SEA Interview Project

Prepared for the Nebraska Department of Education

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North Central Comprehensive Center

Year 6 (2011)

Nebraska Project 1: Statewide System of Support

The North Central Comprehensive Center at McREL was asked by the Nebraska Department of Education (Commissioner Roger Breed and Deputy Scott Swisher) to gather information about how other states are dealing with declining state and federal funds. Information was requested from neighboring states to guide a possible department reorganization effort and develop an effective statewide system of support. The states selected for interview conversations are Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Colorado. Each state that participated in the phone interview has received this copy of the completed matrix of state responses now that the project is concluded.

The following interview questions were identified and approved by Dr. Swisher. A phone interview was conducted by North Central Comprehensive Center to record each state’s responses to the questions. Draft interview summaries were sent to each state for verification and final summaries are published in this compiled document. Summaries appear in the order in which interviews were conducted.

* Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of federal budget cuts?
* If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back?
* If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization?
* How are you handling PLAS/priority school support in your state?
* How are you handling Common Core Standards (CCSS) implementation?
* How and where are you finding funding for your state longitudinal data system?
* Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of declines in your state revenue?
* If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back?
* If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization?

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| **State and Contact** | **Kansas Department of Education – Commissioner Diane DeBacker and Deputy Commissioner Dale Dennis**  **February 4, 2011** |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of federal budget cuts? | KSDE is not considering any current or future reorganization due to federal or state budget issues. The org chart will not change. Instead they are planning to fill only a very limited number of positions (only if the position is deemed absolutely essential)  24 positions are vacant now. The Governor’s budget has asked to keep 37 total positions vacant, so they must find or leave unfilled 13 more positions. Some of these positions have been open for 2 years, when the decision was made to not fill when people left. As staff members leave their positions at KSDE and/or retire, the work they were doing is absorbed by others who remain.  Maintenance of Effort is being monitored carefully by leadership to make staffing decisions. There are about 250 people on staff; this includes both special education and general education. KSDE has a similar small structure like Nebraska (it is more like a family than a business). Everyone – no matter what their level may be – pitches in to help the entire team.  People are doing more and more. Diane looked a variety of different state org charts when she started, but none of them work as well as what they have now. They have two teams (Fiscal and Learning) plus a small office of people that serve everyone (HR, accounting, Leadership). There is no need or advantage to rearranging the deck chairs. They are already very lean.  Current status: ARRA funds (fed money – most or all are spent or committed  They have already made a 10% operations cut and an additional 5% cut is now proposed.  Leadership tried to prepare for this a couple years ago by being fiscally conservative, but there is no rainy day fund. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | Partners:  KSDE does not provide funding for intermediate agencies (education service areas), and KSDE must contract with them for services like grant evaluation, etc.  ESAs are entrepreneurial; they must “sell” their services to member districts and to KSDE – they are not a partner unless they are paid. It would take a change in state statute for their funding mechanism and/or boundaries to change.  KSDE: The biggest and hardest cut is likely yet to come – and they aren’t sure what to do. They can’t continue doing business as they current do, as the current demands are wearing people out. One of the biggest shifts is they no longer work with individual schools. They can only work with districts (and this is quite a different level to reach). This is a change that has taken place gradually over the last 6 years and it’s difficult to say no to the schools. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | none |
| How are you handling PLAS school support in your state? | The number of schools that will need school improvement assistance is increasing. PLAS support needs more resources. What KSDE can do is (1) provide assistance at the district level or (2) use a consortia-like model of bringing schools, districts, and other together in a networks (like the Kansas Learning Network).  KSDE contracts with a company called Cross & Joftus web site: http://www.edstrategies.net/). Cross & Joftus provides a common process and a model for school improvement that all PLAS schools use and has helped KSDE form the Kansas Learning Network. All PLAS schools are part of the network.  The model includes everything from needs assessment to community interviews. It has been well received. C & J is small and uses both in-state and out of state experts to work with schools. They are an excellent partner and are involved now in work with some Race to the Top states.  KSDE is not certain how they will continue to fund C & J as the federal funds dry up. Their original hope was that schools that are successful and no longer on AYP list will mentor others to scale up the implementation. Staff time to do this mentoring work with others is not available, so this is still unresolved. |
