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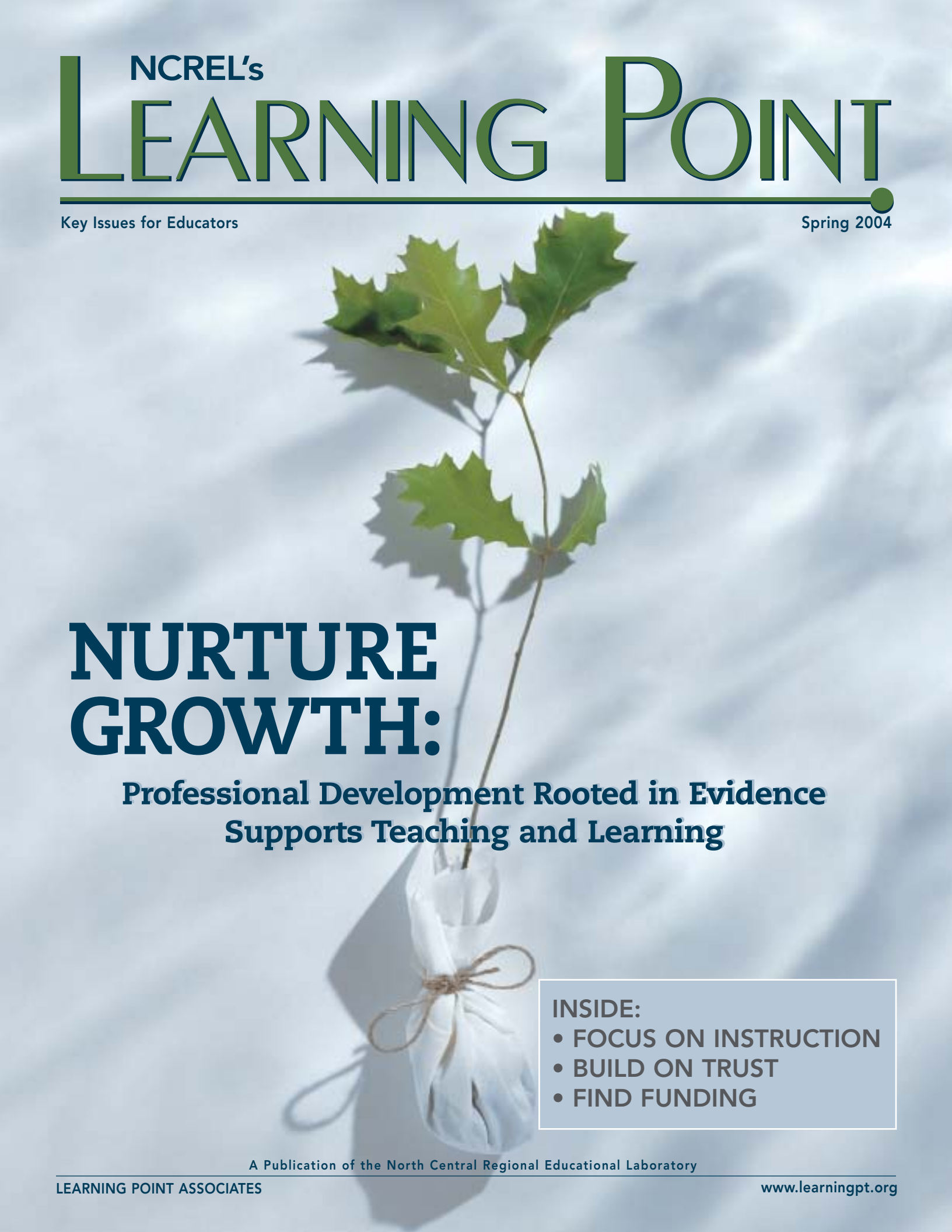
Spring 2004



NURTURE GROWTH:

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INSIDE:
- FOCUS ON INSTRUCTION
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NCREL's
LEARNING POINT

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EDITOR'S NOTE

We at NCREL like the message conveyed by the name of our magazine so much we named a whole organization after it. We have expanded our focus and taken our expertise to new levels with the formation of Learning Point Associates. NCREL remains a critical part of the Learning Point Associates work.

The work of Learning Point Associates builds on NCREL's 20 years of successful research and development, making high-quality products and services available to more schools, more teachers, and ultimately promoting the success of more students across the nation.

Learning Point Associates offers evaluation and professional development services as well as consulting to schools, districts, and states. As a wholly owned subsidiary of Learning Point Associates, NCREL continues its work as a regional educational laboratory serving Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

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NCREL's LEARNING POINT

A publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

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From the desk of
the CEO and Executive Director

Photo by Charles Hopkins

Is there really a lotion that reverses the aging process or a pill that melts the pounds away? We see or hear advertisements every day that make astonishing claims, generally at considerable cost to consumers, which usually can't be substantiated. In a similar way, educators are continually enticed by high-cost, glossy promises of packaged school reform.

At Learning Point Associates, we have learned with our clients and partners that successful educational improvement is a mixture of ingredients that aren't secret or instantly miraculous. The recipe combines rigorous research and development with effective professional development and continuous evaluation to improve teaching and learning.

In our cover story, "Nurture Growth," coauthors Claudette Rasmussen, Susan Hopkins, and Michele Fitzpatrick provide a blueprint for planning professional development with a systemic yet flexible approach that is grounded in research and evaluative in design.

Throughout this Spring 2004 issue of *NCREL's Learning Point*, we focus attention on research-based tools and professional development, illustrating how they come together in ways that support better teaching and improved learning. In our feature article, "Bringing the Picture of Classroom Instruction Into Focus," author Jessica Johnson introduces a new classroom survey tool developed in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This tool, the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC), is based on extensive research conducted by Dr. Andrew Porter, now with Vanderbilt University. SEC can be used to analyze how the curriculum that is taught compares to state-specific standards and assessment. Johnson demonstrates how the tool is being used successfully by teachers at a Florida middle school and how other states, districts, and schools are putting this resource to work for deeper understanding of the impact of curriculum, instruction, and assessment on student learning.

In our regular departments, we take you inside a New Mexico school that is making strides in reading achievement. We offer funding seekers practical tips about the grant-writing process, illustrate relationship building in an initiative focused on improving student learning, and share insights on the coplanning that professional development entails.

You know, I would be the first in line for easy answers to wrinkle and thigh reduction if they really worked. But they don't produce results as promised, so I just have to continue to work hard exercising and reducing stress. The same is true for authentic school improvement. There really is no miracle reform pill—we all must continue working hard to identify and mix the right ingredients (research and implementation) and monitor our progress as we go (evaluation). Learning Point Associates is here to help along the way.

Now, excuse me. I have to go for a run.

Sincerely,

Gina Burkhardt

Nurture Growth

A professional development plan skillfully balances a systemic approach with flexibility to sustain long-lasting progress.

By
Claudette Rasmussen
Susan Hopkins
Michele Fitzpatrick

Sometimes, a comprehensive professional development plan acts as ballast, equalizing a school or district in the sea change that initiatives can inspire. Sometimes, its structure provides a comfort zone for participants grappling with new and complex issues. Sometimes, it serves as a point of reference for gauging the school's or district's evolving needs. Always, it is valuable to those engaged in growing their learning community.

