

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS (RSAs)

Following the enactment of the *Regional Service Areas Act* on June 2, 2008, the Colorado Department of Education in collaboration with the Colorado State BOCES Association set forth to address comments, issues and questions from the educational community of Colorado. The following document will serve to provide assistance to these requests for clarification.

Frequently Asked Questions

Purpose

1. What is the purpose?

- The regional service areas are created to support local regional initiatives that are designed to improve student performance and close achievement gaps. More specifically, the purpose is to “create local and regional partnerships that support effective and efficient delivery of services to school districts.”
- The RSA process is locally driven and addresses local needs. Its purpose is to identify efficiencies that are out of the reach of any single district. The intent is to translate these into added support to districts. Gains in performance are the ultimate goal.
- The RSA can bring the state closer to these local district initiatives in a supportive way by fostering a regional collaborative effort of service and support to local districts. The RSA provides a vehicle to help all of us do better with what we need to do as partners. While in the past CDE has chiefly been concerned with compliance, the department is striving to be more of a service provider. To accomplish this CDE cannot act alone. The way forward is via partnership.

2. What will regions focus on?

- To receive funding, a region develops a plan (based on local needs) that aligns with state initiatives. A regional service area may provide any of the following services and programs, including but not limited to:

Data and assessment centers;
Shared financial services among school districts and boards of cooperative services;
Cooperative purchases;
Technology infrastructure and support;
Distance, on-line learning, and other alternative learning opportunities for students;
Pre-collegiate programs, counseling, and dropout prevention;
Capital construction planning assistance;
Curriculum and instructional expertise and support;
Professional development for teachers and administrators;
Regional and state initiatives;
Shared administration and support services for school districts;
Early childhood and preschool programs; and
Postsecondary partnerships and services to support student transitions into postsecondary schools

- Though there are commonalities in terms of council composition as defined by statute, it is quite possible that RSA's will each look different in the types of regional services created and delivered by the RSA to meet locally identified needs.

3. What is the best outcome for the RSA's to member districts?

- Everyone benefits when educational service and support is done economically and in concert with committed partners. As with any initial project, success breeds success. This may develop, over time, into more support for local educational needs.

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS (RSAs)

- This bill fosters a spirit of creativity. The idea is that we can all learn from one another to be more productive and efficient in the delivery of educational services. CDE and the State BOCES Association can assist with the dissemination of this type of information to others who are interested in what other RSAs are doing and accomplishing.

Membership

4. What is the make up of a regional council?
 - A Regional Service Area council consists of a minimum of five members representing the following entities that voluntarily elect to participate:
 - A Board of Cooperative Services (BOCES) representative from each BOCES within the region;
 - A Board of Cooperative Services (BOCES) Superintendent Advisory Council representative from each BOCES within the region;
 - A non-BOCES school district representative from each school district within the region;
 - A business and industry representative;
 - An early childhood council representative from each council within the region;
 - A postsecondary representative from each 4-year, community college, and technical college within the region;
 - A Department of Education regional representative (ex-officio, non-voting);
 - An Executive Director from each BOCES within the region (ex-officio, non-voting).
5. Why would districts want to participate?
 - The RSA itself does not provide any direct services to the districts or BOCES. Through the RSA plan, funding can be assigned to support services offered by the district, BOCES or other organizations to address regional needs.
6. May districts or regions choose not to participate?
 - Yes. Participation is voluntary. Each district within a BOCES does not have individual membership on the council but is represented by 2-3 superintendents from the BOCES SAC or other superintendent groups. If a district does not wish to participate in offerings from the RSA educational plan, the district should inform a member of the RSA council.
7. Can a RSA be formed without a BOCES?
 - Yes, a RSA may be formed without BOCES representation or a BOCES acting as the fiscal agent if all BOCES in the region decline to participate or if a BOCES does not exist in a region.
8. Can a district withdraw from one RSA and join another?
 - Yes. This will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
9. What happens if a BOCES (or any other defined council member) does not join initially, and then wants to sit at the table later on?
 - This issue needs to be addressed within the local RSA process.
10. What assurances are there that during council formation the appropriate parties identified in legislation are involved in the council formation process?
 - CDE Regional Managers and BOCES Executive Directors act as ex officio members of the RSA council. They will be responsible to ensure that all council participants are included in the process.

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS (RSAs)

Regions

11. Why 12 regions?

- The map and model was created by taking into account the current 8 regions identified by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) with adjustments for geographical challenges such as Wolf Creek Pass and sheer number of miles in the northwest, northeast and east central region. The Colorado Department of Education established which districts are in what regions based upon input from districts, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and the State. What was learned from this experience helped to create a regional division better for all involved.

