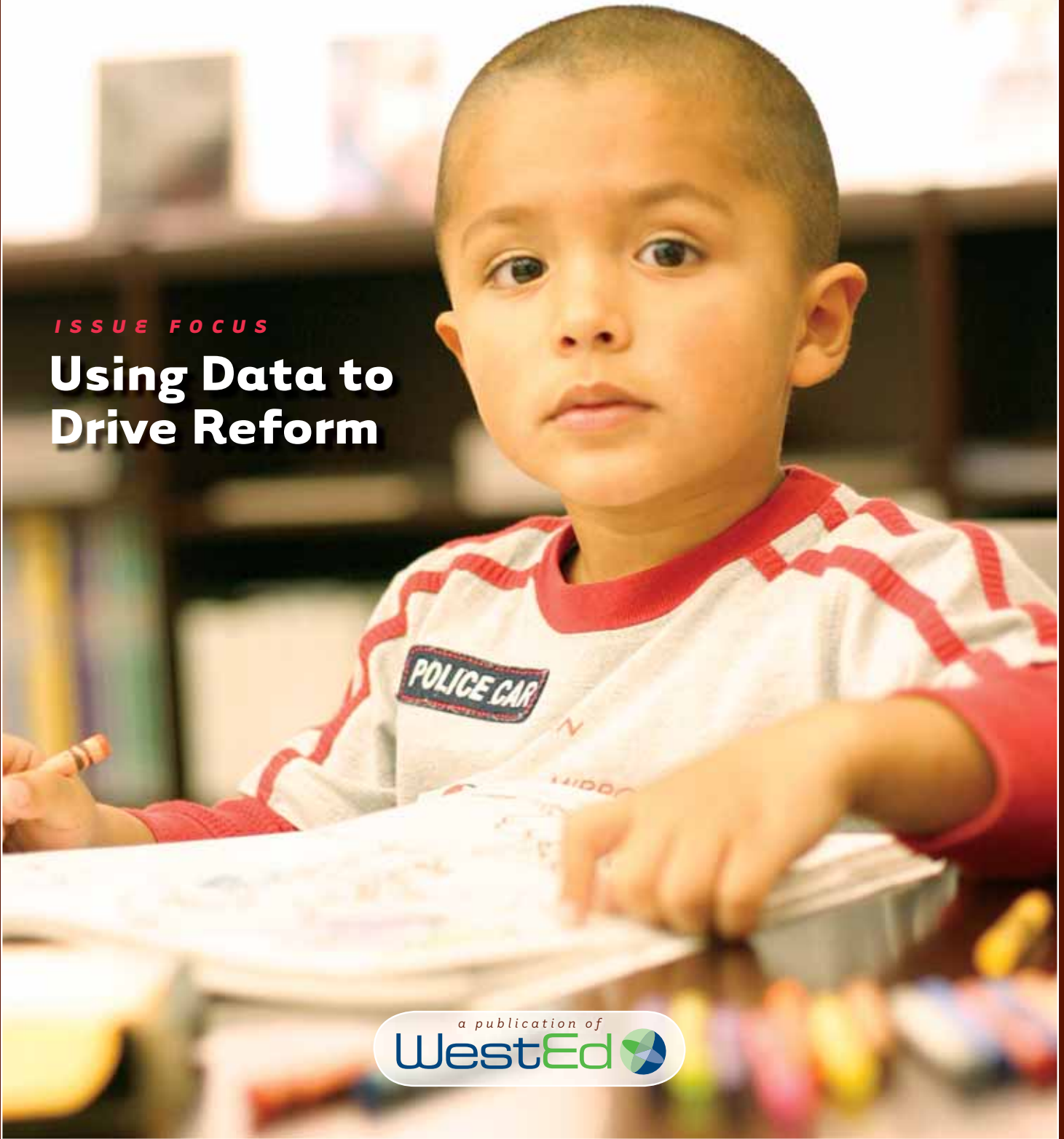# r&dalert

timely knowledge for education and human development

ISSUE FOCUS

Using Data to Drive Reform

a publication of

WestEd

contents

r&dalert

WestEd

On using data to drive reform

>> *One of the perennial challenges in education and human development* is how to make the most of information — whether test results, research findings, or other data. How do we ensure that information is accurate, relevant, and timely? What happens with all the data generated by testing students? How do the results translate into improvements in practice?

These challenges go to the heart of WestEd's mission of promoting equity, excellence, and improved learning for children, youth, and adults. Accomplishing this mission means finding ways to make information and analysis as *useful* as possible, and that is the focus of this issue of *R&D Alert* — generating and using data that drive improvements.

With this issue, we are proud to introduce a fresh new design for *R&D Alert*, shifting to more of the look and feel of a magazine, including full color photos, a new logo, and more article content.

Three of the articles focus on the *generating* side of our theme for this issue: the creation of assessments that provide valuable data. One of these articles describes a new tool from WestEd's Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers (PITC) to assess the quality of early care settings and to identify areas where those settings may need improvement.

