



THE
COLORADO
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE

Deepening Collaboration in
Support of Student Outcomes:

A Guide for BOCES and Rural District Leaders



What is the Integration Project?

The Integration Project is a collaborative effort led by 13 Colorado school districts with support from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and The Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) to pilot an integrated model of teaching and learning designed to significantly improve the number and rate of students who are college- and career-ready when they graduate from Colorado high schools. Participating districts provide teachers with [Literacy Design Collaborative \(LDC\)](#) and [Math Design Collaborative \(MDC\)](#), which are instructional tools and training grounded in the Colorado Academic Standards; pilot a rigorous [system of evaluation](#) for teachers and principals; and explore how [new formative and summative assessments](#) provide educators with the data they need to improve student outcomes.

The 13 Integration Districts are the most comprehensive microcosm of the reforms that are taking place in every district in the state. The San Juan BOCES was chosen specifically to learn how large-scale reform efforts and collaboration can be supported by a regional entity.



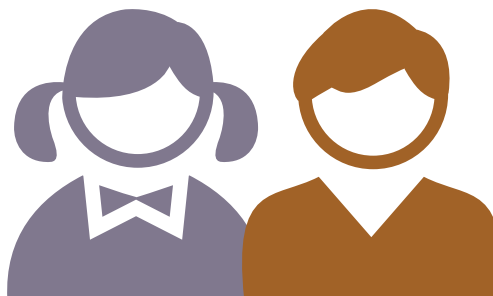
Introduction

What does it mean for rural school districts to take a regional approach to supporting student outcomes? How can a regional approach accelerate each district's ability to provide teachers with meaningful tools and support that improve student outcomes?

If you are a leader in a rural district or BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education Services), this publication is for you. It tells the story of the San Juan BOCES and its nine member school districts, whose student populations range from 60 to 4,500. This guide also identifies critical success factors that deepen district collaboration in support of student outcomes.

Before diving into the San Juan BOCES story, take a moment to reflect on your district's or BOCES' preparedness to collaborate:

- Have district leaders in your region agreed upon **two or three common strategies for improving student achievement**?
- Does your region or BOCES have **staff and structures** in place that provide frequent opportunities for district leaders to build and maintain trusting relationships by planning and working together?
- Does your region or BOCES have structures in place that **provide teachers with meaningful opportunities for collaboration and common instructional strategies or tools** that aim to improve student achievement?
- Does your region or BOCES **engage teacher leaders to bridge the communication gap** between teachers and district leaders, and **collaborate across district borders**?



San Juan BOCES Student Demographics

ARCHULETA COUNTY

Student Population	1,371
Minority Population	34%
English Language Learners ...	8%
Free/Reduced Lunch	53%
Special Education	8%

BAYFIELD

Student Population	1,402
Minority Population	20%
English Language Learners ...	1%
Free/Reduced Lunch	34%
Special Education	9%

DOLORES COUNTY (RE 2 & 4A)

Student Population	1,074
Minority Population	21%
English Language Learners ...	2%
Free/Reduced Lunch	78%
Special Education	20%

IGNACIO

Student Population	718
Minority Population	66%
English Language Learners ...	4%
Free/Reduced Lunch	60%
Special Education	13%

MANCOS

Student Population	396
Minority Population	21%
English Language Learners ...	6%
Free/Reduced Lunch	59%
Special Education	7%

MONTEZUMA-CORTEZ

Student Population	2,753
Minority Population	49%
English Language Learners ...	7%
Free/Reduced Lunch	58%
Special Education	10%

SILVERTON

Student Population	62
Minority Population	34%
English Language Learners ...	21%
Free/Reduced Lunch	69%
Special Education	5%

Working Smarter: Collaboration in the San Juan BOCES

Like most BOCES in the state, the San Juan BOCES in southwest Colorado coordinates and delivers special education services for its nine member school districts: Archuleta (Pagosa Springs), Bayfield, Dolores, Dolores County (Dove Creek), Durango, Ignacio, Mancos, Montezuma-Cortez and Silverton. The San Juan BOCES employs more than 90 professionals in audiology, speech therapy, physical and occupational therapy, assistive technology, psychology, social work and other disciplines.

