

Letter from the Director



November/December 2016

Greeting Colleagues,

There is no such thing as a slow start to the BSCP Center's efforts in Year 5. As reported in earlier letters, much of our work is intended to create systemic support to SEAs and their implementation of the *Every Student Success Act* (ESSA). I am interested in knowing your thoughts about these topics after reading the letter.

The financial transparency work group has launched: The BSCP Center is excited to announce the launch of a working group designed to help states and districts prepare to meet the financial transparency requirement of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). ESSA requires states to annually report per-pupil expenditures for each Local Education Agency (LEA) and school in the state for the preceding fiscal year. Accounting for and reporting spending by school will be a new challenge for many states and LEAs where finances are not currently tracked or reported by school. Working group member states and LEAs will be national leaders in this effort and lessons learned from the group will inform the process for all other states in subsequent years. Thus far, more than forty SEAs and LEAs have joined the group. "For information, as it becomes available, on this work and resources on ESSA financial transparency reporting requirements, visit the BSCP Center [website](#)."

Leveraging the *Every Student Succeeds Act* for School Improvement publication is released: Congress has redefined the federal government's role in K–12 education and handed states increased authority. In this volume of *The SEA of the Future*, we explore how states can take advantage of this historic moment to: (1) craft accountability systems that can drive system-wide continuous improvement and (2) redefine their role in supporting educators, schools, and districts. As states revisit their strategies for K–12 education, they should ensure their plans are: comprehensive, deliberate about data use, clear in defining non-overlapping roles and responsibilities for the state and districts, nimble, and focused on fostering continuous system wide improvement.

I am pleased the BSCP Center can provide a timely and valuable resource for SEAs as work continues on ESSA planning. You will find this newly released publication at www.bscpcenter.org/interviews/#documents.

What are we learning about making communication more strategic in SEAs?

We are currently wrapping up our Year 4 work in benchmarking communication strategies in the states of AR, ID, OH, IL, KS, IN and NC. We are not quite finished with the final analysis and report, but I wanted to share a few high-level findings that I believe are interesting and useful.

Top-level leadership holds a critical role in strategic communication

Leadership is a critical component of strategic communication in any type of organization. In SEAs, the Chief or Superintendent sets the direction of the agency; identifies major focus themes or strategies, and helps convey consistent, clear simple messages to align and clarify the work. While most SEA leaders have a more outward public-facing role in the agency, they have the authority to set internal processes and structures that can lead to coherent, well-aligned communication practices that provide clarity for both internal and external stakeholders.

Organizational structure can support or impede strategic communication

Close proximity of the communications division to executive leaders improves their ability to serve as a centralized source of communication. When the communications division is organizationally separate from leadership, regular access to the Commissioner, including attendance in executive leadership meetings can keep the communications director informed about agency focus and issues. In these cases, formalized processes of when and how to involve communication staff are valuable. Also, connecting the communication division with academics is critical for aligning internal and external communication, ensuring academic content is accurately represented in agency communication, ensuring that information about agency initiatives is clear and reaches all intended stakeholders, and for coordinating requests and visits to LEAs so that messages are aligned, clear, and not redundant or at cross-purposes.

Many internal communication problems are really process problems

Once an SEA leader prioritizes and formulates key messages, it is important to establish policies and processes to ensure communication is clear, aligned, regular, and predictable for both internal and external stakeholders. As with many other organizations, internal communication poses a number of challenges. Processes that could address internal communication issues include creating a clear process for how and when to engage the communications division in agency work; setting expectations and schedules around internal meetings; establishing meeting norms to maximize face-time; establishing procedures for communicating updates and policy information; establishing practices around e-mail, and establishing how communication will be managed to ensure alignment between internal divisions and between internal divisions and external communicators and stakeholders.

We look forward to the completion and release of the final report and to creating more resources and TA around implementing strategic communication processes in SEAs.

My best wishes to you as we enter the holiday season. May you find time, fellowship, and relaxation with family and friends during this holiday season. Take care.

Sincerely,



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