STATE EDUCATION AGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PROCESS: BENCHMARK AND BEST PRACTICES PROJECT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The role of state education agencies (SEAs) has shifted significantly from low-profile, compliance activities like managing federal grants to engaging in more complex and politically charged tasks like setting curriculum standards, developing accountability systems, and creating new teacher evaluation systems. The move from compliance-monitoring to leading large-scale education change is not only more complex, it also has shined a brighter spotlight on SEAs and their ability to improve student outcomes.

To mobilize the many elements required to transform education, the SEA must connect their work internally across multiple divisions and gain support from key external stakeholders to advance any major reform agenda. Subsequently, many SEAs have created new communications divisions or positions to better leverage communication as an important administrative strategy.

Communication is a critical component to help SEAs create system-wide clarity and coherence, and to proactively manage messages to gain stakeholder support. Right now, an opportunity exists to address the communication challenges SEAs are facing by employing strategic communications—a term that refers to developing and implementing an entire systemic communications process created to achieve one or more long-term strategic goals.

This report explains the major processes associated with strategic communication and details the communication approaches employed by five SEAs to support the adoption of new state standards, a reform that has recently become politically charged by the suggestion that the Common Core state standards represent government overreach. Because the debate has little to do with the actual content or purpose of the standards—to set a common bar that will better prepare students for college and careers—and more about political perspectives, SEAs find they must take extreme care with their communications and approach to developing, adopting, and implementing new standards.

The goal of this benchmarking project is to help SEAs increase their capacity to support statewide education reform through coherent communication processes applied within an ever-changing agency and state context. Below are sample strategies used by Arkansas, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, and Ohio to support their shift to new state standards:

- Connecting policy and implementation through weekly meetings between the communications and governmental relations directors.

- Holding brown-bag meetings with legislators to review and discuss myths and facts around a given reform.

- Representing reforms through credible voices from the field like teachers and university presidents.

- Organizing departmental work and meetings around the SEA strategic plan to prompt cross-departmental work that matches SEA strategies and goals.

- Meeting with key stakeholders to provide ample interactive discussion time to gain buy-in or clarity on controversial, pressing, or big issues.

- Streaming and posting meetings that address controversial issues to document support.

The five participating SEAs wanted to better understand their communication processes, and were implementing communication strategies around adopting new standards. Their successful strategies outlined in this report includes those around internal and external information sharing, adjusting messages to stakeholder needs, organizing the SEA to foster open communication, aligning policy and implementation, proactively managing controversy, and using feedback tools to evaluate communication processes.

INTRODUCTION

The role and demands on state education agencies (SEAs) has shifted over the past decade from one of compliance and monitoring to becoming agile and proactive catalysts for LEA and school improvement (Gross, Jochim, Hill, Murphy, and Redding 2013[i]). Subsequently, SEA leaders recognize the need to reorganize, redefine, and rethink their overall structure and strategies to balance reduced but necessary compliance work with a more challenging goal of leading large-scale educational improvement.

Becoming an SEA of the future means migrating from approaches using disparate funding streams, technical assistance, and programs to creating intentional systems of recognition, accountability, and support (Gross, Jochim, Hill, Murphy, and Redding 2013[ii]). This work is by no means new. SEAs began to change years ago with the standards and reform movements of the 1980s to 1990s, continued on with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 through its differentiated and transparent accountability requirements, and then further through flexibility provided to states through incentive programs like the School Improvement Grants, and Race to the Top (Gross, Jochim, Hill, Murphy, and Redding, 2013 Brown, Hess, Lautzenheiser, and Owen 2011[iii]). The culmination of

these policies, reforms, and incentives was the belief that improvement requires a number of levers—rather than just one—that must be applied in concert through a coherent framework.

While SEAs are making inroads in becoming SEAs of the future, they are challenged by the struggle to design and manage a responsive, flexible, differentiated system of support within an environment with constantly shifting expectations and an ever-changing political environment (Gross, Jochim, Hill, Murphy, and Redding 2013[iv]). Additionally, they are expected to make significant changes quickly and seamlessly while many are facing the end of substantial incentive programs and ongoing staff reduction and turnover.

The goal of this benchmarking project is to help SEAs increase their capacity to support statewide education reform through coherent communication processes applied within an ever-changing agency and state context. The lens used within the broad topic of communications is a reform area being tackled by many states that are adopting new standards. To address issues of consistency, stability, and performance management within the agency, this project focused on documenting current communication processes for each participating SEA in order to help them examine where gaps and issues might exist while learning about promising practices from the other participating SEAs.

THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Decades earlier, SEAs focused largely on bureaucratic activities, many of which were in high-risk areas requiring close management in areas such as finance, education statutes, hiring, and accountability. While these areas do not require discussion or public support, they do need accessible, clearly documented processes for activities such as budget development, student expulsion procedures, position posting requirements, and test-monitoring systems (Gross, Jochim, Hill, Murphy and Redding 2013[v]).

Now SEAs are required to broaden beyond compliance activities driven from isolated departments to work that spans across multiple SEA divisions to build LEA capacity for improvement and innovation. In addition to building overall LEA capacity, an SEA must differentiate LEA supports based on performance and need, and include LEAs as partners for reform. The reform levers SEAs are expected to focus on include:

- College- and career-ready standards and assessments;

- Support for effective leadership and instruction;

- Improved performance measurement systems and interventions;

- Increased attention to high school performance and graduation rates; and

- Turnaround support for the lowest-achieving schools.

Given the complexity of each of these levers, the need to help LEAs employ them systemically, and the potential controversy associated with innovative solutions such as teacher tenure reform,

charter schools, and changing state standards, SEAs have greatly increased their communication activities both internally and externally for a number of years. Not only are they addressing new and different cross-agency work, but they are also responding to lessons learned—a few the hard way—about the importance of gaining stakeholder support to advance any significant reform agenda. Subsequently, many SEAs have created new communications divisions or positions to better leverage communication as an important administrative strategy.

Right now, an opportunity exists to address the communications challenges SEAs are facing, by employing strategic communications—a term that refers to developing and implementing an entire systemic communications process created to achieve one or more long-term strategic goals. Found primarily in business, strategic communications is also a common term being used in several government agencies, prompted by critical events like the 9/11 attacks, which revealed the importance of having coherent and effective internal and external agency communication systems, and the need for clear, consistent, and timely information.