Another article describes the development of the first new framework in 15 years for the science portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This framework will guide test developers in creating assessments that will be given nationwide in 2009 and beyond. As such, it is "the vehicle that drives much of our nation's conversation about science education."

WestEd's Stanley Rabinowitz discusses the challenge of ensuring that assessments and accountability systems are of high enough quality for states and districts to depend on them in meeting the ambitious goals of No Child Left Behind. He describes the new Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center that he directs and that aims to address this challenge.

Two other articles focus on *using* data effectively to inform improvement efforts. One describes the development of a new WestEd resource that helps build schools' and districts' capacity for data-driven decision-making. Another article shares lessons from WestEd's work with districts on data-driven improvements that specifically address the education of English language learners.

With well-designed assessments and wise use of data, educators, early care providers, and policymakers can make significant, lasting improvements that have enormous benefits for children. We hope the information and ideas in this newsletter are helpful in this regard, and we encourage you to pursue these topics further by using the contact information at the end of each article.

GLEN HARVEY
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

04

Lori Van Houten assists a teacher analyze data.

A COMPREHENSIVE PROCESS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Using data for decision-making

>> *Even when school leaders have the* **will to improve** *and have all the data necessary to see where improvement is needed, they may still founder. What they often lack, says WestEd Senior Program Associate Lori Van Houten, are* **specific tools** *and* **an overall process** *for using data effectively.*

Van Houten and WestEd colleagues developed such a process and compiled it in a new publication, *Developing an Effective School Plan: An Activity-Based Guide to Understanding Your School and Improving Student Outcomes*.

Educators in California's Beaumont Unified School District began piloting the process in 2004 and have already reaped impressive results. Chavez Elementary School, where the district focused much of its effort, jumped 62 points on California's Academic Performance Index (API). Moreover, the low-socioeconomic subgroup targeted by the school's data team had the greatest growth of all student subgroups, helping make Chavez the biggest success story in a district now celebrated for its overall academic turnaround.

"When we put the tools in teachers' hands to interpret and make sense of their own data, [those data] became much more meaningful to them," says Darrell Brown, Beaumont's Assessment and Accountability Coordinator. "And teachers took ownership of the process."

Developing an Effective School Plan provides a set of organized activities and resources to help educators identify, collect, interpret, and use student achievement data to fuel school improvement. The process initially informs planning at the school and district levels, then moves to implementation.

"Now they have a process and tools for getting ready to use data, analyzing student achievement data, discovering root causes behind those data, selecting effective practices, developing a plan, and then actually implementing and monitoring the plan," says Van Houten, who worked closely with Beaumont. "A lot of schools never get that far. They spend all this time developing a plan, and it just keeps the binders from falling off the shelf."

05

The big picture

WestEd's work with low-performing schools and districts has reaped significant results in schools from Massachusetts to Hawaii. Through California's Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), for example, WestEd has supported more than 75 schools in planning and implementing improvement plans. Over 70 of those have sustained growth sufficient to exit the program and avoid state sanctions — a higher success rate than that of II/USP schools statewide.

Such success informed the resources in *Developing an Effective School Plan*. During her work with Beaumont, however, Van Houten realized teachers need additional guidance to apply the planning and implementation activities to their own situation. ↓

"They kept asking for the big picture," she recalls. "There was one teacher who kept saying, 'Where are we supposed to be going? What's the big picture?' And that's when we figured out we had to have a way to look at the overall process so you can mesh these activities and tools with what already exists in your district, really build a road map for improvement."

The result is a "Change Manager's Handbook," which became the first volume in *Developing an Effective School Plan*. In addition to helping schools and districts take stock of their change process, the Handbook helps change managers identify other individuals who can help lead the process — people who have data content knowledge and the facilitation experience to lead the activities to a successful conclusion.

Along with the Change Manager's Handbook, *Developing an Effective School Plan* contains facilitation notes for all the activities as well as a CD that includes all the activities and tools. The complete package is coauthored by Van Houten with WestEd Program Associate Kim Agullard and with Jeanne Miyasaka, a consultant formerly with WestEd. The Western Regional Educational Laboratory at WestEd funded most of the development of the final product.

When we put the tools in [those data] became much

Based on a wide body of research as well as lessons learned in the field, the publication lays out an ongoing process by which educators use data as the basis for decision-making and achieving results at every level of the education system. [See Figure 1.]

Comprehensive and ongoing

Embedding activities and tools into a comprehensive planning and implementation process was key to success in Beaumont. In cooperation with WestEd, the district conducted "Data Mentoring Workshops" for elementary sites. Teachers learned how to disaggregate results, spot trends, and adjust instruction accordingly — all while contributing to the creation and implementation of a comprehensive school plan for improvement. One hundred percent of teacher participants reported that they would be able to "effectively contribute to school improvement" as a result. School culture changed quickly.

