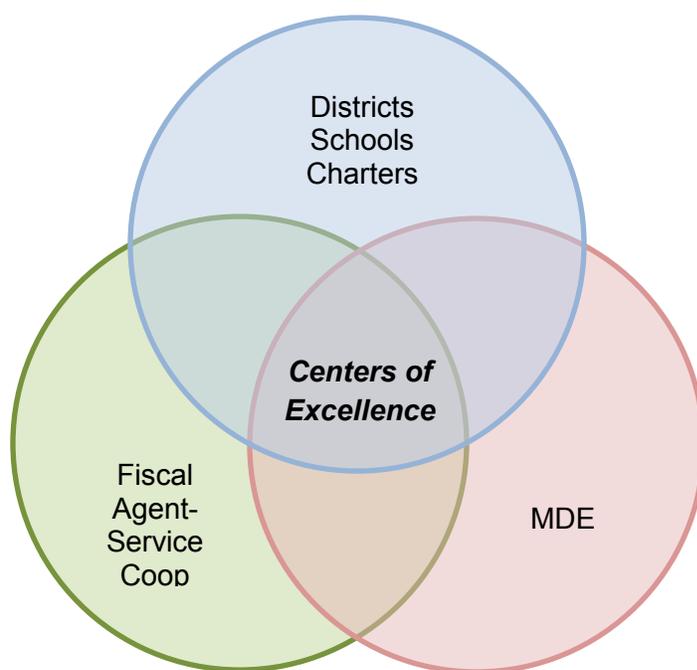


## ***Regional Centers of Excellence: Relationship and History***

The purpose for the graphic below is to illustrate the partnership between the three organizations associated with the Regional Centers of Excellence as required in the Laws of Minnesota, Chapter 116. In this illustration the area of the Venn diagram where all three entities meet is where the Centers reside. The three organizations also conduct business apart from the other two and in some cases, in collaboration with one of the three.



In 2011 the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) requested a waiver from the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The request, which was subsequently approved by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), described RCEs as Minnesota's approach to the provision of state-developed, differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for "Focus" and "Priority" schools. The Commissioner sought to establish a consistent, cohesive statewide system of support to effectively and efficiently provide equitable access for school improvement support throughout the state. In 2012 the MDE launched three RCEs, designed and implemented in collaboration with three Service Cooperatives (regional education service agencies) to serve as the Statewide System of

Support (SSOS). Through this collaborative partnership, RCEs provide assistance to school leadership teams in Focus and Priority schools as proposed in the waiver. MDE made approximately three million dollars of Federal Title I funds available to the three Service Cooperatives to design and implement the RCEs with MDE staff. The Service Cooperatives used the funds to employ three RCE directors and three teams of content area and school improvement specialists to work on site, in partnership with school leadership teams, to build capacity at the school-level to implement improvement initiatives and practices that increase student achievement.

To ensure that RCE staff members were able to deliver consistent and cohesive technical assistance, a cross-divisional team of MDE content and school specialists collaboratively developed numerous tools and processes to support the RCE teams' work. These resources were introduced through ongoing, high-quality professional development, and as a result, RCE staff members were able to strengthen their ability to provide effective assistance for school leadership teams. In addition, detailed communication protocols were developed that included feedback loops among MDE, RCEs, Service Cooperatives, and the leaders in Focus and Priority schools to further secure strong partnerships and positive interactions.

Working on-site in Focus and Priority schools, RCE staff members serve as both advocates and coaches to guide school leadership teams in building local capacity to effectively implement research-based strategies. Employing a continuous improvement cycle, the RCE team specialists provide assistance in reading, mathematics, special education, English language development, implementation science and charter school leadership. Following the first year of implementation, approximately one-third of Focus and Priority schools working with RCE staff made significant progress, allowing their release from designation as low performing schools. Several of these schools achieved gains that earned them recognition as "Celebration" or "Reward" Schools.

In light of this compelling positive impact on student learning, the Minnesota legislature established a statute in 2013 to expand the network of the RCEs, enabling this innovative regional partnership to have greater impact on the educational needs in schools beyond the SSOS initiative. Two million dollars was appropriated by the legislature to be used over a two year period to establish additional RCEs to *"...assist and support school boards, school districts, school sites, and charter schools in implementing research interventions and practices to increase the students' achievement within a region....RCE will work with school site leadership teams to build capacity to implement programs that close the achievement gap, increase students' progress and growth toward career and college readiness, and increase student graduation rates...The department will assist the regional centers of excellence to meet staff, facilities, and technical needs, provide the centers with programmatic support, and work with the centers to establish a coherent statewide system of regional support, including consulting, training, and technical support, to help school boards, school districts, school sites, and charter schools effectively and efficiently implement the world's best workforce goals under section 120B.11 and other state and federal education initiatives."*