Within Our Reach

Higher Student Achievement

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By Leslie Blair, Editor

Despite the large-scale school improvement effort in our country and the hundreds of articles and books written about school improvement in the past decade, schools still face challenges raising student achievement. Most of us realize there is no silver bullet, no magic program that will increase student achievement. It is often long-term, difficult work that is affected by a variety of factors, ranging from district or state policy to specific instructional practice. In this issue of *SEDLetter,* we will examine some of the factors that can contribute to increased student learning and achievement, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or No Child Left Behind.

Our lead article is written by Mike Schmoker, a former teacher and administrator who has written many articles and books related to school improvement. He discusses the two things that matter most in increasing student achievement: What we teach and how we teach it. And because the No Child Left Behind Act is now driving planning and discussion, this issue of *SEDLetter* considers two components of the act — assessment and teacher quality — and what they mean to states in the SEDL region. Both components will affect the operation of schools and districts and have the potential to positively affect student achievement.

We will also take a look at how SEDL's Regional Educational Laboratory is working with low-performing schools and districts to investigate how schools can overcome barriers to high student achievement. Besides our research that focuses on building the procedural knowledge of how schools improve, SEDL is helping these schools zero in on the root causes of low student achievement and then build a coherent instructional program.

Leaving no child behind in the educational system means paying attention to the needs of *all* children, not just most of the children. We want therefore to focus on two groups of students — culturally diverse students and students with disabilities. Despite numerous mandates and programs, the needs of these students are not always fully met. We are including a presentation that University of Texas professor Harriet Romo delivered last fall about the importance of cultural diversity and how it can influence what goes on in the classroom. In this issue we introduce a new SEDL project that aims to improve learning for students with disabilities. Through a partnership with the Southwest Disability Business Technical Assistance Center, SEDL is providing technical assistance and training to educators on how to integrate education-based technology and learner-centered instruction. Our work recognizes that although assistive technology is an important tool in helping students with disabilities learn, it doesn't ensure equity or quality of instruction — that is up to the adults in the field of education.

Come to think of it, leaving no child behind is up to all of us as well.

SEDL

The *Real* Causes of Higher Achievement

By Mike Schmoker

Too many educators suffer from the assumption that student achievement is largely a function of factors over which we have little or no control. The logic of this assumption is compelling: well-situated schools perform well; poor and minority schools don't — and can't.

It is time to dump this assumption. It should be replaced by a new one: Achievement is primarily a function of two things: (1) What we teach and (2) how we teach.

There is great hope in this for students and educators alike. If true, then we can't dodge the fact that from the district level to the classroom, opportunities abound for us to achieve better results — confidently, inexorably — with our students. How strong is the evidence for *this* assumption?

What We Teach

Let's take writing as an example. In the last several years, many states have seen dramatic increases in the proportion of students writing at or above grade-level standards. In Maryland, the percentage rose from 47% to above 90% statewide in an eight-year period. At high-poverty, high-minority Bessemer Elementary school in Pueblo, Colorado, the percentage of students who could meet state writing standards rose from 2% to 48% in one year (Schmoker 1999–2000, 1). Were these gains the result of the much-scorned practice of "teaching to the test"? Well, yes: Teachers were teaching writing with more frequency and vigor than ever.

There is a lesson here: We can't expect most students to do well on exams for which their preparation has been spotty or inadequate. But in too many places, it is just that. In some of our lowest-achieving schools, there is a patent mismatch between the real, taught curriculum and the *actual standards that are assessed* — by state, standardized, or district assessments. This shouldn't surprise us: For all our so-called common curriculum, very little has been done — let's be honest — to ensure that the taught and the tested curriculum are aligned.

Prominent researchers have noted this discrepancy, including John Goodlad and colleagues who wrote that "behind the classroom door" all bets are off on what actually gets taught (1970). Judith Warren Little noted the discrepancy as well, finding curricular differences among English teachers to be so wildly divergent that even to call these courses by the same name — "English" — made no sense to her (1990). Susan Rosenholtz found that teachers

teach a self-selected "jumble" of different topics and that getting them to teach to common standards is perhaps the toughest challenge schools face (1991). David Berliner detected the same pattern in his studies, that in the same grade and in the same school, one teacher taught 27 times as much science as her same-grade counterparts. No one in the school knew this until researchers came into the school (1979).

