

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 810

TM 034 198

AUTHOR Zellner, Luana; Jinkins, Deborah  
TITLE Consequences of High Stakes Testing on the Literacy Programs of High-Performing Learning Communities.  
PUB DATE 2001-12-08  
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the National Reading Conference (51st, San Antonio, TX, December 5-8, 2001).  
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Elementary Secondary Education; High Achievement; \*High Stakes Tests; Institutional Characteristics; \*Literacy; \*Principals; Reading Programs; \*Test Results  
IDENTIFIERS \*Learning Communities

ABSTRACT

The consequences of high-stakes testing environments on the overall literacy programs and student achievement in high-performing learning communities were studied through a questionnaire completed by 20 elementary, middle, and high school principals in high-performing learning communities in a large state. Interviews and site visits were also held with two principals at each educational level. Data also included information from a school/university collaborative. Responses identified key elements in success in high performing learning communities and barriers perceived by administrators and teachers to academic achievement. The study also identified unintended consequences of high stakes testing, including negative reactions by students and teachers and lower than expected achievement scores by students. Also identified were common factors among schools that scored well on assessment measures regardless of economic or ethnic factors. The principal questionnaire is attached. (Contains 23 references.) (SLD)

**"Consequences of High Stakes Testing  
on the  
Literacy Programs of High-Performing Learning Communities"**

**Presentation for the  
51<sup>st</sup> National Reading Conference  
Saturday, December 8, 2001**

**Paper by  
Dr. Luana Zellner, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas  
Dr. Deborah Jenkins, Tarleton State University, Stephenville, Texas**

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND  
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS  
BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Zellner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

**BEST COPY AVAILABLE**

2

**"Consequences of High Stakes Testing  
on the  
Literacy Programs of High-Performing Learning Communities"**

**Presentation for the  
51<sup>st</sup> National Reading Conference  
Saturday, December 8, 2001**

**Paper by**

**Dr. Luana Zellner, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas  
Dr. Deborah Jinkins, Tarleton State University, Stephenville, Texas**

States across the nation are mandating statewide testing programs based on curriculum standards in an effort to ensure educational equity in all schools regardless of the racial and economic factors represented in the campus population. In many cases, states have also mandated statewide testing programs to measure student achievement levels of learning the curriculum. State testing programs generally focus only on reading, writing, and math. Rewards for high levels of achievement and consequences for failures have been created also. "High-stakes testing" is a term used to describe consequences which include retention in grade level or being denied a diploma for student failure and publication of school ratings for districts and campuses with low rates of success. The intensity and expectation to perform well has driven many well-designed instructional programs to emphasize a more test-driven instructional delivery model. The consequences of emphasis on this model and possible alternatives should be of interest to school leaders, curriculum specialists, and classroom teachers who wish to design and implement strong literacy programs for the children they serve.

Researchers and educators around the country have reported on the effects of high-stakes testing regarding instructional practice and the quality of student learning (Anderman, 1992; Kohn, 2000). McNeil (2000) describes how higher test scores do not necessarily result in more quality learning, but in fact actually limits good teaching resulting in less quality learning for children. In the January 2001 issue of the *Kappan*, Alfie Kohn and Scott Thompson, in their respective articles spell out the dangerous consequences of these high-stakes testing environments. Kohn states, "...better standardized exam results are more likely to go hand-in-hand with a shallow approach to learning.... What is true of a student's thinking is also true of a teacher's instruction." (Kohn, 2001, pg. 350). He goes on to describe how this new test focus has "cannibalized the curriculum" with many districts eliminating music and arts, recess, elective courses, quality literature, and disciplines such as science and social studies (since they are often not tested) (Kohn, 2001). Thompson stresses that the linkage of state curriculum

standards and standardized testing programs is unfortunate and may be the unloading of an authentic reform which might have resulted in equity and excellence for all students. He notes, "When academic progress is judged by a single indicator...and when high stakes are attached to Thompson, 2001, pg. 358). They both bemoan the fact that many schools have degenerated into nothing more than test-prep factories as a result of the intense pressure to perform well on the state measures.

