

## Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center: Technical Assistance Preview

*By Kandace Jones*

We are delighted to have been afforded the opportunity to partner with the US Department of Education's (ED) Office of Elementary and Secondary Education to serve as the lead agencies directing the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC). The ARCC is poised to provide technical assistance (TA) and capacity-building support to State Education Agencies (SEAs) in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The team that has been assembled to coordinate and deliver this TA and capacity-building support has 30+ years of experience at the federal, state, and local levels, and has significant experience in the provision of high-quality technical assistance. Each state has been assigned two state coordinators who will broker and facilitate customized TA based on each state's needs.

In addition to the state coordinators, subject-matter experts and technical assistance specialists have been assigned to each of the seven priority areas identified by ED including: Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools, Supporting College and Career Readiness Standards and Assessments, Ensuring Effective Teachers and Leaders, Identifying and Scaling-up Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning, Promoting Data-Based Decision Making, Ensuring Effective Early Education, and Developing Rigorous Instructional Pathways.

As shown in Exhibit 1, we collected a wide array of data to ensure a solid understanding of the area's needs. The resulting needs assessment findings informed the development of customized five-year TA plans for each state and the region.

### Exhibit 1: Preliminary Needs Assessment Methodologies Used

- **SEA interviews:** We conducted site visits and in-depth interviews during the spring and summer of 2011 and 2012 with Chief State School Officers or their designees and department heads in each SEA in the region.
- **Local education agency (LEA) focus groups:** We facilitated focus groups in the summer of 2012 with LEA representatives in each state to obtain a 360-degree perspective on how SEAs are supporting LEAs and how such support might be improved.
- **Appalachia Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) report:** To examine key regional issues, we reviewed the Appalachian RAC report and performed a cross-walk of issues we identified during interviews and focus groups.
- **Extant data:** Because context structures the resources and systems available for education, which in turn influence student outcomes, we analyzed demographic, system, and achievement trend data.

- **Reform efforts:** We reviewed state reform efforts and federal initiatives in the region, examining sources such as media coverage, state and federal websites, applications for federal funding, Race to the Top (RTT) and School Improvement Grant (SIG) annual reports, and publicly accessible evaluation reports.

The team is confident that the five-year TA plan that has been developed will make significant strides in building the capacity of SEAs in each of the areas in which there was an identified need for support.

The following summaries provide a glimpse into the ambitious and exciting work we will pursue in collaboration with SEAs over the next five years. Previews of key state needs and the capacity-building TA we will provide to address them are presented below.

#### **TA Needs in Kentucky**

- **Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools:** Enhancing the capacity of SEA and LEA staff as they support the lowest-performing schools.
- **Supporting College- and Career-Readiness Standards and Assessments:** Refining SEA support to LEAs and teachers as they adapt to new standards and assessments.
- **Ensuring Effective Teachers & Leaders:** Incorporating untested grades and subjects into the teacher evaluation.
- **Identifying and Scaling-Up Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning:** Identifying and removing organizational barriers to innovation, developing systems to test innovative initiatives and systems to disseminate promising practices.

Some examples of the support to be provided to Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) include:

- Collaborating with the *Center on Building State Capacity and Productivity* to identify and disseminate research-based and emerging promising practices for building capacity to improve low-performing schools, and
- Facilitating in-person advisory sessions to assist KDE in identifying training needs and developing training modules to support the alignment of instruction to new standards.

#### **TA Needs in Tennessee**

- **Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools:** Deploying Regional Service Centers (RSCs) in support of instructional improvement and achievement growth in low-performing schools.
- **Supporting College- and Career-Readiness Standards and Assessments:** Supporting the roll-out of the Common Core State Standards for math (2012–2013) and reading/English language arts standards (2013–2014).

- **Ensuring Effective Teachers & Leaders:** Enhancing capacity to develop information dissemination structures that provide employers (districts/schools) with a wider range of high-quality candidates.
- **Identifying and Scaling-Up Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning:** 1) Identifying effective online instructional practices and 2) supporting educator implementation of such practices, particularly in rural schools.

Some examples of the support to be provided to Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) include:

- Providing in-person and online advisory sessions to assist TDOE in working with the RSCs to determine the current level of implementation of both RTT and SIG at the district level, and
- Providing support and guidance to TDOE on the pilot, evaluation, and refinements of implementation support and tracking systems for new standards and assessments.

#### **TA Needs in Virginia**

- **Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools:** Improving cross-program collaboration including helping divisions coordinate services among various major programs (e.g., Title I, IDEA) to better target its efforts to turn around low-performing schools and to close achievement gaps.
- **Supporting College- and Career-Readiness Standards and Assessments:** Designing and providing targeted support to principals and teachers as new standards and aligned assessments are put into practice.
- **Ensuring Effective Teachers & Leaders:** Deepening pedagogical and content knowledge with an emphasis on providing in-building professional supports to teachers (e.g., math specialists) to improve curriculum rigor.
- **Develop Rigorous Instructional Pathways that Support the Transition of Students from Secondary Education to College and Career:** Ensuring that students applying for the standard high school diploma are prepared to pass the newly required skills-based assessment; Assistance with integrating a Career and Technical Education (CTE) component into its Early Warning System implementation manual to broaden its student reach.
- **Promoting Data-Based Decision Making:** Enhancing data use for both teacher evaluation and school improvement; identifying strategies for VDOE and LEA communication about assessments, data findings, and data use to leaders, teachers, parents, and the wider public.

Support to Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) will include, but not be limited to:

- Partnering with the *Center on Building State Capacity and Productivity* to identify exemplary models of cross-program coordination from SEAs across the country and report findings to VDOE, and

- Providing online and in-person TA sessions for VDOE in partnership with the *Center on College and Career Readiness* and the *Center on State Building Capacity and Productivity* on effective skills mastery tracking, including CTE.

**TA Needs in West Virginia**

- **Ensuring Effective Early Education:** Developing grade-level milestones beginning at the pre-K level to monitor long-term progress toward college and career readiness; and monitoring and refining the implementation of this new system.
- **Supporting College- and Career-Readiness Standards and Assessments:** Implementing College and Career Ready Standards and aligning implementation efforts with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Innovation Lab work in supporting large-scale change through policy, structure, and program design; and developing programmatic and personal milestones toward college and career readiness that leaders, teachers, and students can use to monitor progress.
- **Ensuring Effective Teachers & Leaders:** Improving instructional quality and addressing declining reading achievement and widening achievement gaps between the state and the nation.
- **Promoting Data-Based Decision Making:** Developing systems and processes to improve LEA capacities to access, interpret and use the state's data system.

Support to West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) will include, but not be limited to:

- Collaborating with the WVDE standards task force and CCSSO to develop personal milestones that leaders, teachers, and students themselves can use to monitor progress, and
- Assisting WVDE to chart achievement trends and analyze data by assessed concept, skill, and level of cognitive demand, and develop a state-level blueprint of instructional interventions needed to improve student performance in areas identified.

We look forward to continuing to share updates on our work over time, and we welcome your questions and comments along the way. Here's to a productive five years!