Strategic communication is critical to the SEA of the future. For example, perhaps an SEA has the goal to increase statewide student achievement through systems of support and performance management, and adopting a new teacher evaluation system is a targeted strategy toward that goal. Knowing that there is frequently opposition to teacher evaluation measures, it is important to carefully consider how communications could be effectively leveraged to help stakeholders understand and support the measures, reduce opposition and misinformation, and provide opportunities to gain collective knowledge and feedback from various stakeholders. Investing time and attention on front-end planning of such a communication is critical for helping SEAs proactively control the message, and can avoid the time-consuming and less desirable position of reacting to confusion or opposition. Additionally, a strategic approach can align and coordinate communication across the multiple internal departments the reform will eventually impact, as well as various external stakeholders.
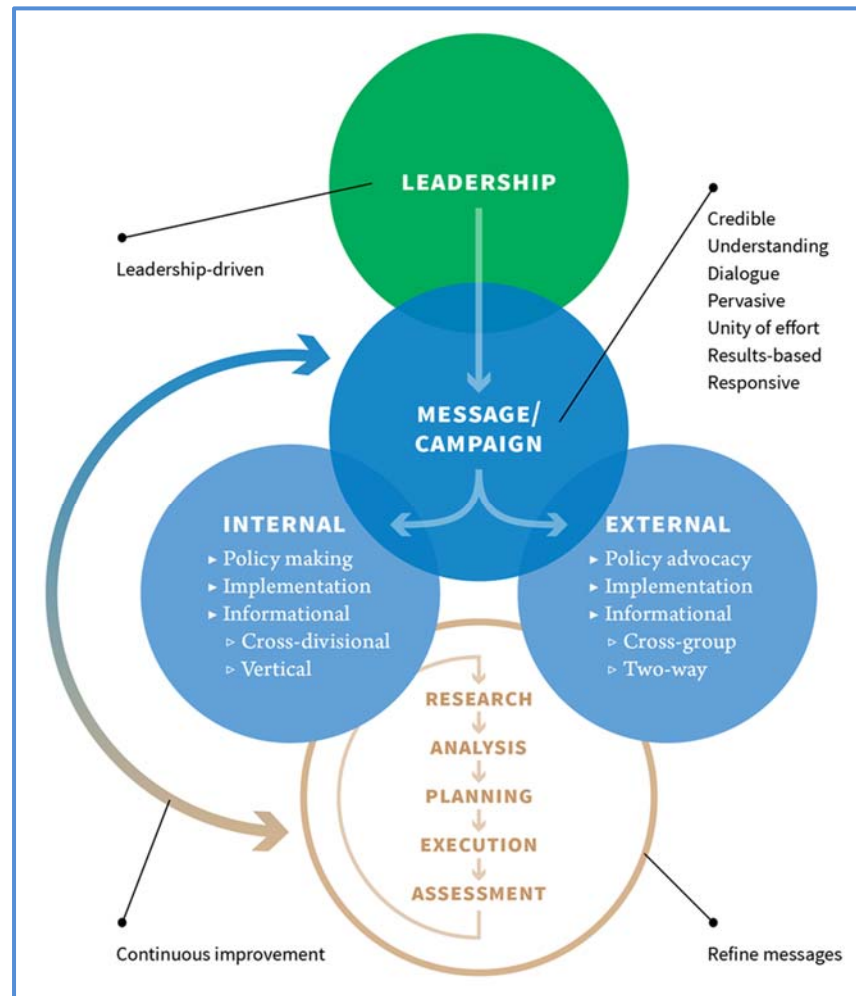
Strategic communications are led and coordinated by top-level leadership who help devise the major elements that are conveyed within the messages and tailored for target audiences. Figure 1 represents a strategic communications framework. Using this framework, communications around important initiatives, especially those that could be perceived as controversial, would entail[vi]:

- **Leadership**—Leading and crafting major message points to be used for integrated communications efforts (by top leadership).

- **Message/Campaign**—Developing carefully worded messages. Common core signal words that might be used include: increased rigor, cross-disciplinary, clear and consistent guidelines, and preparation for college and career readiness.

- **Internal and External Dissemination**—Identifying appropriate dissemination methods for internal and external stakeholders.

- **Message Refinement**—Adjusting and refining messages to meet communications goals and the needs of various stakeholders.

- **Continuous Improvement**—Refining and monitoring the success of communications processes through a continuous feedback loop.

Figure 1. Strategic Communications Framework

What is important to note about the above framework is its holistic approach in illustrating how the five major communication components connect through overlapping circles. Leadership processes need to be facilitated and connected to agreed-upon message tenets and messages must reach both internal and external stakeholders, which, as the graphic depicts, consist of audiences with very different contexts and purposes. The communication needs of SEA internal stakeholders revolve around making and supporting policies; SEAs communicate to external stakeholders to provide information to policy implementers and the general public, and to gain input and support. The final critical piece, which is often missing from the process, is creating a thorough process of researching and analyzing needs, planning strategies and processes, executing the strategies, and assessing their success.

Although no single SEA that participated in this benchmarking project was implementing all of the above key elements in one comprehensive strategy (common among benchmarking efforts—no one organization has best practices in all areas), they each had some exemplary practices and products in place, as outlined below, that addressed different elements of strategic communications.

BENCHMARK FINDINGS AND EXEMPLAR PRACTICES AND TOOLS

Benchmarking is the process of identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices from organizations anywhere in the world to help an organization improve performance. This benchmarking project utilized a collaborative process with participating SEAs and their relative Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) that began with pre-work questions to the SEAs to provide background information about their organizational context and communication processes, and identify areas for deeper probing. Once the pre-interview responses were analyzed, we tailored the interview protocol for each state, and conducted interviews with SEA and communication leaders through site visits when possible or by phone. Working collaboratively with the RCCs, SEA leaders, and their staff was an important feature of this project as it enriched what was learned by bringing together multiple perspectives to analyze needs, develop solutions, and discuss how resources can be used more productively.

The five participating SEAs wanted to better understand their communication processes, and were implementing communication strategies around adopting new standards. While we did uncover a number of exemplar practices, it is important to note that the information captured in this project represents the perceptions of individuals identified by the SEA and therefore might not capture all practices being implemented. A next step for this project could be to interview external stakeholders to gain the perspectives of those receiving SEA communications, for instance district and school leaders, parents, legislators, or community members.

The SEAs that asserted confidence in the success of their communication campaigns cited a number of processes designed to address communication with both internal and external stakeholders through clear, common messages, similar to those depicted in the strategic communications framework (Figure 1).

Those successful strategies include:

1. Create multiple opportunities to share and gain information from internal and external stakeholders.

2. Adjust messages to meet communication goals and stakeholder needs.

3. Create an organizational structure and culture that fosters open communication.

4. Align communication between both policymaking and policy implementation departments.

5. Use multiple tools and strategies to address controversial or important key issues.

6. Use feedback tools and information to evaluate communication process.

Several of the SEAs were implementing a number of the above elements in a planned strategic approach. In those cases, a lot of process overlap can be seen. Even in instances where there is not a clear overall strategic plan, there are strong examples of processes that worked well for a

portion of the strategic process. Below are examples from our five participants in the above six critical communication processes:

Creating Multiple Opportunities to Share and Gain Information from Internal and External Stakeholders

Interviewees from several states discussed the importance of sharing information with both internal and external stakeholders, and used various tools and mechanisms to ensure their messages were aligned and well-disseminated. The key process factors behind successful information sharing and message alignment identified by interviewees were: 1) prevalence of messaging efforts to all stakeholders using a variety of mechanisms, and 2) the use of a centralized source to create messages and monitor message consistency. The strategic communications framework (Figure 1) depicts the ideal process as being driven by top leadership who help craft major messaging elements and identify and drive processes to communicate with both internal and external stakeholders. Interviews with SEA leaders found that the top-level leader(s) were all involved in the communication of new standards to a certain extent, with various levels of alignment found between SEA leaders and other departments, and between internal and external communication efforts. Because audience and messaging contexts vary greatly between internal and external SEA stakeholders, this section will address each group separately after a brief discussion on alignment.