Many professional organizations have issued position statements regarding the high-stakes testing movement. The International Reading Association (1999) voiced the concern that test results now control instruction rather than inform it. The American Educational Research Association (2000) express concern over the possibility that "students may be placed at increased risk of educational failure and dropping out..." (AERA, 2000).

Scheurich, Skrla, and Johnson (2000) have investigated four Texas districts and examined how schools which previously were unsuccessful educating all their children have 'turned around' by focusing on implementing strong, focused instructional programs based on the test results. They report that state-mandates initiated change, various local catalysts served as pressure points for change, leadership (school and community) acted in more ethical ways in supporting a more equitable system, and district employees embraced reform by changing teaching and learning practices, redefined roles, and expected equity and excellence for all.

This debate raises many questions for practitioners, policy makers, and the public. What are the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing environments? What are the common factors among schools that score well on these measures regardless of economic or ethnic factors? How can programs promote increased achievement on the tests while establishing and maintaining quality instruction that results in deep understanding? Researchers have begun to investigate these questions and related issues.

Initial results indicate that there are indeed unintended consequences. Test results determine promotion, retention, tracking, and graduation decisions in many schools (Educational Research Service, 2000). Sheldon and Biddle (1998) report that standards and accountability measures have resulted in shallow, superficial learning decreased motivation, and diminished student love of learning. They also note that producing increased test scores is not the same as producing educated life-long learners. Another unintended consequence of high-stakes testing is in dropout rates among children of color (Haney, 1999).

Successful schools have been called 'beat the odds schools', and 'turn around schools'. (Billig, 1998; USDOE, 1997; Adler & Fisher, 2000). A correlation exists between low academic achievement and socioeconomic status (SES) of the school population. We will use the term 'high-performing learning communities' (HPLC) to

refer to schools which have been successful in increasing student academic achievement for all student populations regardless of SES or other demographic figures. Key elements present in these HPLC include instructional leadership and effective management, shared decision-making, research-based, quality instruction, home-school connections, and the transformation of group beliefs and values (Snow, et al., 1998).

Investigations of the literacy programs of high-performing learning communities point to the interdependence of systemic and classroom level effects. Factors such as leadership, knowledgeable and skillful teachers, shared responsibility for the learning of all students, focused instruction, professional development, faculty collaboration and communication, flexible student grouping, instruction driven by continuous assessment, quality resources, creative resource allocation, and time have been identified as key to establishing quality learning environments while increasing student achievement on state measures (Adler & Fisher, 2000; Snow, et al., 1998; Adams 1990; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1993; Taylor & Pearson, 1999; Kameenui & Simmons, 1999; Darling-hammond, 1998; Clay, 1972, 1985; Costa & Garmston, 1994).

### Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of work is to examine the consequences of high-stakes testing environments on the overall literacy programs and student achievement in high-performing learning communities. The work attempts to provide information about unintended consequences of test-driven environments to leaders of instructional programs.

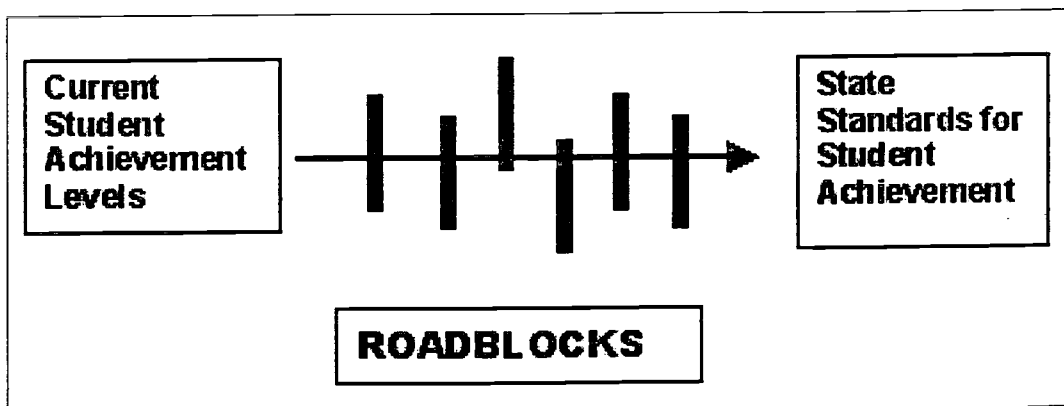


Figure 1. Roadblocks to student success

Specific questions included:

