Improving School Readiness and Success for Children

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Early Experiences Matter

The first 5 years of life are a critical foundation for children's early learning and lifelong development. Although understanding of how the brain develops is still evolving, there is enough knowledge about how young children progress as a result of an explosive growth of the brain in the early years to declare emphatically that early experiences matter. According to an executive summary prepared by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT (2005), early experiences actually influence brain development, establishing the neural connections that provide the foundation for language, reasoning, problem solving, social skills, behavior and emotional health" (p. 1). In fact, the most significant growth in the brain occurs prenatally (Thompson, 2008). "Thus, babies are born wired to learn" (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). However, from the start, without proper nurturing of the environments and experiences that support physical, social, emotional, language, literacy, and cognitive development, many children will face early disadvantages and begin school with a readiness gap. Beginning at birth, the readiness gap continues to grow until children start school and ultimately leads to a persistent achievement gap (Applied Survey Research & Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness, 2008; Fiester, 2010).

> "Young children's earliest experiences and environments set the stage for future development and success in school and life."
>
> *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005*

Since research clearly demonstrates that learning begins at birth and that addressing children's developmental needs early will increase their chances of success, school readiness has come to the national forefront as an entry point for providing interventions that can compensate for early disadvantages and thus improve educational outcomes for children in America (Coley, 2002; National Governors Association, 2005; Applied Survey Research, 2008; Fiester, 2010). Given the challenges and competitiveness of an increasingly global and technological economy, along with the poor performance of U.S. students when compared to those in other countries, the U.S. Department of Education's proposal for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), A Blueprint for Reform, presents a unique opportunity to support early learning by intervening early before children start formal schooling. The department's proposal acknowledges the necessity for an early learning agenda beginning at birth and continuing through third grade, with seamless transitions between preschool and elementary school (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2010).

What is Readiness?

In July 1990, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP)—comprised of a bipartisan group of federal and state officials—was established to assess and report on state and national progress toward achieving the eight national education goals set for the U.S. The first goal states "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (NEGP, 1997, p. 5). NEGP identified three components of school readiness—readiness in the child, schools' readiness for children, and family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness.

School readiness involves children, families, early childhood educators, as well as school and community supports and is defined as follows:

1. A child's school readiness is the culmination of the experiences and care that he or she has received from birth to school entry. These include physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, cognition, and general knowledge.

2. Ready schools are prepared to support the learning and development of every child in their community. For example, ready schools smooth the transition

between home and school, are culturally competent, and have practices to reach out to parents and children as they enter school.

3. Family and community supports that contribute to school readiness include:

   • Parents who, as their child's first teachers, have the skills and knowledge to raise healthy children who are ready to achieve their full potential;

   • High-quality, culturally competent and developmentally appropriate child care and early education programs that help prepare children for school;

   • The nutrition, health care, and physical activity children need to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies;

   • A comprehensive system of assessment and access to effective early interventions;

   • Family economic resources; and

   • Strong, safe neighborhoods (SOAR, 2004).

NEGP asserts that school readiness also involves five dimensions (see chart), which are interrelated in that development in one dimensional area impacts all of the other dimensions.

Moreover, studies indicate that school readiness is a multifaceted issue that requires ongoing support on the local, federal, and state levels, which includes high-quality preschool and readiness programs, professional development for the early childhood workforce, alignment of early learning guidelines and standards with content standards, coordinated early childhood data systems, and other efforts targeted to address the needs of young children and their families.

Five Dimensions of School Readiness

1. Physical well-being and motor development

2. Social emotional development

3. Approaches toward learning

4. Communication and language usage

5. Cognition and general knowledge

Source: NEGP (1997)

The Role of Preschool in Supporting Readiness

As part of the work of NEGP, the U.S. Department of Education conducted the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–1999 (ECLS-K). This study followed a nationally representative sample of children from kindergarten through fifth grade and assessed the academic, physical, and social development of kindergarten children. This research found that children entering kindergarten with family risk factors are associated with lower proficiency in early reading, math, and general knowledge. From this study and subsequent analyses from Coley (2002), access to high-quality center-based early childhood education is cited as the most promising strategy for supporting readiness and preparing children for kindergarten. The ECLS-K study has also demonstrated that high-quality prekindergarten settings are cost-effective because they produce greater gains for the benefit of society. Similarly, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network (2004) also recognized enhanced child performance outcomes when children are enrolled in high-quality childcare settings that provide appropriate learning opportunities and have caregivers who are emotionally supportive and responsive to children's needs.