When the San Juan BOCES joined the Integration Project in 2011, its work expanded to support its nine member districts with deeper collaboration focused on Colorado's largest education reform efforts. "We've always been a support structure for our member districts, supporting them in administrative functions and special education delivery," says Steve Otter, San Juan BOCES Integration Project Manager. "But our mission is really about supporting student achievement. Now we also provide a more connected set of supports to districts in the big areas of standards, assessment and evaluation."

Why did the BOCES decide to engage in the Integration Project? Randy Boyer, former executive director of the San Juan BOCES, believed one role the BOCES could play was to "scout" the education landscape and help districts get out in front of education reform efforts rather than lag behind or play catch up. The Integration Project gave the BOCES an opportunity to step up and play a stronger role in leading and coordinating new work, and districts in the region a chance to be on the leading edge of standards, evaluation and assessment implementation.

More than two years into the Integration Project, San Juan BOCES district leaders report that working together has resulted in better outcomes for students and educators, and a more efficient use of resources, especially in tough economic times.

Every district in Colorado felt the impact of the 2008 economic downturn. Most districts, including those in the San Juan BOCES, have since faced many years of budget cuts, staff layoffs and program reductions.

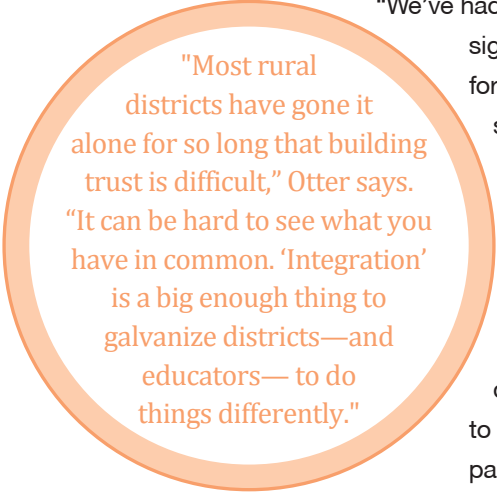
"We've had to cut 20 employees. That's a significant loss for our district and for our students," says Scott Cooper, superintendent of Dolores School District.

Bayfield School District cut \$1.4 million from its budget in four years, which negatively affected staff capacity and professional development. "The more we're able to leverage resources between districts, particularly on training and professional development, the better," says Troy Zabel, superintendent of Bayfield School District.

Alex Carter, superintendent of Montezuma-Cortez School District, believes that all districts—whether they are top-performing or struggling—are maxed out. "We have to maximize our resources and find efficiencies," he says.

In the midst of the economic downturn, districts are faced with new statewide legislation to improve standards, educator evaluations and assessments. The San Juan BOCES was already positioned to provide training and professional development, offer technology support, and act as a convener and facilitator. As part of the Integration Project, the San Juan BOCES stepped in to lead its member districts in implementing these reforms. The conditions were right to deepen collaboration among the districts.

"The Integration Project—implementing new standards, evaluations and assessments—has given district leaders a common platform for conversations," Cooper says. "Now we talk less about our mascots or buying school buses and more about what matters to improve student outcomes."



"Most rural districts have gone it alone for so long that building trust is difficult," Otter says. "It can be hard to see what you have in common. 'Integration' is a big enough thing to galvanize districts—and educators—to do things differently."

It has also helped to build trust. “Most rural districts have gone it alone for so long that building trust is difficult,” Otter says. “It can be hard to see what you have in common. ‘Integration’ is a big enough thing to galvanize districts—and educators—to do things differently.”

The San Juan BOCES districts engaged in the Integration Project agreed that a focus on standards, evaluations and assessments would increase student achievement. Each district also agreed to implement the Colorado State Model Evaluation System for teachers and principals, and to train an increasing number of teachers on LDC and MDC. Most districts are developing common formative assessments, and all are working toward having more robust measures of student learning for use in teacher and principal evaluations.

