

WHAT DIRECTORS THINK ABOUT THE CAPABILITIES OF MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS? AN ANALYSIS OF THE STATES OF ESPÍRITO SANTO AND PIAUÍ

O QUE PENSAM OS DIRETORES SOBRE AS CAPACIDADES DE GESTÃO DAS SECRETARIAS DE EDUCAÇÃO? UMA ANÁLISE DOS ESTADOS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO E DO PIAUÍ

¿LO QUE PIENSAN LOS DIRECTORES SOBRE LAS CAPACIDADES DE LA GESTIÓN DE LOS DEPARTAMENTOS DE EDUCACIÓN? UN ANÁLISIS DE LOS ESTADOS DE ESPÍRITO SANTO Y PIAUÍ



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ABSTRACT: The article analyzes the directors' perceptions of the management capabilities of the Education Departments in the states of Espírito Santo (ES) and Piauí (PI). The data comes from a questionnaire applied to 70 ES directors and 69 PI directors. For the analysis, we used the technical-administrative and political-relational dimensions proposed by Pires and Gomide (2016). When we analyze the data set in the two states, for these two dimensions, we realize that the two Secretariats operate and have contributed to the formation of management capabilities. However, the data suggests that this action is centralized, vertical, and top-down. The bottom-up vertical management and monitoring mechanisms, resulting from interactions between directors and Secretariats, seem more incipient, punctual, and intermittent. For the director's work to occur effectively, the Education Departments must promote the necessary conditions for the selection and training of directors, in addition to monitoring and monitoring schools.

KEYWORDS: State Capabilities. Management Capabilities. State Departments of Education. Responsibility and Responsibility. Director.

RESUMO: *O artigo analisa as percepções dos diretores sobre as capacidades de gestão das Secretarias de Educação dos estados do Espírito Santo (ES) e do Piauí (PI). Os dados provêm de um questionário (survey) aplicado a 70 diretores do ES e 69 diretores do PI. Para a análise, utilizamos as dimensões técnico-administrativa e político-relacional propostas por Pires e Gomide (2016). Ao analisarmos o conjunto dos dados nos dois estados, para essas duas dimensões, percebemos que as duas Secretarias atuam e têm contribuído para a formação de capacidades de gestão. Entretanto, os dados sugerem que essa atuação é centralizada, vertical e de cima para baixo. Os mecanismos de gestão e de monitoramento vertical de baixo para cima, fruto das interações entre os diretores e as Secretarias, parecem mais incipientes, pontuais e intermitentes. Para que a atuação do diretor ocorra de forma efetiva, as Secretarias de Educação devem promover condições necessárias para a seleção e formação dos diretores, além da realização do monitoramento e acompanhamento às escolas.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Capacidades Estatais. Capacidades de Gestão. Secretarias Estaduais de Educação. Responsabilização e Responsividade. Diretor.*

RESUMEN: *El artículo analiza las percepciones de los directivos sobre las capacidades de gestión de los Departamentos de Educación de los estados de Espírito Santo (ES) y Piauí (PI). Los datos provienen de un cuestionario aplicado a 70 directores de ES y 69 directores de PI. Para el análisis se utilizó las dimensiones técnico-administrativa y político-relacional propuestas por Pires y Gomide (2016). Cuando analizamos el conjunto de datos en los dos estados, para estas dos dimensiones, nos damos cuenta de que las dos Secretarías operan y han contribuido a la formación de capacidades de gestión. Sin embargo, los datos sugieren que esta acción es centralizada, vertical y de arriba hacia abajo. Los mecanismos verticales de gestión y seguimiento ascendentes, resultantes de las interacciones entre directores y secretarías, parecen más incipientes, puntuales e intermitentes. Para que la labor del director se desarrolle de manera efectiva, los Departamentos de Educación deben promover las condiciones necesarias para la selección y capacitación de los directores, además del seguimiento y seguimiento de las escuelas.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Capacidades del Estado. Capacidades de gestión. Departamentos estatales de educación. Responsabilidad y Responsabilidad. Director.*

Introduction

Based on the literature on state capacities (SC), the article analyzes the perceptions of principals regarding the management capacities of the Secretaries of Education of the states of Espírito Santo (ES) and Piauí (PI). The study starts from the premise that public schools are not independent entities individually responsible for the management of administrative and pedagogical processes and the performance of their teams and students. According to Oliveira and Daroit (2020), we assume that Secretaries and schools are institutional actors in a network, a multi-level network.

In this sense, based on the perspectives of school principals (actors who, by virtue of their role, are capable of positioning themselves on causal vectors), the article aims to analyze how the Secretaries have coordinated this multi-level network, what management capacities have been created, what dynamics guide such capacities, and how these vectors are oriented in relation to the daily life of schools. Based on the data, we are interested in discussing how the management capacities of these networks relate to the dynamics of accountability and responsiveness that shape and guide them.

Cardoso and Marengo (2019), Souza and Fontanelli (2020), Gomide, Machado, and Albuquerque (2021) state that SC refers to the skills, resources, and administrative, political, technical, and relational competencies that subnational governments possess to produce public policies, i.e., to formulate, implement, monitor, and evaluate. They are concerned, therefore, with a set of competencies and resources necessary for states to perform their political functions.

According to Pires and Gomide (2016), capacities can be unfolded into two analytical dimensions: (1) technical-administrative and (2) political-relational. The first is related to the functioning of qualified and professionalized bureaucracies endowed with the organizational, financial, and technological resources necessary to conduct government actions in a coordinated manner. It is associated with notions of efficiency and effectiveness. The second, in turn, encompasses the bureaucracy's capacity for interlocution, mobilization, and negotiation with multiple actors in a coordinated manner in policy processes, aiming at the construction of minimum consensuses and coalitions to support governmental plans, programs, and projects.

In the case of the two Secretaries (ES/PI), management capacity derives from these two dimensions and concerns the act of managing resources and people through planning and monitoring/follow-up of administrative and teaching-learning processes. Thus, we understand that management capacity is directly related to the debate on the accountability of the

Secretaries of Education and schools because the dynamics of action of these two institutional actors must be considered in an articulated and integrated manner: precisely because the Secretaries impact schools, schools also act on Secretaries, shaping vectors of causation and interdependent interaction. Secretaries and schools are, therefore, responsive and linked to each other in the processes of managing budgetary, administrative, pedagogical, and human resources, achieving results, and evaluating the learning and performance of teachers and students.