Alignment

Message alignment is best achieved when led by a centralized person or process that ensures one message (or the same set of message points) is used in every communication effort. For example, even though different departments might be involved in leading implementation of the standards, there would be one process for posting information on the SEA website about the standards, and one source for vetting information for message alignment. A more organic and less successful approach might allow separate departments to explain their interpretation of the state standards on their own separate websites.

In Kansas, message creation and dissemination are directed by the commissioner, who sets the direction for messaging, and then passes messages down to the deputy commissioner and out to teams responsible for the work. The commissioner and deputy commissioner are often out speaking to external stakeholders, particularly for regional meetings, and the commissioner has been known to speak extensively on the phone to parents to explain the state standards, or answer other questions. Message alignment was mentioned frequently by the interviewees, and is supported by intentional message coordination, and through multiple opportunities to share information both internally and externally. For example, interviewees asserted that connectivity and coherence across various departments and consultants was a key SEA-wide focus for coordinating messages and making decisions about state standards.

The commissioner in Ohio is also very involved in directing messaging and dissemination for major initiatives, and is seen as being very involved in strategizing how information should be

promoted, without micromanaging the message crafting process. While this approach was working well, according to communications staff members, they also asserted that the SEA experiences communication gaps due to departments still functioning in silos. Communication leaders believe their processes could be improved by having a dedicated resource to guide or oversee the overall communications process.

Internal Communication

Changing state standards is a major reform that touches many departments in an SEA, such as governmental relations, core-subject departments, public affairs, and personnel who communicate to districts, schools, and the general public. The SEAs that asserted they were doing well with internal communication focused on having the right people at the table, and used multiple communication methods, including written products and face-to-face meetings.

Internal communication approaches in both Idaho and Illinois are well-connected and inclusive. In Idaho, the communications director meets frequently with the commissioner, and at least weekly with the governmental relations director. Meetings are a key communications vehicle in this SEA; there are weekly senior staff meetings with division heads and key program directors, quarterly meetings with all staff, and the technology director attends all senior staff meetings to maintain message alignment and consider ways to leverage technology to maximize dissemination. As a means of proactive outreach, internal staff members receive emails and printed materials that outline "myths and facts" related to controversial topics with the goal of maintaining message alignment in communications to external stakeholders.

The SEA in Illinois, which is relatively large in size, conducts weekly meetings with senior leadership as well as the human resources director and chief performance officer. Quarterly cross-division staff meetings are held on critical issues, and the SEA conducts periodic "brown bag" meetings to create interactive opportunities to exchange information and discuss issues. Weekly calls are held with public information officers to keep them up to date, and a weekly agency-wide newsletter is distributed that is seen as a key mechanism for message alignment and dissemination.

The Kansas and Arkansas SEAs also hold weekly meetings. Kansas SEA leaders added an additional alignment component by ensuring SEA staff members receive the same information that is provided to their state board. Arkansas communication leaders asserted that their weekly staff meetings have been helpful to offset the departmental silos, however, they felt their meetings could be better leveraged by using a structured agenda that contained only discussion items with email communications prior to meetings for updates and report-outs.

External Communication

Communication with external stakeholders is made more complex by distance and stakeholder diversity. Consequently, the SEAs cited the importance of using multiple tools for external communications, such as social media and websites with video. Because external communication

was often used to gain stakeholder support and/or confidence, SEA leaders stated they also focus closely on how messages are crafted and delivered, which will also be addressed in the section below on "adjusting messages to stakeholder needs." Because distance posed challenges both for assessing communication effectiveness and gaining public perspective, several SEAs also focused on creating opportunities for interactive discussions with external stakeholders.

According to communications leaders in Ohio, their main clients are districts and schools, not the internal agency. To reach their numerous educator stakeholders, the Ohio department found high leverage using webinars, as well as communicating through their website, using social media, and posting videos of specific events or topics on their website and YouTube channel. The Ohio interviewees also mentioned that their SEA has the second-largest Twitter following of any SEA in the country, and that they tweet outside of school hours in order to reach teachers when they are online, and that they avoid using tools that teachers are discouraged from using such as Facebook.

Both Kansas and Idaho SEA staff members used a range of communications vehicles to reach external stakeholders, and they were careful to include external communications as part of their larger outreach goals. Kansas leaders placed a high premium on keeping a close connection to external audiences, and used a weekly postcard campaign to share "good news" about education in Kansas in an effort to maintain a balance between negative communications that were out of their control. They also send a weekly newsletter to schools, and are vigilant about keeping superintendents and principals updated on current reforms and activities so that they are not "blindsided" by public or agency inquires. Additionally, several Kansas SEA leaders have written white papers that have been widely distributed about "hot" topics like cross-walking new to old state standards, and addressing reading fluency. To create a formal interactive communications forum, Kansas leaders are currently working on what they call a "global communication system" to allow stakeholder input on major reforms such as state standards. The process for that system entails identifying a team that would interface with stakeholders "out on the road" on pressing or concerning issues, as well as creating and internally vetting a presentation prior to external dissemination. During the development of their state standards, community members, teachers, parents, higher education leaders, etc. were involved in creating and vetting the standards. The standard development process was completed by committees, and then standards were posted for public comment. To close the loop on the process, state board members went out to schools to thank people who spent time on developing the standards.

Idaho SEA leaders also place a high priority on providing information and tools to districts and schools. For significant or controversial reforms, they provide weekly updates to district superintendents, and use e-communications for major events such as the State of the State address. To help schools explain major changes to their own stakeholders, the department provides communication toolkits for teachers, parents, board members, principals and superintendents. Toolkits cover a range of topics, including how to discuss new standards, how to dispel facts and myths on controversial issues, and how to hold community meetings to

discuss controversial topics. This year, the SEA is partnering with a business coalition to fund and help develop an awareness campaign, which will include an informational video to aid understanding of their new state standards.

To cover their vast number of external stakeholders, Illinois SEA leaders send out a weekly newsletter that highlights top news to superintendents, regional offices, and statewide leadership management organizations. The agency attempts to reach out to parents, teachers, and business leaders as often as possible, and in-person when possible. Additionally, all major communications efforts are implemented through a strategic plan that is reviewed by various stakeholders to ensure the plan and message is appropriate and clear.