This pattern, which explains so much about differences in achievement, is still only tacitly acknowledged. But you can hear it in the knowing laughter that erupts when author Heidi Hayes Jacobs chides her audiences of educators by asking, "What is a curriculum guide?" Her answer: "A well-intended fiction."
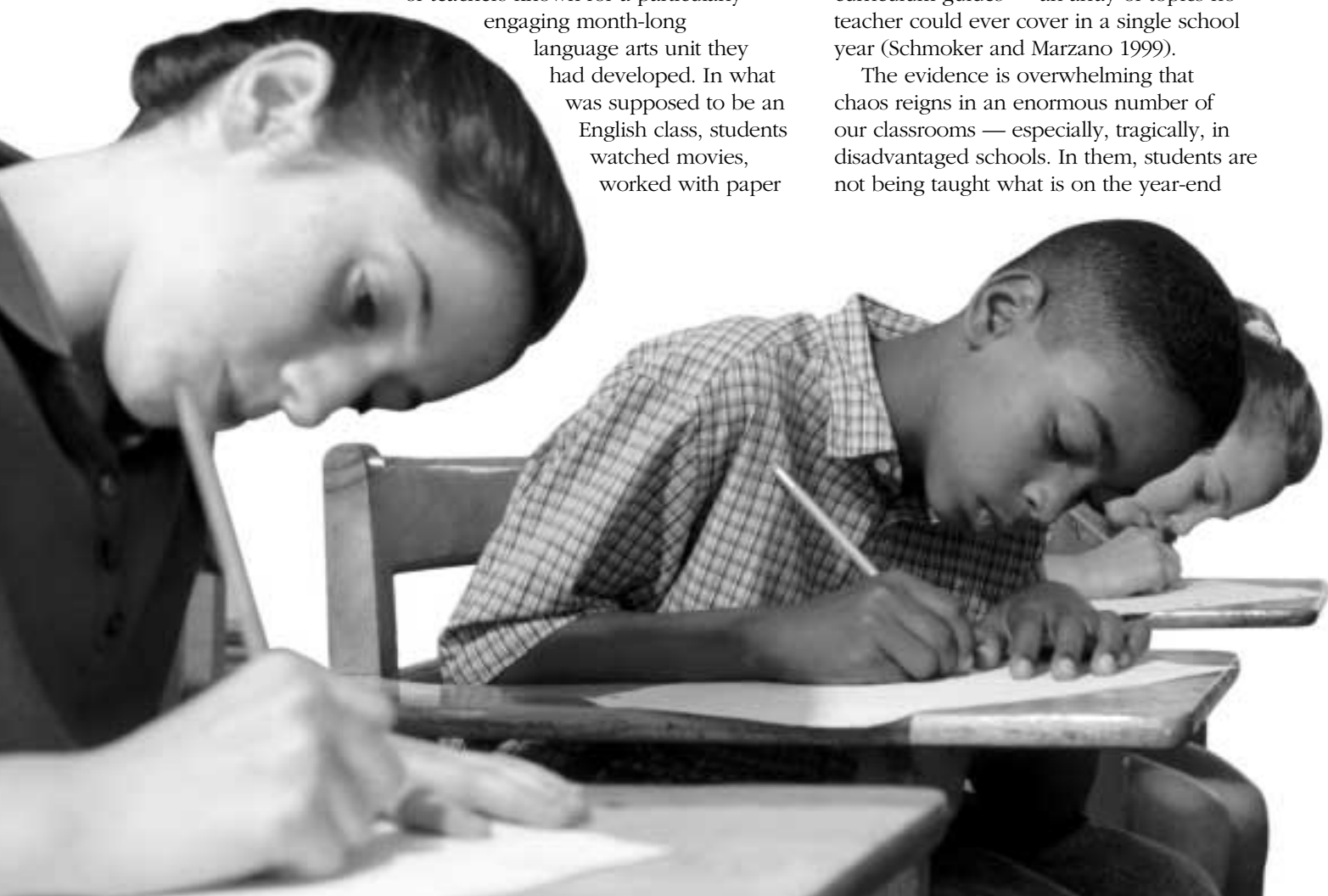
Teacher supervision has made its bargain with this "anything goes" culture. It typically does almost nothing to ensure — or to monitor — a commitment to a common, assessed curriculum. The results can be dismaying. I once interviewed a "teacher of the year" at one school who bragged that her social studies students did almost no reading or writing. She scoffed at writing — learning in her class was all interactive and hands-on. Did her principal know this? I closely observed a team of teachers known for a particularly engaging month-long language arts unit they had developed. In what was supposed to be an English class, students watched movies, worked with paper and fabric, and prepared food together. But actual reading during that month was kept to a minimum, and there was no writing instruction whatsoever. I've toured hundreds of classrooms during the "reading period" with administrators who work hard and care about kids — but who, until these tours, didn't realize that less than half of what occurred during "reading" had any connection to reading or writing. In many of these classrooms, coloring activities took up much of the reading period. The predominance of coloring activities in classrooms has been corroborated by research teams from the Washington-based Education Trust. (Schmoker 2001).

Surprisingly, the standards movement itself has exacerbated the problem. Many of the state standards documents themselves are poorly written, far too lengthy, and despite rhetoric to the contrary, not truly aligned to state assessments (Wolk 1998). This results in what Bob Marzano has called "curricular chaos." He refers to the haphazardness that results when teachers are forced to individually navigate and select among an exhaustive and conflicting set of standards represented by standards documents, textbooks, and district curriculum guides — an array of topics no teacher could ever cover in a single school year (Schmoker and Marzano 1999).

The evidence is overwhelming that chaos reigns in an enormous number of our classrooms — especially, tragically, in disadvantaged schools. In them, students are not being taught what is on the year-end

authentic contexts. Even Grant Wiggins, a prominent voice for authentic performance assessment, points out that the very best kind of education promotes success on state and standardized tests (1998, 320).

In these five school districts, teachers *create, share, and refine lessons* and strategies that are deliberately aligned to the assessed standards. They take pains to ensure that teaching is aligned with instruction. All of them get exceptional results.

In Brazosport Independent Schools near Houston, Texas, teachers actually map out, week by week, which assessed standards will be taught. They then develop teaching materials and lessons that target these standards, with more time and emphasis being given to the lowest-scoring skills. More than 90% of every subgroup in every school — poor kids, minority kids, even special education students — now meet state expectations in reading, writing, and math.

Adlai Stevenson High School District in Lincolnshire, Illinois, has created homegrown, teacher-made, end-of-course assessments for every course they offer. These assessments are carefully aligned to assessed state and district standards. Adlai Stevenson teachers take pains to teach, directly but imaginatively, to these assessed standards. As a result, scores on these homegrown assessments have soared — along with scores on state and college entrance exams; the rate of success on Advanced Placement exams has increased by 800%.

Kerman Unified is a K–12 district outside of Fresno, California. It has an 86% poverty rate. Kerman staff began to focus on standards by carefully examining the invaluable but garden-variety data reports and *interpretive guides* that accompany every state and standardized assessment, in their case the Stanford 9. In a three-year period, Kerman kids realized gains at every level, K–12, particularly at the elementary level, where one school's achievement rose from the 20th to the 46th percentile in reading and from the 18th to the 61st percentile in math.

assessment; they are learning what the teacher happens to teach or likes to teach (the way I often taught my middle and high school charges years ago).

Successful School and Districts — and the Importance of Alignment

Now the good news: When *what* we teach — the real, taught curriculum — is aligned with assessments, success is close behind. Educational consultant and researcher Larry Lezotte has been saying for some time that children generally learn what we teach them, but "there is a huge gap between what is taught and what is tested" (Sparks 2001, 33).