At the local level, the principal, together with their management team, is the bureaucrat who, institutionally, is connected by these two universes: that of the Secretariat and that of the school. These actors, together with the professionals who work in their schools, are responsible for the processes and daily life of these spaces. With their management teams, they also are the ones who directly relate to the Secretaries and to the bureaucrats who operate at this level. This dynamic configures a multi-level network of action and interaction that, ultimately, reflects the ethos of the Network, Secretariat, and Schools.

In the article, we analyze these capacities from two perspectives: (i) management capacities built by principals through the performance of their daily activities in the school, and (ii) management capacities provided/fostered by the Secretariat for principals to exercise their managerial and administrative functions. For the data analysis, we use the technical-administrative and political-relational dimensions proposed by Pires and Gomide (2016) as a reference. Based on these, analysis categories (sub-dimensions) were created with the aim of analyzing the Secretariat's performance from the directors' perspectives.

In addition to the introduction and final considerations, the article is organized into four sections. In the first, we discuss the concepts of state capacities and their connections with the management capacities of the Secretariats of Education. In the second, we present the adopted methodology. In the third and fourth, we analyze the technical-administrative and political-relational dimensions, respectively.

State Capacities (SC): Connections with the management capacities of the Secretariat of Education

Souza and Fontanelli (2020) state that SC is a comprehensive and multidimensional term. The authors emphasize that capacities can be extractive, coercive, administrative, directive, and legitimizing of the state. In this article, to understand this concept, we articulate the formulations of Pires and Gomide (2016), Cardoso and Marengo (2019), Souza and

Fontanelli (2020), Gomide, Machado, and Albuquerque (2021), Abrucio and Segatto (2021), Segatto, Euclides, and Abrucio (2021), and Abrucio and Viegas (2022).

We understand that SC is the characteristics and conditions that states have to produce public policies, i.e., to formulate, implement, monitor, and evaluate. They are concerned with a set of competencies and resources necessary for states to perform their political functions.

Pires and Gomide (2016) decomposed this concept into two dimensions: technical-administrative and political-relational. According to the authors, this "calibration" was necessary since contemporary SC research began associating this concept with the notion of governance. This literature takes into account the growing shift from arrangements focused exclusively on hierarchical structures of the state to more decentralized arrangements involving the participation of multiple actors. Therefore, according to Pires and Gomide (2016), in order to analyze SC, it is important to consider not only aspects related to a competent state bureaucracy but also dimensions derived from the inclusion and interaction among multiple actors in public policy processes.

The technical-administrative dimension concerns the existence and functioning of competent and professionalized bureaucracies endowed with the organizational, financial, and technological resources necessary to conduct government actions in a coordinated manner, being associated with notions of efficiency and effectiveness. It includes the professionalization of the bureaucracy, considering its training and appropriate human, financial, and technological resources available, instruments of intra and intergovernmental coordination, and monitoring and evaluation strategies. Grin, Demarco, and Abrucio (2021) state that a professional and qualified bureaucracy and effective government organization are essential for policy implementation.

The research analyzes SC and engages with this dimension. Marengo and Strohschoen (2018) stated that when public servants are statutory, with higher education, they are closer to a bureaucracy profile linked to autonomy and technical performance. Bureaucracy professionalization is based on traits such as entry into public service and job stability.

Cardoso and Marengo (2019) asserted that the training and type of bond of public servants are essential for the excellent performance and outcome of public administration, especially if the bond is statutory. The way the server is selected to join public management is a differential in the results to be achieved by him, which brings about the construction of an effective and efficient bureaucracy.

In analyzing SC through the technical-administrative dimension of the Secretariats of Education, the studies by Abrucio and Segatto (2021), Segatto, Euclides, and Abrucio (2021), and Abrucio and Viegas (2022) gain centrality. Although these studies focus on Municipal Secretariats of Education, they present relevant evidence for understanding the dynamics of the Secretariats, the aim of this article.

The authors showed that the quality of bureaucracy is associated with academic education, corresponding to a completed higher level and specialization. Moreover, they observed more significant variation in relation to planning and management tools and revealed an absence of specific careers in the Secretariats, with the majority of them being occupied by directors and teachers from schools, who do not always have the necessary managerial knowledge and usually change positions with each change of government. They also emphasized that there is still a lack of administrative autonomy in the Secretariats, a discontinuity of education secretaries, and weaknesses in bureaucratic careers.

The political-relational dimension is associated with the capacity for dialogue, mobilization, and negotiation of bureaucracy and its agents with other actors. According to Pires and Gomide (2016), this dimension is associated with the skills and procedures for including multiple actors in a coordinated manner in policy processes, aiming to build minimum consensuses and coalitions in support of government plans, programs, and projects. Segatto, Euclides, and Abrucio (2021) state that this dimension includes mechanisms for the interaction of bureaucracies with actors from the political system, institutionalized channels in decision-making processes, and coordination with internal and external control bodies.

Abrucio and Segatto (2021), Segatto, Euclides, and Abrucio (2021), and Abrucio and Viegas (2022) emphasized, regarding this dimension, that social participation instruments still need to advance, especially in the relationship between Secretariat-school-community/families, through actions that strengthen, for example, school councils. They also revealed that the mobilization of actors external to the Secretariat is almost incipient and emphasized the importance of the Secretariat's relationship with schools.

Regarding the Secretariat-school relationship, we assert that they are important institutional actors responsible for network management processes. According to Abrucio and Segatto (2021), Segatto, Euclides, and Abrucio (2021), and Abrucio and Viegas (2022), if there is a set of activities and routines that depend on the school, professionals, students, and the school community, there are others that require action, coordination, monitoring, and induction by the Departments of Education. Koslinski, Cunha, and Andrade (2014) state that Secretariats

are responsible for managing their network: they are strategic institutional actors in the management and coordination processes of school professionals, pedagogical processes, and school performance indices.

According to Brooke (2006), accountability policies, that is, accountability, through which information about the work of schools becomes public, consider directors and other members of the school staff responsible for the level of performance achieved by the institution. The principal, in this context, acts as an inducer of changes in the school. According to Abrucio (2010), there are four competencies that are aligned with the principal: (i) specific knowledge regarding education; (ii) interpersonal relationship with the school community, especially with teachers and students; (iii) ability to gain trust and attract the external community, mainly the family; (iv) and management skills.

However, according to Brooke (2006), the school cannot be solely held responsible for its results if the Departments of Education do not ensure indispensable conditions for quality work. This discussion is directly related to management capacities, that is, to manage and administer the Education Network based on its administrative, technical, political, and relational capacities.

