December 2014

Dear Colleagues,

This year scrap all traditional New Year's resolutions—no diets, no exercise—instead take on the goal of developing productivity improvements in education. Rather than lamenting that revenues are too low to institute change or freezing salaries or making other cuts that erode away public education, focus on creating the conditions to improve the productivity of your system.

Taking a Look at Productivity and Efficiency—Productivity is not the same thing as efficiency. Efforts to improve productivity do not call for cutting spending, increasing efficiency, or finding cheaper ways to do the same things as before. For public education, raising productivity means *finding ways to maximize student outcomes with the money at hand*. Toward that end, schools may require new delivery models, access to better information systems, and so on. And because education is a profoundly human endeavor, productivity will hinge on the choices individual schools make in how to best serve their students.

As shared in our *The SEA of the Future* series, key steps SEAs can take to build infrastructure to support productivity improvements include:

- Build information systems that districts and schools can use to fuel productivity gains.

- Design state funding formulas that fund students not programs.

- Prioritize funding flexibility so that districts and school leaders are free to pursue productivity improvements.

- Harness lower cost/higher reach SEA levers to affect schools and districts.

- Use state leverage to tackle long-term cost obligations.

With few new resources to fuel reforms, productivity improvements are likely the most reliable option for improving student outcomes. I urge you to embrace this resolution and connect to the BSCP Center's resources and team for help.

Featured resources from the BSCP Center:

- Marguerite Roza has published essays (BSCP Publications) and hosted webinars (BSCP Webinars) addressing why productivity improvements are critical for public education and providing key steps SEAs can take to advance productivity.

- In early 2015, in collaboration with CCSSO, the BSCP Center will launch a working group for selected SEAs actively developing new infrastructure to support productivity improvements such as information systems.

Taking a Look at Productivity and IndiSEA™—The BSCP Center specializes in enhancing SEA performance and productivity by providing high quality information, tools, and implementation support. One example of this is the online IndiSEA™ tool. When an SEA requests individual assistance from the BSCP Center, the process typically begins with a one-day meeting between BSCP Center consultants, the chief state school officer (CSSO), and state leadership team. The purpose of the meeting is to assess the SEA's current status relative to performance management and productivity. The Center consultants follow the meeting with a quick-turnaround report synthesizing the outcomes of the meeting and suggesting next steps. Next steps may include up to a year of continuing technical assistance, including use of IndiSEA™ performance management system.

I believe the IndiSEA™ process can become the strong over-arching umbrella for all BSCP initiatives and provide a central site for SEAs to collaborate with the BSCP initiatives. Currently IndiSEA™ has rubric-based indicators for the *Differentiated System of Recognition, Accountability, and Support* and *Integrating Services for All Students* (SPED) and *Integrating Services for All Students*. We are also in the process of developing indicators aligned to other BSCP Center work. I look forward to sharing those with you in the New Year.

As you move into the holiday season, I would like to share a quote from Helen Keller, "*The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched—they must be felt in the heart*". I wish you a beautiful, heart-felt Holiday Season with family and friends and a Happy New Year.

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 Edunomics Lab (Georgetown University).

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