from these can then become a dialogue

between the Swedish National Agency for Education and the school, while the scope of the resources allocated is determined in dialogue between the Agency and the universities.

According to the government theory of action, these university-supported initiatives must be focused on improving skills (test results), increasing the proportion of students who meet the goal fulfillment requirements (i.e., complete their studies with passing results), and enhancing the school's ability to continue to improve its results following the conclusion of supportive initiatives from the university. In other words, the government set out a classical vision of a goal-driven improvement initiative. However, the assumption that the school and school district goals might be different from the government's goals and would need to be part of any locally designed initiative introduced a very new aspect, leading to an "effect reality" based on the "problem reality" that the school district and school outlined in their Current Status Analysis. The introduction of this variable and uncertain understanding of desired outcomes also altered the timeframe associated with the measurement of CBS outcomes. Almost all CBS university supported initiative will continue over at least 2 years and if we take in the pre-planning, they will last almost 3 years. The broader effect reality could be measured no sooner than 1 year after the conclusion of the project, although tendencies in terms of merit ratings and goal fulfillment may be discernible during the course of the project. If the initiatives and the collaboration and support given by the universities the district leadership are successful in the long term, the degree of equality between and within schools should increase, and the results at the municipality level should improve.

The model assumes a feedback/follow-up that examines the relationship of the effect reality to the school's formulated problem reality. Thus, the model is collaborative in the sense that the government's desired effects can be augmented by including the degree to which the school believes that its problems have been ameliorated. Finally, the model offers a means of studying whether any visible effects arise in the reality that could be evaluated in relation to the government remit and the resources and initiatives to which the organization of the remit assigned to the Swedish National Agency for Education have led.

In the Beginning: The Results of the Document Analyses

The schools included have low skills results and have had them over a long period of time. They also have a high proportion of students who are not completing their studies, which has again been the case for a long time. We excluded students for whom information as to place of residence, for example, is lacking, with the result that newly arrived students are not included in the statistics. This means that the schools have underperformed with a completely stable student population. Our purpose is to analyse the processes and created documents in the CBS initiative to boost these schools' performance. That is, we approach the documents as if they held a story of how the complex (but weakly articulated) process of stakeholder engagement envisioned by the National Agency for Education would tell us which voices

were reflected, how they framed the interventions, and the degree to which the collaborative ideal was achieved (Riessman, 2005).

The documents we use in the policy analysis are the Schools Inspectorate's comments and its follow-up decisions, the schools' proposed action plans, Agreement 2 between the Swedish National Agency for Education and the school and the school district, and the agreement between the Agency and the universities. Our purpose with the analysis was to examine the patterns that reflect the timelines and experiences of the majority of the different stakeholders and the language they use in the 'narratives'.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate's Oversight of the Schools

The Swedish National Agency for Education's selection of schools for inclusion in the CBS project is based in part on inspection reports from the Schools Inspectorate. These reports are documented on the Inspectorate's website, from which they were obtained. Any follow-up reports that were accessible have been analyzed as well.

We coded the Inspectorate's comments on the schools and present these in Table 9.1. The table shows that the first eight items received the most comments. These also have clear ties to the quality of the instruction and the learning environment of the school, and offer proposals as to what improvements should be made. Items 9–15 are more generally focused on various processes that are tied to the principal's administrative leadership, while items 1–8 pertain more to the principal's pedagogical leadership and responsibility for ensuring that the students receive the quality of education they are entitled to. It is also interesting that all of the first eight items have connections to equitable treatment of students and support for low-performing students.

We also examined the Inspectorate's responses to the schools' reports on how they have addressed the Inspectorate's comments. It is evident here that all of the 78 schools were able to show that their work has improved and have thereby been approved by the Inspectorate. Most were approved directly after the reporting of remedial measures, but in a small number of cases after the Inspectorate failed to approve the initial report, they issued an order imposing a fine. All of these fines have since been eliminated from the critical schools, indicating that they had incorporated the Inspectorate's required changes into their activities. However, it says nothing about whether their activities have actually changed and whether their approved plans are being followed.