I recently completed a study of five school districts and a number of schools that do something startlingly simple but effective: They carefully examine their year-end or state assessments and then, very deliberately, build most of their curriculum around these assessed standards (Schmoker 2001). One of the first discoveries teachers in these districts make is that even norm-referenced tests largely consist not of irrelevant "lower-order" skills, but of incontrovertibly essential, core standards — all of which are best taught in meaningful,

From "What" to "How"

The districts and schools mentioned above benefit hugely from aligning what is taught and tested. But there is another factor that accounts for their success. Because they have established common standards, they can now talk intelligibly and productively about how to most effectively teach these common standards. They are acting on what is increasingly recognized as the most effective

If we want instruction to improve, the most effective, efficient way for this to happen is for teachers to meet regularly to examine and adjust their teaching in light of ongoing results.

way to promote higher levels of learning — having teams of teachers work regularly and continuously to create, adjust, and test methods and lessons collaboratively (Schmoker 2001; Glickman 2002, 4–6).

A 1999 study by the Education Trust found that hundreds of poor and minority schools have beaten the odds and succeeded with exceptional numbers of students, giving them life chances once reserved only for those who grew up in the "right" neighborhoods. How? By (1) teaching to assessed standards and by (2) continuously learning and refining better ways to teach to these standards. At the majority of these schools, teachers meet with colleagues regularly — and expressly — to discuss standards and how to teach them (Barth et al. 1999). Colorado's Bessemer Elementary was among the schools discovered in this study. In addition to their gains in writing, the proportion of students reading at or above standard rose from 12% to 73% in a two-year period, and did so on a state test recognized as among the most difficult.

The most enormous but peculiarly unsung benefit of common standards is that they provide the rich common context essential to focused, productive teacher collaboration, a sine qua non for improvement (Fullan 2000; Sparks 1998). Stated simply: If we want schools to improve, *instruction — teaching lessons themselves — must improve* (Stigler and Hiebert 1999). But there must also be a common set of standards. And there must be a commitment to reaching measurable achievement goals by making real adjustments to *how we teach* these common standards. There is no other way (Glickman 2002, 4–5).

The evidence that teaching itself can become the most important factor bearing on achievement is not new and continues to mount. In 1987, Mortimore and Sammons conducted a study of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in England, finding that in the areas of reading and math, the school and its teachers had between six and ten times as much influence on learning as did all socioeconomic factors combined. A 1997 U.S Department of Education Study found that effective teaching accounted for as much as a 16-point difference in reading and math scores (Jordan, Mendroe, and Weerasinghe 1997). The groundbreaking value-added studies of William Sanders found that certain teachers achieve far better results than their same-school counterparts, which belies the notion that socioeconomic factors reign supreme (Archer 1999). And now we have the most recent Education Trust study (Mathews 2001) which found not hundreds, but thousands of schools that prove good teaching can in fact overcome demographic factors. Teaching matters — mightily.

What Shall We Do?

It is time we acted on these findings.

First, we must enjoin teachers to see that the assessment is not the enemy; the real problem is our failure to teach — as effectively as we can — to the assessed standards.

Second, we must begin to *make systematic use of simple tools that promote both alignment and collaboration,* such as the invaluable interpretive guides that accompany and demystify the contents of state and standardized tests. These guides contain detailed, precise lists of standards and sample items. Many contain rubrics for the writing component of the test, as well as exemplar papers with helpful annotations that clarify criteria and standards for both teachers and students.

Third, we must make targeted teacher collaboration our highest priority. Regular times must be established — even an hour a month could make a difference — for teachers to share and perfect lessons and strategies aimed directly at areas of low performance.

This combination of emphases *virtually guarantees improvement on any kind of assessment*.

Finally, it is time we radically recast what is currently known as "school improvement planning" to reflect the elements described here. Having reviewed hundreds of improvement plans, I see it is only too clear that the activities they typically set in motion compete with or replace the alignment and regular collaboration so essential to the improvement of learning. School improvement plans — and the outmoded templates and bureaucracies that drive them — are typically oversized, imprecise, and an obstacle to improvement. They set off a riot of activities — which supplant the work of teachers to create, adapt, and evaluate lessons and strategies aimed at helping higher proportions of students master essential standards.

The best news is this: There is nothing esoteric about what is needed for schools to make dramatic progress — even in the near term. We need only to fix our gaze on effective, targeted teaching — and on mechanisms for promoting, replicating, refining, and routinely honoring such teaching. Providing our teachers with even an hour a month to create, refine,

and assess the impact of new lessons and strategies could start a revolution.

We can start by looking within our own schools and districts for such teaching. It is there already. We need only to build on it.

It is time for new assumptions. If we believe these, and act on them, it will be enough — to improve schools, to change students' lives.

Mike Schmoker is a writer and consultant living n Flagstaff, Arizona. His most recent book is The Results Fieldbook: Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools (ASCD 2001). *He can be reached at schmoker@futureone.com.*

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ESEA's New Testing Requirements: Will States Make the Grade?

By Lesley Dahlkemper

No Child Left Behind

A Summary of the New Testing Requirements

- States must administer tests in reading and mathematics in grades 3–8 by the 2005–2006 school year.

- In 2007–2008, states must give students science tests at least once in grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12.

- States must test students in reading and mathematics a minimum of once a year in grades 10–12.

- Tests must be aligned with the state's standards.

- Test results must explain how well students are meeting standards (for example, below proficiency, proficient, advanced)

- Tests must produce individual diagnostic reports on students that include an itemized score analysis so teachers can help students address problem areas.

- States must disaggregate test scores by gender, race, ethnicity, migrant status, English proficiency, disability, and income for each school and district.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has been called the most far-reaching federal education bill in nearly four decades. The law addresses many areas, from school choice to low-performing schools to increased accountability. Testing, however, is the area that is drawing much scrutiny from states — and many questions.

The law requires states to administer tests in reading and mathematics in grades 3–8 by the 2005–2006 school year. States also must test students at least once in grades 10–12 in reading and mathematics. Science tests are phased in at least once in grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12 by 2007–2008.

States must also make sure tests are aligned with the state standards. When reporting test scores, the results must explain how well students are meeting standards (for example, below proficiency, proficient, advanced). What's more, states must disaggregate test scores in several categories including gender, race, ethnicity, and migrant status.

The results of mathematics and reading assessments will be the primary indicators of whether schools and districts have made "adequate yearly progress." If a school fails to make adequate progress for two consecutive years, the district must require the school to develop an improvement plan and provide students with the opportunity to attend other schools in the district. Corrective actions continue to mount if a school fails to make adequate progress for a third year and beyond.