12. Can RSAs cross over regions?

- Yes. Legislation allows for the development and partnership of regional plans between RSAs.

Governance

13. Are BOCES in charge of RSAs and vice versa – are RSAs in charge of BOCES?

- BOCES are not in charge of RSAs and RSAs are not in charge of BOCES. Each entity has its own charter under Colorado law and should abide by those charters.

14. Is this legislation to create a super BOCES?

- No, the intent of legislation is to provide funding to regional service areas in order to support and address regional education needs.

15. Will this create more layers of bureaucracy and less money to the districts?

- No. State funding via the legislature is provided to the RSA through a simple application process. The RSA council develops its own plans. The RSA does not have jurisdiction over the BOCES' or districts' funding or personnel decisions. The Regional Council's authority is limited exclusively to the Regional Services Area Plan.

16. What influence does the RSA have over district or BOCES funds/personnel?

- A RSA does not control a district or BOCES allocation of funds or personnel. A RSA council makes decisions for only RSA funds. Any decisions made regarding potential services offered by or to a district or BOCES, must have agreement between the RSA and these organizations.

Relationships

17. For those areas where BOCES areas include all districts in the region, how will BOCES separate their work from the RSA efforts?

- BOCES and RSA's are separate entities and can decide on the amount of mutual involvement they each desire. The amount of interplay is determined locally through the respective BOCES and RSA council processes.

18. How does the state acknowledge and address the local voice and needs, while partnering to establish a collaborative nature, assist with economy of scale issues and needs within the region?

- The RSA collaborative model is a locally driven process. Participation from early childhood and postsecondary partners allows for the mutual sharing of information and to offer new insights in order for regional councils to understand and help bridge education gaps collaboratively. Technical assistance is available from CDE.

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS (RSAs)

19. How is BOCES involved and connected to the RSAs?
- The Colorado BOCES Association worked with state leaders to craft the vision to provide more equity of services throughout Colorado. BOCES were involved in the original eight regions coordinating successful Regional Professional Development Centers in the 90's.
20. Can a BOCES and a RSA be one and the same? What is the difference?
- BOCES and RSAs are two separate entities. While district membership within both organizations may be the same, each group is different. BOCES consists of two or more member districts that collaborate by sharing the cost of like services. The RSA is to create a regional education plan to meet the regional needs in alignment with the Governor's and Commissioner's education initiatives.
21. How are regional managers involved?
- Regional managers may be involved in more than one RSA. The role of the regional manager will continue to be a service and support to the development and success of the RSA opportunity. Regional managers will assist regional councils in support of local regional initiatives. The regional manager will act as an ex-officio, nonvoting member of the regional service council.
22. How might we work as a RSA across distances?
- Each RSA council, through locally developed processes, determines the best approach to work with their representatives across the regional service area.

Process

23. Who starts the process for the RSA application?
- Members of the RSA council will start the RSA application.
24. How will council members be "approved" or "appointed"?
- Each RSA council is responsible to determine how council members are appointed or approved. Council approval of members should be included in the bylaws of each RSA. Best practices indicate that some type of voting method should be used to select council members and will be the responsibility of the council formation team to determine which method works best for them.
25. Who will be responsible for putting the RSA councils together?
- Initial council formation will be coordinated between the CDE Regional Managers and BOCES Executive Directors.
26. What will be different than what is already being done (i.e. BOCES)?
- BOCES will continue to operate as per their present design. This bill does not reinvent or replace a BOCES. This grant opportunity provides additional funding for regional support and service.
27. Will the RSA be seen as a focal point to disseminate information from CDE?
- Information dissemination will continue through normal CDE communication channels including the RSA.
28. Is this a mechanism for CDE to deliver services? How will each CDE unit relate to the new regions, what becomes of CDE's current regions and how will the RPDC's interact with the new regions?
- As with any new idea, the concept will be explored if it benefits service and support to local educational communities. The chief intent is to build better partnerships among districts within a region. However, it is also an opportunity to provide better coordination for CDE-funded professional development in local regions.