| How are you handling CCSS implementation? | Kansas has adopted and will implement by 2014-15.  They have one math and one ELA staff lead who have followed the CCSS work from the beginning. The lead staff work closely with an external field team of content area teachers and district staff from across the state.  The State board has a retreat Monday 2/7 to look are two different plans for implementation. Both plans include offering professional development to state teams starting this spring to phase in the state standards and work on implementation.  Kansas is a SMARTER Balanced Assessment governance state and will use their standards writing teams over the next year as usual. The Standards & Assessment teams were combined in 2003 for NCLB. Standards & Assessment is one of nine total teams within the Learning side of KSDE (recall there are two sides – Learning and Fiscal).  For schools and districts, there will be no change in accountability in the future. But there will be flexibility in regards to the need for steady increases in AYP targets, starting in August. AYP targets can be put on hold. This will take the pressure off; schools will not have to worry about targets. They will still collect data from the state exam and other assessment data but will not have to make steady progress. State exams and other assessments will be administered as usual. |
| How and where are you finding funding for your state longitudinal data system? | Kansas uses a combination of state funds (set aside four years ago) with two rounds of federal SLDS grant awards. The SLDS work is progressing well. Kathy Goza is a lead on this work. |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of declines in your state revenue? | As stated above, there will be no reorganization in the department.  A bit of extra information regarding state funds:  State revenue has been down for the last few years. This has had a major impact on KSDE and on schools and districts. There was a cut of about a $300 million to schools last year alone. There is some gradual hope and some slow progress seen now in the general state economy. In general, areas of the state that depend on agriculture are doing better than urban centers like Wichita and Kansas City. Jobs, sales, and tax revenue need to boost before there can be more hope in the economy. Aviation, telecom and small business are major keys to Kansas economic growth. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | none |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | none |
| Other Comments | Focus on kids first with all the funds (state and federal) that you do have. Use the funds you do have to support the neediest schools. KSDE does not have a defined or official process for determining where to target funds but always looks at student results to make a case-by-case determination.  A state department of education of this size (or the size of Nebraska) could never serve all the districts with the numbers of staff, so there must be defined autonomy. Districts that are doing well receive fewer services from KSDE. Target the neediest of districts.  There is no official system for targeting needs, but a leadership team and/or a few key people make decisions with the input of trusted colleagues from around the state. A superintendent group gives them guidance.  You must use partners (like the C& J model described) to provide some statewide processes to follow. Use your authority to direct districts, but also know you must give some options to districts in some cases so they preserve some local choice.  Use the partners and experts within your state. You cannot do this work alone. Look for people to help you from the districts, higher education, associations, etc… |

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| **State and Contact** | **Iowa Department of Education – Interim Director Kevin Fangman**  **February 11, 2011** |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of federal budget cuts? | The Iowa Department of Education (DE) is not considering any large-scale reorganization efforts.  They may change the bureau structure for preK-12 and move to a ‘work team’ approach. The ultimate goal is to break down groups that now convene separately around funding source. This would help the DE implement a more cohesive approach to support that combines like-minded staff from various funding sources. An example might be Literacy – the “new” work team would include content staff, literacy staff with expertise in everything from early childhood to teacher preparation, Title 1 staff, etc… Work teams would have more flexibility and would set clear targets to reach with their work.  Another example of a new work team is one that combines all administrator preparation, general education teacher quality, special education teacher quality, and teacher evaluation staff. Again, the goal is to be more cohesive by combining staff in like-mined positions and share expertise instead of operating in silos. As much as possible – Special Education and general education will be combined.  