While the law spells out in broad terms what's required, existing testing programs vary widely from state to state. They focus on different grades, subjects, levels of difficulty, and in some cases, even students. Given the wide variation, many observers predict states face a huge task ahead.

"The challenge is that 50 states have gone in 50 different directions," says Stanley Rabinowitz, the director of assessments and standards development services for WestEd, a Regional Educational Educational Laboratory that is based in San Francisco. "To reconcile state policies with federal policies will take some work in all states."

What do states think about the new requirements? Reaction is mixed. States like Texas, which already have a comprehensive assessment system in place, applaud the changes. "It feels really good to work in education in Texas," says Arturo Almendarez, deputy commissioner for programs and instruction at the Texas Education Agency and a SEDL board member. "When you talk to other states that have no assessment system at all, they have a lot of work to do, but I'm confident educators across the country will answer the call."

Still other states with further to go are raising lots of questions about funding and whether they will have enough time to meet the deadline. States that fail to comply risk losing federal dollars. (See chart below to see how much money SEDL states will receive.)

According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS), 15 states, including Louisiana and Texas plus the District of Columbia, meet the requirements for annual assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3–8. (See the table on page 12 for current state testing policies in SEDL's region.)

It is unclear, however, how many of these states meet the requirement to align assessments with state standards. Other states are counting on a federal rule-making committee charged with determining the specifics of the law to offer some flexibility.

A Combination of Tests

To help fill in the gaps, many states that don't yet meet the federal standards, including Arkansas, Louisiana, and New Mexico, are urging the federal government to allow a combination of local and state assessments, or norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests.

New Mexico, for example, tests students in grades 3–9 but those tests are norm-referenced. The state department will begin transitioning to criterion-referenced, (also known as standards-based) tests. Jack McCoy, the director of the agency's instructional support services division, is confident he can meet the U.S. Department

of Education's deadline as long as New Mexico receives sufficient resources. Under the new law, the state will receive $4.4 million in federal funding.

"We'll use those funds to develop criterion-referenced tests. We're optimistic, or foolish, enough to believe that by next spring we will have criterion-referenced tests up and running in at least three grades in mathematics and reading."

State leaders are quick to note that the No Child Left Behind Act pledges that if Congress fails to appropriate funds for test development, accountability provisions required by the law would not apply. Still, there is an expectation that states will continue to develop new tests.

Arkansas is also considering replacing some of its norm-referenced tests with criterion tests, but Ray Simon, the director of the Arkansas Department of Education, predicts "those tests will take awhile to develop."

Louisiana also favors a combination of tests, but like other states will have to show the federal government that the tests measure whether students are achieving state standards. "We may have some adjustments to make on our norm-referenced tests," says Scott Norton, director of standards and assessments for the Louisiana Department of Education. "We'll need an objective third-party study to show our norm-referenced tests are aligned to the standards."

> There's nothing in the federal law that requires a high-stakes system, but there is the potential for that and teachers have a keen awareness about that and are worried about it.
>
> — Kim Anderson, lobbyist, National Education Association

Funding Authorized by the
No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act authorizes up to $490 million a year in federal aid to help states develop and administer mandated tests. If Congress does not appropriate enough money in any given year, states may postpone the 2005–2006 deadline for giving the tests.

How much does your state receive for assessments under No Child Left Behind?

State	$ Millions
Arkansas	4.9
Louisiana	6.7
New Mexico	4.4
Oklahoma	5.7
Texas	20.2

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2002

Interview with Stanley Rabinowitz,
Director of Assessments and Standards Development Services at WestEd

Dr. Rabinowitz has written a number of published papers on issues related to the use of integrated standards and assessment systems in high-stakes state programs and worker-training initiatives. He is the author or co-author of many WestEd resources, including *Balancing Local Assessment with Statewide Testing: Building a Program that Meets Student Needs*; *Building a Workable Accountability System: Key Decision Points for Policymakers and Educators*; and *Do High Stakes Tests Drive Up Student Dropout Rates?*

What do the new testing policies in the ESEA mean in general for states?

The main value of the law is that it sets a standard for all states to meet that represents a consensus of what student performance should look like and what school performance should look like. The challenge is that 50 states have gone in 50 directions to meet those goals, and reconciling state policies with federal policies will take some work in all states.

What message is the Bush administration sending to states through this legislation?

It's time for reform to result in improved student performance. If schools can't make that happen than parents deserve other options. I think that's the central message of the bill. Connected to that is that the drafters of the bill think they know how to make this happen. For the first time, the federal government is going to be explicit about what happens if you don't make the progress you are expected to make. The level of detail is more explicit than any other federal legislation.

What are you hearing from states?

You're not hearing any criticism about the intent and the need for the act, and that's very different from five years ago. The only concern you are hearing from states is, "How are we going to get this done in the time and with the resources that are available?"

Another concern is, 'If the assessment system developed in my state has the same goal in mind, can we implement it as long as we stick to the general guidelines?' Under a strict interpretation of the act, states will have to undo everything they have just built up — that's a real problem. For example, let's say the intent of Louisiana's system is the same as the federal act — they both have the same goals, but they are doing it somewhat differently. Is the act a big-enough umbrella for these programs, or will states have to undo themselves to fit under the act?

What else has struck you as the conversation about testing unfolds?

I'd like to stress the amazing amount of consensus we're seeing across all levels — state superintendents, local superintendents. Now, there are people who don't think this is the right way to go, but the number of voices is much fewer that we have heard. There's a strong sense that enough is enough. It's time to move forward with strong models of accountability, and this bill helps do that.

States that want to use norm-referenced tests to fill in the gaps face another challenge. Norm-referenced tests, like the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, don't measure whether a student is making progress against standards, but instead compare students with other students taking the test.

Norton is convinced it can be done: "A state can do a standard-setting process and yield cut scores. We can use those cut scores to determine whether a student is proficient."

Another issue is cost. The cost of administering, scoring, and reporting the results of criterion-referenced tests often exceeds the cost for norm-referenced tests. McCoy predicts states and districts will have to absorb those costs, which, for a school district in New Mexico, could jump an additional 50–100%.

Organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Governors Association have called on the administration to allow states to use a combination of tests. Time and money factor in heavily.