The Schools Inspectorate's oversight of the schools' districts. The Inspectorate also provides feedback to the municipalities/districts that outline areas for improvement. The 78 schools included in the study are located in 44 municipal school districts throughout the country. The comments directed at these school districts focus on the need for expanded organizational support for the students, while comments pertaining to systematic quality assurance were directed at 27 of the 44 school districts. [3] This suggests that quality assurance was a systemic problem since nearly 100% of schools involved in the CBS project in these municipalities also drew criticism for their systematic quality assurance (Table 9.2).

Table 9.1 Compilation of the main qualities that are comments directed by the Schools Inspectorate to the schools included in the CBS project between 2015 and 2017

1.	Systematic quality assurance	39 comments
2.	Formulation, follow-up and evaluation of actions for students in need of special support	39 comments
3.	Abusive treatment	38 comments
4.	Safe and good learning environment	31 comments
5.	Prompt support in the form of extra adaptations outside the framework of the regular instruction	30 comments
6.	Student health	22 comments
7.	Prompt support in the form of extra adaptations within the framework of the regular instruction	19 comments
8.	Student influence	17 comments
9.	Grading, grade structure and documentation	15 comments
10.	Cooperation between teachers and to improve collegial and stimulating instruction	12 comments
11.	Information for students and guardians	10 comments
12.	Scholastic guidance and student counseling	10 comments
13.	Active teacher support	9 comments
14.	School library	9 comments
15.	Internal organization and leadership	7 comments

Table 9.2 Compilation of the main quality comments by the Schools Inspectorate to the municipal school districts who had schools that participated in the CBS project between 2015 and 2017

1.	Systematic quality assurance	27 comments
2.	Student health	20 comments
3.	Student counseling in native language	16 comments
4.	School library	13 comments
5.	Abusive treatment	11 comments
6.	Internal organization and principal's role	11 comments
7.	Study and vocational guidance	8 comments

The study has, in the same way as for the schools, analyzed the Schools Inspectorate's reports of all the school districts' responses to its comments. The analysis here shows that a majority addressed all the comments, although the comments also led to the imposition of fines in six cases, and in three additional cases the Inspectorate stated that the deficiency was still present, while declining to impose a fine.

Linking the Inspectorate's comments and university interventions. Table 9.3 shows a generalized model and timeline of the relationship between the various

Table 9.3 The chain between the Schools Inspectorate's comments, the schools' action plans, agreement with the National Board of education and tasks given to the universities at the model school

Schools Inspectorate's report (school unit level)	The Schools Inspectorate's follow-up (school unit level)	Action plans from the school	Agreement 2: Between the National Agency for Education and the school	Supplemental Agreement between the national Agency and the school	Task as per agreement between the National Agency for Education and the universities
June 25, 2015	May 26, 2016	April 12, 2016	May 11, 2016	November 28, 2017	December 9, 2016
1) Active teacher support 2) Individualized instruction 3) Prompt assessment of the students' need for special support 4) Formulation, follow-up and evaluation of action programs for students in need of special support 5) Safe and quiet environment for studies 6) Abusive treatment 7) Systematic quality assurance 8) Student health	The report from the school concerning the School inspections critic Is accepted by the school inspection And the school inspections critic is not considered a problem any more	Designation of process manager as support in processes for building the improvement organization. Process manager must have training in analytical skills Counselor/coach with extensive knowledge of the school's policy documents. Purpose: observe, coach, develop quality instruction Counselor trainings to create conditions for planning, organizing, collegial teaching based on prior areas; exhibit consensus on instruction and assessments Literacy boost Lectures/workshops Consensus on basic values and democratic mission. Competence assessment of teachers' ethical learning processes to enhance students' sense of self and motivation	<u>Initiatives</u> Pedagogic leadership, training and counseling. Systematic quality assurance: focus on Counseling: strengthen pedagogic leadership. Initiatives throughout the entire chain of command <u>Initiatives with regard to quality of instruction:</u> professional counseling for teachers, literacy boost, locally adapted education impacts' assessments and grading	Extend professional counseling for teachers	Administrative management/principals/advanced skills teachers/teachers in the municipality given locally adapted counseling. Content is mainly pedagogic leadership and systematic quality assurance: 1) <u>Process management and counseling targeting children and education manager/principals:</u> Build up sustainable school assessment organization and support municipality in its own efforts to build its model for assessment work 2) <u>Training and counseling in analysis of skills results as basis for school development</u> Administrative management/principals/advanced skills teachers 3) <u>Counselor training to advance teacher skills</u> 4) counseling of teachers provided to teachers in subject groups based on teacher's pedagogic plan. Also individual counseling through lesson visits and feedback