"Teachers were actually anxious to see their data," Van Houten says. "They were lined up outside the principal's office, asking, 'Are the data in yet? Can we see how we did?' No one there had been interested in this before." But changes by the teachers turned around the school's previously disappointing performance, raising achievement most significantly among minority and low socioeconomic groups, she says. Similar changes occurred throughout the district.
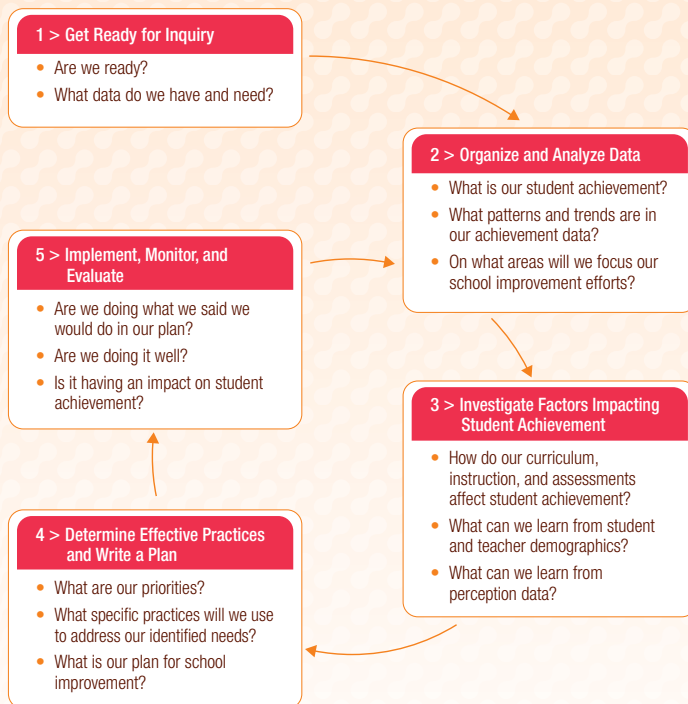
In one year, Beaumont went from declining API scores to the greatest growth of all districts countywide and the top 11 percent statewide. Five of the six schools targeted experienced significant growth in API scores, with a mean of 47 points. The district also experienced an 8.3

To order *Developing an Effective School Plan*, visit www.WestEd.org/schoolplan.

teachers' hands to interpret and make sense of their own data, more meaningful to them…. And teachers took ownership of the process.

Figure 1. The Inquiry Cycle

1 > Get Ready for Inquiry
- Are we ready?
- What data do we have and need?

2 > Organize and Analyze Data
- What is our student achievement?
- What patterns and trends are in our achievement data?
- On what areas will we focus our school improvement efforts?

5 > Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate
- Are we doing what we said we would do in our plan?
- Are we doing it well?
- Is it having an impact on student achievement?

3 > Investigate Factors Impacting Student Achievement
- How do our curriculum, instruction, and assessments affect student achievement?
- What can we learn from student and teacher demographics?
- What can we learn from perception data?

4 > Determine Effective Practices and Write a Plan
- What are our priorities?
- What specific practices will we use to address our identified needs?
- What is our plan for school improvement?

percentage-point improvement in English language arts and a 10.1 percentage-point gain in math.

Brown recommends the data-driven approach to any school system. "You don't wait till you're in trouble to improve — you want to be doing improvement all the time," says Brown. "We're eager to continue."

For more information, contact Lori Van Houten at 415.615.3165 or Lvanhou@WestEd.org.
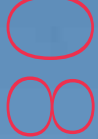
When data speak

English learner evaluation

and accountability support

>> The **sunshine and soil** of California's Coachella Valley have long nurtured some of the largest crops of **lemons, oranges, and avocados** in the state. Today, with WestEd's help, Coachella Valley Unified School District is tending to **another abundant resource**: its **English language learners**.

A third of the nation's almost five million English language learners are in California schools. There is immense pressure to help these students gain English proficiency. Moreover, Proposition 227, passed by voters in 1998, requires that English learners in California public schools be taught "overwhelmingly in English."

In Coachella Valley, a vibrant Latino community has grown with the area's agricultural and service jobs. The school district is 97 percent Latino, with a steady churn of new arrivals who bring various levels of literacy and English speaking ability.

"Every teacher in our district is an English Language Development teacher," says Alma Gonzalez, English learner services director for Coachella Valley Unified. "Our proportion of English learners is about 70 percent."

Systematic use of data to drive improvement

WestEd's Robert Linquanti and Linda Carstens caught the attention of Coachella Valley's superintendent during an institute for local

education leaders. Through WestEd's English Learner Evaluation and Accountability Support (ELEAS), Linquanti and Carstens help districts improve the success of students for whom English is not the primary language.

ELEAS is informed in part by what Linquanti, collaborating with the American Institutes for Research, learned from an extensive review of the impact of California's Proposition 227. The review found, among other things, that "systematic, ongoing assessment and careful use of data to guide instruction" were among the elements most critical to helping English learners succeed.

"Improving English language development and understanding for English learners is a systemic challenge," adds Linquanti, who directs ELEAS. "It requires districts, schools, and teachers to establish some key goals; take a pragmatic, data-wise approach to achieving them; and cultivate internal accountability to get the job done."