"The big complaint is: Will three years be adequate to get our assessments up and running?" says Wayne Martin, director of the State Education Assessment Center at the Council of Chief State School Officers. "Remember, you want everything aligned — instruction, content standards, assessments."

Not everyone agrees with using a combination of tests. The National Education Association (NEA) is opposed to using norm-referenced tests to comply with No Child Left Behind. "The test of this bill will be how well the states implement these tests," says Kim Anderson, who lobbies for the NEA. "If states focus on diagnostic tests, that's good. We support that. But if states buy off-the-shelf tests, it will be a failure."

Draft regulations released in late February by the U.S. Department of Education suggest that states will be able to use a mix of tests, as well as customized off-the-shelf tests "if states also add questions to address their own content standards." The guidelines say that states would have to demonstrate that the assessment system "has a rational and coherent design."

Still, more details are needed, and the draft regulations were a starting point for the rule-making committee. The committee, made up of educators, parents, students, and business leaders, is charged with developing federal regulations on testing and other issues tied to the act. The committee has developed draft regulations and is now holding regional hearings to gather public input.

"The thing that worries me is that states are going to wait for clarity while the clock is ticking away," says Kathy Christie, vice president of the ECS clearinghouse. "Most states should plow ahead and fine-tune as more information comes out."

States will likely have to wait until late June to get the final word from the U.S. Department of Education — that's when the agency is expected to release final regulations.

Impact on Schools and Districts

While states are searching for answers about what's permissible and what's not under No Child Left Behind, some who frequently work with educators say the issues raised by state leaders about testing have yet to reach schools and districts.

"It's not on their radar screen," says Ed Tobia, a program associate with the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL) in Austin who works with low-performing schools in several states. "They have state accountability systems and testing programs they are responding to. They're more concerned about dealing with their kids and dealing with issues at a local level."

When the new changes in testing do hit districts, groups like the National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP) want to make sure that teachers and principals are prepared. "They will have to know how to read [testing] data correctly and make sure the data are in compliance with the law," says Stephen DeWitt, associate director of government relations for NASSP. "Often principals are last in line to get funding for this kind of professional development."

Although the NASSP is "generally supportive" of the bill, DeWitt says principals fear tests will be used for the wrong reasons. Although the act doesn't judge school quality on a single test score, there's concern states will move in that direction. DeWitt adds, "Principals' other concern is how they will be judged and measured by it personally."

While there are concerns, SEDL board member Imelda Guerra, principal of Calallen East Elementary School in Corpus Christi, Texas, thinks the changes at the federal level are good. "We're being held accountable as schools. I think we are going to do fine."

I think the message is 'you are being watched and you need to perform.' Certainly, everyone needs to perform. But we want to make sure they [principals] are getting the support they need, and I'm not sure the other half of that message is coming through.

— Scott DeWitt, associate director of government relations, National Association of Secondary School Principals

Guerra also applauds the law's emphasis on disaggregating testing data. Under the measure, schools and districts will be required to break down and report testing data in several categories. "You can't let that same group of students not learn year after year."

But not all district and state databases are equipped to tackle the task at hand. ECS's Christie predicts it's "going to be a large problem for a number of states that just don't have their systems setup." What's more, some teachers and principals will need help learning how to interpret the testing data. "Many school personnel don't have a good grasp of what testing data represents," says SEDL program associate D'Ette Cowan. "What do the different scores tell us?" She says the challenge for educators is how to use the data to inform classroom instructional practices.

Defining Proficiency

Another challenge facing both states and districts is how they define "proficiency." Under the law, test results must explain how well students are meeting standards (for example, below proficiency, proficient, advanced). How states define proficiency can vary widely from state to state. Some states and districts may choose to set the bar high. These states may have a tough time bringing all students to proficiency, as the law requires, by 2014. Some fear this will lead states to adopt less rigorous standards.

"It's a big question, a legitimate one," says ECS's Christie. "Yet, this is about higher expectations for all kids, not just the ones who are easy to educate."

English and Mathematics Testing Policies for Grades 3–8 in SEDL's Region

State	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Arkansas		English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics standards-based
Louisiana	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics standards-based
New Mexico	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics norm-referenced	English, Mathematics norm-referenced
Oklahoma	English, Mathematics norm-referenced		English, Mathematics standards-based			English, Mathematics standards-based
Texas	English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics standards-based	English, Mathematics standards-based

Note: Standards-based writing tests are also administered at these grades.
Source: *Education Week,* "Grade-by-Grade Testing Policies," January 9, 2002, 27.

Impact on English-Language Learners

Another aspect of the new testing guidelines has drawn the attention of states with large numbers of English-Language Learners. The law says any child who has been in the United States for three years has to be tested in reading in English.

"That's a different way for us to do business in New Mexico," says McCoy. "A large population of our students (Native American and Hispanic) come to school with a home language other than English." While McCoy agrees schools must work on English literacy skills with all students, New Mexico's bilingual programs transition students to English in five years.

New Mexico and other states may get some breathing room. Under the law, implementation may be delayed for one year if the state demonstrates exceptional or uncontrollable circumstances.

The law also requires states to demonstrate that school districts, beginning in the 2002–2003 school year, will provide annual assessment of English proficiency. These tests, targeted at English-Language Learners, measure students' oral language, reading, and writing skills in English.

What's Next?

As the rule-making process unfolds, states will be watching closely — eager for answers to questions about what combination of tests meets the requirements, how to define proficiency, how to help transition English-Language Learners, and other issues. Many hope that the new federal requirements will complement — rather than unravel — their accountability systems. And some predict the new law will only help with current efforts to improve student achievement.

"The federal government is putting a high priority on accountability for student achievement," says Ray Simon, director of the Arkansas Department of Education. "This is the thrust of our current reform efforts. By having the federal government adopt the same position, it strengthens our work with local schools and citizens. We look on it as a new partnership with the federal government and one that we welcome." **SEDL**

Testing Policy Questions
for State Leaders

- Has your state evaluated its assessments for alignment with state standards and for technical quality (reliability and validity)?

- What do your state assessments cost per student, in both dollars and instructional time?

- Does your state have an adequate approach for tracking and identifying how much is spent on state assessments?

- What will be included in your state's multiyear plan to build and sustain the capacity to develop, field test and administer these new annual student assessments?