The BOCES and districts have deployed several strategies to achieve deeper collaboration to improve student achievement, including:

- Increasing the capacity of the BOCES to identify, communicate and implement best practices and professional development across the districts, which has strengthened trust and relationships among district leaders
- Extending collaboration opportunities to teachers through shared teacher professional development days that leverage scarce resources and provide teachers with more customized support
- Elevating teacher leaders to act as conduits of information between teachers and district leaders across all nine districts and the state

Colorado State Model Evaluation System—Improving Educator Feedback and Support

Senate Bill 10-191 (SB191) aims to ensure that every child in every community has excellent classroom teachers and building leaders who are supported in their professional growth. As part of the bill, the way principals and teachers are evaluated in Colorado is changing. To support school districts in implementing the new evaluation requirements, CDE has developed a model system as an option for districts to use for teacher and principal evaluations. Districts may choose to use the model system or develop their own system that meets the requirements of the law.

Half of teachers’ evaluation will be based on five Quality Standards that measure professional practice: content knowledge, establish classroom environment, facilitate learning, reflect on practice and demonstrate leadership. The sixth Quality Standard, student learning outcomes (student growth), will account for the other half of the evaluation and will be based on multiple measures, not a single assessment.

Likewise, half of principals’ evaluation will be based on six Quality Standards that measure professional practice: strategic leadership, instructional leadership, school cultural and equity leadership, human resource leadership, managerial leadership and external development leadership. The seventh Quality Standard will be based on the academic growth of the students in their school.

Learn more:

[CDE fact sheet on Colorado State Model Evaluation System](#)

[A San Juan BOCES teacher leader’s support for SB191](#)

[Video](#) of Colorado district and school leaders discussing the benefits of the new evaluation system

Teacher [feedback and survey data](#) from the 2012-2013 teacher system pilot

CEI’s [SB191 Implementation of the Educator Evaluation Planning Tool](#)

[Colorado Education Association’s steps to help teachers understand and use the model system](#)



Instructional Tools for the Colorado Academic Standards

The LDC and the MDC are tools that support implementation of the Colorado Academic Standards by:

- Guiding rigorous instruction and backwards design
- Providing frameworks and strategies to differentiate instruction
- Incorporating rigorous formative assessments
- Using a common language and structure to facilitate collaboration by teachers
- Providing instructional strategies that foster student engagement while delivering the Colorado Academic Standards

Learn more:

[What is LDC?](#)

[What is MDC?](#)

CEI's LDC Toolkit with professional development materials for elementary and secondary teachers.



CEI's video about the Integration Project, featuring Colorado teachers and students talking about LDC and MDC.

Building Capacity at the BOCES

Expanding Staff Roles

Superintendents like Alex Carter believe one of the most positive outcomes of the Integration Project is how the BOCES role has evolved. Designating one person at the BOCES—someone who has a regional perspective and is tasked with making sure districts are sharing resources—is critical. As Integration Project Manager for the San Juan BOCES, Otter maintains productive lines of communication among the member districts and the BOCES, identifies and seeks support for district needs, and helps member districts learn from each other.

“The work of the BOCES has become a rich, multidimensional resource for districts to identify the resources they need.”

“Through the Integration Project, the BOCES now provides districts with the help and support we need to be better administrators and evaluators; to better support our teachers with professional development and meeting their growth plan goals; and to align instruction and common formative assessments,” Carter says. “The work of the BOCES has become a rich, multidimensional resource for districts to identify the resources they need.”

Districts also tap the expertise of Matt Klausmeier, a data coach at the San Juan BOCES, who has expertise in using data to drive decisions about student learning. Traditionally the role of the BOCES data coach has been to help teachers access and interpret student achievement data from benchmark, interim and summative assessments. The Integration Project expanded Klausmeier's role to include additional responsibilities. He has provided training and support to teachers on the technology platform used to gather evidence of teacher and principal effectiveness and share the data with school, district and state leaders. He has coordinated the implementation of Colorado's [Student Perception Survey](#), a new tool that measures the elements of student experience that most closely correlate to the professional practices that are demonstrated to improve student outcomes. Klausmeier also facilitates discussions among teachers, principals and district leaders about how to develop Measures of Student Learning (MSLs) and choose the measures that will be used for teacher and principal evaluations.

