

State Board Ideas Exchange: An Interview with Jobi Lawrence (ARCC)

On November 1-2, 2018, the ARCC facilitated a State Boards of Education (SBE) Ideas Exchange in Nashville, TN. The objective of this exchange was to provide professional learning and an opportunity for in-person collaboration and networking among SBEs. This exchange focused on several key issues facing state boards: educational equity, social and emotional learning, educator quality, and college and career readiness. All four states from the ARCC region (KY, TN, VA, WV) were invited to participate in the event.

SBE members play a critical role in shaping education policy in their states and partnering with their respective State Education Agencies (SEAs) to put those policies into practice; however, state board members often lack opportunities to exchange ideas with peers who perform the same role in other states. Additionally, if members come from other sectors (e.g., business, human services), they may lack recent, first-hand experience with education systems. The Ideas Exchange helped to reduce the professional isolation of SBEs by building networks among boards and providing information and support for SBE members to tackle policy issues in their respective states.

Dr. Jobi Lawrence, ARCC Associate Director, planned and facilitated the exchange event in November. The following is an excerpt of an interview with Dr. Lawrence about the 2018 Ideas Exchange.

Q: What has been the most significant success of the Ideas Exchange?

A: By connecting with peers across the region, participants have been able to gain new knowledge and strategies to better carry out the work in their states regarding ESSA and strategic planning, as well as, other emerging issues expressed by state representatives. In addition to 3 out of the 4 ARCC states being represented at the 2018 Ideas Exchange, neighboring states in the region have expressed an interest in joining the webinars and future Ideas Exchange opportunities because they do not have access to a similar project in their region. SBE members have further engaged the ARCC in follow up capacity building based on their learning at the Ideas Exchange.

Q: In what ways has ARCC helped to build capacity with this initiative?

A: SBE members have requested connections with other states and are not able to follow up directly to seek peer support and share best practices across state lines. This past year (at the request of several SBE members), the SEA senior leadership was invited to join the group and attend the in-person and virtual meetings. This connection helped to build stronger relationships

between the SBE and SEA, and it has offered an opportunity for the two teams to have crucial conversations around key topics of interest with other states as well as internally.

Q: What would you like people to know about the Ideas Exchange?

A: A message from one of the attendees at the 2018 Ideas Exchange really captures one of the most important outcomes related to the work. [The attendee] said, "Thank you for allowing us to have time with our peers and our own State Board members and SEA team—we never get a chance to talk and dream!" [The ARCC has] provided this opportunity and I am so very proud to give SBE members a chance to talk and dream!

Q: In what ways has this work impacted you professionally or personally?

A: Personally, I have gained a deeper appreciation of the work of SBE members individually and collectively as they strive to establish policy and oversight of all facets of the educational process in their respective states. I see how isolated the SBE members are in their day-to-day roles as board members and am so very proud of being part of the ARCC team that has been able to provide the opportunity for networking and ideas exchange and a true peer-to-peer community of practice.

Following the Exchange, attendees were surveyed to determine the efficacy and usefulness of the event. It is worth noting that 100% of attendees reported that the event was of high quality and that they could apply what they learned at the event immediately in their practice. At the conclusion of the Exchange, attendees reached consensus on three topics they wished to explore in more depth, and the ARCC scheduled webinars focused on the topics to allow SBE members to further engage in solution-focused conversations throughout the year. The ARCC will continue to support SBEs as they strengthen and grow in this community of practice.