The DE is not replacing some open positions and does not have a set target of positions to eliminate or keep unfilled. The Governor sets a budget target but gives the DE flexibility to determine how to make cuts and hit the target (not prescriptive mandates). This is encouraging creativity and flexibility in making decisions. Currently there is not an administrator of the IT department. The Accounting department has taken some cuts in staff so everyone knows things like expense checks will take longer. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | The DE will move away from small projects that only impact a small number of students. They will be discontinued.  Many larger projects are lead with or by the AEA regional system. AEAs receive some funding from the sate and some from Title federal funds). The legislated AEA study is complete and the findings are being studied. Leadership from across multiple divisions will meet soon to brainstorm and determine next steps for using the AEA system. This leadership group will determine the core services to maximize and how to leverage partners to provide core services. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | Cuts have been made and will continue as needed. As core services are identified and new work teams are formed, it will become more evident how the DE can leverage partners and what must happen internally to meet budget targets. |
| How are you handling PLAS school support in your state? | The AEA is taking the lead on CCSS for now. They are still exploring how to support the schools. The DE is just now getting impact data which they will use to determine such items as how the PLAS schools might take part in the AIW initiative. (AIW stands for Authentic Intellectual Work; see <http://centerforaiw.com/> for more information). The DE is trying to target the struggling schools first for professional development where it is needed. This is a new focus, as it is usually the high-performing schools that take part in AIE work and in other initiatives. |
| How are you handling CCSS implementation? | A DE team of six people has been formed. Connie Maxson is the lead. In Iowa, CCSS has been adopted as the Iowa Core content. Some DE staff attended the recent CCSSO SCASS meeting where vision and mission were the focus of the work. They will be looking at what Wisconsin is doing through their CESA intermediate agencies and will attend CESA meetings over the summer to learn from them.  Iowa is on the SMARTER Balanced Assessment System group as advisory but not a governing state. |
| How and where are you finding funding for your state longitudinal data system? | Jim Addy is leading this team. They may get some money ($500,000) from the legislature to help build the data warehouse but the funds aren’t guaranteed; they may be cut. The DE is building the data warehouse slowly to meet the DQC standards (Data Quality Campaign).  There may be great benefit from holding a MEIC consortium meeting this year with the nine states (including NE) to see how they might all benefit from interstate work. |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of declines in your state revenue? | State funds have been down over the past 3 years, for about a 30% reduction total over that time period. The cuts and declines have been gradual.  A state-wide early retirement incentive was offered last year, which resulted in a total of eight fewer hires. New DE staff members have been brought in at lower salaries, for additional savings. The dilemma is attracting qualified, competent staff at the lower salary levels.  The DE needs to prioritize every choice when it comes to spending decisions. There is a push to become more of a monitoring and compliance-driven agency. They still want to support continuous improvement but most of their funds are federal funds. State funds more than likely will not be used for improvement efforts. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | The DE is now down to one content specialist per area. There are no professional development consultants, where there used to be two staff. The Teaching and Learning bureau is focused on support for schools and districts through a system of PLCs (professional learning communities). As many districts don’t have the funds to provide substitute teachers for staff who go to professional development meetings and trainings, they are using technology as much as possible. The DE is trying to provide high quality video clips for PLCs to use, and are trying to hold meetings and collaborating as possible through the ICN video network. They are looking for powerful online teaching ideas and holding webinars. Twitter is being used to get timely information about things like the Iowa Core out to everyone. The tweets provide real-time information and are proving to be useful for everyone from teachers on through to the state Director level.  Strategic partnerships are being formed to look at the education system and work together for improvement. Through an education technology ARRA grant, the DE along with AEA directors, parents, higher education, and business (like Iowa Public Television) are coming together to collaborate on the Iowa Learning Online virtual school network. An Education Summit will take place this summer as part of the planning phase. All partners will come together to discuss how to fund and provide talent to the network. Resources need to be repurposed and leveraged so that every partner can contribute. This fall, a special session that includes the regents, the DE and all the partners will look at the proposal and begin implementation. An interstate alliance task force is part of this work, so Nebraska may want to send a representative to the task force meeting to learn about the work, the benefits of participation, and how they might contribute to and receive resources from this network through task force participation. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | The DE cuts and trimming of the consultants has occurred over the past two years.  Deep cuts to the AEA system are very likely this year (from $10 to $20 million possible). |