documents and analysis produced by the stakeholders in response to the identification of the 78 schools in 44 districts. The documents comprise the Schools Inspectorate's comments and its follow-up decisions, the schools' proposed action plans, Agreement 2 between the Swedish National Agency for Education and the school, and the agreement between the Agency and the universities. The model was derived by examining the patterns that reflect the timelines and experiences of the majority of the schools are intended to hypothetically illustrate the exchanges and experiences of the key stakeholders.

The first agreement with our test municipality was prepared on November 4, 2015. The decision emphasized that the school and the municipality had had low academic results for a number of years, as well as deficiencies in terms of systematic quality assurance. Forceful and broad criticisms of deficiencies with regard to systematic quality assurance were directed at grades 7–9, which serve students from roughly ages 14–16.

The table shows that, on June 25, 2015, the school received numerous comments from the Schools Inspectorate, of which the first six concerned the work being done with the students, particularly those in need of support. The comments clearly point out that there are deficiencies in the management of the school and in compliance with rules, plus a school culture that lacks safe and good learning environment for studies and have problems in terms of abusive treatment. Some of the deficiencies cited in the other items also have clear connections to deficiencies in the work and school culture.

It is noteworthy that an agreement was entered on November 4, 2016 between the school and the Swedish National Agency for Education for the school to take part in the CBS project. The school was then tasked with preparing a current status plan and developing action plans to improve conditions at the school. That document is dated April 12, 2016. It reflects only hints of the criticisms from the Schools Inspectorate. The school presumably failed to take the criticisms seriously since they believed that they were already dealt with when the school submitted its response to the Inspectorate's comments, a response that the Inspectorate then approved, saying that the deficiencies had been rectified. However, that approval did not occur until May 26, 2016, after the school had presented its action plans. Systematic quality assurance, which is the basis for the school development assumptions laid out by the Government and reflected in the Inspectorate's comments, is not mentioned in the school's action plans.

Systematic quality assurance is reintroduced in the next phase of the CBS process that engages the Swedish National Agency for Education and the school, including a focus on results development. This is followed by a number of initiatives pertaining to the quality of the instruction, a literacy boost, formative assessment training, and professional counseling for teachers.

It is worth noting that the professional counseling support is directed toward school improvement and building a personalized/individualized model for growth and development. This also includes training and counseling in analyzing academic results as a basis for school development. On the other hand, the last two items — counseling of advanced skilled teachers and counseling of teachers— were included

as a result of initial conversations with the supporting university staff. However, these can easily be seen as responsive to the school’s self-analysis and report. In other words, the university’s proposed response sought to meet both the self-analysis and the Inspectorate’s analysis.

Our table attempts to summarize the items in the document pertaining to the school’s proposed action plans that is Agreement 2 between the Swedish National Agency for Education and the school. One issue that arose is the difficulty of coherent interpretation of meaning of the Agreement, as there is no common language that clearly delineates the precise meaning of each of the terms, nor the relationship between stakeholders, objectives, functions and desirable results (Ball et al., 2012). This brings to mind the often-noted lack of a common language for describing school processes and, with the exception of standardized test results, the characteristics of an effectively functioning school (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000). One other aspect connected to the language can be that we are scrutinizing a hierarchical chain from the government through their agencies down to the local municipalities and the school district and the schools. Is this chain characterized by authority or thrust? There is in Sweden a growing criticism of the traditional top down governing chain and its structure and functions (SOU, 2018:47). There is a drift towards a governing system based on trust and capacity. When trust is given, the assumption is that the lower level has the capacity to act in relation to the organizational goals. This can also be an explanation for the lack of coherent language between the municipal and state levels. Is there a chain of thrust or is it broken? (Johansson et al., 2016).