1. What are the roadblocks (fig. 1), which act as barriers to a 'fast track' to success with student achievement?
2. What concerns do principals (i.e. school administrators) have with accountability and 'high stakes testing'?
3. How do school administrators make programmatic decisions?
4. What affects their decision-making/

### Methodology

The study utilized both descriptive quantitative and qualitative measures in its research design. A questionnaire was given to 20 principals in identified high performing learning communities across a large state, asking them to identify roadblocks to student achievement in literacy. Demographic as well as annual state reading test information was used. Primary informants included 4 high school principals, 5 middle school principals, and 11 elementary school principals from high performing schools in high need rural and urban communities. Interviews and school site visits with informants included 2 high school principals, 2 middle school principals, and 2 elementary school principals. Data included campus artifacts collected over a two-year period from administrators participating in a school/university collaborative. The collaborative was focused on building campus leadership teams that included the campus administrator and a team of teachers, some who were being mentored into school leadership roles.

### Results and Conclusions

Information from administrators and teachers regarding each of the following emerging themes in this study was gathered from the attached questionnaire for school administrators and from interviews with participating administrators and teachers selected from participating schools. .

*Theme 1:* Key elements present in the high performing learning communities (HPLC) studied included:

1. Instructional leadership and effective management at the campus level;
2. Shared decision-making by faculty, school administrator, students, and parents;
3. Campus goals emphasizing research-based quality instruction;
4. A strong home-school connection; and
5. The transformation of group beliefs and values to address the academic and emotional needs of every student.

*Theme 2:* Roadblocks (as perceived by school administrators and their teachers) to creating HPLCs included:

1. Systemic barriers to a 'fast track' to success with student achievement;
2. Over emphasis on accountability and 'high stakes testing' by school boards and parents;
3. Top down programmatic decision making without 'buy-in' by campus administrators and teachers;
4. An ineffective decision making structure at the campus level; and
5. No clear consistent vision for building student achievement by teachers and school administrators

*Theme 3:* Unintended consequences of high-stakes testing environments:

1. Negative perception of school by teachers and students;
2. Lower than expected achievement scores by students;
3. Fewer opportunities for teachers to adjust instruction and curriculum to address student needs;
4. Fewer opportunities for curriculum integration;
5. Overemphasis by teachers on skills being assessed rather than the integration of those skills into the curriculum.

*Theme 4:* Common factors among schools that score well on assessment measures regardless of economic or ethnic factors:

1. High student attendance;
2. Less teacher turn over;
3. More interaction between teachers and students throughout the day;
4. More daily assessment of student performance and understanding by teachers;
5. More opportunities for students to interact with text throughout the school day;
6. A shared vision by students, teachers, and campus administrator; and
7. Support and "time" for on-going teacher training and reflection on practice.

### *Regarding High Schools*

Of the 4 high school administrators who served as informants in the study, 1 of 3 high school principals was administrator to a *National Blue Ribbon High School*. In relation to the state accountability system which rates school performance on a set of criteria that includes student attendance and state test scores, three of the four participating high schools were given a rating of *Recognized*. The fourth school in the study was given a rating of *Academically Acceptable*. Ratings were based on the state school performance rating scale which includes ratings of 1) Unacceptable: Data Quality 2) Academically Unacceptable: Special Accreditation Investigation; 3) Academically Unacceptable; 4) Academically Acceptable; 5) Recognized; and 6) Exemplary. All four principals attributed student success in these schools to the instructional leadership demonstrated by their leadership teams. The leadership teams consisted of teacher leaders in content areas working hand in hand with assistant principals and teachers in other disciplines in scheduled planning sessions. Meeting student needs was stated and restated as the primary reason for these planning sessions. School success was attributed to teachers moving beyond the required preparation for the state test by including the arts, and more interdisciplinary approaches to the curriculum. All four high schools had an instructional management system in effect with checks and balances. Teachers were involved in tracking their students' performance across disciplines. Focus was primarily given to high school populations that were described as falling behind academically and/or failing at the ninth grade.