Adapted from "Our Work Done Well Is Like the Perfect Pitch," published in JSD, *Winter 2004, with permission of the National Staff Development Council.*

Planning professional development challenges even the best educators because they must strike a balance between taking a systemic approach and allowing flexibility. A comprehensive plan must result from the rock-solid foundation and clear processes needed to accomplish the task and still build in a capacity for change and adaptation.

A carefully developed, comprehensive plan centers professional development on student learning goals and is more likely to improve teacher practice and student achievement. Choices for professional development probably will include study groups, coaching and mentoring, involvement with curriculum, or research-based approaches that build on the inquiry and collective problem solving begun while developing the plan itself. In contrast to one-shot, stand-alone workshops or professional development relegated to a handful of inservice days, schools with excellent programs make professional development an ongoing part of educators' daily work (Hassel, 1999; Loucks-Horsley, 1999).

Integrated professional learning may appear seamless and natural when it occurs, but like a flawless violin solo or perfectly pitched curve ball, it's the thought, effort, and commitment behind the effort, the hours of planning and practice, that produce successful results.

Planners begin by absorbing the lessons research offers, and research indicates that developing, implementing, and monitoring a comprehensive plan requires a systematic yet flexible planning process (Steiner, n.d.).

Evidence-Based Planning

Throughout the administration of President Bill Clinton, the U.S. Department of Education sponsored the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development to encourage and reward schools and districts that successfully implement high-impact professional development. In interviews with staff members at these schools and districts, researchers discovered that despite their many differences, all award winners took similar steps to plan and implement professional development.

First, they made planning a priority—even though it takes time, tremendous mental energy, and coordination of resources. By taking the time to plan carefully, they ensured that professional development focused on the student learning results they really wanted (Hassel, 1999).

This kind of planning begins with the end in mind—improved student learning—and with an analysis of the local context of student, teacher, and school community needs. It then moves through a logical sequence of actions, but not in a lock-step manner and not by doing all the planning before all the implementing. Once a plan is under way, the process is revisited and the plan revised based on implementation results and new student data. **The following steps can guide you through this process.**

Step 1

Gather and analyze the data and identify gaps in student learning.

Gathering and analyzing school data from several sources is the best way to identify trends and patterns in student learning so you can clarify what students need. Data help determine a school's or a district's starting point so planners can identify gaps in student learning, set feasible improvement goals, and direct professional development to meet those goals.

For this step, four categories of data are needed: student achievement data, demographic data, program data, and perceptions data (Sargent, 2001).

Student achievement data may include standardized test scores, results of district-created assessments, classroom exams, alternative assessment results for special education students and students with limited English proficiency, grade book summaries, and achievement data from noncore subjects.

Educators often gather student scores but remain unclear about the overall picture they suggest. Analyzing student achievement requires us to dig deep and spot trends. If reading scores are low, for example, professional development planners need subset data, such as comprehension scores, to determine exactly what students need. They also must look at three to five years of data to be able to identify trends.

Demographic data concern who enrolls in the schools, mobility patterns in and out of grades and schools, nearby neighborhoods and their relationship to the school, how transportation affects student performance, rate of enrollment in special programs, attendance, and information about students' behavior and social problems.

The goal in collecting demographic data is to gain a thorough understanding of the school's student population. The goal is not to explain the demographics, but to examine how these characteristics may affect opportunities for all children to learn.

Program data provide information about what is being taught and to whom. They range from the number of field trips taken to the numbers of graduating students who attend college and may include curriculum sequences; enrollment information, including enrollments in alternative, extracurricular, and specially funded programs; teacher credentials, ratio of teachers to students, and licensure information; graduation rates and postgrad information, such as college enrollments and work-career information; data about instructional aides and community volunteers; and information on strategic plans and program evaluation methods.

Finally, ***perceptions data*** reveal how teachers, students, and the community view the school or district. What stakeholders think of the school's services affects all levels of planning. If stakeholders perceive there is poor communication, for instance, planners will have to be diligent in communicating the professional development plan.

Perceptions data include surveys on school climate, rates of student and teacher absenteeism and tardiness, participation numbers in professional development programs, the number of harassment incidents and complaints, hotline and suggestion box information, and reviews of media coverage.

Program and perceptions data, often overlooked in the analysis of student achievement, provide important information about the current reality of teaching and learning and insight into why students' needs may not be met.

One study of low-performing schools found that examining the data in itself was a powerful form of professional development. Determining which students are achieving at which levels and in what areas helps educators examine their own ideas about achievement and take the next step to determine the specific needs of their students (Geiser & Berman, 2000).

Guiding questions:

- What do the disaggregated data tell us about each subgroup's learning needs? Are there trends or patterns?
- What hypotheses can we generate based on our analysis of the data?

Step 2

Set student learning goals and align those goals with school improvement efforts.

Gathering and analyzing data enables a school or district to identify areas for improvement and see gaps between current reality and student learning goals. Data analysis helps staff focus on greatest needs and begin to establish goals that give students the best opportunities for success. Schools often set too many goals. One to three student learning goals is ideal; six is too many.

Focus is critical to success, and so is alignment. Aligning the student learning goals with school improvement goals is an important prerequisite for good professional development. One national survey of teachers found that when teachers report a connection between professional development and other school improvement activities, they are more likely to say professional development has improved their teaching practice (Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001). Another study of exemplary organizations in both the educational and private sectors found that professional learning was most successful when coordinated with organizational goals (Laine, 2000).

Guiding questions:

- What are the highest priority needs for improving student performance?
- Are there needs that, if met directly, would indirectly address or improve other areas of need?
- What goals would best address student learning needs this year?
- How do these goals align with goals identified in the school/district improvement plan(s)?

Step 3

Define instructional strategies that address learning goals.

Once student learning goals are defined, planners must determine what instructional strategies teachers might use to help students achieve them.

Instructional strategies could include introducing a new reading program, using specific reading approaches (e.g., think-aloud strategies), or after-school tutoring. The bottom line is determining what needs to change in the school or classroom to help students learn what the data indicate they have not yet learned.

Guiding questions:

- What does the research indicate about how students best learn this content or accomplish this goal?
- What resources do we have in the school or district that can help us choose the most effective instructional strategies to address our goals?

Alignment: Are your professional development initiatives aligned with your strategies?

Analyzed Data	School Improvement Goals	Strategies	Professional Development Initiatives
Grade 3: Reading comprehension • 40% passing state test. • 30% at 10 or fewer points below passing. • Disaggregated data indicates comprehension—expository text—is key need.	**Grade 4: Reading** • Teachers focus on reading comprehension (expository text). • 55% pass reading comprehension subgroup. • All students not passing show gains of at least 3%.	**Think-aloud strategies** • Integrate think-aloud strategies into reading, science, and social studies instruction.	**Comprehension monitoring: Think-aloud strategies** • Using study groups, investigate National Reading Panel (2000) conclusions on comprehension monitoring—think-alouds. • Determine how we will integrate. • Seek coaching from reading specialist as needed. • Use peer observations/teacher modeling to build skills in using think-alouds.

Step 4

Identify what staff need to know and be able to do in order to implement new strategies.