The positive effects of high-quality programs for children with disadvantages are even more pronounced than children with advantages. For example, a study of the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian programs on children with disadvantages revealed gains in IQ and achievement test scores upon kindergarten entry (as cited in Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). ECLS-K data also showed that the effects on reading and math skills were even larger for high-need children. Abbott-Shim, Lambert, and McCarty (2003) found that children in a high-quality urban Head Start program showed faster rates of growth in vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and pre-literacy skills than those who were not able to enroll. The Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP) revealed that kindergartners who attended MSRP scored significantly higher on five out of six domains of the High/Scope Child Observation Record and received higher ratings from their teachers (Wat, 2010). The Judy Centers—implemented by the Maryland State Department of Education—showed promising results with kindergarten students who had received their services prior to and during their first year of school. These students attained full readiness at the same level as all kindergartners at the end of the year (Fontaine, Torre, & Grafwallner, 2004). Other studies such as the Chicago Longitudinal Study and the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study have also shown that high-quality early childhood education increases the likelihood that children, especially those with disadvantages will have successful school and citizenry outcomes (Helburn, 1995; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Reynolds, 2000; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001).

Although the benefits of prekindergarten have been well documented for children with high needs, studies show that it can significantly benefit all children. Consider many middle-income families who also face the critical issue of a school readiness gap. For many middle-income families, family income is often too high to qualify for programs for children with

disadvantages while not high enough to afford high-quality programs. A study of the Tulsa, Oklahoma, prekindergarten program found that middle-income children scored 41% higher in assessments of letter-word identification and 17% higher in spelling than middle-income children who didn't attend prekindergarten (Wat, 2010).

In addition to the previously mentioned studies, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of preschool quality in supporting children's readiness. According to Espinosa (2002), improving readiness for high-need children is based on various components such as the number of children in a classroom, adult-child ratio, and the physical environment of the classroom. Quality is also dependent upon the kinds of daily, developmentally appropriate experiences children have in the classroom such as the activities children participate in, the interactions they have with other children, and the interactions they have with their teacher. Furthermore, a critical variable in establishing high-quality preschool education is teacher education and training (Espinosa, 2002).

According to the American Federation of Teachers (2002, p. 2), high-quality preschool programs are characterized by the following practices:

- Language-rich and responsive communication between adults and children;

- Positive and appropriate reinforcement of skills and behavior;

- Extensive rehearsal of old and new cognitive, academic, and developmental skills;

- Guidance in social skills and facilitation of positive interactions between peers and adults;

- Structured and informal activities that encourage children to reflect, predict, question, and hypothesize;

- Availability of numerous materials, resources, and toys that focus on language and literacy;

- Activities that encourage the involvement of children's families and caretakers; and

- Incorporation of adequate nutrition and habits that will support good health.

Given the role of socioeconomic and environmental factors in shaping a child's development, investing in young children and supporting high-quality early learning experiences are critical concerns at the federal, state, and local levels. Consequently, various agencies and organizations across the nation are working to improve school readiness, especially for children in low-income families.

Federal Readiness Programs

The federal government provides for the needs of young children and their families through several early childhood policy initiatives administered through the Department of Health and Human Services and ED. Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Obama administration's Early Learning Challenge Fund and Promise Neighborhoods are a few.

Head Start/Early Head Start

In 1965, the Head Start program was established by the Johnson administration. The goal of the program—then and today—is to enhance the development of 3- to 5-year-old children from low-income families, both socially and cognitively, through educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services. In addition, the Early Head Start program, initiated in 1995, provides support to low-income toddlers, pregnant women, and their families. The federal Office of Head Start offers grants to local public and private profit and nonprofit agencies throughout the nation to provide Head Start services.