And because it asks districts to change their culture, "it's not easy." He emphasizes that educators need to start by knowing where they are.

In Coachella Valley, state test scores reflected some of the district's challenge. Less than 14 percent of the district's elementary and middle school students met or exceeded state English and language arts standards in 2003—04, and only about 16 percent met math standards. Scores at the high school level were similarly low.

Coachella Valley educators knew they needed outside assistance to improve English language development, recalls Gonzalez. The district received a two-year, Title I Supplemental grant and asked WestEd to help set the course.

At the heart of WestEd's ELEAS approach is using data analysis to identify critical instructional issues; establishing a few concise, districtwide goals; and engaging in timely disaggregation of data to guide teachers in adjusting materials or methods to meet the needs of students.

WestEd and Coachella educators looked closely at test scores and demographics, paying attention to how English learners fared over time in the district. "We found that some of our students just were not making the right progress and seemed stagnant," Gonzalez says. "Their English language development wasn't where it needed to be. In some cases, though, their academic achievement was at par or *higher* than English-only speakers."

After refining their understanding of the data, district leaders worked to develop goals to help all English learners in the schools see tangible improvements in both English language development and core academic classes.

From philosophy to practice

ELEAS's Carstens says translating data analysis into long-term systemic changes requires districtwide participation in developing "the bigger picture."

"You start with philosophy: What do you think about English learners, who they are, what they can learn? Then, what kind of teaching supports that philosophy?" Carstens says. "Only then can you get down to pedagogy and the practices that support that pedagogy."

Conversations among Coachella's leaders and educators led to a shared understanding of district philosophy and an overall goal of having every English learner make one level of growth per year in both English language development and in academic areas.

The district also worked to disaggregate data in order to understand where each student was starting from, how well students do in relation to how long they are in the district, and what instructional areas need strengthening.

Disaggregating data "is not a problem-solving strategy. It's a problem-*finding* strategy," notes Linquanti. It can help determine professional development priorities to improve teaching practices.

Coachella's process resulted in adjustments to the district's teacher-guided approach to learning. Gonzalez says, "We had to make sure students were given time to interact with the language." The district's emerging philosophy has been translated into more specific practices that encourage students to share ideas, read aloud, and engage in discussions.

All of these practices help students become more versatile with their new language, but implementing these practices is a change for many teachers, Gonzalez says. "Their classes are not going to be so quiet."

Continuous improvement

As Coachella educators are getting up to speed with ELEAS, just hours away in Orange County's Garden Grove Unified School District, teachers and administrators who have been working with ELEAS since the spring of 2002 are seeing their efforts pay off.

"The goals have become integrated into everything we do," says Debbie Youngblood, director of K-12 educational services for the district. District leaders established two goals for this large, urban district with significant numbers of Asian and Hispanic English learners: to make measurable progress in academic proficiency and to advance English language development and proficiency.

Youngblood says teachers have been included from early in the process. Regular training in how to use new data

Disaggregating data is not a problem-solving strategy. It's a problem-finding strategy.

tracking tools has helped teachers become comfortable using data analysis as a routine part of instructional planning. Quarterly benchmark tests are used, in addition to statewide standardized tests.

After three years of working with Linquanti's "goal-driven, data-wise, research-based" approach, teachers in the Garden Grove district have become adept at looking to assessment results. They are asking for more data, more quickly, to guide their work with English learners.

For administrators, this means crafting data reports that respond to teachers' needs — quickly. The data have helped the district choose new programs to offer. And data help on the individual level by revealing what sub-skills should be emphasized to help a student who has plateaued or lost ground.

In 2004, Garden Grove won the $500,000 Broad Prize for Urban Education, which recognizes districts for improving student achievement and reducing achievement gaps among ethnic groups and between high- and low-income students.

Garden Grove has made the transition into a district that naturally incorporates data analysis into its planning process, but the challenges never really end. Says Youngblood, "It's a constant discussion of how we can improve what we're doing."

For the students, those improvements may build the bridge between learning English, and learning in English.

The study on the "Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12" is available from www.wested.org/prop227.

For more information, contact Robert Linquanti at 510.302.4235 or rlinqua@WestEd.org; or Linda Carstens at 626.836.7753 or lcarste@WestEd.org; or visit www.wested.org/cs/we/view/pj/367.

>> No Child Left Behind lays out a fundamental challenge, asking every school to ensure that every student achieves high standards. Teachers and administrators feel the pressure of this challenge every day. But another group that may feel the pressure of NCLB almost as strongly includes test developers and the policymakers who oversee each state's accountability program.

Creating Accountability System

Assessments and accountability systems play a pivotal role in the implementation of NCLB. They must be of high quality for the ambitious goals of NCLB to be met.

To help states address this challenge, the U.S. Department of Education in 2005 selected WestEd, in partnership with the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), to operate a new kind of assistance center — the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center (AACC).