Determining what staff need to know focuses professional development initiatives. According to one overview of the literature (National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, n.d.), professional development that provides teachers with general information about a new instructional practice or about developments in a particular content field usually does not result in improved teaching. Instead, effective professional development concentrates on the specific content students will be asked to master, the challenges they are likely to encounter, and research-based instructional strategies to address those challenges (Cohen & Hill, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Although building teachers' knowledge and skills is important, teachers enhance their capacity even more when they understand the theory behind learning new skills (National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, n.d.). Understanding the theory helps in two ways. Because changing practice often entails changing beliefs about how students learn or about teacher roles, teachers who examine their own beliefs and reconsider them are more likely to change their approaches in the classroom (Borko & Putnam, 1995; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, n.d.). Also, understanding the theory underlying new skills and knowledge means teachers can adapt what they learn to specific and changing circumstances (Pink & Hyde, 1992).

Examining how the needed theory, knowledge, and skills relate to local or state standards provides additional focus for the professional development initiatives, paving the way for action planning and evaluation planning that are likely to translate into increased achievement on state tests and improved classroom performance.

Once you have identified the theory, knowledge, and skills required to implement new instructional strategies, assess staff members' current practices and capabilities to determine needed improvements. Case studies indicate that different methods can be used to collect this information, including observations, portfolios, surveys, and discussion groups (Hassel, 1999).

Guiding questions:

- What do staff need to know and be able to do in order to implement this instructional strategy?
- How do the knowledge and skills relate to local and state standards?
- What are the current competencies of the teachers?
- What theory, knowledge, and skills do staff need in order to close the gap between current practice and new instructional strategies?

Step 5

Define professional development initiatives and develop an action plan.

Schools often begin with this step when formulating a professional development plan. Starting here implies that professional development is a goal in and of itself. Professional development is not the goal; it is a means of achieving a goal.

Information gathered during the first four steps of this planning process helps ensure that student learning goals are clear and professional development is truly data driven. Planners are better able to target their professional development, aligning professional development initiatives with instructional strategies, student learning goals, and analyzed data.

Only now is it time to define professional development initiatives. Begin by exploring research-based approaches such as study groups, student work examination, coaching and mentoring, or involvement with curriculum, and the underlying design characteristics that make an approach effective such as duration, content, focus, and coherence (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Select and design professional development approaches based on the research and, just as importantly, on the basis of your context.

Once the overall initiatives are defined, planners create a detailed action plan including learning objectives, location, facilitators (if appropriate), delivery date(s), staff involved, duration, costs (including substitutes as needed, coaches, consultants, food, room rental, travel, planning time, study group time, etc.). This level of detail is critical to successfully implementing the initiatives.

Before or as part of defining a professional development initiative, you may want to conduct a resource audit. Knowing where and how time, money, and professional staff's energies are spent is a vital step in allocating scarce resources.

Studies indicate school districts typically spend professional development money in an uncoordinated, nonstrategic fashion and that significant funding can be freed up through reallocation (Boston Plan for Excellence & Boston Public Schools, 1999; Miles, n.d.). A resource audit also helps a school determine how well current professional development spending is aligned with student learning goals.

Guiding questions:

- What are research-based professional development approaches?
- Which research-based approaches best fit our context?
- How well does this professional development initiative align with our instructional strategy, student learning goals, and analyzed data?
- How can our school's resources—people, time, and money—be allocated to support this initiative?
- What are the details of an action plan to implement this initiative—learning objectives, location, facilitators, delivery date(s), staff involved, duration, costs?

Evaluation: How will you evaluate your professional development initiatives?

Professional Development initiative	**Evaluate info/data needed** What questions do we want to answer?	**Data collection method** How will information be gathered?	**Tasks** Who will develop the instruments, administer them, analyze data, and write the report?	**Resources needed** Time, people, and money
Comprehension monitoring: Think-aloud strategies	• **Level 1:** Feedback on study group effectiveness. • **Level 4:** Teachers use of new think-aloud strategies. • **Level 5:** Student gains on reading comprehension subgroup scores.	• Conduct debrief of study groups using common protocol to assess effectiveness. • Use a common protocol for peer observations. • Review state test data reports: reading comprehension.	• Each study group will self-assess using protocol. • Juan and Laura will develop protocols, analyze data, and write short report. • Teachers will do peer observations.	• Juan and Laura need 16 hours. • Subs needed for teachers doing peer observations.

Step 6

Create a professional development evaluation plan. (Refer to the chart above.)

Schools that align professional development with clear student learning goals are better able to evaluate whether certain professional development activities have the desired impact on teacher practice and, ultimately, student achievement. Planners consider crucial evaluation questions early in the process.

To focus evaluation efforts and collect meaningful evidence, Guskey (2003) recommends that planners account for five levels of evaluation by "planning backwards" and considering: (1) the impact on student learning outcomes; (2) participants' use or implementation; (3) organizational support and change; (4) participants' learning; and (5) their reactions to the experience.

These evaluation levels should be incorporated into a plan for each professional development initiative that identifies indicators of success, data collection approaches/tools, data sources, timetable, person(s) responsible, and cost.

Evaluation done well bolsters professional development efforts no matter what the results. An evaluation that shows the activities are successful strengthens educators' participation and commitment. If the evaluation shows less promising results, it can lead to changes in professional development that make the effort more effective.

Guiding questions:

- What indicators of success or evidence will be used to determine whether a professional development initiative will lead to the desired goal?
- How can you gather evidence at multiple levels of evaluation—student outcomes, participants' use, organizational support, participants' learning, and reactions to the experience?
- What are the details of an evaluation plan for each initiative—indicators of success, data collection approaches/tools, data sources, timetable, person(s) responsible, and cost?

Leadership, Coaching Support

Leadership training at all levels of participation and coaching throughout the process are essential in developing a comprehensive plan.

Regardless of skill, talent, and desire, no team ever captured a Superbowl without a coach. A coach helps a planning team clarify its purpose, define team roles, establish meeting processes, determine success indicators, and identify stakeholders. A coach also helps the team make decisions about the design and content of the professional development plan and integrates research-based tools and strategies into every part of the planning process.

Building the leadership capacity of a diverse team of teachers, administrators, and community members is key to sustaining successful professional development. All members of a leadership team need multiple skills and new knowledge to plan, implement, monitor, and sustain high-quality professional development.

A systematic yet flexible planning process, supported by leadership development and coaching, creates a program that enhances the morale and growth of all stakeholders in the learning community, is self-sustaining, and produces results.

A plan aligned with school improvement goals and focused on student needs is the springboard for higher student performance. As one principal said to us, professional development planning is "great preparation for school improvement planning!" ●

FOR MORE INFO

Learning Point Associates designs and delivers professional development products and services to meet the unique needs of individual situations. For further information, call **800-252-0283**.