- Can your state use a combination of local and state-level assessments, assuming issues of technical quality and alignment with standards are addressed?

- What are your state's current testing policies regarding English-Language Learners?

- What kind of assessments for English-Language Learners will your state use to meet federal requirements?

Source: Education Commission of the States, *No State Left Behind: The Challenges and Opportunities of ESEA 2001,* 2002.

Lesley Dahlkemper, a former education reporter, is a senior project director with KSA-Plus Communications in Arlington, Virginia. She manages the firm's Denver office.

The federal government's involvement in state testing and programs is increasing. States don't have a choice unless they want to yield their federal funds. Given a little latitude, we do support these new laws.

— Scott Norton, director of standards and assessments, Louisiana Department of Education

Can ESEA Improve Teacher Quality?

By Andrea Jachman

The high-profile debate over testing requirements in the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has all but eclipsed the bill's sweeping teacher quality mandates. To some observers, the emphasis is misplaced. Test scores can be valuable, they say, but scores aren't going to increase just because you test kids — they're going to go up because you improve teacher quality.

That said, there is plenty in this bill to make advocates of teacher quality happy. First and foremost, the bill recognizes that teaching matters. It reflects a commitment to improving teacher quality and backs up that commitment with significant new dollars. "The conversation around teacher quality is becoming more sophisticated," observes Peter Winograd, director of the Center for Teacher Education and Educational Policy at the University of New Mexico, "And that can only be good for our kids."

Some critics of the bill say the deadlines are too tight, the funding insufficient, and the requirements too stringent to put a qualified teacher in every classroom. Others argue that the bill does not go far enough — that it should have provided more guidance, more rigorous standards, and a greater emphasis on state-level leadership.

And what needs to be in place for the bill's vision to be realized? Time. Money. Respect. This is what teachers, advocates, administrators, and researchers say teachers need to stay committed to their chosen profession. Further, reform must be both deliberative and collaborative, and requires input and dedication from stakeholders at every level of the system.

The question remains whether this legislation provides the mechanisms to accomplish these ambitious goals. Legislation can allocate dollars and set rules, but it cannot mandate a shift in how teaching is conceptualized and regarded, which some believe is critical to improving teacher quality. Whatever one's position, the teacher-quality mandates are significant — and will pose significant challenges for schools, districts, and states in the years to come.

New Definitions of Highly Qualified Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Perhaps the most widely known teacher-quality provision of ESEA is that beginning with the school year 2002–2003, all teachers hired and teaching under a program funded by Title I must be "highly qualified." By 2005–2006, all public school teachers must meet this standard. This means that

- All teachers must have obtained full certification or licensure with no requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis.
- New elementary school teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree and pass a state test demonstrating subject knowledge and teaching skills.
- New middle and secondary school teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree and either demonstrate competence in their subject area(s) or have an academic major or coursework equivalent to a major, graduate degree, or advanced certification.
- Veteran teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree and either meet the requirements above or demonstrate competence based on a "high, objective, and uniform" standard set by the state.

The bill also lays out stronger requirements for paraprofessionals, to be achieved within the same time frame. To be considered highly qualified, paraprofessionals working in a program funded with Title I monies must meet one of these requirements:

- completed at least two years of postsecondary study,
- obtained an associate's degree, or
- met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate through a formal state or local assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in reading, writing, and mathematics instruction.

States must submit a plan to achieve these teacher and paraprofessional goals and must provide a mechanism by which teacher-quality data is made readily available to parents. Local education agencies that fail to show improvement within two years must develop an improvement plan with technical assistance from the state. After three years, the state and district must agree on how the district's funds will be used, and a freeze on the hiring of paraprofessionals is imposed.

The states in SEDL's region — Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas — generally fare well in comparison with these teacher standards (see table below); in some cases, states hold even higher requirements. Every state has areas of critical

Meeting ESEA Requirements in the SEDL Region

Requirement	Arkansas	Louisiana	New Mexico	Oklahoma	Texas
Requires elementary teachers to pass a basic skills test in reading, writing, and math	📄	📄	📄	📄	*
Requires elementary teachers to pass a "knowledge of teaching" test	📄	📄	📄	📄	📄
Requires middle and high school teachers to pass a subject-area test	📄	📄		📄	📄
Requires middle junior high, or high school teachers to hold a subject area major					
For all grade levels, requires a subject-area major rather than an education major					📄

Excerpted from *No State Left Behind: The Challenges and Opportunities of ESEA 2001*. Education Commission of the States, February 2002.

* Texas requires teachers to pass a test in reading, writing, and math prior to admission to state teacher preparation programs.

All states require at least a bachelor's degree to teach at all grade levels.

What may prove most burdensome for this region, however, is coping with the number of teachers on emergency credentials and those teaching out of field or out of grade.

teacher shortages that will continue to be a challenge to fill. What may prove most burdensome for this region, however, is coping with the number of teachers on emergency credentials and those teaching out of field or out of grade. According to Westat statistics provided under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education, 32,228, or 11.5%, of all Texas teachers are not fully certified. In Louisiana, that percentage climbs to 15.2 overall; particularly disturbing is that 23.3% of teachers in Louisiana's high poverty schools are not fully certified. This is a seriously disproportionate number of underqualified teachers — precisely where the best teachers are needed most. Many wish the bill had gone further toward equalizing the distribution of qualified teachers.

The new teacher qualification guidelines highlight existing tensions in education. For example, ESEA supports the identification and implementation of alternative routes to the classroom and, some educators say, favors subject-area knowledge over teaching knowledge. Critics say that creating more avenues into the profession lowers the bar, particularly if pedagogical knowledge is not taken into account, and weakens efforts to retool teaching as a career that is every bit as professional as law or business. Advocates say that more avenues mean more diversity, stronger subject knowledge, and an easing of teacher shortages. The debate over these related issues is passionately argued by both sides. Potentially, this legislation finds middle ground by supporting alternative routes while holding

these teachers to the same standards as those who pass through traditional programs.