WestEd's Stanley Rabinowitz directs the new center. He has conducted research, published papers, and consulted with state and local districts on issues related to NCLB accountability and assessment provisions, including the use of integrated standards and assessment systems in high-stakes state accountability programs; high school exit exam policies for students with disabilities; and assessment of English language learners on core academic content. Prior to joining WestEd in 1991, Rabinowitz directed the statewide assessment program for the New Jersey Department of Education.

R&D Alert recently spoke with Stanley Rabinowitz about his work and the new Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center.

What is the motivation behind creating an Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center?

Assessment and accountability systems are key to the success of No Child Left Behind. They provide the information that everyone — states, districts, schools, teachers, students — must use to guide improvement. They signal goals, focus instruction, and are fundamental tools for achieving the overarching aim of academic proficiency for all students.

The AACC's role is to help states make sure that their assessment and accountability systems are up to the task and that local schools have the tools they need to improve instruction and other education programs.

How is the AACC different from other assessment-focused groups?

The U.S. Department of Education sees us as field agents working on the most important and difficult assessment and accountability issues under NCLB. That's our challenge.

We work with the Regional Comprehensive Centers, and in some instances, state departments of education — not directly with districts and schools. Our work is designed to benefit local districts and schools by making sure the states are putting into practice the best knowledge on how to improve and support their assessment and accountability systems.

Q&A

with WestEd's **Stanley Rabinowitz**

...ns for the Nation

In a broader sense, we're also trying to inform the improvement of assessment development and accountability systems as they move forward.

What are some of the "most important and difficult" issues identified so far?

For our first year, the AACC has three main areas of focus. One is assessment and accountability relating to special populations — how to help narrow the achievement gap, particularly for special education students and English learners.

The second piece is what we're calling our data use strand, which focuses mainly on the classroom and local level. How can teachers get the information they need from state and diagnostic assessments to improve instruction? How can administrators get the information they need to make program and accountability decisions?

And the third piece is a systems focus — working with states to improve their overall assessment and accountability programs. We will expand to other areas of focus in subsequent years.

How will you go about this work?

Mostly through a combination of finding, reviewing, and synthesizing the available research products and services that states and schools can use to improve their assessment and accountability systems, not developing new products or programs. We're using our expertise to review and evaluate what's already out there and make resources available in user-friendly formats, mainly through websites and other dissemination strategies.

Could you give an example of a resource you are or will be using?

One is a set of technical guidelines, titled *The Technical Adequacy of Assessments for Alternate Student Populations: Guidelines for Consumers and Developers*, which I developed with WestEd's Edynn Sato and an expert panel under a previous contract from the U.S. Department of Education.

What is significant about these guidelines?

The number of English learners is increasing, and NCLB has raised the assessment and accountability expectations and requirements for this population. So, this is really a growing area of concern, and states are scrambling to develop or acquire assessments for English learners.

We felt there was a real need for an external, expert, neutral party to review the evidence about these assessments — their validity, reliability, and freedom from bias. More importantly, we wanted to be able to inform states and other consumers about what to look for when evaluating such tests, so they can make informed decisions about which ones to choose, and have more confidence in the results once the assessments are selected and administered.

It sounds like the guidelines are about assessments for English learners, not necessarily other populations too?

We do talk about how the procedures can generalize, but they need to be applied somewhat differently for other populations. And one thing we'll do over the five-year funding period for the AACC is continually update and expand the guidelines, which will mean looking at assessments for students with disabilities and other groups besides English learners.

A Framework

>> Mapping the human genome, monitoring ozone layer depletion, tracking mutations of viruses capable of spreading pandemic flu, building satellites that can circle the planet in an hour: These and other scientific breakthroughs have **changed the world** at the start of the **21st century**. And Americans, including our students, must be able to keep up with the **accelerated pace of knowledge**.

To measure progress on this front, WestEd recently spearheaded the development of a new science education assessment framework that reflects the most current thinking in the fields of physical, life, and earth and space sciences.

Through a contract with the National Assessment Governing Board, WestEd and the Council of Chief State School Officers brought together leading researchers, educators, and policymakers to provide recommendations for the first update in 15 years of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) framework

The significance of the NAEP framework cannot be overstated.... This is the vehicle that drives much of our nation's conversation about science education.

FUTURE OF
Science Assessment

for science assessment. The new framework will help test developers create national assessments for science in 2009 and beyond and could have a major impact on the standards and assessments that states adopt to comply with requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"The significance of the NAEP framework cannot be overstated," says Gerald Wheeler, executive director of the National Science Teachers Association and chair of the NAEP science framework steering committee. "This is the vehicle that drives much of our nation's conversation about science education."

The framework "breaks new ground" in several ways, says Richard J. Shavelson, Margaret Jack Professor of Education at Stanford University and co-chair of the planning committee that coordinated the project. First, the framework links science concepts to scientific practices in order to create performance expectations (see Figure 1, page 16).

Second, it explains the thinking and reasoning processes (cognitive demands) that students engage in to complete various assessment tasks. And third, it expands the range of items that test developers can use to probe students' understanding of science.