“Matt and Chris Vance (Field Services Support Consultant) from CDE convened some of the superintendents in the BOCES to talk about how we are developing MSLs,” Zabel says. “As [each district leader] laid out how we're approaching it, we were getting ideas. It allowed us to think deeper. When you're in your own box, you think you're headed down the right road. But when you can hear and see what other people are doing, it opens up your thinking. We can step back and incorporate things that make more sense. The conversation strengthens all of our plans.”

Building Trust among District Leadership

A key to this type of sharing is establishing strong relationships and open lines of communication. District superintendents agree that their willingness to develop strong relationships and collaborate with one another is supported by the expanded role of the BOCES and the focus on the Integration Project.

A scan of the [monthly minutes from the San Juan BOCES board meetings](#) reveals that conversations go far beyond discussions about special education. In nearly every meeting, board members and superintendents talk about the Integration Project or some aspect of standards implementation, evaluation rollout or new structures for supporting teachers.

Boyer says that identifying common goals and having a shared vision and mission of the BOCES provide the foundation for meaningful collaboration. Jointly working on rolling out new standards, evaluations and assessments “strengthened the BOCES because it gave us specific targets to meet, and every district agreed to do it,” he says.

Boyer also suggests that frequent communication between the BOCES and the districts maintains trusting relationships. “Statute only requires a BOCES board to meet four times annually. But that’s not enough to really establish and maintain the kind of relationships you need. That’s why we had monthly board meetings.”

It hasn’t always been smooth sailing, particularly during leadership transitions. Several new superintendents entered the scene one year into the Integration Project, including Dan Snowberger, who was hired as superintendent of Durango School District in 2012.

Snowberger says the work of the Integration Project initially felt like a distraction. “I needed to move this district in a direction that the school board was expecting of me, to improve student achievement,” he says. “There were times when I thought, ‘Why am I going back to [the Integration Project]? I have my own work to do.’ There was some resentment that built up early in the year.”

Recognizing the need to unify veteran and new leaders in the work, the San Juan BOCES brought in an outside

facilitator to engage district leaders in a discussion about high level challenges and state mandates. District leaders became united when they realized they all had the same big goals.

“It took us being willing to really be vulnerable and lay it on the table and help our colleagues understand what each of us was trying to do in our individual districts,” Snowberger says. “We had some rough points last year where we didn’t necessarily trust each other. But the Integration Project kept us coming back. We’ve achieved deeper unification through Integration.”

Otter and Boyer emphasize the important role the BOCES plays in helping introduce new district leaders to the work of the region. “We started to work together to decide how we’ll do this work as a region,” Otter says. “Having big common goals makes us much more alike than different.”

Measures of Student Learning

SB191 requires that 50 percent of an educator’s evaluation be based on educator impact on student learning using Measures of Student Learning (MSLs). This 50 percent will be based on multiple measures of student growth over time rather than a single assessment. Teachers must have a team attribution student growth score and at least one individual attribution student growth score. If a teacher teaches a subject that has a statewide summative exam, it must be used as one of the multiple measures.

MSLs may include Colorado Growth Model results as well as results from [other state assessments, district assessments and teacher-developed assessments](#). Multiple types of assessments may also be used to generate results from goal- or target-setting processes.

Learn more:

[CDE’s guidance on Measures of Student Learning](#)





Extending Collaboration Opportunities to Teachers

Perhaps the most powerful evidence that the San Juan BOCES districts are deepening their collaboration is that they have agreed to schedule five common professional development days during the 2013-2014 school year. While the BOCES always enabled collaboration among district leaders, this change extends the collaboration to teachers.

“Collaboration should occur around high leverage topics, such as implementation of standards, evaluations and assessments,” Otter says. “You start by bringing leadership together, but you must quickly move to bringing teachers together.”

Otter adds that small, rural districts can’t offer all the professional development teachers need. “It’s hard to do ‘group think’ when there is only one social studies teacher in a school,” he says. “Prior to the Integration Project, districts may or may not have shared their professional development with others. This represents a big shift for districts and teachers because it’s agreed to by the superintendents in advance, and we can jointly plan the support that teachers need.”