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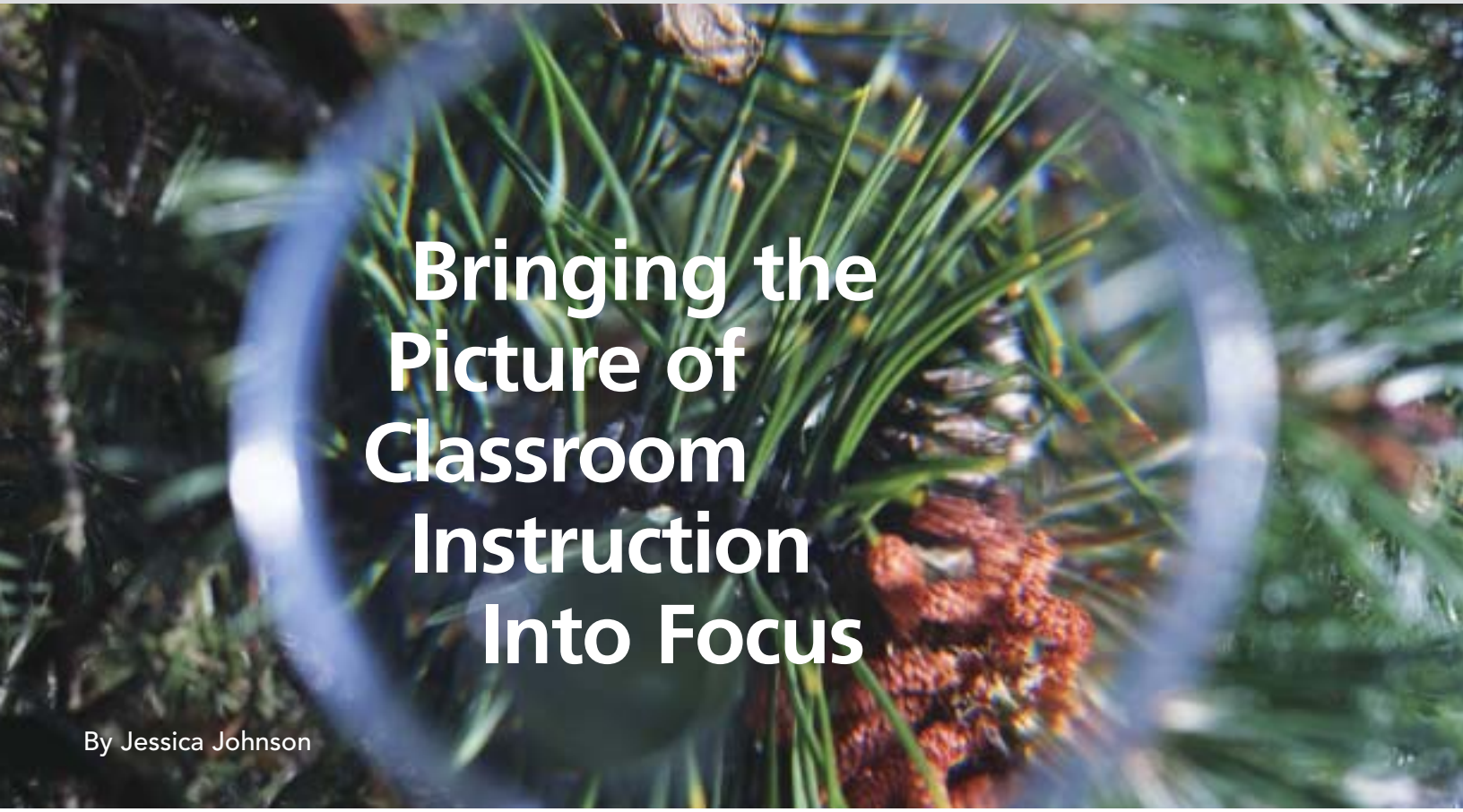


Bringing the Picture of Classroom Instruction Into Focus

By Jessica Johnson

Assessments provide a snapshot of student performance, but they don't answer these instruction questions: What concepts are taught, at what level, and how?

Nationwide, teachers have piloted a unique survey tool that collects and analyzes what is taught and compares those data to standards and assessment.

Since the presidential signing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in January 2002, schools have responded with great effort to the increased demand for understanding and teaching state academic standards and assessment specifications. Unfortunately, limited data exist to inform administrators and teachers about how successful these efforts have been. While assessments provide a snapshot of student performance within state standard frameworks, they don't provide insight into how students perform in relation to what they are taught, at what level, and how they are taught. Obtaining a complete picture—how well students are learning what they are taught in the classroom, and the extent to which what they are being taught is consistent with state academic standards—continues to be a challenge for educators.

To address this challenge, states and districts across the country are now using a survey tool that collects and analyzes data on what is taught and compares that data to state standards and assessments. This tool, the Surveys of the Enacted Curriculum (SEC), provides detailed pictures of what is taught, much as topographical maps display geography and elevation. Teachers and administrators see visual displays that show where instructional emphasis is placed in a content area. Comparable displays depict the emphasis in a particular set of standards or assessments, allowing for a direct comparison of instructional practice and instructional goals. The data provide a meaningful lens to look at what is being taught and how it is being taught. This creates a true baseline for school improvement planning.

A unique feature of the surveys is that they capture not only what topic area is taught but also the cognitive expectations the teachers have for the students. For example, instead of just indicating whether or not fractions are taught in a classroom, teachers are asked to distinguish the level of mastery between memorization, concept understanding, performing a procedure, proving, and solving nonroutine problems.

The surveys, available for K–12 math, science, and English language arts, also include instructional practice questions that probe into the methods of instruction used in the class-

room, as well as the use of homework and technology. In addition, the instructional practice survey contains questions about professional development and teacher beliefs about standards and instruction. The information gained from these questions can be used to complement the instructional content survey or as a stand-alone survey for professional development planning.

The survey instruments and the data-reporting designs are based on research conducted by Andrew Porter, Ph.D., director of the Learning Sciences Institute at Vanderbilt University (and former director of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research [WCER]), and John Smithson, research associate at WCER. A collaborative of state education specialists and researchers, led by Rolf Blank, director of education indicators at the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), developed the SEC in mathematics and science.

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) at Learning Point Associates joined with WCER and CCSSO to lead a similar collaborative in the development of the English Language Arts Survey. NCREL anticipates that this tool will be a key instrument for schools in measuring and achieving progress for both NCLB and Reading First requirements. As such, for all three topic areas—mathematics, science, and English language arts—NCREL is working with these partners to bring the survey tools and the accompanying professional development to local districts and schools to support their improvement processes.

How It Works

The surveys can be completed in paper form or online in about 90 minutes. Online, teachers have access to their own individual results, which they can compare to the group or the standards. Administrators have access to subgroup-level aggregated data only. While some teachers initially feared the exercise would be evaluative, they found that it actually opened the door to a dialogue about content and instruction.

What You Can Hope to Achieve

The depth and breadth of data present multiple options for districts and schools. While many are choosing to use the tools to compare their curricular alignment to standards and assessments, the tools can also help districts evaluate articulation across grades. Or, they can be used to identify areas of need for professional development in either content or instructional practice. Further, the tools can be administered in subsequent years to measure progress in any one of these areas. For example, a school or district focusing professional development on alignment of instruction to standards could give the survey at the beginning of the school year and then again at the end of the year or in subsequent years to determine if instruction is becoming more closely aligned to standards over time.

"The process has supported our teachers in becoming more data driven. Before this, data may have been used to make rash decisions. It has made us more thoughtful as a school. Now we look at multiple sources of data to drive curricular decisions."
—Cecelia Magrath, Curriculum Specialist, Homestead Middle School, Miami-Dade County, Florida

"It's the first tool I've seen that provides reliable, concrete data on what is taught in the classroom," says NCREL Senior Researcher Arie van der Ploeg. "With SEC data in hand, the possibilities are endless."

What Lies Ahead?

During the past few years, the CCSSO, WCER, and NCREL at Learning Point Associates have been working together with state education agencies to implement the SEC tools for data collection, analysis, and reporting in mathematics, science, and English language arts.