Early Learning Challenge Fund

The Early Learning Challenge Fund provides support for states to develop effective, integrated, and innovative early learning systems. Competitive grants will be awarded to "high-capacity" states to take their established plans to scale. Development grants will be awarded to other states to assist them in expanding their early learning efforts with standards-based and outcomes-driven systems.

Promise Neighborhoods

The purpose of the Promise Neighborhood grants is to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children living in distressed communities. The organizations receiving grants will be provided funding for 1 year to plan for a cradle-to-career system to support educational programs, family and community supports, and effective schools. Implementation grant awards of $4 million to $6 million will be awarded by the end of 2011 to four to six institutions. Grantees will provide comprehensive services to support early learning; family engagement; neighborhood health, safety, and stability; and college and career preparedness. Funding will be available for these grantees over 3 to 5 years. Also, a second round of planning grants will be awarded to 10 new institutions.

Additional efforts at the national level to boost school readiness include a 2007 Congressional mandate that 50% of teachers and all educational coordinators in Head Start centers have at least a bachelor's degree by September 30, 2013 (Haskins & Barnett, 2010). Moreover, newly established procedures for grantee

renewal and recompetition as well as other specific changes have been established or discussed by the Obama administration.

The States' Role in Readiness

The National Governors Association (NGA) published *Building Ready States* (Demma, 2010), which outlines six actions that state leaders can take to ensure that children enter kindergarten ready to learn:

1. Coordinate early childhood governance through a state early childhood advisory council (ECAC). The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) offered grants of at least $500,000 to each state to support ECAC development and implementation.

2. Build an integrated professional development system. The system should help track the effectiveness of policies to recruit, retain, and develop the state's early childhood workforce.

3. Implement a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that measures multiple aspects of program quality and promotes improvement.

4. Develop a longitudinal and coordinated early childhood data system that drives continued improvement and maintains accountability while protecting child and family privacy.

5. Align comprehensive early learning guidelines and standards for children from birth to age 8 with K–3 content standards.

6. Integrate federal, state, and private funding sources to support and sustain a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood system.

State and Local Efforts

Many states and cities are well on their way to implementing several of the NGA recommendations. The state of Washington has implemented the Readiness to Learn program since 1993. This program coordinates education and other human service providers to meet the needs of students in preschool through 12th grade and their families. A study conducted by RMC Research Corporation (Einspruch, Deck, & Grover, 2001) concluded that middle and high school students who participated in the program showed slight increases in grade point averages, and elementary school students who participated showed small improvements in attendance and behavior as rated by their teachers. Service providers reported greater collaboration with other providers and increased support for students and families.

Maryland's report on their Model for School Readiness (Maryland State Department of Education, 2009) outlines several actions the state has implemented to improve school readiness. The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) Framework and Standards are aligned with the Maryland Content Standards and Maryland State Curriculum. The state collects and analyzes information about its readiness efforts and has reported them annually since 2001. Students are evaluated via a portfolio-based assessment system in several readiness areas. Data is used to develop countywide needs assessments, target funds to identified needs, develop partnerships, and modify curriculum and intervention programs. Additionally, in 2006, the state established the Division of Early Childhood Development, which developed a 3-year strategic plan to improve school readiness by focusing on the quality of teaching personnel, the quality of early care and education programs, and increasing awareness and involvement of families in the early education of their children. Those efforts seem to be working, as students entering kindergarten in 2009 were deemed better prepared than those in the past in all demographic categories.

The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (2010) reports being the first state to implement an early learning advisory committee and one of the first to establish learning standards for early childhood. In addition, the state offers three professional credentials for early childhood teachers and directors and has a data system to rate and improve program quality. Since 2006, the state has integrated childcare assistance and parent counseling on childcare options through the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) and the Child Care Information Services network. Additionally, OCDEL is run jointly by the departments of Education and Public Welfare, taking advantage of streams of funding and expertise. Results of these efforts indicate widespread improvements. For 3 years, more than 94% of children showed age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate literacy, numeracy, and social skills.

