

Letter from the Director

June 2015

Dear Colleagues,

People often think of summer as a time to take a break and dial things back. For the BSCP Center and many of you, summer is a time to take stock, make plans, and begin new projects. I am particularly excited about a few of our latest products and would like to share them with you.

Strategic Performance Management (SPM) Available Soon to Interested States

In the last letter I introduced the Strategic Performance Management tool that Sam Redding and Allison Layland are developing. Strategic Performance Management unites strategic planning with performance management in a living system that provides direction and structure while allowing innovation to produce better results more efficiently. The system is divided into three modules that allow users to begin with their greatest priority through a self-assessment process. The modules are designed to make lasting changes in the SEA and are broken down into manageable focus areas which include: 1) purpose and direction, 2) functions and structures, and 3) performance and innovation.

We look forward to introducing Strategic Performance Management at the Regional Comprehensive Center Planning meeting in Oklahoma City on August 4 and 5. The complete Strategic Performance Management—*Organizing People and their Work in State Education Agency* guidance will be released in late summer. I am excited about launching this project and providing more details to you as the plan unfolds. If you would like more information contact Sam Redding at sredding@adi.org.

The Evolution of The SEA of the Future Series

Most of you are familiar with our *SEA of the Future* publication series that examines how SEAs can shift from compliance to a performance-oriented organization to meet growing demands to support education reform while improving productivity. Since the establishment of the BSCP Center we released four issues of *The SEA of the Future*, with each volume containing 4–5 essays written by reputable experts on one particular aspect of work within the featured topic. The goal of these publications is to share knowledge, tools, challenges, and solutions that will help SEAs make this important management shift. The feedback we have received on this series has been positive, with many readers asserting that the essays provide useful foundational information and ideas that can be applied to their work. The first four volumes build upon each other and, as a collection, address key aspects of the SEA of the Future. Below is a quick recapture of each volume for those not as familiar with the series.

Volume 1—*Leveraging Performance Management to Support School Improvement*: Examines how SEAs can better manage their relationships with districts and schools, identifies strategies for aligning resources with goals, and considers how outsiders—governors, legislators, philanthropies, and reform advocates—can support the transition.

Volume 2—*Prioritizing Productivity*: Calls on state leaders to begin the conversation about productivity and makes the case for why productivity is essential to improving outcomes for students. Key steps in this conversation include: (a) integrate finance data with existing state data on student, teacher, school, and district performance; (b) encourage and support the use of data to inform decisions across a system including, school, district, or state; and (c) provide flexibility to enable educators, leaders, and policymakers to respond to data and shifting needs.

Volume 3—*Building the Productivity Infrastructure*: Introduces the productivity infrastructure, which constitutes the building blocks for an SEA committed to supporting productivity, innovation, and performance. The blocks include: (a) policies to expand the flexibility of district and school leaders and allow them to make resources choices; (b) state funding arrangements that fund students, not programs; and (c) information systems that allow district and school leaders to accurately assess the productivity of policies and practices.

Volume 4—*Uncovering the Productivity Promise of Rural Education*: Illustrates how rural schools and districts are able to stretch their dollars further, similarly to their urban counterparts, but in different ways because of their unique context. As with urban districts, there are examples of rural districts and schools that are innovating how they deliver services to students, recruit teachers, use technology, and serve special populations. This volume details those efforts, provides potential solutions to challenges, and compels state leaders to keep the unique needs of rural education in mind when crafting policies that are often designed with urban and suburban districts in mind.

You can access *The SEA of the Future* as a complete volume or by individual topics by going to the BSCP website at: <http://www.bscpcenter.org/sea/>. We are continuing to identify topics for future issues and would appreciate hearing your ideas.

Preliminary Communication Survey Results are Being Analyzed

In preparation for the collaborative meeting on strategic communication being held in Denver July 2 and 3, we sent out a survey to meeting participants to find out about their current communication strategies and challenges, and to identify what they want to gain from the meeting. Because the survey represented an intentional sample of SEA communication leaders, it was sent to a very small sample size. While the information gained is more descriptive and qualitative than generalizable, it did provide information to us on how SEAs are addressing communication; an area of work that has little current research or information base. We will have

much more details next month after the meeting; however, I wanted to share a few interesting points gained from the 8 survey respondents:

- Top two communication issues being addressed by participants are adopting new state content standards and providing assessment results from new content standards.
- Most meeting participants hope to learn more about:
 - How structure and align external communication with agency goals.
 - How to control messages in difficult political situations.
 - How to evaluate the success of communication efforts.
 - How the role of leadership affects SEA communication.
- The top strategies survey respondents employ to address controversy include:
 - Using grass-roots sources for messaging rather driving messages from the SEA.
 - Meeting with key stakeholders and providing time for interactive discussions.
 - Creating tools for educators in the field to help them communicate (i.e., parent brochures).
- The top strategies survey respondents employ to gain stakeholder support for SEA reforms include:
 - Presenting compelling data.
 - Using quotes from stakeholders in the field.
 - Posting videos of stakeholders in the field.
 - Connecting messages to commonly cited stakeholder concerns.

We have a fantastic agenda for the July 1 and 2 meeting in Denver that will address these and other topics through various presentations and panels comprised of some of the most reputable education leaders in the field. I look forward to telling you more about outcomes from the meeting in my next letter.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the events the BSCP Center has planned for the summer and at other meetings I will be attending. As always, keep in touch with us regarding our work and always feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



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Hold the Date!

August 4 & 5
Oklahoma City, OK

Joint Center Planning Meeting: Year 4

Agenda and registration
information will be
available soon.

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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