

Letter from the Director

October 2015

Dear Colleagues,

Not only does October signify the launch of fall, it also represents the beginning of the BSCP Center's Year 4 work plan. Details of the Center's focus areas were explained in the last letter. Now the work for us at the BSCP Center really begins. I will highlight where we are with the start of that work.

Coming Soon, a Fall Release of *The SEA of the Future: Building Agency Capacity for Evidence-Based Policymaking*—In the fifth volume of *The SEA of the Future*, we explore how state education agencies can build their capacity to leverage research to support policymaking. We draw upon the experiences of agency staff from Massachusetts, Michigan, and Tennessee, as well the experiences of the Regional Comprehensive Centers. Carrie Conoway (Massachusetts Department of Education) describes why evidence-building is valuable, what types of research activities SEAs might focus on, and how to ensure research has impact. Nathaniel Schwartz (Tennessee Department of Education) describes the work of building a research team within the SEA and how to ensure research adds value to the work of other programs in the SEA. Venessa Keesler (Michigan Department of Education) discusses how states can leverage external research partnerships to supplement the SEA's capacity to advance evidence-based policy. Finally, in an audio essay with three Regional Comprehensive Center leaders, we discuss how states can leverage the resources of the regional centers to make connections between research and policy.

Year 4 Communications Work is Supported by a Collaborative Effort—One major focus of our work this year is supporting the strategic communication initiatives of SEAs in order to yield understanding and support for their core education initiatives. Similar to last year, the communications collaborative includes several Regional Comprehensive Centers—Central, South Central, Midwest, Great Lakes, Northwest, Texas, Southeast, North Central, and Appalachia. One goal is to create relevant tools and resources to help SEAs with the critical components of strategic communication work, including: leading and organizing SEAs for strategic communication; aligning internal and external communication; engaging stakeholders; creating and implementing communication plans; and managing the plans through an interactive improvement process.

Also, we are identifying good resources that have been developed in the field. One great resource comes from The Reform Support Network (RSN)¹. Over the past five years, the RSN has amassed a number of tools, lessons learned, and publications that are designed to forward

¹ Supported by the U.S. Department of Education and managed by ICF International.

reforms nationally. Stakeholder Communications and Engagement is one of the RSN focus areas that provide useful tools for strategic communication.

The RSN materials are organized around a “work stream” of promising communication practices that include the following areas:

- State communication plans/outreach efforts
- Websites
- Measuring and opinion
- Research
- Newsletters and updates
- Issues briefs, guides, and other materials
- Social media
- Videos

Within these areas you can find documents such as the Council of Chief State School Officers Communications Toolkit, Maryland’s Communication Campaign, the Colorado Department of Education Messaging Materials, sample SEA publications, and Colorado’s Social Media Response Matrix. The site also includes publications and tools that we plan to use this year, including “Communications and Engagement Assessment Rubric”, and the corresponding State Facilitator’s Guide. The website for these resources is <https://rtt.grads360.org/#communities/sce> under “Promising Practices.”

Smoothing Out the Systems—States often find themselves with a variety of programs that operate independently, creating barriers to communication and collaboration. Obviously, this is not the most productive way to function. As SEAs seek to better align the work of their different programs and functions, the BSCP Center is providing support through a new technical assistance initiative—Strategic Performance Management (SPM). Our technical assistance products and services help states ground all of their work in well-articulated agency goals and strategies. SPM brings state units into alignment with one another through performance management methods that connect everyone in the agency to common strategies. We help states use data to gauge their performance and inform their mid-course changes. For more information, contact Lois Myran at: loismyran@ndsupernet.com.

I look forward to an exciting and productive year with all of you as we launch our Year 4 work plan. As always I solicit your comments and questions as your opinions and collaborative efforts are of great value to our work at the BSCP Center.



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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 Edunomics Lab (Georgetown University).

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