Methodology

The data in this article are derived from the Practices of Management, Educational Leadership, and Education Quality (PGLEQE) research in high schools in Brazil, promoted by the *Instituto Unibanco* (IU) in partnership with researchers from different Brazilian universities³. One of the instruments used in the research was a questionnaire (survey) administered to 70 principals in the State Network of ES and 69 principals in the Network of PI.

The questionnaire contained 52 questions subdivided into three themes: (i) School Management and Leadership Practices (questions 2 to 20); (ii) School Characteristics (questions 21 to 25); and (iii) You in this school and your personal characteristics (questions 26 to 52). Drawing on the literature on state capacities (CE), we analyzed each question and selected 18 from the total that addressed dimensions associated with capacities.

³ For more detailed information about the Research, see Oliveira *et al.* (2024) in the opening article of this dossier "Dossiê: Práticas de Gestão, Liderança Educativa e Qualidade da Educação em Escolas de Ensino Médio no Brasil" published in this issue.

In this article, data analysis was conducted based on two dimensions: technical-administrative and political-relational. These dimensions are anchored in the studies of Pires and Gomide (2016), Marengo and Strohschoen (2018), Cardoso and Marengo (2019), Abrucio and Segatto (2021), Segatto, Euclides, and Abrucio (2021), and Abrucio and Viegas (2022). The first was unfolded into four categories (sub-dimensions): (i) Secretariat's Performance: resources, strategies, and guidelines for school management; (ii) Secretariat's Performance: monitoring and evaluation of school management; (iii) Secretariat's Performance: training and qualification of principals; and (iv) Secretariat's Performance: careers, incentives, and professional opportunities. The second was composed of three categories (sub-dimensions): (i) Secretariat's Performance: autonomy and motivation for school management; (ii) School/Secretariat Relationship: support and availability of the Secretariat; and (iii) Secretariat/External Actors Interaction.

Table 1 presents the dimensions, key expressions related to each of them, corresponding categories, and the questions from the directors' script that were utilized.

Chart 1 - Dimensions, key expressions, categories, and questions from the directors' script

Technical-Administrative Dimension		
Key Expressions	Categories	Director's Script Questions
existence and functioning of competent and professionalized bureaucracies (Pires; Gomide, 2016) efficiency and effectiveness (Pires; Gomide, 2016) operation of mechanisms for intragovernmental coordination (Pires; Gomide, 2016) formulation and implementation of public policies through a professionalized bureaucracy (Souza; Fontanelli, 2020) body of technical and specialized professionals in organizations and public policies (Abrucio; Segatto, 2021) professionalization of bureaucracy: training and resources (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) adequate and available human, financial, and technological resources (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) monitoring and evaluation of actions (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) more organizational, managerial, and administrative nature of	Secretariat's Performance: Resources, Strategies, and Guidelines for School Management	<u>Question 4</u> (Alternatives: 20 and 21); <u>Question 20</u> (Alternative: 7); <u>Question 21</u> (Alternatives: 2 and 3); <u>Question 33</u> (Alternatives: 7, 11 and 12); <u>Question 47</u> (Alternatives: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7)
	Secretariat's Performance: Monitoring and Evaluation of School Management	<u>Question 7</u> (Alternatives: 11 and 12); <u>Question 33</u> (Alternatives: 6, 8, 9, and 14)
	Secretariat's Performance: Training and Qualification of Directors	<u>Question 33</u> (Alternatives: 2 and 3); <u>Question 42</u> (Alternative: 5)
	Secretariat's Performance: Careers, Incentives, and Professional Opportunities	<u>Question 29</u> (Alternatives: 3, 4, 8, and 11); <u>Question 46</u> (Alternatives: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13)

bureaucracy (Grin; Demarco; Abrucio, 2021) organizational and professional structure of bureaucracy (Abrucio; Viegas, 2022) Governance and Deliberative Processes		
Technical-Administrative Dimension		
Key Expressions	Categories	Director's Script Questions
professionalization of bureaucracy: autonomy (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) skills and procedures for inclusion of multiple actors (social, economic, and political) (Pires; Gomide, 2016) legitimacy, learning, and innovation in government actions (Pires; Gomide, 2016) relations with non-state actors and society in general (Abrucio; Segatto, 2021) bureaucracy's capacity for interlocution and negotiation with other actors (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) mechanisms of interaction between Executive bureaucracies and actors of the representative political system (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) institutionalized channels in decision-making processes (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) articulation with internal and external control bodies (Segatto; Euclides; Abrucio, 2021) political and social articulation skills (Abrucio; Viegas, 2022)	Secretariat's Performance: autonomy and motivation for school management	<u>Question 14</u> (Alternatives: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7); <u>Question 15</u> (Alternatives: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8); <u>Question 27</u> (Alternatives: 5 and 6); <u>Question 33</u> (Alternative: 1)
	School/Secretariat Relationship: support and availability of the Secretariat	<u>Questions 2 and 3</u> (Alternative: 4); <u>Question 7</u> (Alternative: 10); <u>Question 16</u> [16.1 1st option/16.2 2nd option] (Alternatives: 3, 8 and 10); <u>Question 23</u> (Alternatives: 8 and 9); <u>Question 31</u> (Alternatives: 6 and 7); <u>Question 32</u> (Alternatives: 6 and 7); <u>Question 33</u> (Alternatives: 4, 5 and 10)
	Secretariat/External Actors Interaction	<u>Questions 2 and 3</u> (Alternative: 12); <u>Question 16</u> [16.1 1st option/16.2 2nd option] (Alternative: 5); <u>Question 31</u> (Alternatives: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5); <u>Question 32</u> (Alternatives: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5); <u>Question 33</u> (Alternative: 13)

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Although the directors' questionnaire was not created with the intention of analyzing the Secretariats' CE, the selected questions provide approximations that allow building relevant connections in this direction. Such connections will be presented in the following sections.

State and Management Capacities: Technical-Administrative Dimension

Secretariat's Performance: Resources, Strategies, and Guidelines for School Management

In this subtopic, we analyze questions that provide elements related to the resources, strategies, and guidelines of the Secretariat to support the actions of the directors and, consequently, the management of the schools. One of the selected questions concerns the three

main concerns that directors have regarding the school, beyond the challenges arising from the pandemic and considering the characteristics of the students.

Directors in ES pointed out the following concerns: an increase in the number of students with emotional problems (18.6%), disinterest and demobilization of students regarding studies (13.3%), and absenteeism/excessive student absences (12.4%). Directors in PI, on the other hand, highlighted the following aspects: student dropout (15.2%), an increase in the number of students with emotional problems (14.8%), and academic results of my school (*Prova Brasil* or others) (9.5%). Regarding these data, we note that in both states, there was concern about the emotional problems of students. This aspect may be justified by the fact that data collection took place in a post-pandemic context.