Efforts to implement readiness programs at the local level have also been implemented and evaluated. One study (Raver, et al., 2011) reported on the effectiveness of the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP), and one report (Maxfield, Gozali-Lee, & Mueller, 2010) describes the outcomes of the Project Early Kindergarten-Early Reading First in the Saint Paul Public Schools.

CSRP is an emotionally and behaviorally focused classroom intervention that supports readiness for low-income children. The program builds on existing community resources and provides extensive teacher training to help teachers manage dysregulated behavior (i.e., ability to attend and control impulses). Results of this study suggest that students participating in the CSRP intervention performed better on attention and impulse control skills and performed higher on executive functioning but not on effortful control skills. (p. 373)

Project Early Kindergarten-Early Reading First is Saint Paul Public Schools' prekindergarten program for 3- and 4-year-old children. It is built on a partnership between Saint Paul Public Schools, Wilder Child Development Center, and Bethel University King Family Foundation Child Development Center. The program specifically targets low-income students, English learners, and students with special needs. The program is standards based, aligned with the district's academic reform model, provides extensive professional development, offers parental education and support, and involves both schools and childcare settings. The evaluation report (Maxfield, Gozali-Lee, & Mueller, 2010), indicated the following: (a) teachers in the program provided strong emotional support and actively engaged children in learning activities; (b) classrooms showed improvement in the extent to which they promote literacy and language development; and (c) children showed improvements in English receptive vocabulary on average teacher ratings of oral language, reading, and writing, and assessment results in the areas of alphabet knowledge, print and word awareness, and other measures of early language and literacy development.

Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period for development and later school success. Tragically, for many children, barriers exist that stand in the way of readiness, creating an achievement gap on the very first day of kindergarten that can be difficult and costly to overcome. Getting an early start in addressing the needs of our youngest learners will pave the way for improving their academic and life success.

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Spotlight on SECC Work

Alabama

By Mary Lou Meadows, EdD, SECC State Liaison

Training Session on Concerns-Based Adoption Model

On June 21–22, 2011, SECC program associates Ann Neeley, EdD; Erin McCann, PhD; Dale Lewis, PhD; and Mary Lou Meadows, EdD, Alabama state liaison, provided a follow-up professional development (PD) session on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) for staff at the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), including grant coaches and representatives from the school districts they support. During the session at ALSDE offices, participants reviewed the steps for developing an innovation configuration, reviewed the process for completing a Stages of Concern Questionnaire, and discussed the School Improvement Grant (SIG) implementation monitoring process.

Teacher Effectiveness Resources and Support

Sherrill Parris, assistant state superintendent of education at ALSDE, and Debra Meibaum, MAT, SECC program associate, participated in a conference call on June 7 to discuss potential technical assistance needs related to teacher effectiveness. During the call, Parris indicated that Alabama currently was focusing on measuring student growth. Following the call, Meibaum e-mailed information regarding several resources on measuring student growth. Additionally, she sent Parris a number of teacher evaluation resources from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) that may be beneficial to Alabama's state educator effectiveness work.

Building Shared Capacity to Improve Student Results

Darlene Brown, PhD, SECC project director, and state liaison Meadows, represented SEDL at the "Building Shared Capacity to Improve Student Results" collaborative meeting in Atlanta on June 2–3. Meadows presented an overview of Alabama's needs and strengths along with key staff from the Southeast Regional Resource Center. Other state representatives presented an overview of their states to help the consortium determine and develop common themes, needs, and resources in the states. Meeting outcomes included increasing understanding of the partnership, developing collaborating partners for state teams, sharing understanding of data and contexts of the states, identifying states for this work, determining common state issues to be addressed through the collaboration, providing training on tools that could be used for the results work, and developing next steps.

Alabama Instructional Coaching Design Project

SECC is partnering with the Florida Center for Reading Research and the Center on Instruction (COI) to assist an ALSDE team with the design of a pilot for a school-based instructional facilitator program that could begin in the school year 2011–2012. The design team is researching how instructional facilitators will work with teachers, what PD they may need to work across content areas and grade levels, and how this model will interface with the efforts of the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI). SECC's McCann is helping the team to develop an evaluation instrument to measure the effectiveness of this model. Also, SECC staff Kathleen Theodore, MA, and Mary Lou Meadows have provided assistance at numerous meetings held in May and June.

