

Letter from the Director



May, 2016

Dear Colleagues,

Just as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is receiving prominent attention in educational conversations, we at the BSCP Center are beginning to focus on helping states address ESSA guidelines. One resource we are currently developing is a podcast series about the impact of the changing education environment on states from the perspective of those that will lead these changes. Our goal is to capture and provide insights from several state chiefs on how they are approaching and structuring their organizations to take advantage of the flexibilities afforded by ESSA. The final product will be a series of podcasts that can be shared with colleagues.

Preliminary interviews reveal that Chiefs are excited about the potential opportunity to create a different educational experience for children, but are also aware that such a transformation requires great thoughtfulness, collaboration with many stakeholders, and some consideration about how the SEA can move out of traditional silo structures and practices to support and move that vision forward. We believe these podcasts will provide a valuable resource to the field, and I am delighted that this series is being created and disseminated as a joint effort between the National Center on State Capacity and the Education Commission of the States. Dr. Alan Morgan, former New Mexico Superintendent and consultant to the BSCP Center, is leading this effort.

What does strategic performance management look like in Arkansas? ESSA brings great flexibility and opportunity for states to create and lead transformational education reform in their schools. With this opportunity comes greater need for organizational coherence and alignment to move change beyond the fringes to all schools. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) didn't wait for Congress to pass the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to initiate changes that reflect their new direction. Beginning months before the passage of the landmark education bill, ADE began an intensive examination of Arkansas's education future and ADE's role relative to districts and communities in shaping that future.

Commissioner Johnny Key and the ADE executive team met for a full day each month, with much work in between, to formulate a strategic direction for the agency, sharing their ideas with ADE staff, teacher groups, district superintendents, charter directors, co-op directors, education and parent organizations, business and community leaders, legislators, and other state agencies. The process entailed getting feedback, going back to the drawing board, and revising. The ADE strategic direction is the foundation

for the agency's bold move into performance management as a holistic coherent approach to improve the quality and responsiveness of the SEA.

The BSCP Center developed the Strategic Performance Management (SPM) process to overcome the common problem with strategic plans...lots of thinking that ends up as a paper report with little impact. The SPM process draws everyone into a smoothly operating, open system that recognizes contributions and innovations and turns them into actions that are assessed and adjusted as needed. It weds strategic

"We are engaging stakeholder groups inside and outside ADE to set a clear direction toward transformational change for Arkansas."

Commissioner Johnny Key

planning with performance management in a living system that provides direction for people's work while allowing for innovation and adjustments in course to produce better results more efficiently.

Sam Redding and Allison Layland, on behalf of the BSCP Center, led this intensive process with the ADE team with assistance from Kerri White and Jennifer Watson from South Central and Central Comprehensive Centers. I am extremely pleased with their leadership in the work with Arkansas and for the foresight demonstrated by ADE in recognizing this opportunity for their SEA. For more information about the SPM work in Arkansas go to <http://www.bsccpcenter.org> and read Arkansas Out Front with SPM.



ADE Team working with BSCP Center Facilitators

Strategic Communication continues to rise to the forefront as key to the transformation process.

As we continue our work on supporting states to address the new policy environment, to work through a productivity lens, and shift to a strategic performance management orientation, we see and hear that communication is a key factor. States will need to communicate both internally and externally about ESSA and their new vision; will need to create venues to collect ideas and feedback from stakeholders on that vision; ensure there is clear understanding of the approach; and gain support of the vision so that it can become a reality to all students and schools.

Our work on supporting states to communicate more strategically to address those important needs continues to deepen as we conduct in-depth site visits to the five states participating in our strategic communication benchmarking project. What we are learning is that states are already thinking about how they can significantly improve their educational system and approach, and they are seeking ways to make that process more coherent, aligned, clear, and to gain stakeholder support. As we consider ways

we can provide tools and processes to our participating states and their Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) to support their communication efforts, we continue to examine other organizations who must communicate mission critical messages to multiple stakeholders across complex bureaucratic layers.

We recently held an intriguing discussion with FEMA's Strategic Communications Director about the processes and tools their agency uses to clearly communicate to stakeholders both internally and externally. The FEMA director provided ideas for the project and sent some potential tools to use with our SEAs and RCCs. We will be sharing these and other information at our Strategic Communication convening this summer.

In closing, I would like to remind you to save the week of July 19-22 for two upcoming BSCP Center meetings. The Strategic Communication Convening for regional centers and states and the Joint Annual Planning meeting for content and regional centers. More specific details will be available soon. I hope to see many of you at these important meetings in July.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Nafziger", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dean H. Nafziger, Ph.D.

Director, Building State Capacity & Productivity Center at Edvance Research

210-558-4101

deannafziger@westat.com