The data also showed that the directors did not show significant concerns about the lack of support from the Department of Education (ES: 0.0%; PI: 0.0%) nor the lack of human and material resources for school management (ES: 0.5%; PI: 2.4%). Regarding this information, it is worth asking: is this lack of concern due to the fact that directors have this support and resources from the Secretariat to carry out their functions?

Are they provided with possibilities through the actions of the Secretariat to build capacities/skills to manage the school? We consider that the concerns raised by the directors are legitimate and relate to the responsibilities of their position. Oliveira and Paes de Carvalho (2018) state that directors play an essential role in organizing school work and leading and coordinating the daily life of the school. According to the authors, their management capacity in mobilizing other school professionals towards more effective teaching and learning through articulation, planning, organization, and monitoring/evaluation indirectly influences the academic performance of students.

Furthermore, Oliveira and Giordano (2018) point out that, as a public servant (bureaucrat), the principal occupies their position and is invested by the power that appointed them, being the representative of the State. However, they are also representatives of the school professionals and the school community.

Therefore, this multiple representation refers to the political character of the principal, conferring centrality to their actions. However, the question arises as to whether the principals understand that, to address the identified concerns, they need management skills provided by the Secretariat. It is understood that this body, as a crucial institutional actor in the implementation of educational policies, should provide resources and tools for principals to develop their management skills.

When asked about what they take into consideration to evaluate the work done by teachers, in both states, the principals pointed out the same strategies as the most significant: they discuss the teacher's performance with the management team (ES: 31.4%; PI: 26.9%) and analyze the students' results (ES: 27.0%; PI: 29.9%). We note that, in both states, no relevant responses were found regarding considering the considerations made by higher management bodies to evaluate the teacher's work (ES: 0.7%; PI: 0.7%).

According to Koslinski, Cunha, and Andrade (2014), principals feel responsible for teachers' practices and believe they can, through their actions, demand results, evaluate teaching performance, and strategies to increase student performance. In this scenario, the data showed that principals believe they have the capacity to evaluate the teacher's work by discussing with the school team and analyzing student results, at the school level.

The question to be asked is: what about the responsiveness/responsibility of the Secretariat? Does this actor contribute to the principal building their capacities to evaluate the teacher's work? Is there a sector in the Secretariat that performs this monitoring and evaluation function of teachers' work, producing guidelines for the State Network? If there is such a sector, how do principals evaluate its performance in schools? And how does the Secretariat build its management capacities?

When asked if the school faces problems regarding high turnover of teaching staff and the lack of teachers for some subjects or grades/years, the data revealed, as shown in Table 1, that principals from both states do not face problems with these issues, as they most significantly responded rarely and sometimes. However, it is important to consider that in the State of PI, principals indicated that they often face problems with the high turnover of teaching staff (24.3%), which is considered a significant value compared to the other data found.

Table 1 – Teacher Insufficiency

Question 21	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
2. High turnover of teaching staff	32,9%	47,1%	12,9%	7,1%	30%	38,6%	24,3%	7,1%
3. Lack/non-existence of teachers for some subjects or grades/years	55,7%	40,0%	4,3%	0%	37,1%	37,1%	14,3%	11,4%

Scale: (1) Rarely; (2) Sometimes; (3) Often; (4) Frequently.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Regarding the resources, strategies, and guidelines of the Secretariat to support the actions of the principals, we highlight in the questionnaire the questions related to the Regional

Education Directorate (DRE)⁴. In Espírito Santo, the DRE is responsible for: (i) planning, coordinating, supervising, inspecting, guiding, and monitoring the operation of schools in its jurisdiction in physical, administrative, pedagogical, and legal aspects; (ii) monitoring and guiding the programs, projects, and activities that are part of the state education policy in its area of coverage; (iii) diagnosing needs, proposing, and implementing interventions in the state school network; and (iv) other related activities. Thus, this sector is concerned with the Secretariat's decentralized operation. In Piauí, the DRE is a sector that supports the management of the State Network in a decentralized manner, assisting in teacher placement, and pedagogical, and financial management.

We noticed, from the data, that directors from both states agreed that this sector sets educational objectives, ensures the technical support that schools need to improve teaching and learning, and ensures that schools have the physical conditions and equipment to function properly, as shown in Table 2. However, the level of total agreement was more explicit in the state of Espírito Santo. In the state of Piauí, although the percentage of responses was high, the agreement was more partial.

Table 2 – Director's Perception of the Regional Education Directorate (DRE): Setting Objectives, Technical Support, and Ensuring Physical Conditions and Equipment

Question 33	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
7. Sets clear educational objectives for this school.	0%	2,9%	24,3%	72,9%	4,3%	14,3%	42,9%	38,6%
11. This school has ensured that it has the technical support it needs to improve its teaching and learning.	0%	0%	31,4%	68,6%	4,3%	10%	52,9%	32,9%
12. Ensured that this school had the physical conditions and equipment to function properly.	0%	2,9%	40,0%	57,1%	8,6%	14,3%	52,9%	24,3%

Scale: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree somewhat; (3) Agree somewhat; (4) Strongly agree.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Marengo (2017) and Cardoso and Marengo (2019) point out that the way a public servant is selected to enter public management is different from the results to be achieved by him, which brings about the construction of an effective and efficient bureaucracy. In the case

⁴ In ES, the current nomenclature for the DRE is the Regional Superintendency of Education (SRE). In PI, it corresponds to the Regional Education Management (GRE). These sectors are included in the Secretariats' organization chart in both states.

of the selection for the position of director, Oliveira and Paes de Carvalho (2018) and Oliveira and Giordano (2018) affirm that there are different strategies adopted by Education Networks to assign the school director function, with different consequences for work and school dynamics. Pereda, Lucchesi, Mendes, and Bresolin (2019) state that when there are more technical and democratic processes for choosing the director, there is a greater likelihood of selecting directors who are more qualified in terms of leadership and managerial skills.

The data revealed that, in both states, the selection process for the director position is simplified. This response was more significant in the state of Espírito Santo (75.7%). In Piauí, although this criterion appeared in the directors' responses (48.6%), technical or political appointment by the Department of Education or another agency was also mentioned significantly (25.7%).

Data provided by the Department of Education informs that, in Espírito Santo, the selection process for the director position aims to select, through technical competence criteria, effective teachers and pedagogues from the state education system to perform this function. The current selection process for school directors was instituted by Ordinance No. 197-R, of September 1, 2022, which "establishes the procedures for the selection of effective state teaching staff, to exercise the function of School Director of the state public network".