Research-Based Instructional Strategies for Diverse Learners

This two-phase project seeks to identify research-based instructional strategies in core content areas and assist ALSDE staff in developing professional learning modules for classroom teachers aimed at improving instruction for all learners. On May 27, SECC's Lewis participated in a conference call with Sherrill Parris, of ALSDE, who gave an update on the team's progress. The team—composed of members of ARI and AMSTI—has been working on instructional strategies in adolescent literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies. In June, SECC program associates Georgina González, MA; Ada Muoneke, PhD; Blanca Quiroz, PhD, and Lewis reviewed Instructional Strategies Projects and provided feedback to the team.

Training and Technical Assistance Needs

Meadows, SECC state liaison, met with Parris, of ALSDE, on May 26 to discuss technical assistance and professional development provided by SECC during Year 6. Their discussion centered on the progress and status of SECC projects in Alabama.

Georgia
By Glenda Copeland, MA, SECC State Liaison

Development of Online Materials for Mathematics Teachers

Camille Chapman, MEd, SECC program associate, and Glenda Copeland, MA, Georgia state liaison, participated in a planning meeting with Sandi Woodall, Chance McPhearson, and Brook Kline, of the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), on May 20, 2011, to discuss SECC assistance with development of online vignettes for math teachers who are implementing the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). The group also held a follow-up meeting on June 21 at GaDOE.

School Improvement Training Conference

SECC's Copeland attended GaDOE's School Improvement Training Conference at Callaway Gardens on May 18–19. The meeting focused on updates from the CCGPS math and science leads, Sandi Woodall and Kim Jeffcoat, and on reviewing the design and assignments for the 2011 Summer Leadership Academy (SLA). There were four SLA sessions for approximately 1,400 participants from 132 schools from 55 school systems.

Thinking Maps Support

On May 5–16, SECC staff Copeland and Sally Wade, EdD, conducted interviews with GaDOE school improvement specialists Steve Tester, Beverly Turner, Carol Casion, Wanda Oldfield, and Jo Ward at nine participating schools that are implementing Thinking Maps as a school improvement strategy. The data will be evaluated along with online surveys from administrators, coaches, teachers, and school improvement specialists assigned to the schools. Schools in their second year of implementation also had student focus groups included in the interviews.

Supplemental Education Services Parent Outreach Project

The Georgia SES Parent Outreach Project is completing the pilot year of implementation. District data is being analyzed and presentations are scheduled to determine local educational agency interest in a year 2 project. Michelle Tarbutton and Brenda Williams, of GaDOE, presented on the project at the Georgia Title I conference, held on June 14–17 in College Park. This research informed project is a collaborative effort of GaDOE, Georgia Parent Information and Resource Center (GA PIRC), Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII), and SECC.

Louisiana
By Robyn Madison-Harris, EdD, SECC State Liaison

Resources on Teacher Effectiveness

Debra Meibaum, SECC program associate, shared with Elizabeth Shaw and Patrice Saucier, staff of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), new teacher quality resources from the TQ Center including information from a workshop that was held on June 2–3, 2011, in Rosemont, Illinois.

Academy of Pacesetting States

Robyn Madison-Harris, EdD, Louisiana state liaison, attended for the LDOE Pacesetter team the last of four distance learning sessions hosted by CII on May 6. The sessions focused on the development of states' operational manuals for school and district support. LDOE is working to revise its manual to reflect its reorganization. Madison-Harris also participated in monthly conference calls with staff from CII and other centers to collaborate on the pacesetter activities that are transpiring in Louisiana and other member states.

Survey on English Learner Professional Development

SECC staff Georgina González, Laura Torres, and Cheryl Harris, PhD, collaborated with LDOE staff to design a survey that was sent to many states inquiring about the types of English Learner (EL) professional development (PD) that are provided to professionals working in this area and modes of delivery utilized for providing the PD. The survey is being used to collect data that will advise how the state can best disseminate information and deliver its own PD.

