

Letter from the Director

February 2014

Dear Colleagues,

Winter is lingering on and the groundhog hasn't given us much hope for a break soon. I know that the difficult weather has created situations that have added challenges for a lot of you across the country. Nevertheless, we are pleased to have made progress in our work together, and I want to report on the progress of a few of the BSCP Center initiatives.

Preliminary Communications Benchmarking Work—Communications is an integral part of any implementation or improvement strategy, which is the reason we launched the Benchmarking SEA Strategic Communications project. The first portion of the work is focused on the effective communication of new state standards; an issue almost every state is facing. With our participating SEAs we are working at two levels—1) to identify needs for communications capacity building, and 2) to document what SEAs determine to be successful communication strategies.

With a little over half of the interviews completed, we are already identifying some important strategies, contextual factors, and areas where we need to learn more. In particular, we have learned that we can make an important contribution by documenting SEA communication work in a manner that can be disseminated and used. There are several more interviews to go, and many more interesting and useful lessons to gain.

Managing Performance in the System of Support Mississippi's Approach—The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) began their Managing Performance project in the fall of 2013 with a cross-functional leadership team from key MDE departments, as well as BSCP Center consultants Dr. Thomas Kerns and Dr. Susan Hanes.

This process is an essential component for MDE as it implements its flexibility plan and integrates the school improvement supports provided by various departments. The management system established in the project will continue to provide a platform for internal collaboration and improvement beyond the scope of the project. The Coordinating Team is comprised of members representing several offices within the state agency, including Accountability; Assessment; Conservatorship; Curriculum and Instruction; Dropout Prevention; Federal Programs; Quality Professionals; School Improvement; School Recovery; and Special Education. The MDE is working with external partners (such as the regional educational service agencies) which assist the MDE with helping educators receive training and supports, and professional organizations which provide venues for the MDE to share updates at non-MDE hosted events.

MDE is using its own survey tool to document information about training and staff development opportunities from each office across the agency. Once completed and analyzed, they will be able to identify duplication and gaps that need to be addressed. By March they plan to have this information available on their website for MDE staff, as well as all Mississippi educators. The information will be updated on a regular basis. MDE is conducting biweekly work sessions and meeting to specifically discuss the larger picture of their SRAS and develop action plans for making improvements.

Expansion of the Managing Performance Work Scope—As we receive more requests for participation in Managing Performance in a System of Support, we are expanding the scope of project work. Currently, there are two phases to this work. *Phase I* is a consultancy format where BSCP senior consultants and state leadership meet to discuss the vision and goals of a state agency, current organizational functions and structures, and performance managing processes. A report is prepared and shared with the SEA. In *Phase II*, SEAs participate in a year-long examination of the 52 indicators of an effective system of support.

While we believe we have had a successful beginning to the Managing Performance in a System of Support, we also see an opportunity to expand and strengthen both phases. We are reviewing the research in order to develop additional rubric-based indicators around productivity, data analysis, and effective SEA structures. These will provide SEAs with more information to make a deeper and more comprehensive examination of their goals and processes.

BSCP Center publications for the Managing Performance in a System of Support can be found on the www.bscpcenter.org website. Click on the [Publications](#) tab to access:

1. *Managing Performance in the System of Support: Rubric with 52 Indicators, Explanations, and Exemplars*
2. *Technical Assistance for the SRAS Performance Management Rubric: A Guide for Regional Comprehensive Centers and States*
3. *Functional Coherence in the State Education Agency: A Structure for Performance Management* (found in *Solutions* Issue No. 4)

Register for the Upcoming Productivity Webinar—I would like to invite you to participate in the third webinar of our productivity series, *Building a State Information System to Support Improvements in Productivity*. This webinar is presented by Dr. Marguerite Roza, Director, Edunomics Lab, and Research Associate Professor at Georgetown University and partner in the BSCP Center. In this 1-hour webinar Dr. Roza will explore how SEAs can build an



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information system designed to drive productivity—what data are needed, how to compile the data into useful resources for leaders at every level of education, and how these stakeholders can use the data to drive decision making and advance productivity. The webinar will be held on **Wednesday, February 26, 2014 at 1:00 p.m. CST**. To access the webinar registration link go to: <https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/605458006>. We look forward to you joining us at the upcoming productivity webinar.

If you would like to view the first two webinars in this series, *Staring at a decade of budget gaps: How can states drive productivity gains in public education?* or *Understanding the productivity landscape in your state*, go to www.bscpcenter.org/ and click on the Events tab for easy access to the recordings at your convenience.

In closing, I would like to remind you we are always eager to hear from you and appreciate your opinions and points of view regarding the work of the BSCP Center.

Sincerely,



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Building State Capacity and Productivity Center

The Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center) focuses on helping state education agencies (SEAs) throughout the country, as they adapt to reduced 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, the Center on Reinventing Public Education (University of Washington), and the Edunomics Lab (Georgetown University).

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