A number of states and several large urban school districts have been participating in collecting and reporting instructional data using SEC surveys. The SEC content framework has been used to display alignment analyses of 20 states' standards and assessments. Currently, a collaboration of states is measuring the effects of aligned instruction on student achievement to address a key question: Do classrooms where instruction is aligned to state standards produce improved results on state assessments? The SEC will help educators answer that question. ●

FOR MORE INFO

If you are interested in learning more about the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) or starting a project in your school or district, please visit the Learning Point Associates SEC home page at **www.secsupport.org**. This Web site offers professional support for the SEC, such as how to gain commitment from leadership and how to get started with the SEC. You can also initiate a project from the site, download valuable resources, and learn about workshops available on the topics of understanding the results and implementing changes.

If you are interested in learning more on the state-specific collaboration and research information for the SEC, please visit the CCSSO Web site at **www.secsurvey.org**.

To read a case study on the SEC in practice, turn to page 12.

A Case Study: Making Sense of the Numbers

A middle school in Florida uses Surveys of Enacted Curriculum to align curriculum with standards.

In 2001–02, Homestead Middle School in southern Miami-Dade County, Florida, implemented the SEC in conjunction with a larger project promoting data-driven decision making. With a low-income and highly mobile student population, administrators were determined to focus efforts on programs and tools that would have lasting impact on the school faculty and student achievement.

Homestead first administered the surveys to approximately 20 teachers in the areas of math and science. Because the survey is so comprehensive, the resulting data can be a bit overwhelming. In order to make sense of it all, the staff opted to look at the data in smaller pieces, through instructional improvement teams. In smaller teams, they were able to provide coaching to teachers, so they could examine the data without jumping to rushed conclusions. For example, while a summary chart may have indicated heavy instructional emphasis in a general content area, a deeper look at the detailed charts may have indicated that the focus was slightly misdirected. The staff found it critical to look at the SEC results in conjunction with student achievement and other data. For instance, with multiple sources of data, they were able to identify particular areas where instructional emphasis was heavy but assessment results were low.

One recent example involved poor assessment results in the area of number sense. Despite data from the SEC indicating a high amount of instructional time focused on this area, assessment scores had remained relatively low. An analysis of the assessment items revealed that the concept was being measured by means of real-world story problems rather than through the more traditional problems used as practice in the classroom. The school improvement team offered this hypothesis: The way in which problems were being presented was a major stumbling block for the students. In view of that, they recently instituted a "problem of the day" for

students, which incorporates not only math skills but also vocabulary and has a look and feel more in line with the assessment items. The SEC provided the context, in conjunction with assessment data, to pinpoint a problem area and implement a solution.

Another area of the SEC surveys that Homestead has benefited from is the professional development section. The needs that teachers cited in the survey have driven the planning for many of the school's designated professional development sessions. For example, the data revealed that teachers need and want more training in the area of technology. As a direct result of this feedback, specific technology training programs have been implemented.

Overall, teachers and administrators have benefited from the process. Cecelia Magrath, curriculum specialist, sums it up: "The process has supported our teachers in becoming more data driven. Before this, data may have been used to make rash decisions. It has made us more thoughtful as a school. Now we look at multiple sources of data to drive curricular decisions."

Test scores in math have risen for all grade levels at Homestead. Teacher discussions now focus on student work and supporting data. The staff continues to use SEC and other data to evaluate progress and make instructional decisions.

—Jessica Johnson

By
Arlene Hough

For a Good Cause: Finding the Funding to Fuel Improvement

Where are today's funding dollars being channeled? How can you increase your opportunities of receiving a share? We offer timely tips and resources for finding the funding to fuel the good choices you are making for your school or district.

Here's a familiar scene: Two working moms talking over lunch about a wish list for their local elementary school. "I really wish the district would do something about after-school programs," says the young mother of a third-grade boy. "It would be great if they would start a new language program—something that would really make our schools stand out," adds her lunchmate. "But you know there isn't money for programs like that."

These moms are not alone. Educators all over the country are grappling with the need to support their students and parents with various programs. Unfortunately, they are also struggling with another issue, finding money to pay for the programs.

One often-considered choice is writing a grant proposal. Every year, millions of dollars are available through government agencies, various corporations, and foundations. But for a first-time grant writer, beginning this task can seem overwhelming.

The Process

The most important first step is planning your project. Write down every detail you can think of: your goals, outcome, timeline, manpower, resources required, an effectiveness evaluation tool, and, of course, total cost.

What's the next step in your plan? Whether you are an individual teacher or part of a group of teachers with a project in mind, make sure you have the support of your principal and central office. Districts often are selective about the number of grants and types of programs they can support each year.

Next, it's time to search out a funding agency that fits with your project's needs. For after-school programs, a good place to start is **www.afterschool.gov**. This Web site features a section with the straightforward title *How to Get Money* and offers direct links to federal-funding basics, grant-writing tips, and other facts. You can find information about funding for projects other than after-school programs at sites such as the Foundation Center at **www.fdncenter.org**, the Donors Forum at **www.donorsforum.org**, and SchoolGrants at **www.schoolgrants.org**, to name only a few, and information about federal funding at the U.S. Department of Education Web site at **www.ed.gov/fund/landing.jhtml**. Of course, it's also useful to follow up with organizations and people you may already know. Even if their organization is not a good fit, they may be able to introduce you to one that is.

At this point, you've identified a potential funder or two. Most agencies have a grant application package, which usually consists of the application, a narrative section, and a budget. The most important part of this process is reading! Read the application thoroughly, read it again, and then have someone else read it. Your attention to detail here is often what determines whether your proposal is a success or failure. The narrative is your selling pitch. What makes your project more desirable to fund than the next one? Convince the reader. The narrative should include the following:

- Purpose, goals, and objectives.
- How the goals will be met.
- How the goals will be measured—funders like to support successful programs.
- Timeline.
- Reason your project should be funded—why it is needed.

Your budget should be clear, concise, and, most of all, accurate. You don't want to have an underfunded project. The entire application package should be carefully edited and reviewed by a third party. After that, you submit the proposal and wait.

The Outcome

Scenario 1. Congratulations! You've won the grant. The hard part is over and the joy of doing good work has begun, but don't forget how you got here. Some points to remember:

- Attention to detail is vital.
- Thank the funder.
- Follow the prescribed timeline.
- Prepare requested evaluation reports thoroughly.
- Write a final report that is clear, understandable, and complete. Make the funding agency want to support you again.

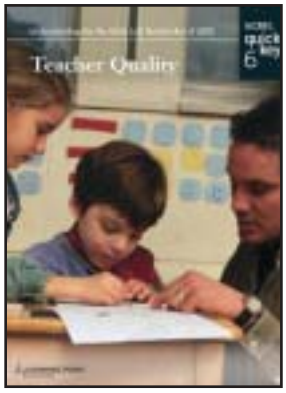
Scenario 2. What a shame! The proposal was not funded. Things to learn or do:

- Contact the funding agency and ask for a critique of your proposal.
- Remember, a failed application doesn't necessarily mean the proposal was not solid. Applications may not be funded for a variety of factors that you can't foresee or control.

Whether a proposal is for funding a large-scale undertaking or a small, great idea, each one will be judged by how well it is presented. Be organized. Be thorough. And your wish just may be granted. ●

Developing Solutions to Meet Regional Needs

Make Sense of the Teacher Quality Components of NCLB



What qualifications and characteristics define a highly qualified teacher? What determines a highly qualified paraprofessional? What are alternative routes to certification? These questions and more are addressed in "Understanding the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act of 2001: Teacher Quality," the sixth brochure in the *Quick Key* series focusing on components of the NCLB Act. Increase your knowledge on this topic with the easy-to-follow, question-and-answer format and descriptions of key resources for more information. Order a complimentary copy through the Product Catalog at **www.learningpt.org/catalog.htm** or through the Product Order Line at **800-252-0283**.