### *Regarding Elementary and Middle Schools*

Of the 16 elementary and middle school principals participating in the study, 5 schools were in rural and urban high poverty areas. Each of the 5 schools had strong community involvement programs. Faculty at all 16 elementary and middle schools strongly emphasized curriculum integration, teacher involvement in decision making related to curriculum development, professional growth and training opportunities for staff and teachers. Ten of the 16 schools demonstrated indications of 'teacher by-in', a common teaching philosophy, and a plan for achieving total campus literacy. Eight schools indicated that teacher decision making was based on the school vision, 2 acknowledged focus on the school district vision.

Elementary and middle schools in larger school districts had less commitment and understanding of district goals and 'vision'. There were often several reading and literacy initiatives being carried out without continuity or follow through. Schools where the leadership (the principal) was highly involved in the training and implementation of the literacy program demonstrated higher autonomy among faculty in decision making and buy-in to the campus vision and *action plan* for attaining high levels of student achievement.



### Educational Significance

The work explored the consequences of high-stakes testing environments on literacy development in high-performing learning communities (HPLC). As demonstrated the consequences of test-driven environments is but one issue of the work. The identification and description of essential program components and processes that support and enhance overall student literacy development clarify focal points for administrators charged with increasing student achievement. The administrators and their teachers who participated in this study identified common concerns and factors that need to be considered when planning and developing high performing literate learning communities

### REFERENCES

ADAMS, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

ADLER, M. A. & FISHER, C. W. *A cross case analysis of successful early reading programs in high poverty, high performing schools*. Paper Presented at the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual National Reading Conference Meeting, phoenix, AZ, 2000.

ALLINGTON, R. L. & MCGILL-FRANZEN, A. (1993). Placing children at risk: Schools respond to reading problems. In Donmoyer, R. & Kos, R. (Eds), *At-risk students*, pp. 197-217. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION. (2000). *AERA Position statement concerning high-stakes testing in preK-12 Education*. <http://www.aera.net/about/policy/stakes/htm>.

ANDERMAN, E. M. (1992). *Motivation and cognitive strategy use in reading and writing*. Paper presented at the National reading Conference, San Antonio, TX, December, 1992.

BILLING, S. H. (1998). Implementation of Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act: A 1997-1998 update. *Journal of education for students at risk*, 3 (3), pp. 209-222.

CLAY, M. M. (1972). *Reading: The patterning of complex behavior*. Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann.

CLAY, M. M. (1985). *The early detection of reading difficulties*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

COSTA, A. L. & Garmston, R. J. (1994). *Cognitive coaching: A foundation for renaissance schools*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.

DARLING-HAMMOND, L. (1998). Teacher learning that supports student learning. *Educational leadership*, 55 (5), 6-11.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, (2000). *High-stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and graduation*. Washington, D.C.: national Academy Press.

HANEY, W. M. (1999) *Supplementary report on Texas assessment of academic skills Exit Test (TAAS-X)*. Los Angeles, CA: Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION, (1999). *High-stakes assessments in reading*. Newark, DE: IRA.

KAMEENUI, E. J. & SUMMONS, D.C. *Beyond effective practices to schools as host environments: Building an sustaining a school-wide intervention model in beginning reading for all children*. Paper Presented at Improving America's Schools Conference, Orlando, FL, 1999.

KOHN, A. (2000). *The case against standardized testing: raising the Scores, ruining the Schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

KOHN, A. (2001). Fighting the test: A practical guide to rescuing our schools. *Kappan*, 82 (5), (349-357).

MCNEIL, L. M. (2000). *Contradictions of school reform: Educational costs of standardized testing*. New York, NY: Routledge.

SHELDON, K. M. & BIDDLE, B. J. (1998). Standards, accountability, and school reform: perils ad Pitfalls. *Teacher College Record*, 100, 164-180.

SKRLA, I., SCHEURICH, J. J., & JOHNSON, J. F. (2000). *Equity-driven achievement-focused school districts: a report on systemic school success in four Texas school districts serving diverse student populations*. Austin, TX: Charles A. Dana Center & University of Texas.

SNOW, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in children*. Washington, DC: national research Council.