| Other Comments | Some state revenues are up in Iowa but job confidence is still low. We need to see this current economic time as an opportunity for the education system. Having less funding helps you identify what’s really important and work in those areas. When the money does rebound, the state will be ready. Determine: what is the critical work? Then organize around it. Work across states whenever possible to have the highest-quality impact. |

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| **State and Contact** | **North Dakota Department of Public Instruction – Dr. Wayne Sanstead, Dr. Gary Gronberg, and Mr. Bob Marthaller**  **February 15, 2011** |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of federal budget cuts? | We have not anticipated any SEA reorganization based on federal budget cuts. However, since approximately 68% of SEA staff salary is federal funding and recognizing that our state will not supplement federal dollars there is certainly potential for staff cuts and SEA reorganization. North Dakota is not in a deficit budget situation. The western third of the state is alive and robust with many opportunities for work in the energy and agriculture fields. The state has very low unemployment.  Since district budgets include about 10% federal funding, it is reasonable to anticipate the federal budget cuts could certainly impact local school districts. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | Finance decisions are made by a management team that consists of the state superintendent, two assistant superintendents, the human resources director and the finance director. They have membership on the state Education Commission chaired by the Governor and contribute to the statewide strategic plan through this mechanism.  The state uses the funding lenses of equity and adequacy to guide their decision-making. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | No cuts or reorganization are forecasted at this time. |
| How are you handling PLAS school support in your state? | North Dakota uses SIG grant funding to help support their struggling schools. North Dakota has only one Tier 1 school that applied for SIG funds. The turnaround models are not satisfactory solutions for North Dakota schools. The DPI does not have authority to close schools so that is not an option.  DPI can help schools work on curriculum and professional development but have hit a block with improvement in the American Indian schools. These schools have been the lowest-performing in the state for at least 30 years – this is not new. Sam Redding from CII has worked with the state of North Dakota and BIE schools to create their statewide system of support known as the North Dakota MILE. It is designed to improve learning and offer support for schools in improvement. ND MILE uses a combination of state staff and on-site technical assistance staff.  The DPI hopes to have some resources in the near future to conduct a study of effective ways to support the education of Indian students. They have an advisory council on Indian education and focus efforts, funds and emphasis in this priority area. |
| How are you handling CCSS implementation? | McREL is helping North Dakota with the CCSS implementation. The state is taking it slowly, and they are not taking a forceful lead at the DPI. Instead, they are getting ideas for strategies and input from hundreds of teachers in the field. They have completed a cross walk document of their current and CCSS standards. Their goal is to collect and consider all recommendations from the field by April. The transition plan that takes them from current standards to the common core in phases is almost final.  The DPI does not and cannot mandate any curriculum but instead offers support and guidance as requests are received from schools and districts. Their goal is to assist schools to achieve high performance levels. 2009 NAEP Science scores were just released and ND students’ scores increased in both 4th and 8th grade. North Dakota will focus some effort on alignment of standards with the university system (preK-16). |
| How and where are you finding funding for your state longitudinal data system? | North Dakota is in year two of a five-year SLDS grant.  North Dakota has completed ten out of ten requirements on the Data Quality Campaign essential elements side, and two out of ten on the state action/implementation side. |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of declines in your state revenue? | Estimates made in February predict North Dakota’s treasury will collect $3.02 billion by June 30, an increase of $42.6 million from November’s forecast. For the 2011-13 budget period, which begins July 1, the amount of expected revenue rose $4.2 million, to almost $3.28 billion.  There are no declines in state revenue, so no cuts are expected. The Department hopes to address improvement measures with state funds this year.  