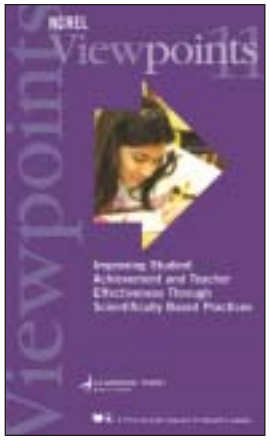
Understand Scientifically Based Research

Need help understanding and identifying scientifically based research (SBR) on school improvement? Learn how to ask key questions about the research you find and how to apply SBR to your school programs and practices. Increase your knowledge on the six specific components of SBR with detailed explanations and examples, as well as a glossary of common research terms. "Understanding the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Scientifically Based Research" is seventh in the *Quick Key* series of brochures, which explain NCLB components. To order a complimentary copy, visit the Product Catalog at **www.learningpt.org/catalog.htm** or call the Product Order Line at **800-252-0283**.

Explore Educational Technology and State Policies in the Region

Deepen your understanding of how state policies can enhance educational technology use to improve student learning and standards-based reform. The latest edition of *Policy Issues*, "Making Educational Technology Work: State Policies in the North Central Region," highlights the findings of a study that analyzed state educational technology policies in the North Central region. It includes policy recommendations, examples of best practices, and a policy implementation rubric. A complimentary print copy can be ordered through the Product Catalog at **www.learningpt.org/catalog.htm** or through the Product Order Line at **800-252-0283.**

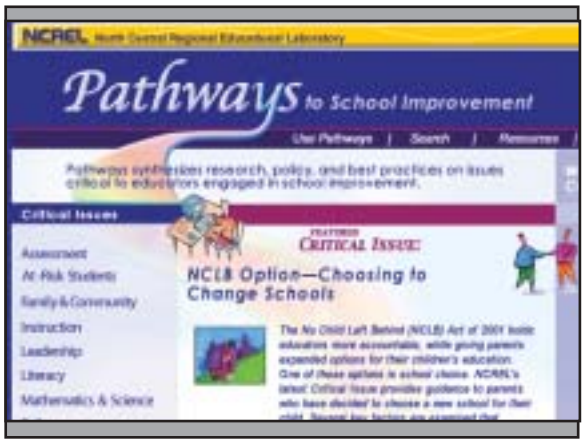
Multimedia Package Focuses on Scientifically Based Practices



The most recent volume of *Viewpoints*, "Improving Student Achievement and Teacher Effectiveness Through Scientifically Based Practices," outlines the elements of scientifically based research as they relate to teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. The two audio CDs present the perspectives of education leaders who work closely with scientifically based research, and the informative booklet provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities for implementing scientifically based initiatives. This multimedia resource can be ordered by visiting the Product Catalog at **www.learningpt.org/catalog.htm** or by calling the Product Order Line at **800-252-0283**.

How Can Parents Make an Informed Choice About Switching Schools?

"NCLB Option—Choosing to Change Schools" is the title of a recent Critical Issue on the *Pathways to School Improvement* Web site. It examines key areas researchers have identified as especially significant: quality teachers, smaller classes, the parent-teacher partnership, a challenging environment, and strong reading programs. The document also examines the other side of the issue, which reflects the thinking of those who question whether choice delivers the effective results for which it is intended. View the Critical Issue at **www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa600.htm**.



Assistive Technology Addresses Special Needs

In spring 2003, the U.S. Department of Education released reauthorization principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 in an effort to align this legislation with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Both of these laws call for stronger and increased accountability for results. To help administrators and educators rise to these challenges, "Enhancing System Change and Academic Success Through Assistive Technologies for K–12 Students With Special Needs," a *Pathways to School Improvement* Critical Issue, identifies key elements surrounding the successful implementation of assistive technology and dispels many common misconceptions associated with this wide-ranging field. It goes further to provide research-supported and evidence-based answers to important questions to help educators make good decisions that lead to overall school improvement and academic success for children with disabilities. View the Critical Issue at **www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/technlgy/te700.htm**.

How Do Educational Technology Policies Fit Into Strategic Planning?

New to the NCREL *enGauge* Web site is "A Framework for Analyzing Districts' Educational Technology Policies in Light of the Federal No Child Left Behind Legislation." The framework allows school districts to conduct a self-assessment about how policies around learning technology fit into the overall context of strategic planning to improve student academic achievement. It delineates ways that policies can enhance educational technology usage at the district level to improve student learning and standards-based educational reform. The framework can also be used to compare policy patterns across districts. The framework is available online at **www.ncrel.org/engauge/resource/analyzing/index.htm**.

NEWS & NOTES

State of the Region

The *State of the Region 2003* is available on the NCREL *Educational Policy* Web site. The report includes the top issues and priorities for each state in the seven-state region; education highlights from each governor's 2003 State of the State address; notable state activities, as reported by the state departments of education and through various media; and useful information regarding each state's progress in implementing the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. A national perspective is also included. The 2003 report on the North Central region is available online at **www.ncrel.org/policy/region/stateofregion.htm**.

By Asta Svedkauskaite

Building Multifaceted Relationships to Improve Student Learning

The North Central Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium brought its experience in building relationships into play when asked to consult with The Learning Partnership.

"There are many different ways to view the multifaceted gem called *partnerships*. Held one way, the light of the gem produces insight about partners. Held another, the process of partnership is reflected. Turned yet another way, the benefactors and beneficiaries of partnership glisten" (Copa & Ammentorp, 1998, pp. 172-173).

For more than 12 years, fostering collaboration and forming partnerships have been the core—the gem—of the work of the North Central Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium (NCEMSC) at Learning Point Associates. Collaboration with strategic partners has thrived to such a degree that it has now become a norm. It is an intuitive strategy of NCEMSC in supporting mathematics and science teachers to become more effective in improving student learning. Of course, collaboration would not be possible without a team of dedicated and competent professionals who take pride in their work.

In the summer of 2003, two NCEMSC staff members—Cyntha Pattison and Nancy Berkas—were engaged as external consultants to help design and facilitate summer institutes for teachers as part of The Learning Partnership, a long-term collaborative effort to help urban school districts raise and enhance student performance through improved instruction. The partnership is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Collaboration Begins With Joint Planning

The Minneapolis (Minnesota) Public Schools was selected as the first site for implementation of The Learning Partnership. With the help of the Philadelphia-based Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), district leaders guided the design of The Learning Partnership implementation plan for the first phase. This stage focused on improving teaching and learning in mathematics and literacy, supporting instructional leadership for teachers and principals, establishing high-quality professional development, and using research and data more effectively in instructional decisions.

In the fall of 2003, the MacArthur Foundation granted the Minneapolis Public Schools $6.2 million in support of the initial three-year implementation phase of The Learning Partnership, with potential for funding up to nine years. The Learning Partnership is designed to capitalize on the district's strengths, using strategies for instructional improvement that have been proven effective elsewhere and adapting them to the local context. One of its goals is to engage teachers in the continuous improvement of teaching so that every teacher has the skills and resources needed to provide high-quality instruction in the district's classrooms. The Learning

Partnership is built on an understanding that quality teaching demands high standards, good leadership, workplaces that are conducive to learning, and a quality research base. It is designed to help establish professional learning as the norm and enhance student learning based on sound evidence.