“You start by bringing leadership together, but you must quickly move to bringing teachers together.”

Achieving common professional development days across all districts was a goal 10 years in the making, according to Boyer. Local priorities have always trumped the common goals that districts were working toward. Durango, for example, would align its calendar to Fort Lewis College’s calendar. Ignacio, with a large number of Native American families, created its schedule around important community cultural events. Districts had a different number of instructional days in their calendar, and some districts have a four-day school week.

The tipping point came in 2011 when the superintendents agreed upon a shared focus on standards, evaluation and assessment implementation. Teachers in the San Juan BOCES are now working across districts on standards implementation through LDC and MDC, developing MSLs and common formative assessments.

“What the Integration Project did was focus us on common goals. LDC and MDC have been the biggest drivers (of teacher collaboration),” Boyer says.

San Juan BOCES Shared Professional Development: Fall Schedule

[See the content and locations of the professional development](#) provided to teachers across the nine districts. Examples include:

- Training and support on instructional tools that are grounded in the Colorado Academic Standards (such as LDC and MDC)
- Developing common student growth measures needed for new evaluation
- Cross-district professional learning communities
- Common formative assessments

LDC and MDC are tools that help teachers formatively assess students, make quick decisions about how to change their instruction based on data and lead to the kind of deep content knowledge and 21st century skills required of students to succeed in college and in a career. According to teachers in Colorado, equally important is the collaboration opportunities LDC and MDC have inspired between colleagues in the same school, across districts and even across states. Because the units are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards, teachers can collaboratively design and implement the lessons in classrooms.

“Collaboration begets collaboration. Teachers who weren’t included initially now want ‘in,’” Otter says. As a result, LDC and MDC are being adapted for use in elementary grades, although they were originally intended for secondary teachers. An increasing number of teachers at all levels continue to be trained in all districts.

“If we want to impact student achievement, we’re talking about impacting classroom instruction,” Klausmeier says. “Teachers need resources, tools and connections with one another to help build instructional pathways for students. LDC and MDC provide that to teachers. The Integration Project has brought districts closer together, and when teachers can share ideas across districts, it’s really powerful.”

In April 2013, most districts in the BOCES brought teachers together to develop MSLs. This was especially beneficial for teachers in grades and subjects not tested on TCAP (Colorado’s state summative assessment), who are often isolated in their own district as the only art or science teacher. “The process has allowed each district to benefit from the strengths of the others,” Snowberger says.

Durango and Bayfield are also convening their teachers to develop common formative assessments aligned to evidence outcomes found in the Colorado Academic Standards. “Teachers from Bayfield and Durango are working together to unpack the [Colorado Academic Standards], determine what mastery looks like and develop formative assessment items that we can use across districts,” Snowberger says.

While Durango and Bayfield have shared in the cost to design the technology needed to house the formative assessment items and provide teachers with a user-friendly interface to use achievement data, the most powerful part of the process has been the collaboration among teachers.

“When teachers are given the time to work together on challenges like standards implementation and formative assessment, we’ve been amazed by the rigor and quality of the products they produce,” Otter says.

SchoolVault:

A Technology Tool for Monitoring Mastery of the Colorado Academic Standards

"Off the Shelf" assessments that monitor student progress often assess broad areas of standards and don't target the foundational skills necessary for students to cement their learning. There is a history of administering broad assessments in reading and writing only to miss the mark at real diagnosis in learning. For years, assessments indicated growth for students. However, performance on high stakes state level assessments that target the standards show a five year decline in performance. This past data provided a snapshot that wasn't sufficient, detailed, or timely enough to inform and guide continuous improvement actions at the classroom and school level.