The means by which teachers' knowledge and skills are tested have also come under fire, with many in the education field arguing that existing tests are not rigorous enough and thus are not a good measure of a "highly qualified" teacher. "When I took it in 1986, the teacher's test was worse than a joke," says Cathy Hord, a 25-year veteran of Texas schools. "It was a slap in the face." In recent years, more attention has been paid to measuring teachers' knowledge and abilities. Texas, for example, will implement a new teacher certification test in the fall of 2002 that is aligned with statewide standards. Arkansas has taken the unusual step of requiring new teachers to pass the Praxis III, an expensive performance assessment that evaluates all aspects of a beginning teacher's practice and typically takes place during the first year of teaching. Louisiana teachers must undergo a local team evaluation to reach the second stage of certification.

In spite of the challenges, no one is complaining that the standards are too high. Arturo Almendarez, Texas deputy commissioner for programs and instruction, reflects the opinion of many when he says, "It is a difficult but necessary standard. If we're really serious about educating all children, this is what needs to be done."

More Recruiting and Training Dollars for Teachers and Administrators

Title II of the ESEA consolidates the existing funding from the Eisenhower and Class Size Reduction Programs into a single Teacher Quality grant program. States are given considerable flexibility in prioritizing their disbursement. Activities might include, but are not limited to

- Recruiting highly qualified teachers, principals, and administrators
- Creating or expanding mentoring programs
- Reforming tenure systems
- Establishing merit pay systems
- Revisiting alternative licensure and certification programs
- Reducing class size
- Providing technology instruction to teachers

Every state in this region has made strides toward improving teacher quality in recent years.

Additional Provisions of the ESEA
Related to Teacher Quality

In addition to those provisions detailed here, ESEA

- Provides grants to state education departments and high-need school districts to recruit and retain mid-career professionals and recent graduates through alternative routes to certification.
- Provides grants to partnerships that provide professional development for early childhood educators who work with children from low-income families in high-needs communities.
- Provides additional funding for Troops to Teachers, a program that facilitates a transition from the military into the classroom.
- Encourages states and schools to work with institutions of higher education to improve math and science teacher education.
- Explicitly prohibits the creation of a national teacher test or certification.
- Takes steps to protect teachers from lawsuits.

In many cases, the act validates existing programs and provides additional funds for their expansion. All five states in SEDL's region, for example, provide mentoring, induction, and other support programs for beginning teachers. All five have also adopted alternative certification policies, with Arkansas, New Mexico, and Texas programs being rated as exemplary by the National Center for Education Information. In fact, according to Education Week's *Quality Counts 2002,* Arkansas and Oklahoma ranked fifth and sixth in the nation respectively in teacher quality overall.

What Must Be in Place to Succeed?

Among those administrators and policymakers interviewed for this article, there is general agreement that the combination of mandates and flexibility means that states must be very strategic about how their money is used.

To start with, reform must be collaborative and creative. Says Deputy State Superintendent Susanna Murphy of New Mexico, "We must make sure that legislators are in the loop, that they don't pursue these isolated good ideas that can jolt a systemic approach and cause more work." Such collaboration must include stakeholders at every level of the system.

Professional development must be sustained. The "spray and pray" approach of isolated workshops and one-time seminars, while certainly the least-expensive course, is far from the most cost-effective. Money and time must be focused on long-term strategies that are known to work, such as mentoring programs. Further, all professional development must be truly linked to what goes on in the classroom — especially with regard to standards-based reform.

Above all, teachers must be supported in their work. Frequently, this comes down to compensation. "How to make the profession more desirable in terms of pay is a crucial issue that's never fully attended to," remarks Michael Davis, New Mexico state superintendent of public instruction. While regional salaries are not the lowest (indeed, starting salaries for Texas teachers are among the highest in the nation), average salaries for teachers in all five states fall below the national average of $41,820 — in some cases, far below.

But compensation is only one piece of the teacher support puzzle. Attention must be paid to working conditions, which encompass many issues: having great responsibility but little authority, not being supported when dealing with problem students, lacking curricular

support, and feeling isolated. Observes Arkansas middle-school teacher Becky Adams, "Just to hear administrators acknowledge the job you've done or give credit where credit is due can go a long way." Administrators must also show commitment to reform by providing time and incentives for professional development and for teachers to collaborate with and learn from their expert colleagues.

Finally, there is a call nationwide for the professionalization of the career. The myth that teaching is the easiest job in the world persists and works against attempts to gain greater benefits and recognition for our nation's dedicated educators. Some see positive signs in this legislation. "The fact that it insists on highly qualified teachers in the classroom is a big step in the right direction," says Holly Eaton, a staff attorney for the Texas Classroom Teachers Association. "It will force states and districts to take steps to make the profession more attractive. It will force them to do the right thing."

The reauthorized ESEA gives states and districts the potential to address all of these issues — but does not mandate it. As Barnett Berry of the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality notes, "Policy cannot mandate what matters most. We can try to capitalize on policy, but it requires leadership and vision, and a lot of push from a number of quarters to turn what could be the sow's ear into a silk purse. There is great opportunity, but no guarantee." **SEDL**

Policy cannot mandate what matters most.

— Barnett Berry, Southeast Center for Teaching Quality

Andrea Jachman is a Denver-based freelance writer and editor who specializes in the education and nonprofit sectors.

For More Information

For more information about policies and practices related to teacher quality and preparation in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, see **http://www.title2org/statereports/index.htm**.

For more information about the ESEA, visit the Department of Education Web site, **http://www.ed.gov**;

the Education Commission for the States Web site, **http://www.ecs.org**;

and the Education Week Web site, **http://www.edweek.org**.

Celebrating Diversity to Support, Student Success

By Harriett D. Romo

This article is taken from the presentation that Harriett D. Romo, Ph.D., gave at the National Rural Education Association convention in Albuquerque in October 2001. The theme for the convention, which SEDL cosponsored, was "Rural Education: Celebrating Diversity."

I began my career as a teacher in inner-city Los Angeles, in a community that was described recently in the *L.A. Times* as one of the poorest areas of the city. I first taught predominantly African-American students and then later, because I spoke Spanish, immigrants from Cuba and Mexico who arrived speaking no English. I also worked with the National Origin Desegregation Center for Language Minority Students (a Lau Center — named after the Lau v. Nichols Supreme Court Case) helping school districts provide successful programs for children who did not understand or speak English.