Thus, according to the aforementioned ordinance, to participate in the selection process, the employee must meet the following criteria: not have any impediment for bank transactions in the Individual Taxpayer Registry (NIN); not be under disciplinary administrative proceedings (PAD) at the Secretariat's Office of the Ombudsman; have availability to work during the shifts at the school unit; not fall under any of the disqualification scenarios outlined in the current legislation; not have relatives up to the 3rd degree of civil consanguinity, nor spouse, serving at the school; be an effective employee in the state public teaching staff of ES and be in active service; have the minimum qualification required for the highest level of education offered by the school unit; and be part of the pre-registration list of professionals for admission to the position of school director. The selection process is carried out upon vacancy of the position, whether at the employee's request, due to retirement, or by decision of the Regional Education Superintendence (SER), with a presentation of reasons and considering the current procedures.

In the state network of Piauí, the selection for the position of director occurs through a reserve roster called the "Managerial Bank." The roster is formed through a selection process that involves four stages: (i) Registration; (ii) Approval in a School Management course, to be

conducted on a Virtual Platform, with a workload of 40 hours; (iii) Completion of the Qualification and Certification Exam in School Management (objective questions); and (iv) Interview.

Teachers, coordinators, or pedagogical supervisors belonging to the effective staff of the State Department of Education can apply for the reserve roster and must meet the following requirements: have a bachelor's degree; have a minimum of two years of proven teaching experience; be effectively assigned to schools in the state network, Regional Education Management, or the headquarters of the Secretariat, in the municipality where the desired school is located; be in compliance with electoral obligations and, in the case of male candidates, also with military obligations; have no criminal record and enjoy full political rights; not have been penalized due to disciplinary, civil, or criminal proceedings in the last four years and/or not be under disciplinary administrative proceedings (PAD).

In addition to these requirements, candidates who have previously held the position of school director must present a negative statement of debts issued by the Regional Education Management of the State Department of Education (SEDUC), regarding the accountability for financial resources received by the school during their management. They must also present a management plan that includes performance goals to be implemented at the school; a declaration of availability for the position, distributed to cover all working days of the week according to the school's operating shifts, in line with pedagogical work and the development of programs and projects, as per the manager's responsibilities; and specify the school for which they are primarily competing.

Secretariat's Role: Monitoring and Evaluation of School Management

We examine how directors perceive the monitoring and evaluation conducted by the Secretariat in schools. According to data provided by the Department of Education, the ES sector responsible for planning, monitoring, and evaluation is the Undersecretariat of Planning and Evaluation. This sector has the following duties: coordinate the formulation of educational policies in line with government guidelines, plans, and actions; develop plans, programs, and projects in the field of education; formulate the Multiannual Plan of Actions, the annual budget proposal, and the guidelines and priorities for the Budgetary Directives Law; monitor the physical and financial execution of programs and projects; evaluate primary education results;

produce, analyze, and disseminate statistical data on basic education; and other related activities.

In PI, the responsible sector is the Strategic Management Unit, which includes the Planning and Evaluation Management, responsible for the Secretariat's strategic plan. Currently, the Secretariat is operating through projects (an average of 30 prioritized projects), and monitoring is carried out by the Project Office, established in 2023. This office aims to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of resource utilization, ensuring that projects are delivered on time and within budget and establishing quality standards, enabling the Secretariat to achieve its strategic objectives.

One of the selected questions allowed us to analyze how directors perceive the Secretariat's monitoring when asked about the contingencies faced in school management in the last academic year. In ES, when asked about the frequency with which they respond to unforeseen information requests from regional/central agencies or other external agencies, directors responded that they are requested once a month (22.9%) and 2 to 3 times per week (18.6%). In PI, they mentioned that they respond daily (21.4%), followed by 2 to 3 times per week (20.0%).

Regarding receiving unplanned visits from representatives of the Department of Education or other external agents, ES respondents stated that they have not faced this contingency (40.0%). In PI, however, directors reported facing this situation 2 to 3 times per semester (31.4%) and once per semester (20.0%).

Analyzing the performance of the Regional Education Directorate (DRE), Table 3 organizes data for both states regarding: the DRE's awareness of school events, monitoring of goals to be achieved by educational institutions, evaluation of directors' performance, and technical and pedagogical support to aid in analyzing school performance information. Directors in both states acknowledge the role of this sector in monitoring and evaluating directors regarding their performance. We highlight that the level of agreement was more explicit in the state of ES. In PI, there was a greater variation between partial and total agreement.

What directors think about the capabilities of management of education departments? An analysis of the states of Espírito Santo and Piauí

Table 3 – Director's Perception of the DRE: School Awareness, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Technical and Pedagogical Support

Question 33	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
6. Aware of what is happening in this school.	0%	2,9%	20,0%	77,1%	0%	5,7%	40,0%	54,3%
8. Systematically monitors the fulfillment of goals set for this school.	0%	1,4%	12,9%	85,7%	0%	11,4%	47,1%	41,4%
9. Evaluate the performance of school directors under its responsibility.	0%	2,9%	20,0%	77,1%	2,9%	12,9%	41,4%	42,9%
14. Took care to provide technical and pedagogical support to support the analysis of information about your school's results.	0%	0%	30%	70%	1,4%	11,4%	50%	37,1%

Scale: (1) Totally disagree; (2) Partially disagree; (3) Partially agree; (4) Totally agree.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Secretariat's Role: Training and Qualification of Directors

Grin, Demarco, and Abrucio (2021) assert that a professional and qualified bureaucracy is indicative of State Capacity. According to Marengo (2017), a qualified bureaucracy requires entry through public competition, combined with job stability, university education, and ongoing training as necessary attributes for performing its activities.

In this context, related to training and qualification, directors were questioned about the DRE's role in providing professional development opportunities for teachers and whether this sector is involved in the director's professional development. As can be seen in Table 4, the data revealed that directors in both states acknowledged this sector in assigning these activities. Again, we emphasize that the level of agreement was more explicit in the state of ES. In PI, despite the high percentage of responses, the agreement was more partial.