For example, computer-assisted tasks could simulate the life cycle of plants and then ask students to reflect on the observable relationship between sunlight and germination. Interactive CDs could replicate laboratory experiences that may be too dangerous or messy for fourth-graders to conduct in the classroom but could help them demonstrate what they know about recording data and drawing conclusions. Middle and high school students could use a customized software program to create concept maps that show their understanding of the relationships among important science ideas that lead to solving problems.

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Figure 1. Crossing Content and Practices to Generate Performance Expectations

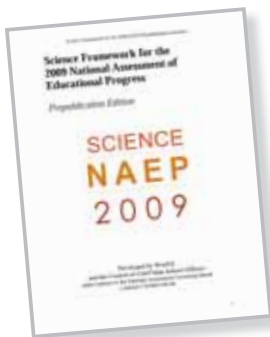|	SCIENCE CONTENT		
	Physical Science content statements	**Life Science** content statements	**Earth and Space Science** content statements
Identifying Science Principles	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations
Using Science Principles	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations
Using Scientific Inquiry	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations
Using Technological Design	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations	Performance Expectations

(Left axis label: SCIENCE PRACTICES)

"We focused on the uses of science principles," says Senta Raizen, director of WestEd's National Center for Improving Science Education and co-chair of the NAEP science framework planning committee. "It's about predicting, observing, and explaining science phenomena — *using* science knowledge rather than just identifying terms."

The NAEP science framework builds on the *National Science Education Standards*, published by the National Research Council in 1996, and the *Benchmarks for Scientific Literacy*, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1993. In addition, the framework reflects international assessment standards, such as those represented in the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS).

But in setting the course for future U.S. science assessments, the NAEP designers carefully reduced the number of standards and content statements to encourage test developers to focus on depth, not just breadth, of knowledge.

An overview chapter adds, "the *Framework* attempts to strike a balance between what can reasonably be predicted about future school science and what students are likely to encounter in their curriculum and instruction now and in the near future."

> **The framework focuses on predicting, observing, and explaining science phenomena — using science knowledge rather than just identifying terms.**

A prepublication version of the framework is available free online:

www.nagb.org/pubs/ sci_fw_prepub_0119.pdf

The framework recommends specific science concepts in the physical, life, and earth and space sciences to be assessed at grades 4, 8, and 12, and four major categories of science practices:

§ identifying science principles (e.g., students may be asked to choose the correct response to a question about what happens to plants and animals when they die)

§ using science principles (e.g., students may be asked to draw on their knowledge of the earth's tilt and its rotation around the sun to explain the change of seasons)

§ using scientific inquiry (e.g., students may be asked to design an experiment that would assess factors affecting plant growth, assess whether the results of the investigation are consistent with theoretical models, and critique their investigation)

§ using technological design (e.g., students may be asked to recommend a new energy plan for a community and evaluate the environmental impacts of natural gas versus coal)

"It's critical to embed the science practices in the science content," says Alice Fu, a WestEd research associate who helped write the NAEP framework. "Anything you expect from students should draw on both content and practice."

Working under tight time constraints and balancing diverse views about science education, the NAEP framework designers achieved a remarkable level of consensus about what students should know about various topics. The project's success stemmed in large part from the ongoing involvement of major stakeholders at federal, state, and local levels.

"It was clear early on that WestEd brought to the process a 'class act' in the way it staffed the project and carried it out in a seamless manner," Shavelson says.

In addition to the regular committee and subcommittee work, organizers conducted a national meeting for representatives of the Council of State Science Supervisors, 13 regional meetings for representatives of various scientific communities across the country, an Internet survey of science teachers in conjunction with the National Science Teachers Association, and presentations at national and regional professional conferences. At each step in the 18-month development process, organizers sought reactions and addressed concerns.

"From beginning to end, we've been proactive about getting feedback from many sources. That helped act as a check on our work," Fu says. "We ended up with a product that represents the perspectives of a lot of different groups and is also current and forward-looking. It's sort of amazing." ″

ℹ *For more information abut the NAEP science framework, contact Senta Raizen at sraizen@WestEd.org or Alice Fu at afu@WestEd.org.*

A NEW YARDSTICK FOR Assessing Early Childhood Care

>> Measuring how well early childhood programs use concepts and practices that promote quality care for infants and toddlers has just gotten easier, thanks to a new tool developed by WestEd's Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers (PITC).

The tool, known as the PITC Program Assessment Rating Scale (PITC PARS), represents the latest development in PITC's 20-year mission to train infant care providers to deliver care that reflects the latest research findings in the area of early development and care. Closely aligned with PITC concepts, practices, and policies, PARS is designed to assess quality of care before and after PITC training.

"We see PARS being used in tandem with other widely used measures of quality care," says Peter Mangione, co-director of WestEd's Center for Child and Family Studies, which oversees PITC. "Other measures give you an overall sense of how much progress you're making, according to widely shared and accepted standards. PARS, on the other hand, lets you document more specific dimensions of infant and toddler care that the Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers identifies as being very important."