Therefore, Bayfield and Durango School Districts have been working to provide classroom teachers tools that allow close monitoring of student skills based on Colorado Academic Standards. Teachers from all grade levels and content areas are developing authentic, performance based assessments that teachers can embed in their instruction to adequately track student mastery and guide instruction on a daily basis. This initiative has given new life to the standards and allowed educators to dig deeper into real student mastery of 21st century skills. Teachers have worked to create Common Formative Assessments (CFA) to determine, "What is mastery of the standard and how will students demonstrate it through a performance task?" Teachers will be able to use the bank of questions to create pre-assessments to help guide their planning; use the bank for on-going formative assessments; and as a part of a summative assessment to help determine students' academic achievement. With the bank of questions, educators will be better able to answer questions like, 'How are we doing? What's working, what's not?'

3rd Period Earth Science

Pacing Guide: 7th Grade-Earth Systems Science

Evidence Outcome: Identify, interpret and explain models of plates moving on earth (DOK 1-3)

Assessments: 3 Items: 13 Classes: 2

81% of students have mastered this EO

64% mastery in school 32% mastery in district

95% Average percent correct

Name	Item Scores	Last Assessed
Doe, Jane		11/03/2013
Smith, Bob		11/03/2013
Johnson, David		11/03/2013
Williams, Jennifer		11/03/2013

Name	Item Scores	Last Assessed
Smith, Bob		11/03/2013
Williams, Jennifer		11/03/2013

Name	Items	Classes	Students	Status	Results	Complete
Week 5 Quiz Understanding Patterns...	22	4	61	unassigned	N/A	N/A
Week 4 Quiz Doc	7	6	94	assigned for 11/16/2013	44%	44%
Week 3 Quiz on Defining Systems	19	2	33	required hand grading	81%	81%
Week 2 Quiz	10	4	61	unassigned	N/A	N/A
Week 1 Quiz	4	1	17	draft (review panel)	21%	21%
Week 3 Quiz on Defining Systems	19	2	33	required hand grading	81%	81%

Name	Average Score	Assessments	Assessment Items
Williams, Jennifer	80	5	64
Doe, Jane	72	5	72
Smith, Bob	61	5	61
Johnson, David	80	5	80
Williams, Jennifer	81	43	81

Name	% completed	Date Due	Date Administered
Week 5 Quiz Understanding Patterns Def...	0%	11/16/2013	N/A
Week 4 Quiz	44%	10/29/2013	10/31/2013
Week 3 Quiz on Defining Systems	81%	10/02/2013	10/19/2013

Pacing Guide: 7th Grade-Earth Systems Science

Evidence Outcome: Identify, interpret and explain models of plates moving on earth

81% average score for this EO

Answer: CR SA M MC M P M PI M CR

Question Type: CR SA M MC M P M PI M CR

Month	Assessment 1	Assessment 2	Assessment 3	Assessment 4	Assessment 5	Assessment 6	Assessment 7	Assessment 8	Assessment 9	Assessment 10	Assessment 11	Assessment 12	Assessment 13	Assessment 14	Assessment 15
August	3	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
September	3	0	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
October	3	0	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
November	3	0	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Legend:

- 3 types of assessment items answered correctly
- 2 types of assessment items answered correctly
- 1 types of assessment items answered correctly
- 0 types of assessment items answered correctly

Teacher Leaders Bridging Communications Gaps

The San Juan BOCES has nine Integration Liaisons—teacher leaders who are actively engaged with implementation, information sharing and coaching related to the new educator evaluation systems and the Colorado Academic Standards in their districts. Each district selected one or more teachers or retired principals to serve as Liaison(s) and determined the most advantageous manner to maximize their skills and knowledge. Some of these teacher leaders are still teaching full time, some teach part time, and some are on full-time release from the classroom. District leaders and BOCES staff agree that these teacher leaders have increased districts’ ability to successfully implement new standards, evaluations and assessments.

Liaisons have different responsibilities depending on each district’s needs. Some are responsible for facilitating conversations with teachers about a fair way to implement the MSL requirements of SB191. Others are establishing a system of peer coaching so that teachers can provide and receive less-threatening feedback and support from colleagues.

Liaisons also have a set of shared responsibilities. They communicate with each other to identify common challenges and collaborate on solutions and successful strategies. Most have a direct line of communication with district leaders, helping them to understand how best to communicate with and support teachers in different settings. Liaisons also act as important communication links between the state and teachers.