In addition, SECC will facilitate LDOE's relationship with representatives of the South Central Collaborative for Equity—led by Dr. Bradley Scott of ED's Equity Assistance Center—to assist LDOE with gathering the best available EL materials and services. SECC also will continue to assist with revising the English Language Learners Program Handbook and other documents to facilitate successful academic education for these students.

Literacy Presentations and Training

On April 21, SECC staff Kathleen Theodore participated in a half-day meeting to review and finalize the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) intervention presentation. The presentation is now completed and is scheduled for review by DIBELS' author, Dr. Roland Good. The team discussed next steps in formulating a new development team that will prepare future advanced reading presentations.

In addition, the DIBELS Intervention Task Force Team will attend several PD sessions such as a Differentiated Instruction Institute and a Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling training for early childhood educators. The LDOE Literacy Office is sponsoring these events.

Mississippi

By Debra Meibaum, MAT, SECC State Liaison

Title I Schools

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) Office of Federal Programs' school improvement committee met on May 26, 2011, to continue planning the 2011 school improvement symposium and the work of the 2011–2012 School Support Team. Committee members included external consultants and Debra Meibaum, Mississippi state liaison.

Work sessions #5 and #6 of the Consolidated Federal Programs Monitoring Instrument Task Force were facilitated by Meibaum on April 25–26 and May 25. During these sessions, task force members finalized monitoring indicators, legal references, and evidence of compliance for the targeted indicators. The draft of the revised instrument was submitted to MDE at the conclusion of the May 25 work session. Next steps in the revision process include submission of the draft document to an MDE external consulting group and to ED for review and feedback. The team held a follow-up work session on June 27–28.

School Improvement Grant Districts and Schools

School Improvement Grant monitoring team site visits were conducted May 16–18, with the objective of completing yearly SIG monitoring site visits and reports. Each four-person team visited two districts and schools to conduct interviews, returning on the third day to write the monitoring reports. SEDL staff Erin McCann; Ed Tobia, EdD; and Meibaum served as consultants in the process. On May 18, a follow-up meeting was held at MDE with Kim S. Benton, EdD, director, Office of School Recovery. Other participants in the meeting were Robert Talmadge, Julie Wade, and Pam Compton, school improvement specialists for SIG Districts; Marcus Cheeks, Laura Jones, and Natille Duncan, team chairpersons; and Vicky Parker, Tony Winters, and Lydia Hanes.

On June 7–8, a second meeting was held at MDE to review the resulting monitoring site visit reports to ensure reporting consistency. McCann worked with the three school improvement specialists to review and refine site visit reports and ratings to ensure inter-rater reliability and consistency in reporting. Participants in the meeting included MDE staff Dr. Benton, Talmadge, Wade, and Compton.

On April 13–14, SECC sponsored the participation of Dr. Benton and Dr. Laura Jones, director, Office of School Improvement, in ED's Eastern regional SIG conference, Leading Successful School Turnarounds: The Role of State, District, and School Leadership. Staff from three Mississippi SIG school districts, Claiborne County School District, Clarksdale Municipal School District, and Hazlehurst City School District also attended the conference. The SIG conference focused on building the capacity of state educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and leaders of SIG schools to accomplish the following:

- Develop a stronger knowledge base about research and evidence-based strategies for turning around low-performing schools and practical strategies and tools

- Gain a deeper understanding of key roles of state, district, and school leaders in supporting school turnaround efforts

- Gain a better understanding of state and regional needs and issues around supporting school turnaround efforts

- Form new beneficial relationships and strengthen current ones to improve educational outcomes for at-risk students and schools

Participants attended keynote presentations, extended breakout sessions, role-alike discussions, and state-specific meetings. SECC's Meibaum facilitated the work of the Mississippi delegation.

Adolescent Literacy Summer Institute

Ramona Chauvin, PhD, SECC program associate, conducted a 4-day summer institute entitled "Lighting Up Possibilities with Literacy," June 6–10, for career and technical education instructors and student services coordinators as part of the Academics, Skills, and Knowledge in Career and Technical Education (ASK-CTE) Pilot Project. Outcomes of the institute were to increase understanding of the pilot project, knowledge of the key research connecting CTE and content literacy, and knowledge of and practice with evidence-based content literacy strategies.