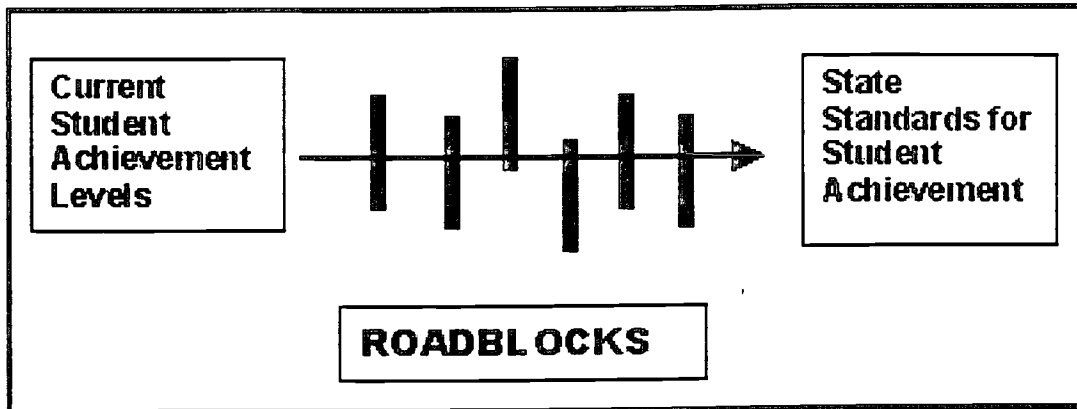
STRINGFIELD, S. C., MILLSAP, M. A., & HERMAN, R. (1997). *Special strategies for educating disadvantaged children: Findings and policy implications of a longitudinal study*. United States Department of Education (USDOE).

TAYLOR, B., Pearson, P. D., & Associates. *Beating the odds: Lessons from effective schools and teachers*. Paper Presented at the Improving America's Schools Conference, Orlando, FL, 1999.

THOMPSON, S. (2001). The authentic standards movement and its evil twin. *Kappan*, 82 (5), 358-362.

## Principal Questionnaire

The state has mandated standards for student achievement along with what has come to be known as 'high stakes testing' increasing the accountability of schools, principals, and teachers.



In light of this state of affairs, as a school leader please respond to the following:

1. What are the roadblocks which act as barriers to your 'fast track' to success with student achievement?

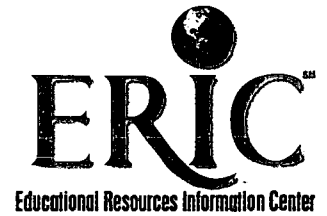
Consider issues of internal nature (teacher knowledge, practice, resources, culture, procedures, etc.) external nature ( district requirements, time, parents, etc.)

2. What are your concerns with accountability and 'high stakes testing'?

3. How do you make programmatic decisions? How do you select a program for the children in your school? What affects your decision making? ( consider: district goals, state goals, parent pressure, teacher opinions, student needs)



**U.S. Department of Education**  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)  
National Library of Education (NLE)  
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



# REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

**TM034198**

**I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:**

Title: "Consequences of High States Testing on Literacy Programs of High Performing Learning Communities"	
Author(s): Luana Zellner, Deborah Jenkins	
Corporate Source: Texas A&M University	Publication Date: Presented at 51st National Reading Conference 12/8/2001

**II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:**

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

\_\_\_\_\_ Sample \_\_\_\_\_

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

**1**

Level 1

↑

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

\_\_\_\_\_ Sample \_\_\_\_\_

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

**2A**

Level 2A

↑

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

\_\_\_\_\_ Sample \_\_\_\_\_

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

**2B**

Level 2B

↑

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.  
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

*I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.*

**Sign here, → please**

Signature: <i>Luana Zellner</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: Luana Zellner Associate Professor
Organization/Address: Texas A&M University	Telephone: (979) 2862-1296 FAX: (979) 862-8373
	E-Mail Address: L-zellner@tamu.edu Date: 3/18/02



### III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

### IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

### V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse: <b>University of Maryland ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation 1129 Shriver Laboratory College Park, MD 20742 Attn: Acquisitions</b>
--

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

**ERIC Processing and Reference Facility  
1100 West Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598**

Telephone: 301-497-4080

Toll Free: 800-799-3742

FAX: 301-953-0263

e-mail: [ericfac@inet.ed.gov](mailto:ericfac@inet.ed.gov)

WWW: <http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com>