The state legislature is looking to fund more schools and more teachers in the~~ir~~ state education budget. ND school districts should see an increase of $100 to $300 per pupil funding. This is the 3rd biennium of increase; there have been increases each biennium since 1995. Property taxes are in a decrease, so the situation looks good.  DPI has about 100 total staff serving general and special education initiatives. DPI is organized in two units – one is content and the other one is operational. Teams are formed and grouped by federal function, although they are hoping for more cross-training across teams in the future. They do use one consolidated application for federal title program school monitoring and evaluation. Career and Technical Education is a separate department of state government.  The state has a system of regional education associations (REAs). There are currently eight REAs. There is a bill under consideration that would allow some state funds to go to the REAs to help with professional development and school improvement. Almost all districts are members of a REA. They are relatively new; only six-eight years old. They do not have any SEA function but can be enlisted as partners through contracts with the DPI. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | No services should be cut or scaled back. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | No cuts are anticipated. |
| Other Comments | Advances in the oil industry (like horizontal drilling) and wind energy bodes well for the North Dakota economy. They do recommend that NDE leadership take a serious look at the MCREL scenario planning if they have not already. DPI leaders found it valuable to go through the scenario process and consider the critical drivers of change and the state uncertainties ahead to help with strategic planning for multiple scenarios.  North Dakota has a history of making cuts in the past, so they now appreciate their good economy. What they have learned is that above all else, keep the focus on students. Determine what your non-negotiable items are as an agency, and then make them the priority. Never forget your rural schools – think about your smaller communities and realize that the school is the focus for entire communities. |

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| **State and Contact** | **Colorado Department of Education –Diana Sirko, Deputy Commissioner**  **February 18, 2011** |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of federal budget cuts? | Shifts in funding sources have placed the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) in a current situation where about 20% of the agency funding is from state money and 80% is from federal/ARRA funds. CDE is in its third year of implementing cuts. CDE has reorganized in some each year for the past three years in response to changes in funding source. They anticipate that organizational change will occur again with the end of ARRA funds. Because of the past cuts, the future cuts will be more difficult to determine and implement. There is little else considered non-essential to cut. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | The process for determining what to cut or scale back is both formal and informal. There are conversations at the leadership level regarding work and determining if someone can do more; if there are meaningful ways to consolidate any responsibilities. An executive team (Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, and Associate Commissioner) meet with the cabinet (CDE department heads) about once a week. The Colorado State Board has authority for some positions and can choose to fill or not to fill specific positions.  All CDE staff members are taking on more responsibilities, and some positions have been left unfilled as they become open. One example is at the Deputy level. The Deputy Commissioner supervised an Assistant Commissioner in charge of four major projects. The Assistant position became open but was left unfilled for budget reasons. The Deputy has now taken on the four extra project responsibilities in addition to all the previous responsibilities.  Another scale-back example is that CDE has gone from a staff of 12 field representatives who work regionally, down to only 3 field representatives. Field reps have curtailed the number of times they visit their region, and when they do go out in the field they maximize efforts by working with multiple districts and hosting more regional events. They have looked to create trainers of trainers when possible to create more capacity. They also use technology tools (like online webinars) when it is appropriate for the work. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | CDE received their budget target from the governor on Tuesday February 15. They will continue to cut back on travel and work on non-essential projects until further decisions are made. They know that school and district improvement comes at a cost, and they also know they need to target money in the direction of what is best for kids. They always try to consider both the intended and unintended consequences of their actions and decisions, and to look for the solution with the least negative impact. They also determine if the cost is a luxury/nice-to-have or if it is truly non-negotiable. The loss of ARRA funds will have a great impact on the state. All programs have been mapped out and they know some will end in the fall of 2011. |