Table 4 – Director's Perception of the DRE: Professional Development for Teachers and Directors

Question 33	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
2. Provided opportunities for professional development for teachers in this school.	0%	5,7%	32,9%	61,4%	11,4%	11,4%	55,7%	21,4%
3. Took care of your professional development (as a director).	1,4%	5,7%	30,0%	62,9%	8,6%	10%	61,4%	20%

Scale: (1) Totally disagree; (2) Partially disagree; (3) Partially agree; (4) Totally agree.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Directors indicated factors that contributed to their performance based on their professional trajectory. Regarding the training provided by the Secretariat, ES directors emphasized that it significantly contributed to the execution of their activities (71.4%). PI directors, on the other hand, stated that the training contributed (41.4%) and greatly contributed (57.1%). Based on this data, we can consider that, in both states, the training offered by the Secretariat is relevant to the directors' performance. We can inquire whether these training sessions promote the development of directors' management capacities. If so, it would be pertinent to evaluate whether directors, based on the training received, can effectively analyze if they have contributed to the exercise of their activities.

Another factor to be considered, based on the data, is the fact that directors in both states also significantly highlighted the contribution of their experiences in other management roles (87.1% in ES and 84.3% in PI) associated with professional training and qualification. Such data reinforce that the management capacities of directors have a strong relationship with their performance at the school level, as directors, according to Oliveira and Paes de Carvalho (2018), play a central role in organizing school work by leading the management team and acting, above all, in administrative coordination.

Secretary's Performance: Careers, Incentives, and Professional Opportunities

Regarding careers, incentives, and opportunities offered by the Secretariat, directors, when projecting, in five years, which position/role they would like to perform, responded that they intended to continue as directors of the same school (ES: 61.4%; PI: 47.1%). This data reveals that directors enjoy and identify with their activities and workplace.

Data provided by the Department of Education indicate that in ES, there is no specific career plan for the position of school director, with the designated employees for this position subject to the career plan of effective teaching professionals in the network. Additionally, regarding remuneration, it is currently regulated by *Portaria*, 060-R, dated March 9, 2021, which establishes criteria for calculating the typological profile of state public school units for the specific purpose of assigning remuneration for the position of school director.

This typological profile of schools is defined based on official data from the State School Management System (Seges) and the School Census, observing the following criteria: number of enrolled students; teaching stages and modalities offered; operating shifts; percentage

occupancy rate of effectively occupied classrooms (total number of enrolled students divided by the maximum enrollment capacity, multiplied by 100); and the school's socioeconomic index.

In PI, as in ES, there is also no specific career plan for the position of school director. There is additional remuneration for directors who work in full-time schools.

The data also indicated that there were no significant responses regarding the intention to assume roles in Technical and Pedagogical Advisory in the Management, Core, Directorate, or Regional Superintendence (ES: 7.1%; PI: 12.9%) and neither in School Inspection/Supervision (ES: 0.0%; PI: 11.4%). Such data may lead to the following question: are there guidelines, in both states, that promote career progression by encouraging the occupation of positions in the Secretariat as happens in the state network of Ceará?

Regarding the positions/roles that directors held before assuming the school's leadership, the data revealed that, both in ES and PI, the most significant function mentioned was that of a teacher (both in the current school [ES: 22.9%; PI: 50%] and in another school [ES: 27.1%; PI: 35.7%]). We emphasize that, regarding the role of technical and pedagogical advisors in the Management, Core, Directorate, or Regional Superintendence, no significant percentages were found. These data reinforce the previously raised question of whether there are incentives for directors to work in sectors within the Secretariat.

State and Management Capacities: Political-Relational Dimension

Secretary's Performance: Autonomy and Motivation for School Management

Regarding the autonomy of directors to carry out their functions, we noticed some differences between the two states, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5 – Directors' Autonomy: Pedagogical Activities

Question 14	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Define the use of funds allocated to the school through programs like PDDE and similar ones.	60,0%	37,1%	2,9%	0,0%	31,4%	58,6%	5,7%	4,3%
2. Define the school's curriculum offer (offered subjects).	0,0%	11,4%	45,7%	42,9%	10,0%	34,3%	38,6%	17,1%
3. Define the subjects offered for each grade/year of high school.	0,0%	11,4%	41,4%	47,1%	8,6%	31,4%	37,1%	22,9%

4. Define the curriculum planning (teaching contents) to be taught in each subject.	4,3%	42,9%	28,6%	24,3%	18,6%	52,9%	22,9%	5,7%
5. Select textbooks (PNLD) and other texts used in the school	44,3%	52,9%	2,9%	0,0%	24,3%	58,6%	15,7%	1,4%
6. Establish rules of discipline and school coexistence.	45,7%	40,0%	12,9%	1,4%	51,4%	48,6%	0,0%	0,0%
7. Hire consultancy for teacher training.	2,9%	5,7%	31,4%	60,0%	14,3%	27,1%	38,6%	20,0%

Scale: (1) Very high; (2) High; (3) Low; (4) Very low.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

The data revealed that directors have autonomy to define the use of funds allocated to the school, curriculum planning, selection of textbooks (PNLD) and other texts, and the establishment of rules of discipline and school coexistence. We consider that these aspects concern the daily actions of directors in schools, illustrating their management capacity.

The data also revealed that directors in both states do not have the autonomy to hire consultancy for teacher training. We can deduce, then, that this function falls under the jurisdiction of the Secretariat. Regarding the definition of the school's curriculum offer and the offering of subjects for each grade/year of High School, differences in the two states were observed. In ES, directors reported having low or very low autonomy in these situations. In PI, however, responses were concentrated in high and low autonomy.

Still, regarding the autonomy of directors, we can see in Table 6 other aspects related to this issue. The data showed that directors, in both states, did not have the autonomy to hire a consultancy to support the development of projects at the school, for the elaboration and execution of improvement plans for the school, for carrying out minor repairs and fixes, for the acquisition of materials for the school, and the acquisition of permanent assets such as television, DVD, printer, and computer. We can deduce, then, that such functions are more related to the Secretariat in terms of administrative and budgetary aspects, reinforcing the centrality of this body in these processes.

Tabela 6 – Autonomia diretores: atividades administrativas

Question 15	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Hiring consultancy to support project development at the school.	14,3%	12,9%	35,7%	37,1%	7,1%	22,9%	42,9%	27,1%
2. Hiring consultancy to improve school management.	17,1%	37,1%	25,7%	20,0%	7,1%	21,4%	42,9%	28,6%
3. Developing improvement plans for the school.	1,4%	11,4%	42,9%	44,3%	7,1%	12,9%	64,3%	15,7%
4. Executing improvement plans.	1,4%	12,9%	47,1%	38,6%	5,7%	22,9%	60,0%	11,4%
5. Making minor repairs and renovations.	1,4%	1,4%	31,4%	65,7%	8,6%	24,3%	51,4%	15,7%
6. Acquiring materials for the school (such as notebooks, pencils, pens, stationery, etc.).	1,4%	0,0%	15,7%	82,9%	2,9%	14,3%	52,9%	30,0%
7. Conducting more complex repairs and renovations (e.g., bathroom renovations).	17,1%	27,1%	37,1%	18,6%	24,3%	42,9%	24,3%	8,6%
8. Acquiring permanent assets (television, DVD player, printer, computer).	5,7%	15,7%	42,9%	35,7%	10,0%	30,0%	44,3%	15,7%

Scale: (1) Very high; (2) High; (3) Low; (4) Very low.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

The data also revealed differences between the states regarding the autonomy to hire a consultancy to improve school management, as well as to carry out more complex repairs and renovations, such as bathroom renovations. Concerning the former, the data indicated that directors in ES reported having high and low autonomy, respectively. Directors in PI, on the other hand, reported having low and very low independence, respectively. Regarding the latter point, we note that directors in PI claimed to have autonomy for carrying out more complex repairs and renovations. Is there any directive in the state that ensures directors greater autonomy in budget execution at the school level?

