Dear Colleagues

The financial transparency requirements within ESSA are now being addressed throughout the country. Because we have been deeply engaged in helping SEAs both comply with the requirements and use the financial information to meet educational goals, I want to provide you with a national overview of progress.

Taking Stock as SEAs Begin Releasing School-Level Spending Data

BSCP Center partner Edunomics Lab has been working with SEAs to help ensure that their school-level financial data is understood and can be used to surface opportunities toward equity, productivity, and innovation to benefit students. To date, at least 14 states are reporting some form of school-by-school financial data, with 7 of those meeting federal ESSA requirements and all remaining states appearing on track to report on this year’s report card.

The early state report cards vary greatly on visualizations, ease of navigation (some require multiple steps to find school spending information), and comparison options (most require some analyses to compare schools within a district or across districts). Despite challenges, this new level of financial detail presents an unprecedented opportunity to understand the relationship between school outcomes and school spending. For example, newly released data are revealing within-district spending inequities and raising important questions about the relationship between spending and outcomes just as the state considers an overhaul of its funding formula.

Public reporting of school-level spending will also make it easier to explore patterns in areas like resource equity and productivity; however, what and how data are displayed will impact use and usefulness. Earlier this spring we hosted a webinar led by Edunomics Lab on what users can find on sites with ESSA-compliant data, including examples of promising data visualizations. Late-reporting states can learn from the efforts of these early adopters as they work to create accessible and useful report cards that can help schools and districts drive improvements.

Edunomics Lab researchers shared five analyses to run on the school-by-school spending figures, plus messaging tips based on interviews with district leaders, principals, teachers, and parents. Recent research reveals important knowledge gaps about school finance—and a clear need to cultivate greater transparency and trust when talking about it. States may find these tips for communicating more effectively about school finance issues useful as the new data emerge and raise some potentially thorny questions.
Looking ahead, we will work to help stakeholders at all levels of the education system find, use, and communicate about this new treasure trove of fiscal information.

**Announcing Edunomics Lab’s New School Spending Data Hub**

Edunomics Lab has launched the [School Spending Data Hub](#), an online gateway to explore states’ school-by-school spending data.

The School Spending Data Hub provides easy links to navigate each state’s report card and shows what can be learned from reporting on per-pupil expenditures, as well as how to find information the report card may not provide (for example, whether spending is equitable across schools in a district or how spending compares based on demographics and outcomes).

To date, seven states have report cards that meet ESSA’s financial reporting requirement and another eight states have published school-by-school spending data. Edunomics Lab will post new states as their report cards come online and will update information on early-reporting states as they make changes and improvements.

Soon Edunomics Lab will add targeted resources to help principals, district leaders, advocates, journalists, and others engage with the information. The site will also share examples of useful analyses and press highlights from across the country.

Explore the School Spending Data Hub [here](#).
I hope this letter will further stimulate the use of the rich trove of financial information that it is now being generated nationally, and to integrate it with other sources of data. We look forward to hearing from you about your progress.

Sincerely,

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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 23 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 Westat, the Academic Development Institute, and the Edunomics Lab (Georgetown University).