CTE instructors represented a variety of content areas, including fashion design, marketing, cooperative learning, allied health, and business, computers, and technology. In addition to CTE instructors and student services coordinators, attendees also included Gail Simmons and Mike Mulvihill from MDE.

In addition to the institute, Chauvin conducted a 1-day Directors' Overview on June 10 to accompany the summer institute. Administrators were introduced to several of the literacy strategies through direct instruction and application. They viewed videos of Insert Notetaking, which modeled one way in which student services coordinators and vocational instructors can work together in the classroom. Post reading strategies were also reviewed in Save the Last Word for Me. Phase I and Phase II of the job-embedded pilot project were defined as well as roles and responsibilities of the three team members. The following administrators, who are part of the ASK-CTE Pilot Project, attended the event: Dr. Thomas Johnson, Jefferson Davis Vocational Center, Jefferson Davis County; Becky Sanders, Laurel High School Vocational Center, Laurel Municipal District; Monica Westerfield, Kemper Country Vocational Center, Kemper County; Tracy Dearing, Newton High School Vocational Center, Newton Municipal District; Kimberly Jackson, Martin Luther King Career and Technical Center, Wilkinson County; and D. Jan Sears, Carl Lofton Vocational Center, Marion County.

Assessment Bias Review Committees

At the request of Jan Kirkland Hogue, Office of Student Assessment at MDE, Georgina González, SECC program associate, served on the Bias Item Review Committee for the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program on June 6–9 and for the Mississippi Science Test (MST) Grade 5 and 8 Bias Committee Review on June 13–14. Bias committee reviews are vital to the legal defensibility of statewide assessments. Both meetings were held in Jackson.

Technical Assistance for Work to Support English Learners

Chris Norwood, MDE's Title III coordinator, attended the National Conversations on English Learner Education, May 9–10, in New York. During the conference, Norwood met and networked with other Title III state directors. SECC's González provided technical assistance to Norwood regarding specific implementation of the Title III guidelines and other requirements. She also assisted in the development and revision of a May 2011 English learner presentation to Mississippi schools and districts.

Educator Effectiveness Workshop

A Mississippi team participated in the Leadership Strategies to Support Effective Teaching workshop on June 2–3, hosted by the TQ Center. Team members included Dr. Daphne Buckley, deputy superintendent, MDE's Division of Quality Professionals and Special State Schools; Cecily McNair, director, MDE's Teacher Center; Dr. James Hutto, consultant, IMPACT Mississippi Education; and SECC program associate Meibaum. The team interacted with state and regional educators to enhance its capacity to identify and implement leadership strategies to support effective teaching.
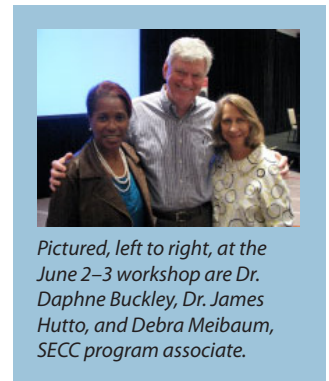
Pictured, left to right, at the June 2–3 workshop are Dr. Daphne Buckley, Dr. James Hutto, and Debra Meibaum, SECC program associate.

Workshop topics included the following:

- Development of high-quality leadership evaluation systems

- Enhancement of leadership to create strong teacher evaluation systems

- Linkage of teacher evaluation systems to professional development

- Equitable distribution of high-quality leaders across districts and states

South Carolina

By Beth Howard, EdD, SECC State Liaison

School Improvement Grant Support Update

Beth Howard, EdD, South Carolina state liaison, continued to provide technical assistance to the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) SIG Office, which was led by Courtney Foster, former SIG project director. In May, the SIG Project 180 Council, which Howard is a member of, reviewed LEA applications for the second round of SIG. Also, as a component of the application process, the council interviewed LEAs and schools to gain greater insight on their application process and reform model selection.

SECC assisted SCDE's SIG Office in the planning of the SIG Summer Institute, held July 18–19 in Columbia. SECC was asked to assist by screening presenters for panel discussions and breakout sessions, coordinating travel for presenters, and advising in the development and implementation of the institute.