| How are you handling PLAS school support in your state? | When it comes to school improvement for the lowest-performing schools and SIG support, CDE makes an exception and provides customized support to individual schools and districts, instead of combining multiple schools into regional or statewide meetings for efficiency.  A new state performance framework was used to rank schools this year. Funding for this framework was passed through Senate Bill 163 and marries three systems – federal, state report card and accreditation – in to one system. A longitudinal data formula is used to rank schools and helps CDE target the lowest 5% to 15% ranking schools; these schools are always priority. Round 1 SIG funding was significantly more than round 2 is predicted to be (a cut from about $20 million to $6 million).  Colorado has a unified implementation plan for their statewide systems of accountability and support. To build capacity, they plan to use ARRA funds to host a “training of trainers” session this summer which will accessible to all SIG schools. They do enlist the support and assistance of their intermediate BOCES agencies to help with school support, particularly in rural situations. They have an SEA team of 8-10 staff members that support all areas; achievement, targeted implementation, tiered intervention grants, SIG, etc…  Colorado continues to work to implement their Race to the Top plan but knows it will take much longer without the funds. |
| How are you handling CCSS implementation? | Colorado uses a regional mechanism to deliver Common Core State Standards support. They adopted new state standards through Senate Bill 212, and incorporate the CCSS ELA and mathematics standards within this new standards framework. They expect full-scale implementation by December of 2011. As is true now, districts must meet or exceed the state content standards. There will be a CSAP transition assessment in spring of 2012-13.  Colorado is not a member of the SMARTER Balanced or the PARCC assessment consortia. They have taken a ‘wait and see’ stance to see how the assessment consortia work unfolds. |
| How and where are you finding funding for your state longitudinal data system? | Colorado has two current grants – a $17 million federal SLDS grant (in year 3 of a 5-year grant) and a $100 million federal bandwidth and infrastructure grand (in year 1 of a 3-year grant). They are striving to merge multiple systems that will in turn consolidate reporting.  Colorado has received national attention on their longitudinal growth model (School View?). Their data system is completely open source many states participate with them in an interstate project. Nebraska may wish to explore an MOU option. There are 12 official states with MOUs, and 6 additional states are in the process of investigating and signing an MOU by the end of the school year.  Colorado is hoping to secure a Gates Foundation grant to supplement and accelerate their work in the area of teacher evaluation structures. They have received good press so far which has attracted Gates support. |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of declines in your state revenue? | Please see the above information regarding federal cuts for full details of the whole funding picture. State guidance is different from the federal guidance only in terms of flexibility. The state does not have as many options or as much flexibility with federal dollars tied to specific programs or guidance. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | See above |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | See above |
| Other Comments | Colorado SEA leaders know that they must focus on their four current priority initiatives. They must complete this package of four priority systems before they can think about any new reforms. These new systems are the basis for all future decisions and will either be the “perfect storm or the perfect reform” package. |

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| **State and Contact** | **South Dakota Department of Education – Dr. Melody Schopp, Interim Secretary**  **March 23, 2011** |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of federal budget cuts? | South Dakota currently relies on a mix of about 78% federal funding and about 22% general state funding. With uncertainty now at the federal level around budgets and potential cuts, they are not clear what the exact impact will be on the agency once a federal budget is passed. Since South Dakota is funded at a minimal level already, there is not much that could be cut from the federal side.  In the latest state legislative session, the governor asked them for a plan to cut 15% from the agency. Prior to the legislative session in December, the plan was submitted to the Bureau of Finance and Management and a 13.3 % cut was approved for the SD Department of Education. Every agency was required to take a minimum 10% cut. The Joint Appropriations Committee accepted those cuts during the legislative session which ended a week ago.  Districts will implement an 8.3% cut to their school per pupil allocation in the coming year. Tax levy options have been frozen. The state budget situation is not good right now. An additional $12.2 million in onetime funds will reduce the blow to 6.6% for this year. School districts will go from a $4808 PSA to a $4,486.  A reorganization of the department was completed last July-August (2010) and the reorganization is serving them well. The interim secretary – along with five managers – form a team of six that meets to discuss and determine ways to be more efficient, services to scale back, and cuts to implement. This leadership team receives input from staff in some cases to help make decisions. The agency teams are now:   * Accreditation and Teacher Quality (Afterschool fits here) * Assessment and Technology (Nutrition fits here) * Curriculum and Career & Technical Education (High School fits here) * Finance, Grants and the Data Management   Federal Programs (SPED, Title programs)  There is also a State Library office, as well as an Indian Education Office with one staff member. The agency includes about 125 total staff).  