Regarding the relationship between autonomy and the director's work, as depicted in Table 7, the majority of directors in ES believe they can influence the improvement of the work done by teachers and the performance of students. Most directors in PI are divided between partially agreeing and disagreeing. However, when we add up the percentages of "completely disagree" and "partially disagree," which are 54.3% and 61.5%, respectively, it reinforces that

directors in this state believe they can improve the work of teachers and the academic performance of students.

Table 7 - Perception of the Work

Question 27	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
5. There is little I, as a principal, can do to improve teachers' work.	61,4%	30,0%	7,1%	1,4%	21,4%	32,9%	41,4%	4,3%
6. There is little I, as a principal, can do to improve students' academic performance.	62,9%	28,6%	8,6%	0%	28,6%	32,9%	34,3%	4,3%

Scale: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree Somewhat; (3) Agree Somewhat; (4) Strongly Agree.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

The data also showed, through the data, how the DRE has been encouraging principals to innovate and try new strategies to improve the school, which we associate with autonomy. The data revealed that principals in both states agreed and acknowledged the DRE's actions in this regard, as we can see in Table 8.

Table 8 - Principal's Perception of the DRE: Encouragement of Innovation

Question 33	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. It has encouraged you to innovate and try new ways to improve the school.	0%	1,4%	31,4%	67,1%	5,7%	4,3%	52,9%	37,1%

Scale: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree Somewhat; (3) Agree Somewhat; (4) Strongly Agree.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

The data revealed that the level of total agreement was higher among principals in ES. In the state of PI, principals were divided between partially agreeing and fully agreeing.

School/Secretariat Relationship: Support and Availability of the Secretariat and the Role of the DRE

Abrucio and Viegas (2022) assert that the relationship between the school and the Secretariat, as well as the establishment of mechanisms and communication strategies between these two institutional actors, are significant indicators of State Capacity (CE). Therefore, to verify the School/Secretariat relationship, we analyzed questions addressing the director's work routine in a typical week.

In both states, directors indicated that the activity where they spend the most time is performing administrative tasks and managing the school's financial resources (ES: 25.4%; PI: 25.0%). The second most mentioned by directors in ES was conducting meetings and providing guidance for the school management team's work (15.2%). In PI, directors mentioned monitoring and developing student learning through the monitoring of school results (13.6%). Regarding participation in meetings and gatherings promoted by the Department of Education and regional agencies, the data showed a low percentage in both states (ES: 2.2%; PI: 8.6%).

Oliveira and Paes de Carvalho (2018) and Oliveira and Giordano (2018) assert that in the school environment, the director assumes different demands and tasks: administrative, bureaucratic, relational, pedagogical, among others. Additionally, the authors highlight the centrality of the director due to their activities involving articulation, planning, organization, and monitoring of pedagogical activities, beyond administrative aspects.

The data revealed that directors, in their daily routine, perform tasks related more to administration, management, and school monitoring. These aspects lead to the following question, which, although connected to the research and relevant for discussion, exceeds the scope of this article: what support does the Secretariat offer in the administrative and managerial activities carried out by the directors? In other words, what are the technical and managerial capacities that the Secretariat has provided for directors to carry out their activities?

Regarding aspects that directors considered most important for school improvement and student learning, we noticed, in both states, a low percentage of directors' participation in meetings and gatherings promoted by the Department of Education and regional agencies (ES: 0.0%; PI: 4.4%). Directors cited the most significant monitoring of students' development and learning through the monitoring of school results (ES: 43.1%; PI: 32.4%).

Regarding the contingencies faced by directors during the last academic year, we analyzed participation in unscheduled meetings with regional bodies or other external agents. The data showed differences between the two states. In ES, directors stated that participation in unscheduled meetings occurs once a month (25.7%), followed by the option "I have not faced this contingency" (21.4%). On this aspect, directors in PI indicated the option "2 to 3 times per semester" as the most significant (21.4%), followed by the option "every 15 days" (15.7%).

Still regarding the School/Secretariat relationship, the data revealed that when directors, in both states, face problems in school management that are difficult to solve, they turn to the Directorate, Management, Nucleus, or Regional Superintendence as a second option (ES:

32.9%; PI: 31.4%). This data suggests that there seems to be a channel of dialogue between the Secretariat and the school.

The first option indicated by ES directors was "members of the management team" (52.9%). In PI, directors, on the other hand, turn to the "School Council" (35.7%). We may inquire: what are the functions of this Council? Who are its members? What is its discretionary power and its capacity to influence the daily life of the school?

Directors also evaluated their relationship with professionals from higher authorities (Regional, Department of Education), as well as with professionals from neighboring schools. The data revealed that, in both states, directors considered the relationship to be good and very good in both instances.

Regarding the support that the school has received from the State Department of Education and the Regional Directorate of Education in the last three years, directors in both states significantly affirmed that they feel supported by this body and sector. According to the directors, this support has greatly improved the quality of the school's work. As we can see in Table 9, although the percentage is high in both states, the assessment of the quality of support to the Secretariat was higher in ES.

Table 9 – Support from the Department of Education and the Regional Directorate of Education

Question 31	Espírito Santo		Piauí	
	1	2	1	2
6. State Department of Education	100%	0%	97,1%	2,9%
7. Regional Directorate of Education	90,0%	10,0%	98,6%	1,4%

Scale: (1) Yes; (2) No.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Finally, regarding the Regional Directorate of Education's (DRE) efforts to promote directors' involvement in school-related decisions, the availability of this sector, and the promotion of collaborative work among directors, in both states, directors recognized and agreed with the functions of this sector when considering these aspects, as can be observed in Table 10.