Webinars, testimonial videos that feature stakeholders from the field, such as teachers, and websites were the most frequently cited high-yield tools for communicating with external stakeholders. Website organization and user experience is a critical factor, according to several SEA leaders. For example, one SEA interviewee mentioned that while the public seemed to access their website with great frequency, the lack of coherence and easy navigation of their site seemed to create a high volume of time-consuming questions from the general public.

A summary of exemplars and tools for creating multiple opportunities to share and gain information from internal and external stakeholders is provided in Table 1.

Summary of exemplars and tools for: Creating multiple opportunities to share and gain information from internal and external stakeholders—

- Internal:
    - Monthly agency-wide newsletter.
    - Quarterly cross-division staff meetings on critical issues.
    - Weekly senior leadership team meetings
    - Weekly updates with PIOs.
    - Meeting processes that use face-to-face time for interactive discussions and email to share updates prior to meetings. Meetings are also managed through an agenda, and often a facilitator.
    - CPO and HR included in internal meetings.
    - Technology director included for technology-use.
    - Brown bag meetings to create opportunities for interactive discussions, share myths and facts, and gain perspective on stakeholder opinions and concerns.
    - Staff informed about communications to state board.
- External:

- o Weekly newsletter to superintendents, schools, regional offices, and statewide leadership management orgs.

- o Meetings and conversations with parents and teachers. Fact sheets and media from key external stakeholders. (See Appendix B.)

- o Teachers and university presidents included in state standards press releases as "voice of credibility." (See Appendix E.)

- o Commissioner posts weekly blog on highlights. (See Appendix D.)

- o Deputy commissioner conducts frequent regional meetings.

Adjusting Messages to Meet Communications Goals and Stakeholder Needs

Mentioned earlier, internal SEA stakeholders require accurate information about major reforms like state standards to work with both policymakers and implementers. It is also important to provide the same to external stakeholders, with the additional element of gaining support as a critical factor. Both internal and external audiences have unique and different needs and contexts, and the purpose of the communication often differs significantly. Almost every participating SEA showed sensitivity toward their stakeholders' communication needs, illustrating that they had already begun to shift from a compliance-based orientation to one more related to customer service.

Communications leaders in Ohio described their approach as being customer-focused. Through the support of the communications department, their communications are written on an eighth-grade level and composed to be jargon-free. The communications director in Idaho also spoke frequently about adjusting messages to audience needs, and also adjusted language by eliminating jargon like "unpack the standards" and "formative and interim assessments." Because Idaho leaders believe stakeholder groups have diverse needs, they use public opinion research to formulate messages, and often pilot them on similar stakeholders. Additionally, Idaho leaders asserted that they found out the hard way, after previous problems passing a large reform package, that messaging for legislators and for the general public needed to be very different. Legislators, they assert, prefer messages to be straight to the point, factual, and concise, whereas education issues can often be emotionally charged for community members, parents, and educators, and need to be formulated with more of a connection to those emotions. Figuring out how to balance the two, and improve their ability to craft messages on sensitive topics, is an area Idaho leaders want to continue to try to improve.

Another issue related to the wording of messages came up regarding the name of the standards themselves. Similar to the other participating SEAs, Idaho leaders moved away from the politically charged term "Common Core standards;" a perceived government-led reform, to "Idaho Core Standards," or something similar using the state's name and often the general term standards. Because the term "Common Core" became so politically charged in Ohio, the SEA

decided to take a "hands-off" approach to communicating about their standards, and worked with external organizations on communication efforts and advocacy.

Almost every SEA mentioned the importance of representing the work with voices "from the field" to carry their messages, with a teacher's voice being seen as the most effective. Illinois leaders asserted that teachers represented the "number one voice" in advocating for the Common Core and that videos featuring teachers explaining how the standards could improve teaching and learning provided a powerful example. As improving preparation for college and workforce readiness are major goals of new state standards, many SEAs found that stakeholders responded well to communication delivered by university presidents to represent the "voice of credibility" toward that goal. SEA communication strategists also engaged the help of business leaders to develop and disseminate information; in one instance, Caterpillar wrote a letter to a media outlet that was also distributed to members of the Illinois Business Roundtable about how the standards would help prepare students for business. Similarly, Idaho and Kansas use teacher voices for messages, and also find using teachers in videos to be very effective.

Summary of exemplars and tools for: Adjusting messages to stakeholder needs

- Adjust communication to be clearly understood by the average stakeholder in a fashion similar to the newspaper industry; eliminate jargon, use clear language, and use an average reading level.

- Adjust messages to background and context of different audiences; legislators respond well to short, factual, clear writing while the general public view education as a very personal topic, and sometimes have an emotional response.

- Pilot communications on similar stakeholders to ensure messages achieve desired results.

- Connect the audience to the heart of the topic by representing the reform with voices and images from the field. Most stakeholders respond well to communication by teachers and students.

- Eliminate words that prove to be political "hot spots."

Creating an Organizational Structure and Culture that Fosters Open Communication

The SEA interviewees that believed they were doing well with internal stakeholder communication and message alignment were in agencies that were organized to support easy and open access across and within departments. While some physical structures and processes provided a formal mechanism for easy collaboration, organizational culture was cited as an important factor for fostering a natural inclination and desire to share information informally and frequently.

Idaho is an example of an SEA that has organized physically, functionally, and culturally to foster open, accessible communication. The chief moved everyone to the same floor within the

same building, and reorganized departments to follow the three pillars forming the overall SEA strategic plan: educational divisions, transparent accountability, and finance. The purpose was to align the work to the strategic plan, and move departments out of their traditional silos. Once the SEA was reorganized, everyone was asked to rewrite their job descriptions to explain how their work related to the SEA's reform efforts. The communications director described their SEA culture as being a very open environment, where she could easily walk in and speak to the chief, director of governmental affairs, or anyone else she needed to collaborate with. Regarding interface with external stakeholders, Idaho leaders asserted that their focus was their customers, not the adults in the organization.

The Kansas SEA is depicted by a simple organizational chart that is divided between the umbrellas of Fiscal and Administrative Services, and Learning Services, each led by a deputy commissioner. Similar to Idaho, the interviewees described the culture as being very open, with much communication happening informally, as a natural part of how work is done.

Although Ohio is a large SEA with twelve people reporting to the executive director of communications, the communications director asserts that he has direct open access to the superintendent "any time day or night." As with Idaho and Kansas, Ohio operates with a heavy focus on its customers: external stakeholders.

Where the communications department was housed on the organization chart and the connectivity between communications personnel and top leadership seemed to greatly impact coherence and information flow. In one SEA, the communications department is listed externally next to Chief of Staff and Legal Services. Interviewees in that SEA felt that their work was not central to the SEA, but rather functioned as an afterthought.

Summary of exemplars and tools for: Organizational structure and culture that fosters open communication

- Organize physical location of departments in as close proximity to each other as possible.

- Organize departmental work and meetings around the SEA strategic plan to move from silos of departments to cross-departmental work that matches SEA strategies and goals.

