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# Reflections

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As we begin our fifth year operating the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC), we reflect on what region state education agencies (SEAs) have accomplished in collaboration with us. We are struck by the range of work SEAs have undertaken in the last four years--from developing policies to establishing new programs to providing support as educators refine their practice. As notable as these achievements are, their effects are even more so.

For example, the four Appalachian states have conceived and implemented an array of important education reforms since 2012. Our staff is assisting Tennessee to review, refine, and better align its early learning system, to include a statewide early literacy coaching program and early childhood assessment system. The result of this work will be improved quality of programming and outcomes for children in pre-K through the early grades. In West Virginia, our assistance contributed to the state's selection of a new teacher performance assessment while simultaneously enhancing agency staff's capacity to collect, analyze, and use data to inform future policy decision making. The state now has a consistent means by which to assess, not just the knowledge, but also the pedagogical skills, of teacher candidates.

We also partnered with region SEAs to help them support districts and schools. Our team aided Kentucky, for instance, in the refinement of its statewide district capacity building systems so it could better target support for schools in the Rural Low-Income Program. In 2016, 96% of participating schools and districts reported that they were more satisfied with KDE's support as a result of this project. As a consequence of our collaboration with Tennessee and the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders, the SEA is developing and disseminating online professional development modules to help teachers across the state improve the social and emotional instructional skills evaluated by the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model rubric. Because such practices prepare students to engage more fully in instruction, Tennessee teachers using such strategies will be even better equipped to inspire and support their pupils' learning.

Additionally, because one of our guiding principles is client empowerment, ARCC assistance has also helped prepare SEAs to sustain effectiveness once our services are complete. Following four years of collaboration with West Virginia's comprehensive statewide early learning initiative, moving from early implementation through evaluation and refinement, the state is now developing a guide based on its experience to assist other units across the SEA to carry out complex reforms. Thus, in this instance, not only is the state continuing to implement its initiative, agency staff associated with the effort are contributing to the organization's collective knowledge. In Virginia, we partnered with the state's Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement staff to support teachers and division staff in understanding and using effective formative assessment instructional practices via pilot testing, progressive refinement, and ultimately, scale up of a low-cost support system. A total of 40 divisions are now implementing these practices and the support system is nearly self-sustaining.

And these are only a few of region SEA accomplishments! We are privileged to partner with agency staff, a sense that is only reaffirmed by reflecting on outcomes emerging from our collaborative body of work. Yet we also recognize that education, like any human endeavor, is a work in progress--and so we look forward to another year of working side by side with the SEAs of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

*Caitlin Howley*