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS (RSAs)

Fiscal

29. Who serves as fiscal agent for the RSA?
- The RSA will receive the funding but BOCES will act as the fiscal agent for the RSA grant.
30. Does the RSA have to sign an MOU with the fiscal agent?
- CDE is pursuing the response to this question.
31. Are funds available for planning?
- Yes. The initial year (2008-2009) regional service areas may request reimbursement of expenses for up to \$10,000. Each region will be required, in order to receive state funding, to develop a plan (based on local needs) that aligns with state initiatives.
32. Are funds available for implementation?
- Yes. Each RSA can apply for and receive funding up to \$50,000/RSA and up to \$.50/pupil in each region.
33. If a district chooses not to participate, will the RSA lose the per pupil allocation for that district?
- No. In order to provide maximum funding to a RSA, the RSA will receive per pupil allocation for all districts within the region. If a district chooses to join the RSA later in the implementation, funding will have already been allocated to the RSA.
34. If a district chooses not to participate, will the district receive the \$.50/pupil funding allocated for the RSA?
- No. Legislation does not provide any reference to allow this type of allocation. Also, see #32 above.
35. How is the RSA funded?
- The State of Colorado provides the funding for the RSA through the Education fund. The grant application details what is submitted for approval of funds. Each RSA can receive funding up to \$50,000/RSA and up to \$.50/pupil in each region.
36. If the annual State's fiscal allocation is not enough to cover the \$50,000.00/RSA and \$.50/pupil allocation, how will the RSA be funded?
- To ensure the greatest allocation of funds possible, the \$50,000/RSA allocation will be applied first and the per pupil allocation will be adjusted up to the total available funds.
37. What if there is a concern with a BOCES and how they handle their finances?
- Legislation states that a BOCES will act as the fiscal agent for the RSA. These funds will be audited. As with any other grant monies disbursed, each fiscal agent will follow federal or state guidelines in the handling of financial transactions. If there is a concern regarding a BOCES' fiscal activities, then the regional council should address this in their local process. All BOCES are subject to the same fiscal oversight as school districts are by the state. BOCES, like school districts, are also required to have an annual independent audit that is submitted to CDE and the State Auditor's office.
38. Who is the fiscal agent when the local BOCES does not want to participate?
- If a BOCES chooses not to participate in the formation of the regional service area, another education organization (LEA) may take on the role of fiscal agent.

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS (RSAs)

39. Will a BOCES lose funding if they don't participate in the RSA?
- A BOCES does not receive RSA funding. Federal, state or local funding that a BOCES receives for other work is not contingent on the BOCES participating in the RSA.
40. Who owns equipment purchased with RSA dollars?
- The Regional Service Area "owns" any equipment or other tangible supplies/materials.
41. Can a BOCES, acting as fiscal agent, authorize the expenditure of funds?
- The designated fiscal agent can only authorize the expenditure of funds after the Regional Service Areas council has approved the expenditure.
42. Can RSA funds be co-mingled with the General funds or other funds of the fiscal agent?
- RSA funds must have their own accounting/funding code. RSA funds are audited and must not be co-mingled with other funding codes.
43. A district receives services from two different BOCES in two different regions. Which RSA will receive the district per pupil allotment?
- The RSA in which the district physically resides will receive the per pupil allocation. The RSA will decide which BOCES is the fiscal agent for that RSA.
44. What happens to the dollars if a region does not participate?
- Dollars can only be granted to a region if a local RSA plan is submitted by the RSA and approved by the State Board.

Accountability

45. To whom are the regions accountable?
- Each region is accountable to the Regional Council for the regional plan in addition to the State Board of Education for providing services and programs as determined by their locally developed plan.
 - Once a regional service area receives and implements funds, the RSA will submit an annual report that addresses each of the elements of that plan to measure impact of the implementation and identify areas for improvement. The report will be submitted to the Department of Education and State Board.
 - To receive continued funding the annual report from the RSA will describe its efficient and effective delivery of services; receive State Board of Education approval on its accomplishments; submit and receive approval of its upcoming year's plan.

Implementation

46. If my district has a specific need and others in the region have different needs, will I be able to write my ideas into the plan?
- a. Each regional service area council will evaluate the data and information provided to them by the participant districts and other education organizations and develops education goal/objectives, through a local collaborative process, that are in alignment with the regional vision.
47. Who sits at the table and who decides who sits at the table?
- a. The legislation clearly defines the minimum configuration of the council membership. Through the individual RSA council, additions to the council formation will be determined.

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS (RSAs)

48. How does someone get their voice heard?
- Providing input takes place through the local processes established by the RSA council. It is important to get involved in the RSA meetings, any committees created within the RSA, know who the council members are, etc.
49. How is CDE going to be held accountable for this implementation?
- CDE is accountable to provide service and support and to ensure healthy partnerships that are for the betterment of education opportunities for children by supporting local regional initiatives. CDE is also responsible to ensure that all applicable laws and fiscal requirements are met and to provide appropriate technical assistance to ensure partner success.