Participation in Regional SIG Conferences

The national network of content and regional comprehensive centers—funded by ED—offered a series of four conferences, which focused on building the capacity of SEAs, LEAs, and leaders of SIG schools. The conferences included keynote presentations, extended breakout sessions, role-alike discussions, and state-specific meetings.

The Eastern regional conference was held on April 13–14, in Washington, DC. Kathy Mason, education associate from SCDE's SIG Office, attended along with representatives from various South Carolina school districts and SECC team members. The Midwest regional conference was held on May 18–19 in Chicago. SECC's Howard, Foster from SCDE, and Gail Widner, PhD, former SCDE grants coordinator, attended, as well as Lewis Martin, associate superintendent with the Charleston County School District. The theme of the session was: Leading Successful High School Turnarounds: Learning from Research and Practice. Two other regional conferences were held in Los Angeles, April 5–6, and in Denver, May 25–26.

Palmetto Priority Schools Work

On May 11 and 12 in Columbia, SEDL program associates Sylvia Pirtle, MEd, and Stella Bell, EdD, in conjunction with Darlene Brown, SECC project director, facilitated the Office of Special Projects' (OSP) staff retreat. During this time, participants discussed the OSP functions and the services they provide to Palmetto Priority Schools (PPS). Additionally, they reviewed the OSP logic model. SECC staff members suggested revisions to both documents, to more appropriately describe the OSP functions, staffs' roles and responsibilities, and the services it provides to PPS. The group also discussed CII's SIG online tools,

and OSP staff members were provided compact discs containing SIG resources and tools.

Response to Intervention Support

SECC staff Dale Lewis, Ada Muoneke, Concepcion Molina, EdD, and Chris Times, MBA, assisted SCDE in the review and editing of their Response to Intervention (RtI) Guidance and Support document. Pamela Huxford, education associate in the Early Learning and Literacy unit of SCDE, is leading the work sessions.

Statewide System of Support Update

Robyn Madison-Harris and Danny Martinez, MA, SECC program associates, are continuing to assist SCDE with the development of its statewide system of support (SSOS). They held a series of conference calls with Robin Rivers and John Holton, education associates in the Division of Federal and State Accountability.

The proposed plan for the SSOS focuses on creation of a mediated Virtual Resource Center for the South Carolina educational community including teachers, administrators, parents, and students. The resource center will provide a focused set of resources related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that will help teachers know what to teach, administrators know what to inspect, kids know what to learn, and parents know how to support their kids. Virtual content will include research, videos, webinars, instructional materials and assessments, success stories, and educational research/professional texts. Madison-Harris and Martinez will continue to work with SCDE in the launching of the state's Virtual Resource Center that will begin with foci in reading and mathematics.

SECC has been asked to assist with this project in the following areas:

- Gathering stakeholder data
- Developing an action plan
- Designing an evaluation plan
- Researching resources (videos, research-based strategies, articles, etc.)
- Advising on the specifications and supporting the development of the virtual site

South Carolina Educator Effectiveness Summit

The Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) State Consortium on Educator Effectiveness (SCEE) hosted its National Summit on Educator Effectiveness, Transforming State Systems for the Future, April 28–30, in Washington, DC. As a member of SCEE, South Carolina convened a six-member team to participate in the summit. Mark Bounds, deputy superintendent for Educator Quality and Leadership, served as the team lead, and SECC's Debra Meibaum facilitated South Carolina's team sessions. Team

members included representatives from administrator and teacher associations, institutions of higher learning, and senior SCDE staff.

The summit featured plenary sessions and breakout sessions that were organized into six topical strands: preparation, teacher evaluation, leader evaluation, professional development, developmental continuums and tiered licensure, as well as policy and systems change. Another integral part of the summit agenda was state work sessions that provided time for the state teams to follow up on summit topics as they applied to their individual states.

The summit participants are, left to right, Mark Bounds, Debra Meibaum, SECC program associate, Dr. Mary Beth Copenhaver, Dr. Kathryn Meeks, Dr. Alan Coles, Linda "Cookie" Winburn, and Dr. Cleo Richardson.