

How Districts' Central Offices Work—In 4 Charts



By Denisa R. Superville — March 31, 2023

1 min read



Bill Oxford/E+

The central office—the brain trust of the nation’s nearly 14,000 school districts—is a bit of a black hole. New data show wide variations in how central offices are organized, and that the size of the central office is not necessarily connected to a district’s enrollment.

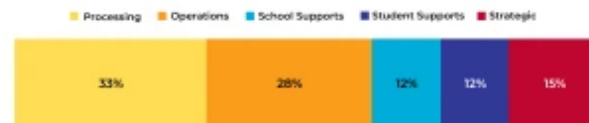
William Eger, the chief business officer in the Ravenswood City district, in California’s Bay Area, analyzed 87 districts’ central office arrangements. Here are some details about what he found—in charts.

More central office employees work on operations than on instruction

According to Eger's analysis, a majority of central office employees worked on things like procurement, the budget, and operations. Just about a quarter worked on school or student supports.

How Central Office Staff is Classified

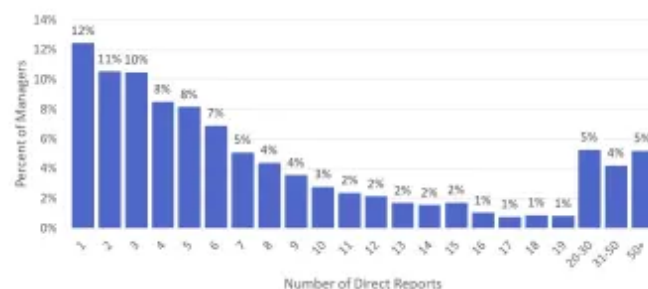
The majority of people in central office focus on keeping things running, not directly on teaching and learning.



SOURCE: Strategy in Structure: The Alignment of District Strategy and the Formal Structure of School Districts, William Edmond Eger, 2023.

A few 'super-managers' oversee 50 or more direct reports

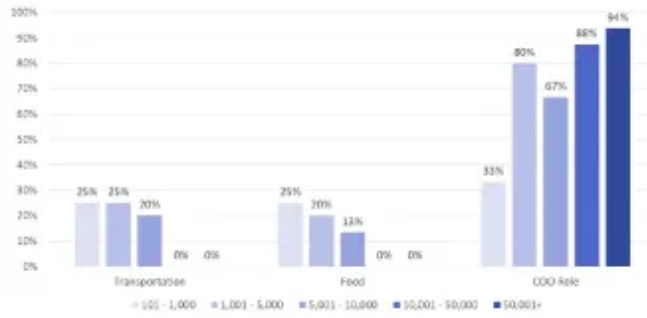
While the majority of managers in central offices oversee few people, 4 percent have between 31 and 50 direct reports and another 5 percent directly manage more than 50 people. The chart below shows that most managers have fewer than 10 people, but a few have an astonishingly high number of direct reports.



SOURCE: Strategy in Structure: The Alignment of District Strategy and the Formal Structure of School Districts, William Edmond Eger, 2023

Larger districts have operations manager roles

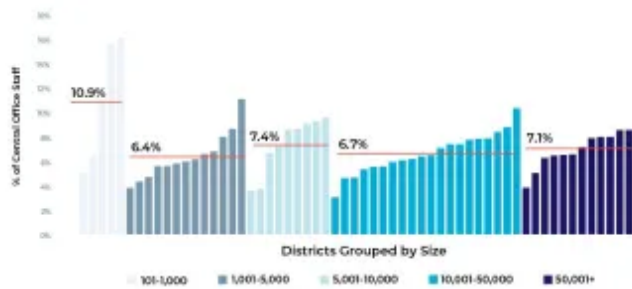
This chart shows how job duties change as a function of district size. In smaller districts, the superintendent tends to oversee a number of traditional operational duties, such as managing the transportation and food programs. But as enrollment grows, districts often add operations managers, such as a chief operations officer, to take over those responsibilities.



SOURCE: Strategy in Structure: The Alignment of District Strategy and the Formal Structure of School Districts, William Edmond Eger, 2023

Central office staff as a share of total employees

This chart shows the percentage of central office staff as a share of the district’s total employees. In general, the relationship shows little connection to the size of the district—the smallest districts, not the largest, have the highest relative share of central office employees.



SOURCE: Strategy in Structure: The Alignment of District Strategy and the Formal Structure of School Districts, William Edmond Eger, 2023



Denisa R. Superville

Assistant Editor, Education Week

Denisa R. Superville is an assistant editor at Education Week who focuses on principals and school leadership.