- Place the communications department and leader where the work can be executed holistically across all departments.

- Schedule regular time for various departments to meet collaboratively; structure the time to ensure effective use.

Aligning Messages and Information between Policymaking and Policy Implementation Departments

Complex reforms such as adopting new state standards require a number of different communication activities that span both policymaking and implementation. Policymaking activities include informing legislative staff about the reform and keeping them abreast of "hot"

issues, and gaining external support for the passage of legislation. Implementation involves both internal stakeholders who will be involved with implementation, and external stakeholders in districts and schools who will be expected to understand and act upon new or changing policies. Agencies that connected these two facets of reform were much more cohesive, connected, and in control of their messaging.

Connecting policymaking and implementation is a particular strength in Idaho, perhaps because the chief at that time (Commissioner Luna cited he will not re-run after his term completes in December 2014) had governmental experience working on a school board, and was seen as a good legislative communicator. The Idaho SEA is organized to connect communication to policy by placing the communications and governmental affairs departments together on the organizational chart under transparent accountability. Both directors of that division work very closely together to ensure that messages are well-aligned, both internally and externally. For example, if a memo goes out to all superintendents, it is also sent to legislators. In addition to connecting internal and external communications dealing with policy and implementation, the communications director is "at the table" when policy is formulated so that she is able to answer questions about how policy was crafted or rolled out when they arise.

Alignment and coherence is much improved when policy and implementation are connected, both internally and externally. For example, the communications director in Idaho pointed out that teachers cannot be expected to implement new standards without having ample time to study them and make lesson plans around them. However, states and districts often have policies and practices that do not allow for that additional time to prepare to implement a new policy. Another advantage we found in connecting policy and implementation was that internal and external stakeholders appeared to be well-informed about how decisions were made, and what their role was to be in implementation. Thus, if someone in one of these SEAs was asked how standards were adopted and who was involved in the process, the answer was readily available and likely to be accurate.

Summary of exemplars and tools for: Aligning communication between policymaking and policy implementation departments

- Weekly meetings between director of governmental affairs and communications director.

- Communications director attends policy-related meetings to answer questions on how decisions are made when they arise.

- Luncheons to explain myths and facts to legislators.

- Fact sheets sent to legislators.

Using Multiple Tools and Strategies to Address Controversial or Important Key Issues

Crafting an effective message that gains buy-in from diverse stakeholders is clearly important, however, it becomes much more critical when controversy and politics come into play. When

asked about challenges, every SEA participant mentioned political pushback to be one of their biggest issues. The SEAs that were the most cohesive and strategic about communications were the ones that fared the best with controversy. This is also an area where the most interesting practical advice arose.

In addition to avoiding certain "hot" terms, SEAs often approached controversial issues by using a "grassroots" approach that included using teachers' voices, for example, rather than driving all the messages from the SEA itself. Similarly, Ohio used external organizations, such as Battelle for Kids and the Ohio Business Roundtable, to advocate for their standards. All SEAs created an entire strategy around "hot" topics based on past experiences. Idaho, in particular, based their communications strategy for new state standards on lessons learned from their past education reforms being struck down by a referendum vote. Kansas based their approach on a past conflict with regard to science standards.

For Idaho and Kansas, keeping internal stakeholders well-informed was critical to proactive messaging. This meant having weekly staff meetings, sending out weekly updates to legislators and superintendents, creating myth and fact sheets to disseminate, and holding brown bag luncheons and meetings to discuss myths and facts in person. Idaho also walked legislators through the standards to help them understand the "facts and myths" behind them, so that legislators could see the content of the standards for themselves. Both agencies were very strategic about the rollout of information on their standards, and made sure that stakeholders were prepared to counter myths with facts when they arose. Proactive planning was critical, cited the communications directors, to stay ahead of the message rather than defend it. Similarly, Illinois also focused on frequent communication for controversial issues, and used a number of partners to assist with the large external audience they needed to address. These partners included regional offices, a statewide system of support contractor, the Illinois principal association, and the Illinois Center for School Improvement.

Inviting the opposition to the table to voice their opinions and clarify facts and myths was another important strategy for addressing controversy. Informed by their past failed attempt to pass reform, the Idaho commissioner met frequently with union leaders and skeptical legislators to discuss their concerns and involve them in decision-making processes. Kansas leaders worked to ensure that policies, practices, and messages illustrated community representation by engaging state board representatives, community members, and by soliciting feedback from their website.

Helping external stakeholders communicate about controversial issue was also an important strategy used by SEAs. To help districts communicate about their standards, the Idaho SEA developed a communication toolkit for teachers, parents, board members, principals and superintendents on how to hold community meetings and talk about controversial topics. Leaders in Kansas developed a parent guide that explained new assessments associated with their standards that included information on how the assessments are different, how their children can succeed on them, and how parents can help.

Another challenge or concern mentioned by all interviewees was how information was driven down to teachers and parents, or as Idaho described it, "getting water to the end of the row." Typically, the SEA does not have individual email addresses, so they are left to provide information or materials to superintendents or other district or school contacts who may or may not decide to disseminate it at that given time, or at all. Several SEAs mentioned that they cannot require schools to disseminate a brochure to parents on state standards; however, they want to provide something to schools as many do not have the capacity to do it themselves, and an SEA-developed brochure is another way to ensure a coordinated message campaign.

Summary of exemplars and tools to: Address controversial or key issues

- Meet with key stakeholders and provide ample interactive discussion time to gain buy-in or clarity on controversial, pressing, or big issues.

- Represent reforms through images and voices of the most impacted stakeholders; audiences respond well to teachers and students.

- Use testimonial or advocacy videos from the field.

- Get ahead of negative messages through fact sheets and/or informational brochures.

- Carefully strategize rollout of messages on controversial issues.

- Stream and post meetings that address controversial issues to document support.

- Develop global communications system to create transparency for major issues.

- Publish white papers on key topics.

- Provide implementers with brochures, toolkits, etc. that share facts or dispel myths.

- Train or assist implementers on holding community meetings to discuss concerns about hot topics.

- Use "grassroots" approach for oppositional issues rather directing messages from the SEA.

- Use meetings about controversial issues as "unifying" events to provide key information and solicit feedback

- Send out "good news" postcards. (See Appendix A.)

Used Feedback Tools and Information to Evaluate Communication Process

According to a communications professor in Georgetown, strategic communications means "…communicating the best message, through the right channels, measured against well-considered organizational and communications-specific goals.[vii]" While none of the SEAs were following a formal evaluation and feedback process, some of them were informally attempting to measure the effectiveness of their communication strategies to some extent.

Illinois seemed to be the closest to having a more formalized or structured approach to evaluating their communications processes, perhaps attributable to their development of draft plans for messaging. While Illinois cited that they did not have formal assessment mechanisms, they did mention collecting daily data on media tracking, invested in surveys and focus groups to help with their improvement process, and had recently completed a statewide learning conditions survey which did not yield the results they had hoped for, but did create an opportunity to discuss current conditions and next steps.

