



## Highlighted Project *Arkansas*

### Strategic Performance Management in Arkansas

The South Central Comprehensive Center (SC3) at the University of Oklahoma acknowledged the conundrum that baffles many when developing a strategic plan: how does a state education agency (SEA) develop a plan that does more than sit on a shelf? How does the plan become entrenched in the daily work of the agency and lead to sustained student outcomes statewide? How does it survive SEA turnover and changing political interests over time? In order to shift from theory into practice, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) approached SC3 with the need to create a strategic plan. For any plan to impact work meaningfully and ultimately improve student learning, all members of the ADE team needed ownership in the process of developing the plan, empowerment to implement it, and accountability for its success. SC3, along with the Building State Capacity and Productivity (BSCP) Center, saw the opportunity to transform the agency's culture by connecting strategic planning with performance management and engaging BSCP Center's newly developed [Strategic Performance Management \(SPM\) process](#) for SEAs.

Collaborating with BSCP Center, SC3 created structures that encouraged the ADE Leadership Team to incorporate broad stakeholder engagement, internally and externally, in setting a new direction for the state through a unified vision, mission, and set of values. Most critical to the process was engagement of ADE team members in the development of ambitious goals, strategies to achieve the goals, milestones to measure progress on an annual basis, and action plans to implement each strategy and meet the milestones. The SPM process requires unit leaders and each team member within the unit be held responsible for determining and implementing the action steps necessary to meet milestones.

Professional learning and working sessions began in September 2015, and included 14 monthly sessions, reaching over 75 ADE leaders and team members. Arkansas has already begun to make significant changes to practice as a result of the synergy surrounding the SPM process. Because of the vision ADE team members established is to lead the nation in student-focused education, they are working as a unified team to study what the research says about personalized learning including personal competencies. Additionally, they are working with SC3 and the Center on Innovations in Learning (CIL) to develop an Arkansas-specific working definition or description of "Student-Focused Learning Systems" that can serve as a foundation for their leadership, support, and service of Arkansas districts and schools through this journey. The culture of the SEA has already begun to change, and stakeholder support for student-focused education has increased both internally and externally: formerly addressed as "personnel," now "team members" are recognizing how each of their roles contributes to a higher quality of education provided to Arkansas students.



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*Following the action planning retreat facilitated by SC3 and the BSCP Center, one team member said, “I realize how willing [Commissioner Key and Deputy Commissioner Gotcher] are to entertain unusual ideas that have the promise of transforming education in this state.”*

Many team members are embracing the empowerment and are excited about working shoulder-to-shoulder with Commissioner Key, the Leadership Team, and other units. One unit leader stated this was the first time her unit had been involved in the “academic part” of the agency, and another stated he had never been asked to help make decisions about how to do the work before. ADE team members began implementing action plans related to each milestone in the strategic direction in July 2016. The action plans will be monitored and adjusted throughout the upcoming year, and milestones and strategies will be monitored and adjusted in the years to come through performance management cycles (defined by BSCP Center’s SPM process) and ongoing improvement processes. Most importantly, internal and external support for the strategic direction and associated action steps increases the likelihood for success in implementation. ADE can now realize the **vision** of being a national leader and provide positive changes in student-focused (personalized) learning.

A supplement **infographic** for this highlighted project is available. For more information and resources, visit the South Central Comprehensive Center website at [www.sc3ta.org](http://www.sc3ta.org).