Teams Implement Plan

During the first phase of The Learning Partnership in Minneapolis, efforts focused on improving student performance in mathematics and literacy. To enhance and sustain these efforts, external collaborators joined The Learning Partnership team to codesign and cofacilitate summer institutes, where participants shared proven methods and practical approaches to improving mathematics and literacy. NCEMSC worked with the first-, third-, fifth-, and sixth-grade facilitation teams to plan and deliver four-day summer institutes for teachers at each of those levels.

The summer 2003 institutes offered teachers an opportunity to explore and share proven instructional strategies for teaching mathematics and literacy. The participants included grade-level classroom teachers, Title I mathematics and reading teachers, and principals. Mathematics institutes centered on how to help mathematics teachers understand how students develop number sense and how teachers can use available curriculum materials to help students develop number sense. The discussion components included pacing, differentiation, classroom assessment, and home-school connections.

Teachers reflected on the following questions to inform their work:

- How do we assess prior student knowledge?
- How do we engage *all* students in learning mathematics?
- How do we balance the need for students to understand number concepts and their need to compute accurately and efficiently? How can we best use supplementary materials to do this?
- How do we use classroom data to improve instruction?
- How can we integrate reading and writing with mathematics?

Follow-Up Focuses on Shared Learning

To support and sustain the summer institutes' work on teacher practice, multiple follow-up sessions with teachers and principals have been taking place during the 2003–04 school year. NCEMSC staff members assisted the teacher teams with planning and delivering the follow-up sessions and articulating a vision for Year 2 summer institutes to help other teachers hone their mathematics and literacy teaching skills. Several sessions focused on the Lesson Study approach, a professional development model in which teachers work together to plan, teach, observe, refine, and reteach a single lesson that is part of a larger unit of instruction. Those sessions resulted in developing a Minneapolis model of Lesson Study. To equip teachers with a means to examine the impact of Lesson Study, NCEMSC staff members collaborated with the Minneapolis Public Schools staff to develop protocols for determining and evaluating progress.

Solid Principles Evolve

Building on the district's strengths and collaborating with local and national education experts, The Learning Partnership has formed a solid foundation—the culmination of two years of research and discussions among teachers, administrators, and specialists in primary and secondary education. It is based on 12 core elements:

- Collaboration on design among all parties.
- Public engagement and support for the initiative.
- Focused and coherent policies and practices aligned with teaching.
- Reallocation of resources to support more effective professional learning.
- Incentives to encourage continuous skill development.
- A professional development system that builds local capacity.
- Tools and strategies to support teacher learning.
- Evidence-based practice in decision making.
- Professional communities of practice that work to improve practice.
- Teacher leaders who coach, mentor, and model.
- Highly skilled principals who provide instructional leadership.
- Collaborative leadership within schools.

Collaboration is the glue that strengthens the professional development system by building upon the strong elements that are already in place across the entire district and improving or renewing the linkages among them. It permeates all levels and involves all levels. It sheds light equally on all its core facets: Evidence-based instruction, continuous teacher improvement, and successful learning for every student in the classroom.

Participants in Student Progress

The following are key players in The Learning Partnership:

- Minneapolis Public Schools—first site selected for The Learning Partnership (www.mpls.k12.mn.us).
- Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania—executive arm of The Learning Partnership and technical assistance provider (www.cpre.org).
- Center for Research on the Context of Teaching (CRC) at Stanford University—documenter of The Learning Partnership implementation, processes, and outcomes (www.stanford.edu/group/CRC/).
- Annenberg Institute for School Reform—communications liaison and technical assistance provider (www.annenberginstitute.org/).
- The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation—funder (www.macfound.org).
- North Central Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium (www.learningpt.org/msc/) and National Science Foundation (www.nsf.gov)—external partners.

Continued on page 20

By Peggy Grant

From Struggle to Success: One High School's Journey to Literacy Achievement

PHOTO: STEPHEN E. GROSS & ASSOCIATES

Three years ago, students in an impoverished high school in New Mexico were struggling with their reading assignments. A group of dedicated educators responded by setting improvement goals, developing and implementing action steps, and monitoring student progress. Improvements in teaching and in learning have been dramatic. This is their story.

In Mr. Espinoza's freshman science class, a group of students follows the directions to conduct an experiment on soil analysis; another group works at a bank of computers in the back of the room preparing PowerPoint® presentations on sections of a textbook chapter; a few students cluster around a computer looking up information on the Internet; and others read scientific materials silently. In another classroom, a reading specialist models a vocabulary activity in a child development class. As students contribute words related to the discussion about child abuse—*abandonment, shaking, domestic violence, neglect*—the reading teacher arranges them on the board. The regular classroom teacher watches, preparing to take the lead in teaching the same lesson the next period.

In classroom after classroom, the high school students at Shiprock High School, located in the Navajo Indian Reservation in the Four Corners area of northwest New Mexico, are actively involved in learning and reading. Their teachers engage in continuous conversations among themselves, peppered with phrases such as *brick and mortar words, cognitive strategies,* and *strategic reading*.

It wasn't always this way. Just three years ago, the atmosphere of the school was, as a concerned assistant principal describes, "zoo-ish." Test scores were low among students, many of whom lack what are considered the basics of life. Seventy-four percent of these students live below the poverty level; 50 percent have to haul their own water; and 25 percent don't have electricity.

A data-driven district administration and the hiring of a visionary principal brought a new atmosphere to Shiprock High School. Changes in instructional practices that improve student reading achievement have come about as a result of a systemwide school improvement plan built on collaborative planning, the use of data, and comprehensive professional development tied to that data.

When Larry DeWees was drawn out of retirement to become principal of Shiprock, he posed the following questions to the teachers: "Do we want to own the data?" and "If we own it, what can we do about it?" These questions began a series of faculty discussions, which led to their collaborative decision to focus on improving reading achievement. The long-term professional development plan created by the leadership team

focused on three areas: building a knowledge base about reading instruction, modeling of effective instructional strategies, and planning for continuous growth.

The first conclusion reached by faculty members was that they didn't know enough about how to teach reading, so DeWees set out on a mission to inform himself and his teachers about the topic. His research enabled him to build a variety of professional development activities for the teachers, including workshops by visiting experts, a professional library, and participation in the pilot and field test of the Strategic Teaching and Reading Project (STRP) online course "Reading in the High School Content Areas" developed by Learning Point Associates.

According to DeWees, the component in this reading initiative that provides the most "bang for the buck" has been the hiring of two full-time reading specialists. Rather than working primarily with struggling readers at Shiprock, the two reading specialists, Randy Rober and Angela Guiliano, spend nearly all their time modeling in classrooms and working with teachers to help them incorporate research-based instructional strategies that improve students' reading ability, a Joyce and Showers (2002) recommendation.

The specialists meet with teachers in their assigned departments to discuss content goals for a lesson. The specialist works with the teacher to develop a lesson that incorporates an appropriate instructional strategy. The classroom teacher observes the lesson, then—with the specialist's help—tries it out in subsequent classes, and reflects on the experience with the specialist afterward.

The final component of Shiprock's plan to improve reading revolves around structures that foster continuous improvement. As the instructional leader of the school, DeWees is committed to providing ways for the faculty and administration to teach and learn from each other, which he believes is the best way for everyone to continue to grow. Each Wednesday morning, department heads meet with the principal and reading specialists to learn a new instructional strategy that they share with their colleagues.