One of the most important, according to the research, is child care that emphasizes the development of strong, positive relationships between infants or toddlers and their earliest caregivers. Such relationships promote feelings of safety and security that, in turn, allow young children to attend to intellectual pursuits.

Kerry Kriener-Althen, a WestEd Senior Research Associate, points out that assessing the quality of relationship-based child care is difficult. Yet, such assessment is critical. "You can have all the best equipment, toys, and books in the world, but to provide optimal care, teachers need to be truly engaged with the infants and toddlers and effectively supporting their interests and learning."

Mangione agrees. PARS is a unique assessment tool, he says, because it places a "greater emphasis on the relationship between caregivers and children than one typically sees in instruments designed to measure infant and toddler care."

PARS is available in two versions: one for use in family child care settings, the other for center-based care. Both versions are structured to assess five main components of infant-toddler care, as defined by PITC:

- § The quality of caregivers' interaction with infants
- § Family partnerships, cultural responsiveness, and inclusion of children with disabilities
- § Relationship-based care
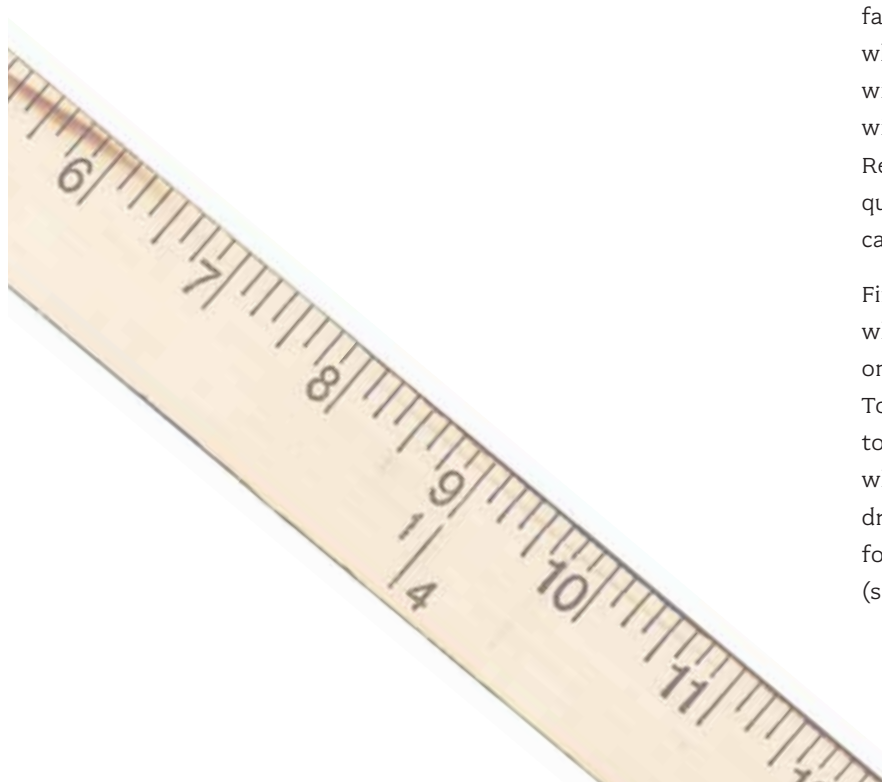- § Physical environment
- § Routines

Each component, in turn, is divided into several items. For example, the quality of caregivers' interactions with infants is assessed by measuring such things as the caregivers' responsiveness and sensitivity to children, respect for infants' initiatives and choices, and facilitation of language

Everything from the way a child is helped to fall asleep at naptime to ways of holding and carrying a child are part of a family's particular culture…. Providing responsive care means being responsive to that culture.

development and communication. The quality of family partnerships is measured by the extent to which the program promotes positive communication with families as well as care that is culturally consistent with and supportive of children's home environments. Relationship-based care is assessed by considering the quality of primary caregiving, the continuity of care, and a caregiver's ability to follow a child's individual schedule.

Finally, each item consists of four sub-items, each of which is scored as either "met" or "not met," depending on information gained through observation and interview. To measure a caregiver's responsiveness and sensitivity to children, for instance, an evaluator must determine whether or not a caregiver responds promptly to children's distress cues. To do so, the evaluator must watch for instances in which children exhibit signs of distress (such as crying, fearful expressions, or agitation) and

Kriener-Althen asked. Of course, infant care teachers can't be expected to respond to every child immediately. "But if a teacher doesn't respond, is it because that teacher is working with another child, or talking to another teacher?" asked Kriener-Althen. "A teacher could be sitting across the room from a child who is voicing a concern and begin to address that concern simply by saying, 'I'll be right there.'"

Given the fact that PITC, the signature project of WestEd's Center for Child and Family Studies, is the single largest infant-toddler training program in use nationwide, Mangione expects PARS to be widely used. "Thousands of child care providers around the country are running programs that implement PITC concepts and practices," he says. "We see PARS as a tool to give them a way to look more comprehensively and specifically at the care they're giving." What's more, Mangione says PARS will also help PITC trainers assess whether their training is achieving what they want. "We want to know, are we getting the kind of responsive, relationship-based care from caregivers that we're training for, and can we document it? We think PARS will help us answer that question."

then rate the consistency and timeliness of the caregiver's responses. A User's Guide has also been developed to promote consistent scoring of sub-items across evaluators.

