

Letter from the Director

January/February 2017

Greetings Colleagues,

Everywhere I go it seems all roads lead to communication, whether I am attending a conference on education policy, working with SEAs on strategic performance management, or discussing issues of financial transparency with our partners. That is why I believe our next phase of work in strategic communications is so important to help SEAs impart clear information and gain support for implementing their ESSA plans.

In my last letter I shared a few insights that we learned from our 2016 Strategic Communications Benchmarking Project about how top-level leadership, organizational structures, and the adoption of clear and formalized internal and external communication processes can promote clear, aligned and effective communication. In essence we want to see SEAs shift from viewing communications as strictly an external function to an approach that begins with organizational mission/vision/goals and is driven from the inside of the organization through set internal communication processes and out to external audiences that will be continually engaged through ESSA planning and implementation.

Here is an example of why and how this approach might look. Let's say an SEA has two major goals associated with ESSA: 1) Strengthen standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and 2) Promote educator development. One could imagine such goals would involve a number of divisions in an SEA, to include academics, accountability, assessment, teacher development, human resources, and teacher licensure to name a few. For Goal #1 to result in effective teaching and learning in classrooms, those and other divisions would ideally collaborate to ensure their portion of the work would result in policies and supports to meet intended goal outcomes. It might also mean gaining stakeholder support from parents, teachers, district leaders, and legislators to make innovative changes as well. Working strategically from the inside out, the SEA might consider:

- What are the key messages to be used to describe how the SEA will improve instruction (Goal #1) and educator skill? (Goal #2)?
- How can top-level leadership promote those messages both internally and externally?
- What is the role of the communications division in promoting and disseminating those messages?
- What regular processes can ensure that key SEA divisions understand the key messages and their role in the work? How do they interface with the communications division?

- How will the work of different divisions be managed and aligned to the goals and key messages?
- How can the SEA create a strategic communication plan that will outline the role of leadership, internal and external communication processes, and evaluation strategies to ensure effective implementation toward those goals?
- What are the best mechanisms to reach various external audiences like LEAs, the general public, and policymakers?
- How can the SEA effectively engage stakeholders through the formulation and implementation of the goals?

We have several products and activities coming out that we believe will help SEAs and their RCCs address these and other questions that I am excited to share this spring. They include:

- The February release of our 2016 benchmarking report: “Creating Strategic Communications in State Education Agencies: Lessons From States,” which will delve deeper into how SEAs can create more strategic communication processes and will illustrate effective practices from SEAs in Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, and North Carolina.
- Creation of a Strategic Communication Toolkit that is designed to address the critical elements of strategic communication through resources and the creation of an agency-wide communication plan.
- Launch of an interactive online learning series designed to take SEAs and RCCs through different components of the Strategic Communications Toolkit.
- Posting of additional strategic communications tools and resources on our BSCP website.
- Participation in a committee facilitated by SC3 to create a comprehensive Strategic Communications KnowledgeBase.
- Deepening engagement with the Strategic Communication Collaborative.
- Planning a late summer in-person Strategic Communications meeting for interested SEAs and Centers.

Please let me know if we can be helpful to you in this critical area. As always, we value your reactions and comments.

Sincerely,



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Building State Capacity and Productivity Center

The Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center) focuses work on helping state education agencies (SEAs) throughout the country, as they adapt to constrained fiscal resources and increased demands for greater productivity. As State Departments of Education are facing a daunting challenge of improving student performance with diminishing financial resources, the BSCP Center provides technical assistance to SEAs that builds their capacity to support local educational agencies (LEAs or districts) and schools, and to the other 21 regional comprehensive centers and national content centers that serve them, by providing high quality information, tools, and implementation support. The partners in the BSCP Center are Edvance Research, Inc., the Academic Development Institute, and the Edunomics Lab (Georgetown University).

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