However, although the language and meaning of educational terms is imprecise, there are clear connections between Agreement 2 and the agreement with the universities. But those agreements between the National Agency of Education and the seats of higher learning are formulated between two state agencies. They exhibit a number of recurring categories (Table 9.4).

Different initiatives are of course concealed under each heading. The question that arises is whether, despite everything, the will to change will be created through these school development-oriented initiatives, along with a transformation of the work and school culture that will lead to improved skills results for all students. The Schools Inspectorate’s primary criticism pertains to the school’s work with its low-performing students, and nothing specific is found in the texts. We reviewed all the comments directed by the Inspectorate to the schools that managed initiatives

Table 9.4 Recurring categories in agreements between the Swedish National Agency for Education and the universities

Counseling	34 instances
Instruction-related	33 instances
Pedagogic leadership	33 instances
Systematic quality assurance	32 instances
Collegial processes	17 instances
Student health issues	13 instances
Formative working methods	8 instances
Language-developing working methods	7 instances

targeting students who required support or special adaptation. We then supplemented the list with student health, which often affects such students, and found 100 comments directed at the schools. This is discussed further in the Summarizing Reflections section.

Summarizing Reflections

The reading through these documents trying to find their improvement narrative bolsters the impression that, despite low skills results and low goal fulfillment, the participants in the processes failed to note the connection between the quality of their activities and the instruction provided and the need to develop the schools in order to better address students who require extra support and adaptations. What remains as the strongest impression is the nearly total absence of any connection to the Inspectorate's comments with regard to deficiencies in the schools' work with low-performing students, safe and good learning environment for studies and abusive treatment.

With regard to the Government's third policy objective — targeting schools that face or are considered to be facing difficult conditions in terms of improving their results on their own — the analyses indicate that this will remain and can be a major problem.

These schools have been underperforming for the last 20 years, albeit without being aware of the fact. This is apparent in their action plans, which contain mainly general initiatives, and why we see so few traces of the Schools Inspectorate's comments in the schools' action plans. Furthermore, there are not many comments concerning the work with students in need of support and extra adaptations in the tasks assigned to the universities at the end of the process.

Another major problem with meeting the government's third policy objective is that the school districts responsible for these schools are underperforming in relation to the national levels in terms of both merit ratings and goal fulfillment. The ability of these school districts to help their schools improve their results and goal fulfillment may be highly questionable. In terms of the chain of command, we can see that, in the schools included in the CBS project, the school district level is too weak to provide support at the school level.

The challenge for the CBS project is to determine how the school district level and the entire local organization can be strengthened. Is it by counseling the chief administrator and their employees at the school office, or also by training the school districts with regard to their responsibilities? The analysis indicates that the entire local organization must be the object of targeted initiatives, in other words, the school district's policy and administrative levels and all the underperforming schools for which the school district is responsible.

Our analysis also shows that the results point to problems in the work and school culture. Part of this pertains to the view of the students outlined in the Schools Inspectorate's comments about the ways the schools are managed and governed

with respect to students who need support and extra adaptations. The following documents do not address how the schools are succeeding with such adaptations and the compensatory support outlined in the government description of the policy problem. This could be attributed to a lack of understanding, but also to an unwillingness to work together.

It is problematic that there is no major overlap or common language in the documents concerning the problems and initiatives at the same school, as there are many actors and activities that must function as support for the individual school. These differing interpretations make it difficult to monitor, assess and analyze what is successful and important in moving the process forward.

This lack of coherence between the documents does also affect the way the universities are interpreting their task according to the agreement with the National Agency of Education. But through the money spent on the different CBS projects and the involvement of many universities we can conclude that the state has managed to bring support structures to scale, but the process can be improved to give more coherent narratives and better goal fulfillment in relation to the Governments CBS policy.

- [1] Most municipalities in Sweden are responsible for a single school district.
- [2] Unfortunately, these are viewed by the Swedish National Agency for Education as municipality documents, and consequently are not documented in the Agency's database and could not be included in the analyses for this paper. This has of course affected our understanding of how school districts and schools analyze their problems, and how the connections between selection criteria such as the Inspectorate's comments, the school's action plans and the initiatives undertaken by the seats of higher learning are to function.
- [3] There were also a few comments directed at just a single school organizer, usually a private school, which were administrative in nature.

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