The interim secretary does the job of both state education Secretary and Deputy. This double responsibility may continue as the norm and expectation once a permanent secretary is chosen. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | To determine ways to cut, scale back, and be more efficient, the management team uses three primary considerations:   1. What can we stop doing? 2. What changes can we make to be more efficient? 3. What is sustainable?   Some cuts that have been implemented include budget line items such as:  no more matching funds for Gear Up grants (they will look for an outside source for matching funds), no more general funds for advance placement/distance learning support, no more South Dakota Public Broadcasting programs, as well as cuts to gifted, healthy schools, and contracts with ESA intermediate agencies.  They are reducing outside contracts and all out-of -state and in-state travel. They were asked to reduce from 5-6 FTE positions and were able to do this by not rehiring positions that were vacated. They have asked current staff to take on the additional work of the vacated position for a small increase in pay. This has ended being a good thing. Staff has taken this well. Agency staff have not seen a raise for three years, but have not had a cut in pay or been asked to take furlough days. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | The agency is very lean in staff and in budget. But the management team will continue to consider everything they do and implement cuts or changes whenever they can or whenever they see a way to be more efficient.  They cut state funding to the Education Service Agencies (ESAs) last year. Schools used ARRA money to pay for services from the ESAs. This cut of funds to the ESAs will remain into the future. |
| How are you handling PLAS school support in your state? | As mentioned above, South Dakota does not use its education funds for ESA support to assist the PLAS schools. There are five PLAS schools funded from SIG round 1 and South Dakota just received funds for round 2 applications. PLAS schools must use their SIG funds for support and professional development. |
| How are you handling CCSS implementation? | South Dakota standards are highly aligned with the Common Core State Standards. A comprehensive plan was rolled out this week and can be seen in more detail on the web site <http://doe.sd.gov/octe/commoncoreStandards.asp>. South Dakota is proud of their plan that includes pilot work over the summer and five days for teacher training in the fall. The state does not have money for substitute costs; that will be the school and district responsibility. The Common Core team will use technology for training as much as possible.  South Dakota will administer the regular state assessment until 2014 when use of the SMARTER Balanced assessment will start. The state is in the beginning stages of considering ACT as its sole high school assessment. |
| How and where are you finding funding for your state longitudinal data system? | South Dakota has applied for both rounds of SLDS funds and has been denied a grant each time. They use an outside vendor (Campus) for the work. The vendor has become increasingly more responsive and hard-working, which has helped the state accomplish as much as they can without the grant funds. They are hoping to use carryover dollars from a Teacher Incentive Fund grant to complete the work around teacher-student linkage. Initial investigation of this use of funds appears to be ok in the regulations. |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of declines in your state revenue? | The management team laid out every general fund dollar and item on the table consider as they made their recommendations to the governor and legislature for the 15% cut at the agency. There were two questions they considered:   1. What can we not reduce? This came down to federal mandates or state statues requiring levels of compliance beyond their control. 2. What impacts the least number of students and teachers?   As mentioned above, the 13.3% budget cut was approved. The outlook at the state level is not positive and the governor cannot increase education spending. The governor did send an email of thanks to agency staff acknowledging their lack of raises and the sacrifices they have made. The state support is there for education, but the money is not there. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | This was covered above in the federal funding section.  One thing they are finding across the state is that superintendent leadership is key in how districts are reacting to cuts in funding. With some districts, it is doom and gloom. Others are working to put together three-year plans and explore partnerships and ways to keep services going strong. Not all the ARRA money has been spent down at the district level. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | This was covered above in the federal funding section. |