The Liaisons “are one of the biggest bangs for our buck,” Carter says. “Not only are the Liaisons working directly with teachers, they are tied back to the BOCES and [CDE and CEI] so that information is going to the broadest possible audience.” Carter believes that having a Project Manager at the BOCES level who coordinates activities and having district-facing Liaisons is a new and better structure to deepen collaboration.

Liaisons have been focused on how to build the right structures—systems and support—for teachers.

Durango has made a significant effort to engage stakeholders in the development and rollout of their instructional work and evaluation system. But Snowberger recognized the limitations he faced as a new superintendent in engaging with teachers. “Durango needed teachers who were respected colleagues and good at their craft to engage in conversations with their colleagues to problem-solve and identify real issues that are emerging as we implement this work,” he says. Given this need, Durango hired two teacher liaisons who lead much of the district’s communications with teachers on evaluation.

In Bayfield, Zabel says Liaisons have been focused on how to build the right structures—systems and support—for teachers. “Administrators are very busy, and we wanted to have someone who could dedicate specific time to building structures of support. Liaisons are working with teachers to answer questions like, ‘How are we going to identify multiple measures for your evaluation? How should we build a useful walk-through observation tool?’ They support standards implementation by helping to identify professional development needs.”

Four districts—Cortez, Dolores, Dove Creek and Mancos—have pooled resources to share two Integration Liaisons who are developing systems and providing training for teachers on peer coaching.



“It is difficult as a BOCES or third party to really understand the needs in the district without having district-specific context. That has to originate from district leaders. Liaisons have been providing that.”

“This is definitely a structure we’d like to budget for in the future,” Cooper says. “Our Liaisons are setting up a structure of peer-to-peer coaching so teachers can give and receive nonthreatening feedback to and from one another.”

Cooper believes peer coaching is a model that will give teachers the kind of feedback they need to make a significant impact on student achievement. With the new evaluation requirements, observers and coaches need to be in classrooms more than ever.

Otter agrees. “Peer support is critical,” he says. “Principals can’t be solely responsible for evaluating all teachers. This will be the way that teachers get better. Plus it provides checks and balances, and leads to better and more professional development.”

The Liaison role ultimately charges a teacher leader with responsibility for helping teachers learn about and implement new standards, evaluations and assessments, and helping district and state leaders understand what teachers in each district need to feel prepared and supported.

According to Klausmeier, “It is difficult as a BOCES or third party to really understand the needs in the district without having district-specific context. That has to originate from district leaders. Liaisons have been providing that. They really promote collaboration across the districts.”

Looking Ahead

BOCES and district leaders acknowledge they have significant challenges ahead of them.

For one, Carter says, they waited too long to get started on the MSLs. “Teachers are nervous about how it’s going to be implemented,” he says.

Otter believes more work must be done to identify where and how instructional strategies should be deployed to improve student growth.

In Bayfield, the focus is on deepening the work. “We’re doing the right work. The challenge now is to deepen it without adding to it. We have to be focused on how we impact instructional change in classrooms—how we get our staff the right training and the right tools in the classroom to make the instructional shifts necessary to move in the direction the Colorado Academic Standards require of them,” Zabel says.

But district leaders agree that confronting these challenges together rather than alone will result in better outcomes for teachers and students.

“Every time we started [implementing something], we realized our neighbors had things that were better

than what we had. [Small districts shouldn’t] do this by themselves. Engage with your neighbors and BOCES to do the work regionally,” Carter says.

Cooper adds that the BOCES can be a platform for a common conversation. “Collectively, we are focused on how to support teachers and develop best practices for instruction. But you have to put your ego aside and share your toys.”

