

## Clayton Burch Reflects on West Virginia's Work with ARCC

*Last month we interviewed Clayton Burch, Associate Superintendent of Schools for the West Virginia Department of Education, about the Office of Early Learning's work with the ARCC. Here are excerpts from that interview.*

**Clayton Burch:** Several years ago we decided to partner and collaborate with the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center in what originally started out as facilitation for some meetings we wanted to have to expand our early childhood network and some ideas around literacy. We've been successful in early childhood and universal pre-K for years—continually ranked in the top five in the nation. And lo and behold, we had a governor who really wanted to push the envelope and expand that universal pre-K system and really look at the impact it was making on the state and, in particular, third-grade literacy. We know that's not the end-all of a target, but it is a major milestone. And in order to do that, we had to devise a plan that brought all the players together, just like we'd done for early childhood.

With 55 districts doing 55 different things for early literacy and third-grade reading, state partners and national partners, we really had to think about how do we get everybody pointed in the right direction, singing from the same hymn book, and I think that's where the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center came in. They started off facilitating meetings for us, but we soon found that we needed a little more than facilitation. We needed to really think about a true long-term logic model, and how do we bring all the players together, how do we organize the work and do it in a way that was efficient for everybody, but actually moved the needle and got us moving in the direction of not meeting for the sake of meeting. So we were very, very fortunate to rely on a young lady by the name of Sarah Sayko. Sarah came from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center and really sat down as a collaborative partner. She brought resources and she helped us connect. There is an art to facilitation—that we all know is a great art. But I think what ARCC was able to do for us was to take it beyond facilitation to true collaboration and coordination. Because of that, we ended up with a plan, a comprehensive plan that is now recognized nationally. It is a plan that has garnered a lot of accolades from across the nation. It's one of the only comprehensive plans in the nation that includes all 55 districts as well as the governor's office, legislature, and the department of education. In fact, the National Campaign for Grade-Level Reading just recognized us. Two weeks ago, they came and recognized us as being the only state in the nation to pull off such a plan. So it's been quite a feat, and I think the reason it was so successful was, if you go back to the beginning, the way the ARCC helped us

organize the work and really bring people together so that it was meaningful for all stakeholders.

**Interviewer:** In what ways is ARCC's technical assistance the same or different from other technical assistance the department has received?

**Clayton Burch:** The technical assistance we receive from ARCC is quite different. Everybody wants to give you technical assistance. We do receive technical assistance from a lot of organizations, but oftentimes that technical assistance is simply resources that may or may not align to the outcomes you're looking for. We had others who tried to give us technical assistance on third-grade literacy, and it usually ended up being what other states are doing or resources that were far-removed from a state capacity organization. Having resources for our educators is very important, but when you're trying to make systemic changes throughout the entire state, you need the expertise to really be—how to move state agencies and how to move state policy and legislation—and I think that's where the expertise from ARCC came in. When we built the logic model, that logic model really allowed us to create a blueprint if you will, a path of how to take current practices at a state level to future practices, and I think that is the difference in the expertise. So instead of coming in and thinking, "This is what you need," it was a true collaboration of having ARCC come in and sit down and say "how can we help you" and "how can we get from Point A to Point B," and that's the space that we really fell short in with prior initiatives, is having somebody help us organize that pathway.

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