Most feedback collected was informal and anecdotal, and not tied to any formalized communications plan or interim communications goals. For example, Ohio and Arkansas surveyed superintendents, and the commissioner in Arkansas meets regularly with superintendents. However, that information does not reach the communications department, so it may not be utilized to the fullest extent. Kansas leaders mentioned sending out teacher surveys, but otherwise did not have formal mechanisms to assess their communications efforts.

Figure 2. Communications Feedback Loop

The feedback loop depicted in Figure 2, excerpted from the strategic communications framework (Figure 1) illustrates a thorough process for SEAs to use to evaluate the effectiveness of their outreach strategies as a means of proactive rather than reactive communications. Doing so would allow the SEA to articulate goals and strategies, identify interim or benchmark goals, plan and execute their strategies, and then assess their effectiveness and build next steps. To date, their processes were very much organic and not executed within a larger process improvement strategy.

RESEARCH
↓
ANALYSIS
↓
PLANNING
↓
EXECUTION
↓
ASSESSMENT

DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

To achieve targeted outcomes regarding communication around a major reform, communications should be planned and implemented holistically across the entire agency, and as part of the overall agency strategic plan. Such an approach would ensure that SEAs connect the important components of their work—policymaking and implementation—while maintaining coherence and support from both internal and external stakeholders. The level of complexity of a major reform, such as adopting new state standards, requires SEAs to complete multiple activities, including: conducting research to develop content, disseminating information to gain legislative and public support for the standards, and, once adopted, clearly communicating policies around the standards and providing support for implementation. When the process becomes political, as it has recently with the Common Core standards, it greatly increases the need to build a holistic plan and strategy for proactively getting the right messages to the right people, rather than being

in the position of reacting or defending messages from oppositional, misinformed, or uninformed stakeholders.

The information gathered in this benchmarking project allowed us to document the communication practices and tools being used to support the adoption of new state standards in five states. The descriptions and sample tools in the appendices provide useful examples for other states that SEAs may consider using for their own standards adoption approach. While the five SEAs had varying levels of success in their standards adoption process, we worry about what happens when key leaders and personnel leave the SEA; how can the successful strategies continue if they rest within individuals and organic processes? With the realities about high SEA leader and personnel turnover, this is a critical issue for maintaining stability and continued work flow. A potential next step for this project might be to further examine what communication processes are well documented within SEAs, and explore ways those processes could become part of holistic communication approach within an overall agency strategic plan.

We believe this project only touched the tip of a very important and complex topic for SEAs. Therefore, another next step would be to consider either expanding the project further with the five participating SEAs to track changes over time, or launch another similar communications benchmarking project using different states to gain a broader perspective and examples from SEAs with different contextual challenges.

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[i] Gross, B., Jochim, A., Hill, P., Murphy, P. J., & Redding, S. (May 2013). The SEA of the Future: Leveraging Performance Management to Support School Improvement. Report produced by the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center. See: http://www.crpe.org/publications/sea-future-leveraging-performance-management-support-school-improvement

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Ibid; Brown, C. G., Hess, F.M, Lautzenheiser, D., & Owen, I. (July 27, 2011). State Education Agencies as Agents of Change: What It will Take for the States to Step UP on Education. See http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2011/07/27/9901/state-education-agencies-as-agents-of-change/

[iv] Ibid.

[v] Ibid.

[vi] Based on Principles of Strategic Communication by the Department of Defense, 2008. See http://gao.gov/assets/600/591123.pdf

[vii] See http://www.idea.org/blog/2011/03/16/what-is-strategic-communications/

APPENDIX A:
KANSAS' POSITIVE COMMUNICATION SAMPLE

To keep legislators informed and updated with both reform news and positive news, Kansas SEA staff members provided legislators with one-page fact sheets, particularly on controversial topics. To remind legislators about what was working in the state, they sent legislators a weekly postcard with at-a glance, bulleted facts about key information.

APPENDIX B:
IDAHO MYTHS AND FACTS FOR EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

MYTHS & FACTS

Here are common myths you will hear about the new Idaho Core Standards and the facts to dispel them.

Myth: The federal government has required Idaho to adopt Common Core State Standards

Fact: Idaho voluntarily chose to adopt the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts as Idaho's new Core Standards in these two subject areas. The federal government has never reviewed a state's standards, and they have not reviewed these standards. These standards were the result of a state-led effort. Idaho signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with other states that clearly defines this as a state-led effort. Specifically, the MOA states, "The parties support a state-led effort and not a federal effort to develop a common core of state standards." The state-led effort also is evident in the fact that not every state has adopted these standards. Each state reviewed these standards and made its own decision.

Myth: States must adopt the Common Core State Standards if they accepted federal stimulus funding, Race to the Top grants or received a federal waiver from No Child Left Behind

Fact: No state is required to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Idaho chose to adopt these new standards because we know how critical it is to raise academic standards for all students. The U.S. Department of Education has tried to incentivize states to raise their academic standards in core subject areas through Race to the Top grants and the federal waivers from No Child Left Behind. To date, Idaho has not received any federal funding to implement these new standards. In addition, states like Virginia received a No Child Left Behind waiver even though they chose not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. No requirement exists. The adoption of standards remains a state-level decision.

Myth: These new standards will teach communism, indoctrinate our children with a leftist agenda and change the way schools teach the history of how 9/11 occurred.

Fact: These are academic standards in mathematics and English language arts. Idaho has not changed the academic standards in science, history, or social studies. Idaho has only added literacy standards in other subject areas so students will learn how to read, analyze, and write in any subject matter or career field they choose. The new standards are available online at http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/common/ for your review.

Myth: These standards will dumb down education in Idaho.

Fact: These standards are considerably higher than the previous standards Idaho had in place for mathematics and English language arts. To see evidence of the difference in standards, you can review the comprehensive gap analysis Idaho conducted to compare our previous standards to these new standards on our website at http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/common/. In addition, Idaho's colleges and universities have told us that students who graduate with mastery in these standards will be prepared for the rigors of postsecondary and the workforce. These standards were developed so they are comparable with any other state in the nation and with the standards of any other country in the world.

Myth: Because Idaho adopted these new standards, it must upload student identifiable data into a national database, including details such as family income, family religious affiliation, and parent's education level and biometric data (iris scans, DNA, and fingerprints) from students.

Fact: These are academic standards that set goals for what each student should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level. When Idaho adopted the Common Core State Standards as Idaho Core Standards in mathematics and English language arts in 2011, the state only adopted these content standards. The state did not adopt any other policies to go along with these standards. These standards are in no way tied to the way data is collected at the state or local level. Idaho implemented a statewide longitudinal data system back in 2009 to streamline data collection processes at the state and local levels. That was two years before the state chose to

adopt these new content standards. Idaho's statewide longitudinal data system is not tied to a national database in any way. Neither the state nor local school districts collect data on things like religious affiliation, nor do we have the technology to collect biometric data on students.