The focus on deeper collaboration pushes against a tendency in public education “to do things all by ourselves,” Snowberger says. “The nine districts in the San Juan BOCES really have a unique cohesion. After being in a community of superintendents like I am here and recognizing how much we can do to support each other, I would say it’s important to build allies in neighboring districts because **the work that lies ahead is the same work for all of us**. If we can work together, we can certainly lighten each other’s load. **We’re so much stronger as a collective than we are as individuals.**”



Guidelines for Other Rural District and BOCES Leaders

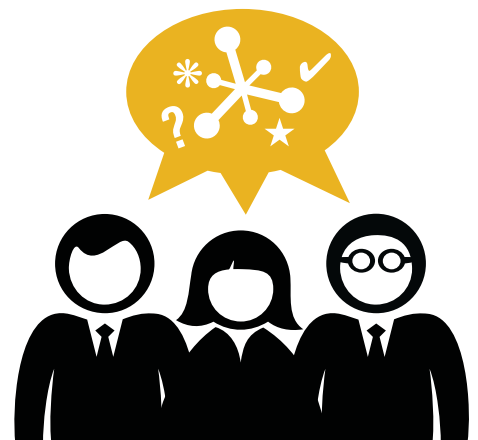
Consider these guiding questions for the districts in your region as administrators, teachers and support staff work collaboratively to integrate new standards, evaluations and assessments:

Have district leaders in your region agreed upon two or three common strategies for improving student achievement?

- In the San Juan BOCES, all districts agreed that a focus on standards, evaluations and assessments would increase student achievement. Each district agreed to implement the State Model Evaluation System for teachers and principals, and train an increasing number of teachers on LDC and MDC, instructional tools grounded in the Colorado Academic Standards. Most districts are developing common formative assessments, and all are working toward having more robust measures of student learning for use in teacher and principal evaluations.

Does your region or BOCES have staff and structures in place that provide frequent opportunities for district leaders to plan and work together to build and maintain trusting relationships that will improve student achievement?

- The San Juan BOCES has two staff members focused on helping district leaders, principals and teachers implement standards, evaluations and assessments and learn from one another.
- In the San Juan BOCES, monthly board meetings provide an opportunity for district leaders to discuss and work together on initiatives beyond special education.
- The San Juan BOCES organized a facilitated retreat for district leaders to unify the region and build trust that was initially lacking.



Does your region or BOCES have structures in place that provide teachers with meaningful collaboration opportunities and common instructional strategies or tools that aim to improve student achievement?

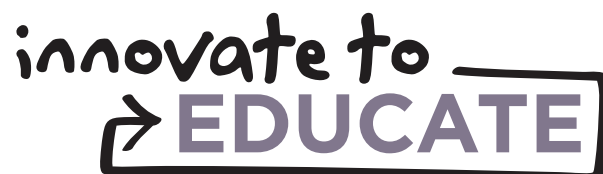
- The nine districts in the San Juan BOCES have five common professional development days for teachers.
- The districts use LDC and MDC, instructional tools that are most powerful when teachers collaborate on their design.
- District leaders and teachers are working together to develop MSLs and common formative assessments.

Has your region or BOCES identified teacher leaders to bridge the communication gap between teachers and district leaders, and collaborate across district borders?

- Most districts in the San Juan BOCES have a teacher representative responsible for helping teachers learn about and implement the work of new standards, evaluations and assessments. They also collaborate as a cohort to identify common needs across districts.

Here are some next steps you might take to ignite this type of collaboration in your own region or BOCES:

- Find one or two big initiatives to work on across districts and agree on a common course or strategy. Authorize the BOCES to lead the work.
- Consider an alternative staffing structure for the BOCES. The staffing structure should place a priority on improving student achievement for all students, making it equal to the priority of delivering special education services.
- Focus BOCES meetings on high-leverage agenda items that superintendents agree can lead to student achievement for all students.
- Find ways to provide teachers in your district with time to collaborate. Consider scheduling common professional development days with neighboring districts or through the BOCES. Consider using an online environment like an intranet or holding webinars.
- Elevate teachers to leadership roles and empower them to serve as a bridge between teachers and district leadership, among neighboring districts and even between the district and the state.
- Contact CEI to learn more about the Integration Project and opportunities for district leaders to engage with each other on standards, evaluation and assessment implementation.
- Contact Steve Otter, Integration Project Manager in the San Juan BOCES, to learn more about the Integration Project rollout in the nine member districts.





THE
COLORADO
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE

1660 Lincoln Street
Suite 2000
Denver, CO 80264
(303) 736-6477
coloradoedinitiative.org