Table 10 – Director's perception of the DRE: relationship with the school

Question 33	Espírito Santo				Piauí			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
4. Involved you in decisions regarding this school	0%	7,1%	41,4%	51,4%	7,1%	18,6%	47,1%	27,1%
5. Is available when you need it	0%	1,4%	21,4%	77,1%	1,4%	8,6%	50%	40%
10. Has provided you with opportunities for collaborative work with other directors.	0%	4,3%	31,4%	64,3%	5,7%	11,4%	41,4%	41,4%

Scale: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree somewhat; (3) Agree somewhat; (4) Strongly agree.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

We emphasize that the level of total agreement was higher in ES. In the state of PI, there was greater variation in responses, partially agreeing with the DRE's performance.

Secretariat/External Actors Interaction

Lotta and Vaz (2015) argue that the involvement of new actors beyond government entities has contributed to initiatives and funding for public education. With the engagement of new actors, the Secretariat exercises its capacity for dialogue, mobilization, and negotiation.

Regarding this aspect, we found, through the data, that in a typical week, directors in both states reported that it is not part of their daily routine to meet with agents/partners external to the school (the guardianship council and the community association). We observed a low percentage in both states: ES: 0.0%; PI: 0.7%. Since it is not part of the directors' routine activities, they did not consider these meetings to improve the school and students' learning. Again, the data reinforce that directors assume responsibility for the quality of the school and the student's learning process.

When facing problems in school management that are difficult to solve, the data informed us that directors do not turn to external technical advisors. As mentioned earlier, they turn to the Regional Directorate, Management, Core or Regional Superintendence, the management team members, and the school council.

Regarding the support the school has received from external actors in the last three years, the data showed that in ES, directors emphasized the support of both public and private universities and colleges (65.7%), as well as the support of the Ministry of Education (MEC)/National Education Council (CNE) (75.7%). Concerning the quality of this support improving the school's work, directors stated that in relation to universities and colleges, this

support has greatly improved by 35.9%. Regarding the MEC/CNE, the percentage found was 50.0%.

In PI, we highlight a high percentage of support from MEC/CNE (80.0%). When evaluating the support received to improve the school, directors were divided between "little" (41.4%) and "much" (45.7%). Based on this data, we emphasize that both states recognize the role of the federal government. They seem to understand the role of the MEC as an agent inducing educational policies.

Regarding the support from other external actors, we found that companies support the state of ES more (35.7%) compared to the state of PI (18.6%). Regarding the support from foundations and non-profit, non-governmental organizations, and the neighborhood council or community organizations, the percentages were more diffuse in ES, being divided between having or not having support, as can be seen in Table 11. In PI, the percentage found emphasized the lack of support from these latter external actors.

Table 11 - External Support

Question 31	Espírito Santo		Piauí	
	1	2	1	2
1. Foundations and non-profit non-governmental organizations	48,6%	51,4%	40,0%	60,0%
4. Neighborhood council or community organizations	44,3%	55,7%	17,1%	82,9%

Scale: (1) Yes; (2) No.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Finally, regarding the DRE's role in selecting relevant external support initiatives for school priorities, directors from both states agreed with this sector's actions. We emphasize that in both ES and PI, the percentage related to partially agree was higher (ES: 48.6%; PI: 50.0%) compared to fully agree (ES: 45.7%; PI: 37.1%).

Final considerations

In this article, we analyzed school directors' perceptions of the management capacities of the Education Secretariats of Espírito Santo and Piauí. When analyzing capacities based on the technical-administrative and political-relational dimensions, the data reveal that, concerning the first dimension (technical-administrative), in both states, directors highlight the

performance of the DRE (a sector within the organizational chart of both Secretariats) regarding monitoring, evaluation of directors, and providing opportunities for professional development. Also highlighted, concerning professional qualification, were the training offered by the Secretariats as relevant to their performance. Despite these aspects, for situations involving the evaluation of teachers' work, the data show that directors do not significantly consider the assessments made by higher management bodies.

Regarding the second dimension (political-relational), the data informs that directors in both states have greater autonomy concerning the daily aspects of their actions within the school context, illustrating their management capabilities. The Secretariats, on the other hand, have greater independence regarding administrative and budgetary aspects, reinforcing the centrality of these bodies in both states. Directors state feeling supported by the Secretariat in carrying out their activities, noting that this support has contributed to improving the quality of their work. Regarding the Secretariat's interaction with external actors, directors highlight the role of the MEC/CNE as essential agents in shaping educational policies.

According to Koslinski, Cunha, and Andrade (2014), the school and the director are not the only ones responsible for teachers' and students' performance. It is important to consider the support of the Education Secretariats and intermediary instances for schools to achieve their goals, or even the establishment of goals for higher education management instances. From this aspect and the data found, we notice a belief in the director's role regarding their abilities and capacities to perform their work, illustrating their ability to manage the school's functioning.

Thus, the data suggests that directors feel responsible for improving the school and student learning. These data are consistent with Brooke (2006) and Koslinski, Cunha, and Andrade (2014) in asserting that directors consider themselves responsible for the level of performance achieved by the school institution. These aspects lead us to inquire: what is the responsibility of the State Department of Education? How does the Secretariat monitor student learning? How does it communicate with directors? How do the guidelines formulated for the Network reach the schools?

It seems important to question whether, beyond the capacities built by directors through their experiences and the daily aspects of their actions, Education Secretariats foster and equip these capacities for directors. In this direction, we also inquire about how Secretariats develop their administrative and relational capacities to manage their Network.

When analyzing the data set from both states, we perceive that both Secretariats act and have contributed to the formation of management capacities. However, the data suggests that

this action is centralized, top-down, and vertical. In other words, the Secretariats define guidelines and management and monitoring mechanisms that will be transferred to the directors, who will be responsible for disseminating and mobilizing their teams in schools. The bottom-up vertical management and monitoring mechanisms resulting from interactions between directors and Secretariats appear more incipient, sporadic, and intermittent.

In this context, both Secretariats still adopt the classic approach of responsiveness, responding and acting more according to the demands of the directors than following structured routines and strategic planning. This approach potentially contributes to a logic of accountability and blame for directors, one of the adverse effects of the fragility of the Secretariats' management capacity, evidenced by the division and antagonism between the two scenarios: that of the school and that of the Secretariat.

Therefore, for the directors' and other members of the school team's actions to occur effectively, education secretariats must promote necessary conditions for the selection and adequate training of directors, as well as conducting visits, monitoring, and follow-ups to schools. The Secretariats represent an essential component for building the quality of schools and, therefore, should be considered central in the management and implementation processes of any educational policy/program.

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