Myth: The federal government has changed FERPA to require the collection of biometric data on students and allow this data to be released publicly

Fact: FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of students in the public education system. This law only contains policies to protect the privacy of students. It does not mandate the collection of any data. The only changes that have been made to the law in recent years reflect changes in technology and data collection to ensure the continued privacy of students. FERPA is available online at http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/pdf/ferparegs.pdf. On page 4, you will see that the law now lists an official definition of a "biometric record." The law only lists this definition in the event that a local school or district is collecting this type of data. In that case, as you can see on page 6, FERPA clearly defines a biometric record as "personally identifiable information" so that, as stated on pages 12-13, no personally identifiable information can be released without the consent of a parent or guardian. This only applies to local school districts or states that collect this type of data. It is a completely local and/or state decision on whether or not to collect this data. In Idaho, we do not collect biometric data on students.

These standards are not related to data collection in any way. If you have questions about data collection, please click here.

Myth: These new standards will require teachers to teach math in an "untested way."

Fact: These standards are in line with the Idaho Math Initiative that the state implemented in 2008. Research has shown that teachers who have taken the Mathematical Thinking for Instruction course through the Idaho Math Initiative and applied these methods in their classrooms see better student achievement results in mathematics. A primary reason Idaho chose to adopt these new standards is because they aligned well with what we were already doing in our schools. Through these new standards, Idaho students will learn critical thinking and problem-solving skills that we believe are important now and in the future.

Myth: These new standards will de-emphasize literature, like Huckleberry Finn, and historical texts, such as the Gettysburg Address.

Fact: These standards actually emphasize reading and writing skills across all subject areas, not just in English language arts classrooms. Students will continue to read classic literature and other types of fiction in English class. In addition, the standards include literacy standards for history, science and other subject areas to make sure reading and writing are emphasized outside of English class as well. Local school districts still choose the texts that are taught in every classroom, not the state. In this way, the new standards ensure students in public high schools receive a well-rounded education in learning both literary texts as well as informational texts. The business community in Idaho and across the country has told us that students need to be prepared to read, write and analyze informational texts before they graduate from high school. We know this is a critical skill in the workforce and have to make sure Idaho students are prepared to meet it. Here are examples of some of the new standards Idaho has adopted:

- Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics. (See page 36, Reading Standards for Literature, Grades 6-12)
- By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. (See page 36, Reading Standards for Literature, Grades 6-12)

Myth: The adoption of these new standards will eliminate school choice options in public education.

Fact: These are academic standards that set goals for what each student should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level. These standards are in no way tied to school choice options. Every public school, including schools of choice, will teach these new standards beginning next school year. Choice within public education is in fact alive and thriving in Idaho. Four new public charter schools are scheduled to open next school year to bring the total number of public charter schools in Idaho to 46. Idaho currently has 23 magnet schools or programs operating in the state along with 10 focus schools or programs. Many districts also offer alternative

schools or academies as another choice. These are just a few examples of school choice in public education in Idaho.

Myth: These new standards were developed by private interest groups based in Washington, D.C.

Fact: The new standards were developed by states. Critics point to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governor's Association (NGA) as "private interest groups," but these groups are actually two state-led organizations that were asked by their members – state education chiefs and governors – to facilitate the state-led effort. The members of these organizations include Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna and Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter.

Myth: States are not allowed to change anything in the standards after they adopt them.

Fact: These are Idaho Core Standards, and Idaho is ultimately in control of these standards. Idaho will review these standards every five years just as it reviews standards in other subject areas. Each state has the flexibility to add on to these standards if it sees fit. Idaho, for example, already has passed a resolution to consider adding cursive writing as a standard in the elementary grades. The Idaho State Board of Education will consider that this year. In addition, local school boards have the flexibility to add on to these standards at the local level as well.

APPENDIX C:
KANSAS MYTHS AND FACTS EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Myths About the Process and Development of the Standards

Myth: No teachers were involved in writing the *Standards*.

Fact: The common core state standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, there were many state experts that came together to create the most thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together.

For more information, please visit: www.corestandards.org

Myth: The *Standards* are not research or evidence based.

Fact: The *Standards* have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research; surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college and career-ready performance; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations. In Mathematics, the *Standards* draw on conclusions from TIMSS and other studies of high-performing countries that the traditional US mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of a curriculum that is "*a mile wide and an inch deep*."

Myth: Adopting common standards will bring all states' standards down to the lowest common denominator, which means states with high standards, such as Massachusetts, will be taking a step backwards if they adopt the *Standards*.

Fact: The *Standards* are designed to build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college and their careers. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level. In fact, since this work began, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The *Standards* were informed by the best in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and expertise about educational outcomes. We need college and career-ready standards because even in high-performing states – students are graduating and passing all the required tests and still require remediation in their postsecondary work.

Myth: The *Standards* are not internationally benchmarked.

Fact: International benchmarking played a significant role in both sets of standards. In fact, the college and career ready standards include an appendix listing the evidence that was consulted in drafting the standards and the international data consulted in the benchmarking process is included in this appendix.

Myth: The *Standards* only include skills and do not address the importance of content knowledge.

Fact: The *Standards* lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice **applying** mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they **prepare students to think and reason mathematically**. The *Standards* set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

Myth: The *Standards* dictate (determine) the sequence of courses for students through school.

Fact: The *Standards* give direction on several pathways to mathematical understanding.

Myth: The *Standards* do not prepare or require students to learn Algebra in the 8th grade, as many states' current standards do.

Fact: The *Standards* do accommodate and prepare students for Algebra 1 in 8th grade, by including the prerequisites for this course in grades K-7. Students who master the K-7 material will be able to take Algebra 1 in 8th grade. At the same time, grade 8 standards are also included; these include rigorous algebra and will transition students effectively into a full Algebra 1 course.

Myth: Key math topics are missing or appear in the wrong grade.

Fact: The mathematical progressions presented in the common core are coherent and based on evidence. Part of the problem with having 50 different sets of state standards is that today, different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

Myths About Implementation & Assessment of the Standards

Myth: The *Standards* tell teachers what to teach.

Fact: There are many publishers claiming to have textbooks that are aligned to the *Standards*, however with the final draft of the Common Core Mathematics Standards being released to the public on June 4, 2010, it is highly unlikely that publishers have had time to "rework" the entire contents of their textbooks at each grade level to align 100% to the *Standards*. Be cautious of publishers changing only the table of contents to match the *Standards* terms (i.e. Domain, Cluster, Standard) without changing the content inside. Phil Daro, Lead CCSS Writer, states implementing the Standards means getting away from the "coverage"

business in mathematics textbooks and focusing on building conceptual understanding that emphasize the Standards for Mathematical Practice in every lesson. Understanding mathematics is a key component of the *Standards*. It will take a great deal of time for publishers to align texts to the *Standards*. Until this happens, pay attention to NCTM and NCSM for supplemental resources that are aligned to the Standards.)