Each semester, all teachers must observe three other teachers—two outside and one within their subject area. Reports on these observations are submitted to the principal. The purpose of this activity is to give teachers different real-life examples of instruction so that they can expand their "toolkits," as explained by DeWees.

None of these professional development activities would have the desired effect without an accountability component. The most basic level of accountability is the online course's lesson-plan form, which has a pull-down menu of over 200 strategies. Kevin Werth, social studies department chair, explains that at first he thought the teachers were expected to use all the strategies, which concerned him. However, he soon realized that the reason for so many strategies was to allow teachers to choose those that best suit them and their subjects. Werth focuses on just three or four of them.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHIPROCK HIGH SCHOOL

Another noteworthy measure of accountability is what the principal describes as a "no-volunteers" approach. All teachers must observe their colleagues, participate in modeling, read assigned texts, and write reports. One summer, for example, DeWees required all teachers to read VanDoren and Adler's (1972) *How to Read a Book* and write a report about it. If a teacher doesn't participate in required activities, it is noted in his or her performance evaluation. Those who participate enthusiastically and show growth in student achievement can receive rewards, such as technology for their classrooms or attendance at conferences related to reading.

Are these measures working to improve student achievement in reading? Results have been very positive for the first two years of the project, as shown by ninth-grade scores on the TerraNova assessment.

Freshmen TerraNova Scores

Subject Area	2000	2001	2002	2003
Reading	28.7	32.8	36	42.1
Language Arts	26	33	37	43
Mathematics	23	34	34	43.2
Science	29.2	29.8	32.5	39.2
Social Studies	37.1	40.6	25	31.2

Note: All scores are percentile scores.

Professional development activities, no matter how well conceived, cannot be effective on their own. The success of the reading initiative has occurred in an environment that supports growth, as evidenced by the school's participation in the Baldrige National Quality Program, which defines a process for organizational improvement (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2003). In December, Shiprock High School received the Piñon, a New Mexico quality school award for excellence.

Linda Besett, Ph.D., superintendent of the Central Consolidated School District, and Marlene Frazier, executive

director of curriculum and instruction and manager of federal programs, have been key players in this initiative. Dr. Besett sees her role as advisor, cheerleader, and model for using data to improve student learning. Frazier's enthusiastic support for "the next big idea" enabled DeWees to hire the reading specialists, purchase dictionaries for every student, and provide a variety of professional development activities.

Change isn't easy, but at Shiprock High School the consequences of the change have proven to be the motivational force behind continued improvement. DeWees and Dr. Besett admit frankly that, at the beginning, doing this work was challenging. Some teachers objected to tasks such as writing reports and reading books. Knowing that he had his superintendent's support enabled DeWees to persevere. When the first year of test scores showed improvement, teachers saw the results of their efforts. Now, most of the teachers—80 to 85 percent, according to DeWees—are enthusiastic participants.

Things that appear simple on the surface are often not so. Organizing instruction for several different activities at once—all involving reading and meaningful learning—is a complex task requiring commitment, knowledge, and teacher expertise. Likewise, having teachers observe experts using instructional strategies with the students in their classrooms is historically a challenge. At Shiprock, however, these kinds of activities occur regularly. By laying the groundwork through collaborative goal setting and decision making, and by committing to professional development that improves teacher knowledge while providing support to implement that knowledge, teachers at this high school are providing students with a better foundation for success in school and in the real world. ●

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Partners *continued from page 17*

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FOR MORE INFO

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For further information about The Learning Partnership, contact **Tom Corcoran**, Codirector of CPRE (e-mail: tomc@gse.upenn.edu or phone: **215-573-0700**, extension 231) or **Anne Bartel**, K–12 Mathematics Coordinator, Minneapolis Public Schools (e-mail: Anne.Bartel@mpls.k12.mn.us or phone: **612-668-5365**).

By
Michele Fitzpatrick

Cornerstone of Trust Supports Authentic Professional Development

Katherine Nolan, Ph.D., chief officer, Professional Services Group at Learning Point Associates, blends global-perspective breadth with local-context depth as she leads development and delivery of evidence-based professional development services to schools, districts, and states. With rare ease, she both reads ancient Greek and can speak computer "geek." With rare humor, she finds meaning and value in both.

Her doctorate in philosophy and classics from the University of Pittsburgh and her fluency in languages—combined with an inner urge she calls "the social justice part of me"—fashion the fabric of her career in education. From crafting an equity model within diverse urban school districts to implementing protocols for benchmarking standards internationally to delivering professional development services globally at Learning Point Associates, a constant for Dr. Nolan is trust, not trust as a given but trust as something that is earned.

She says, "Schools and districts and states should be demanding from professional development both expertise and understanding, saying to us, 'We don't want you just to help us raise our test scores. We want you to do that with an understanding of our local context in a way that's sensitive to the strengths and challenges we have in our site.'"

> *"Schools, frankly, are savvy users of professional development. They want to know, 'Are you going to do what you said you were going to do? Are you going to be here when it gets difficult? Are you going to help us?'"*
> *—Kate Nolan, Ph.D.*

Expertise and understanding guide much of the work of the Professional Services Group. Both elements forge the cornerstone of trust on which coplanning can be most effective and barriers to improvement can most effectively be removed. According to Dr. Nolan, it isn't easy, but it works.

"Anything we know as Learning Point Associates, we know because of three things: Most of our staff have personal experience in schools. We are up-to-date and informed about what's going on in the world of research. And, we've learned from the schools, districts, institutions, and others we've worked with. We aren't like some organizations with a pre-fab model they plug into a site—and if the model doesn't work, it's because [the site] didn't do it right."

Staff members of the Professional Services Group take a very different approach, investing the time required to understand each site they work with in order to build the trust that can overcome barriers to improvement. Dr. Nolan draws a comparison with medicine, explaining that health care is at its most excellent when it is not merely "treating the liver in Room 42" but rather "treating 22-year-old Ms. Spohn in Room 42 who has Hodgkin's lymphoma and has had to withdraw from college to receive treatment."

KATE NOLAN, Ph.D.

PHOTO BY CHARLES HOPKINS

She says, "We aren't going to treat a school as just the low scores in District 42. We want to understand the school, its story, so we can plan together and help identify what really are the barriers to moving forward."

To Dr. Nolan, building a relationship of trust includes learning from each other. Willingness to learn from those in the field extends to learning from and with her staff. She says, "I can't think of any conversations I've had with staff members in which they haven't talked about what they learned at a site. Take something straightforward like our Data Retreats, specific two- or three-day events. Staff will tell you every single one is different, the ups and downs, strengths and weaknesses. They are always learning."

And she learns from them, describing the Professional Services Group as highly expert people who are, in fact, very humble, always willing to acknowledge what they don't know and reluctant to claim expertise, even when they clearly possess it. "It's an encouraging thing to see because the world is full of people who are trying to sell snake oil," she comments.

It's a short mental leap from snake oil to Plato for Dr. Nolan, and she takes it gracefully when further explaining her role with staff and colleagues, a role she says includes "helping them claim the deep expertise they possess."

She references Plato's discussion about the variety of people who know things—from the poet who writes inspired imagery to the craftsman who builds wonderful objects—but who fall into the trap of thinking they know other things equally well. She says, "The philosopher, according to Plato, is the preferred teacher because he knows what he doesn't know and doesn't try to claim otherwise." ●

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