

# Letter from the Director

August 2015

Colleagues,

We are nearing the end of a very warm summer—a good time to relax and reflect. There have been some very rich professional meetings and activities this summer and I would like to share with you some of the things I have learned from them, so far.

### ***Effective communication is recognized as a key factor in the success of state education initiatives.***

Discussions about how to communicate well with the public are pervasive. At the ECS National Forum on Educational Policy this year, there were deep discussions about a broad array of educational initiatives. Common to all of the discussions was the recognition that effective communication, driven by state education agency (SEA) leadership, is an integral aspect of implementation success. Education initiatives, by their nature, are complicated; therefore, effective communication requires clarity and consistency in messaging to avoid the tangle of complicated and arcane details.

### ***A significant body of knowledge is developing within state agencies about communication best practices.***

On July 1–2 the BSCP Center co-hosted a Strategic Communication convening, *Strategic Communications: Navigating Policy and Politics in a Competing Information Environment*, in Denver, Colorado. The two-day meeting represented a great collaboration between seven Centers including BSCP, and was attended by over 70 participants, many of whom were from 14 different SEAs. The meeting was designed to share best practices and lessons learned from many states and from multiple levels within state agencies. Listening to these reports confirmed an important fact: Communication initiatives within SEAs are an important source of best practice information that we need to capture and disseminate.

### ***Strategic communication is difficult, as it requires an agency-wide approach.***

Throughout the SEA, there must be continuous focus on coherence, alignment, clear messaging, and assessing the effectiveness of how and what is communicated, as well as to whom. Reflecting that complexity, SEAs are balancing *leading* strategic communication, and *implementing* its various aspects. The BSCP Center has described this Strategic Communications Framework which can found in our “State Education Agency Communications Process Benchmark and Best Practices” report available at <http://bit.ly/1htdSjy>.

***There is a continuing demand for practical information about communication work.***

Participants at the Strategic Communications meeting voiced a desire for additional information about how to address the more challenging aspects of strategic communication, such as evaluating the effectiveness of communication strategies, aligning communication within the SEA, and strategizing around politically charged topics. Now that we have provided foundational information on the basics of strategic communication through this first convening, we look forward to going deeper into the field to collect more tools and strategies that SEAs and Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) might find useful.

In addition to providing information on an important topic that seems to cut across all of our work at the BSCP Center, we also discovered the incredible value that can come out of collaborating with other Centers. For almost three months, my BSCP Center colleagues worked together planning and sharing information via bi-weekly calls with the Central Comprehensive Center, Great Lakes Comprehensive Center, Midwest Comprehensive Center, Northwest Comprehensive Center, South Central Comprehensive Center, and the Southeast Comprehensive Center. The contribution of all of the individuals within the collaborative made this convening incredibly interesting and valuable, and I want to offer a special thank you to Drs. Kerri White and Heather Zavadsky for their leadership on this effort.

For a number of interesting readings and presentations shared during the convening, see <http://bit.ly/1ILaPtv>.

***States are eager to find ways of improving productivity of their systems, and are learning together how to do that.***

While state interest in communication practices is long-standing, the need for advancing system productivity is rapidly emerging as an interest for states, as well. We designed and are hosting, in partnership with CCSSO, a Community of Practice to support a group of state leaders interested in exploring productivity. We are mid-way through our series of five webinars that cover important topics for improving productivity including: making the case for productivity, building information systems, creating effective funding and regulating structures, and using SEA leverage. Currently 15 states are participating in this Community of Practice. The next step will be for states to develop a state-specific framework and strategy designed to promote productivity. States will have an opportunity to meet individually with Edunomics Lab staff to personalize the lessons on productivity to their state context and develop a timeline of action steps that they will implement to improve productivity in their states.

Consistent with these observations, the work plan for the BSCP Center for the next year will include an increased emphasis on both Strategic Communications and Advancing System Productivity. Also, we will increase our emphasis on Strategic Performance management using newly developed tools. To maximize expertise and close relationships with SEAs, we are

working with Regional Content Centers to coordinate our work in these areas with their work plans. Stay tuned for more information.

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 Edconomics Lab (Georgetown University).

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