Kriener-Althen says that measuring whether or not care is "culturally consistent" could involve something as simple as documenting a teacher respecting a parent's wishes about food at snack time. "Everything from the way a child is helped to fall asleep at naptime to ways of holding and carrying a child are part of a family's particular culture," she says. "Providing responsive care means being responsive to that culture."

Both Kriener-Althen and Mangione say that PARS evaluators were asked to "put themselves in the place of the children" they were observing. "Would you feel your concerns were being addressed promptly and appropriately?"

What's New & Useful

Developing an Effective School Plan: An Activity-Based Guide to Understanding Your School and Improving Student Outcomes

The inquiry, planning, and implementation process embodied in this school improvement package represents the distillation and thoughtful organization of what WestEd staff have learned firsthand from their work with diverse schools across the country. *Developing an Effective School Plan* includes a facilitation guide, activities, interactive tools, and CD-ROM. The tools and activities represent the most effective on-site processes for guiding schools' improvement efforts.

Authors: Lori Van Houten, Jeanne Miyasaka, & Kim Agullard

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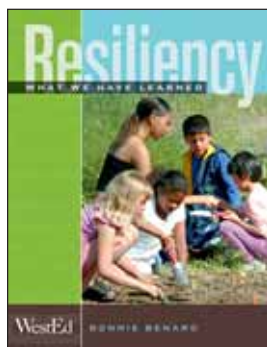
Resiliency: What We Have Learned

This synthesis of more than a decade of resiliency research highlights the role that families, schools, and communities can play in supporting children's and youth's natural capacity to lead healthy, successful lives. Of special interest is the evidence that resiliency prevails in most cases by far — even in extreme situations, such as those caused by poverty, troubled families, and violent neighborhoods. Benard offers a practical analysis of how best to incorporate research findings to support young people.

Author: Bonnie Benard
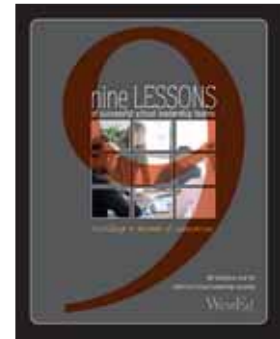
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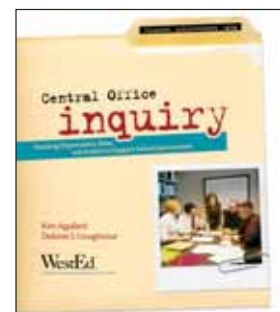
Authors: Kim Agullard & Dolores Goughnour

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Authors: John Carr, Rachel Lagunoff, & Ursula Sexton

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Inside High School Reform: Making the Changes That Matter

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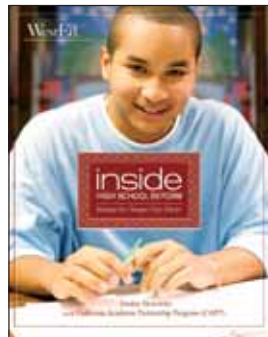
Authors: Jordan Horowitz & California Academic Partnership Program

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> *We felt there was a real need for an **external, expert, neutral party** to review the evidence about these assessments — their validity, reliability, and freedom from bias.*

Can you give a sense of what these guidelines say?

There are certain categories of evidence that should be considered when evaluating any test — mostly concerning reliability, validity, and freedom from bias. So, the guidelines we developed talk about tailoring how you look at these categories for assessments of special populations.

You have to look at reliability, validity, and bias in different ways for English learners. Take validity, for example. For tests in general, you might check content validity by having content experts review the test — mathematics experts for the math items, and so on. But for a test that will be used with English learners, you need to have reviews by those content experts — the math people and others — *plus* you need to have experts in linguistics and educators of English learners review the test. You need to make sure that the content *and* the expectations for the given student population are right.

Who will use these guidelines?

Primarily test developers and consumers — the consumer here isn't a parent, it is a state or a district. So, if I am a consumer, the guidelines provide categories and ways of evaluating a test before I purchase it or for improving it once I have it. If I'm a developer, the guidelines help me consider issues I might have overlooked in analyzing my test to make sure it is valid, reliable, and free of bias.

Another audience is broader, though. We want to be able to inform assessment development as the field moves forward. We are trying to guide the next generation of tests that will be used to gauge whether students are reaching the standards set by states.

In reviewing the current generation of high-stakes tests, our sense is that they need to provide better access for English learners, students with disabilities, and other special populations. We expect the tests to get better as time goes on. But there's a lot of work to be done to get there, and we hope the AACC will help in that process. "

For more information, visit www.aacompcenter.org or contact Stanley Rabinowitz at 415.615.3154 or srabino@WestEd.org.

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