| Other Comments | Disaster breeds Innovation!  These decisions have not been made in a back room without the involvement of staff. Keep communication open and solicit staff and other partner input as much as appropriate. You need to make these tough decisions together.  Even though this is painful, it has been a process with good results. It’s important to not become complacent or revert back to “business as usual,” even if funding increases in the future. South Dakota will continuously engage in this cost-cutting process and consider additional cuts and efficiencies. Good results have come from this process, including partnerships with the Board of Regents and Technical Institutes.  It’s also important to be upbeat and keep agency staff morale high. Do what you can to make the agency a great place to work. South Dakota has offered flexibility, work from home/remote options for employees, alternate work schedules and a productive environment that says to staff: You are worth it! You are valued. |

SEA Interview project, North Central Comprehensive Center

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| **State and Contact** | **Minnesota Department of Education – Dr. Jessie Montano, Deputy Commissioner**  **April 7, 2011** |
| Are you considering any reorganization of your SEA because of declines in state revenues and/or federal budget cuts? | Funding for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) comes from about 60% federal sources and 40% state sources. There are approximately 440 current MDE staff members.  State budget cuts for the agency are likely. Although different numbers are being considered, MDE may end up with about a 10% cut in state revenue. The legislative session is scheduled to end May 23 and final decisions will be made when final numbers are announced. There are too many unknowns right now to make predictions, so multiple scenarios are being considered. Several factors are being used to propose possible plans/scenarios:   * State budget figures * Federal budget figures * What would help MDE focus on collaborative and eliminate working in silos? * Because of union regulations, any cut or reduction must be proportional and equitable (i.e. reduction could not be just at the support staff or managerial levels; it would have to be proportionally equal across all levels)   Besides a current freeze on filling any new positions or vacancies, about 20 staff members have already accepted the early retirement option offered from December 2010 through June 2011. More staff may accept this option. |
| If so, what services are you considering to either cut or scale back? | A team that includes the commissioner, deputy commissioner, and five others from the executive team are looking at services that might be duplicative efforts. It is an important, driving vision of the new Commissioner to eliminate duplication and find ways to combine staff doing similar work. Every effort is being made to look at ways to consolidate efforts. Each area director is looking at potential staff reductions and ways to combine elements of multiple staff into single positions. Some staff may move from current responsibilities to new job responsibilities.  If the cut ends up being mostly in state money, then the services that are state-funded (like charter schools) may be scaled back. Different scenarios are being proposed in the cut is mostly federal. |
| If so, when might you implement cuts and/or reorganization? | No final decisions will be made until after the legislative session ends (now scheduled for May 23). There are too many unknowns to make any announcements at this time. |
| How are you handling PLAS school support in your state? | MDE uses a combination of the federal SIG grant money, along with information gathered through a statewide needs assessment done by an outside vendor (Cambridge).  There are three tiers of schools eligible for SIG grants. In round one, about 29 eligible Tier 1 schools were identified and 19 grants were awarded. Some schools did not apply. Eight Tier 2 schools are eligible in round 2. Many of these schools are charter schools. Four schools may apply and the others may close.  MDE has one team that works with the SIG schools, again trying to promote collaboration and cross-divisional work. They are using the Cambridge needs assessment information to look at how more high-quality services and professional development can be delivered across the state. |
| How are you handling CCSS implementation? | MDE adopted part of the Common Core State Standards for ELA only. They would like to adopt more standards, but legislations (both current and proposed) prohibit further adoption.  Plans are moving forward to implement the adopted ELA standards by 2014. All the timelines and assessment work connected with this are on track. |
| How and where are you finding funding for your state longitudinal data system? | Minnesota has a large grant, but the work that must be done is huge and complicated. The teacher/student linkage work is almost done and all the Essential Elements from the Data Quality Campaign will be accomplished.  Minnesota has finally approved alternative teacher license flexibility, and a teacher performance model is in the works. Minnesota is building their own teacher evaluation framework with components that districts may use. Some bills have been introduced with varying components, but nothing has been settled yet. The model is still under discussion. Again, a final decision cannot be made on components to include until the legislative session is complete in May. |
| Other Comments | The new Commissioner was appointed by the new Governor in January. The new vision, mission, and way of doing business is seen as a breath of fresh air, both internally and out in the field. The new administration is willing to listen and collaborate. |