Myth: The State Assessments will have items embedded next year that are similar to items students will see on the Smarter Balance "Pilot" Assessment in 2013-2014 and the CCSS Assessment scheduled for 2014–2015.

Fact: The Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) will begin writing items in the 2011-2012 school year. Any assessment company claiming to have similar items is untrue. Currently, Kansas State Mathematics Assessment is only multiple choice and covers specific indicators. The SBAC has made it clear that the Common Assessment will assess all Domains and may include 1) multiple choice, 2) short answer, 3) constructed response, 4) performance, and 5) simulations.

Myth: Since the Common Assessment is a few years away, schools need not worry about changes in instruction, resources, or assessments until 2014.

Fact: Schools and/or Districts that wait until the year of the Common Assessment will have students who are ill-prepared. Conversations need to be happening now as to professional development needed for teachers in order to prepare all students to be successful in mathematics.

The Standards for Mathematical Practice need to "come alive" in every classroom, THIS YEAR! The focus should not be on "answer getting" or "covering all the topics", but teaching for understanding and providing opportunities for students to make sense of mathematics.

> ## Correct answers are essential... but they're part of the process, they're not the product. The product is the math the kids walk away with in their heads...
> *- Phil Daro, CCSS Lead Writer*

APPENDIX D:
KENTUCKY'S COMMISSIONER'S BLOG

Although Kentucky did not participate in the full benchmarking process, they did provide information for the pre-work. One interesting aspect of their work is the dedication by the commissioner to connect with external stakeholders and keep them informed. Below is one of his sample blogs.

Doc H's Blog
Days in the life of Kentucky's commissioner of education

Make it Real
While most of the country seems embroiled in a political fight around Common Core State Standards and their implementation, too many of our students are graduating from high school unprepared for the current workforce. An upcoming special report, No College = Low Wages, from the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics (KCEWS) brings this issue to the forefront. The report is due out on July 25, so be sure to check the KCEWS website for the full report once it is released.

The following highlights are based on the third of the total high school graduates from 2009-10 and 2011-12 who did not enroll in postsecondary programs. Of the third, 60 percent went directly into the workforce.

- On average, Kentucky's public high school graduates from 2011 to 2012 earned $7,567 the year following graduation. After three years the 2009-10 graduates' wages rose to $11,511.

- Three years after high school, more than three out of four graduates from 2009-10 who did not attend postsecondary were earning less than full-time minimum wage.

- Female graduates who did not attend postsecondary are earning 30 percent less than male graduates.

- African American high school graduates who did not attend postsecondary were earning 30 percent less than their white counterparts.

- Graduates with 20 or more unexcused absences in their senior year earned up to 55 percent less than those with five or fewer absences.

- About 60 percent of the high school graduates, who did not attend postsecondary, work in three industry groups that have three of the four lowest average wages.

These facts should be a wakeup call to high school students and their parents. This is clear evidence that high schools must do a better job in preparing all graduates to enter postsecondary programs (one year, two year, or four year diploma or certification) prepared for credit bearing work and with the skills necessary to succeed in careers that pay a living wage.

We certainly can continue to discuss the right wording for standards and the right assessments to measure the standards, however, we need to make the discussion REAL! Too many of our high school students are leaving high school unprepared for postsecondary and unprepared for careers. We have made excellent progress in the last four years in addressing this situation; however, we have much more work to do. Let's not get sidetracked with the political debates around standards and assessments, let's stay focused on the getting ALL students prepared for THEIR FUTURE and not our past.

APPENDIX E:
ARKANSAS SEA VIDEO USING TEACHER VOICE

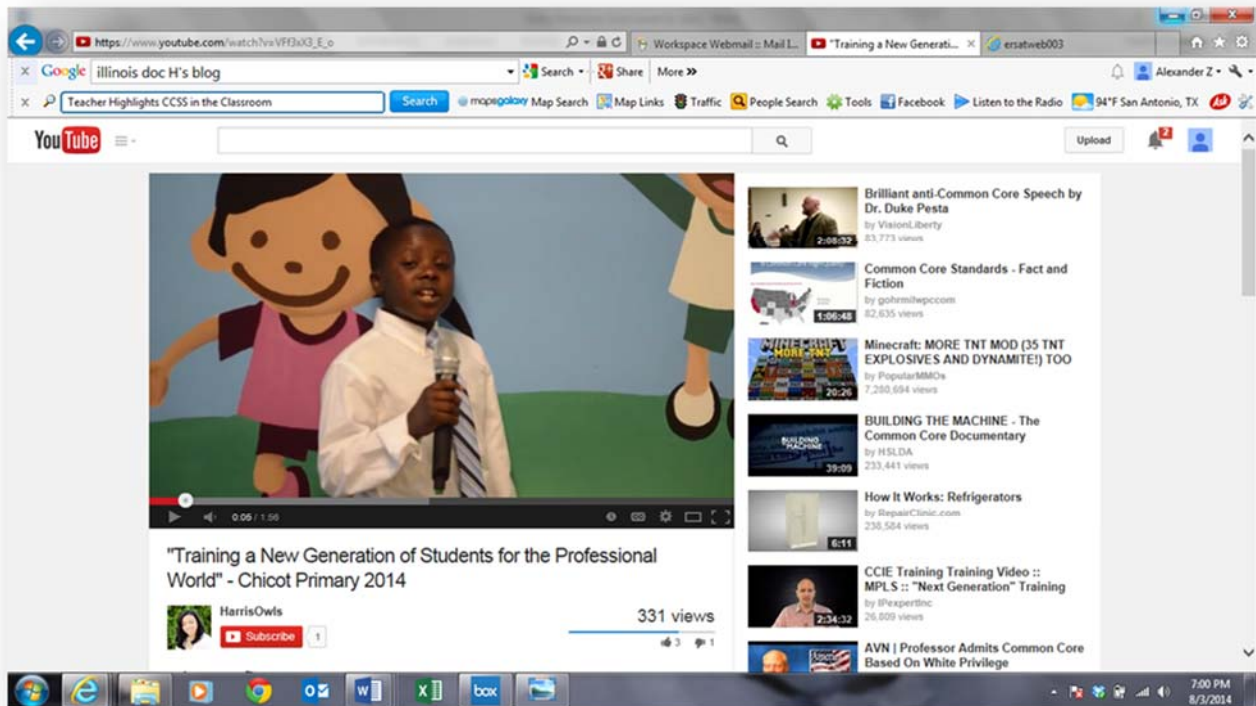*Teacher Highlights CCSS in the Classroom*

http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/communications/video-gallery/100/teacher-highlights-ccss-in-the-classroom

APPENDIX F:
ARKANSAS SEA USING STUDENT VOICE
IN COMMON CORE VIDEO

Training a New Generation of Students for Professional Work
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFf3xX3_E_o

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. 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 and content comprehensive 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).

Visit us at www.BSCPCenter.org