These work experiences impressed upon me the importance of affirming diversity. The work at the Lau Center took me to schools in isolated rural areas, in border cities, and urban centers. I learned that the reasons for students' school failures and for their successes are complex. As those of you working in public education know, there is no single magical solution, no one teaching strategy, no one program that will make all students succeed. There are, however, a variety of programs that meet important needs, that define success differently, that affirm diversity, that work well for Mexican-origin students — and for students of other backgrounds (Delpit 1995; Romo 1999; Sleeter 1996). Here I offer suggestions to make the celebration of diversity a way of affirming differences and securing student success.
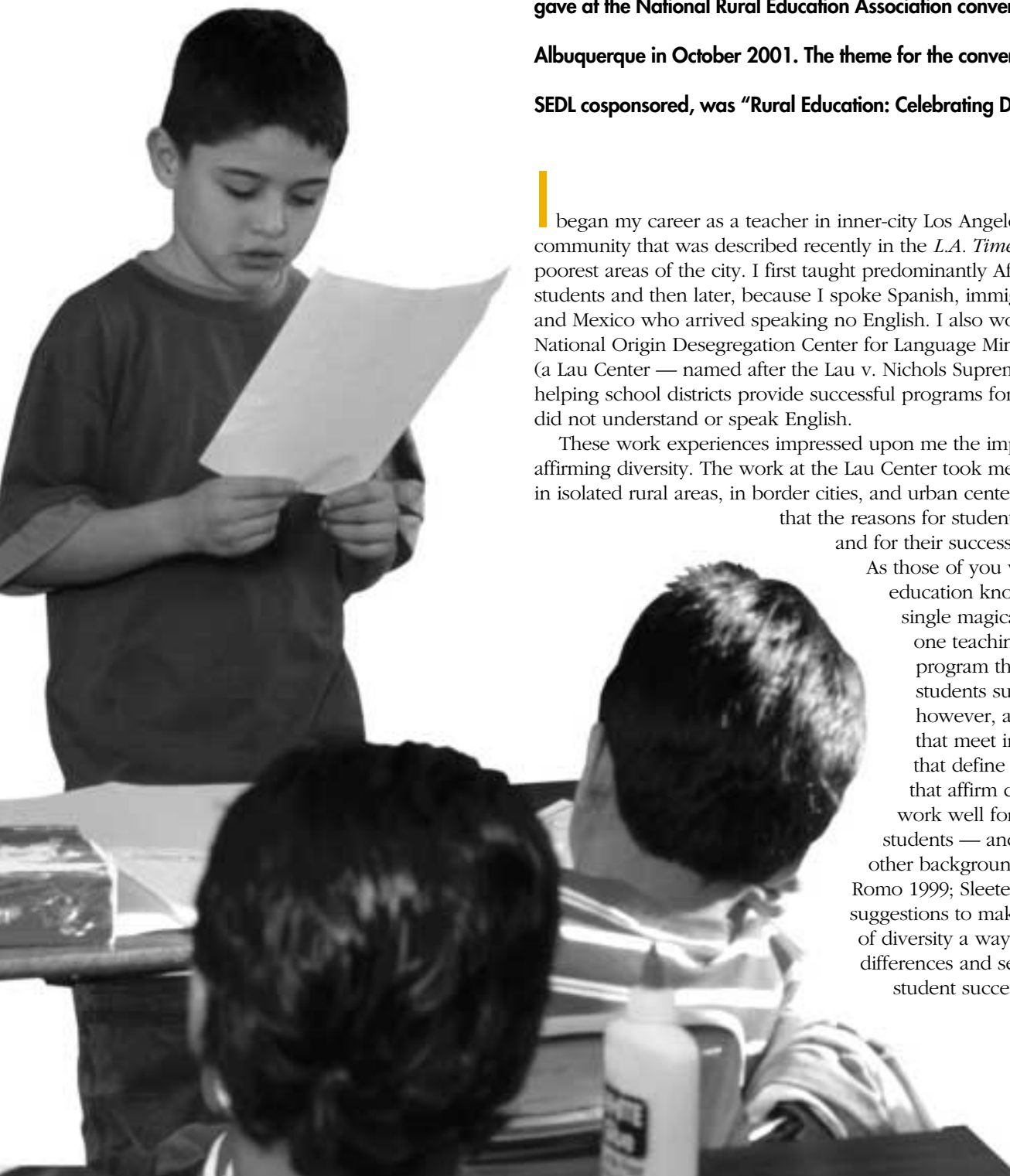
Differences in Cultural Values Influence School Success

Cultural groups define success quite differently from one another and quite differently from the definition of success used in U.S. schools. Understanding various perspectives is important because cultural differences can influence how teachers view the behaviors of students in classrooms, how children interact with teachers and other adults in the schools, and how parents perceive that school staff are treating their children. I will elaborate on each of these issues by providing examples from different cultures.

Susan Philips (1983), in her book *The Invisible Culture: Communication in Classroom and Community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation* demonstrated clearly that the successful behaviors expected of children by respected elders in the American Indian community differed significantly from the behaviors expected of children by their classroom teachers. She observed four classrooms, following students during their school activities, and then informally interviewed teachers about what she had observed. She spent time in the community, too, participating in activities and events, visiting with people in their homes, and traveling around the reservation with residents.

She concluded that many of the problems of Indian children noted by their teachers resulted from incompatibilities between Indian and Anglo systems for the regulation of turns at talk. In the Indian system of talk, the individual had maximum control over his or her own turn at talk and minimum control over the turns of others. Individuals decided when they wished to talk and did not have to be called upon to be given a turn. Address by a speaker was often general, rather than focused on a particular individual. If an individual did not pay attention in an Indian event, it did not deter the speaker from continuing to talk. Also, in Indian interaction, an immediate response to a speaker was not always necessary. An individual might ponder what a speaker had said, then respond to an earlier point after much time had passed. Individual speakers controlled the end of their turns and were not interrupted by others. In the community, young people were expected to listen carefully to their elders.

In the Anglo-system classroom, children were expected to respond immediately when called upon by the teacher. The teachers were not accustomed to allowing longer pauses between speakers' turns at talk. The teachers often allowed too little time for a response before calling on another student or asking another question. The possibility that a child might respond to questions somewhat later in the discussion was not likely to occur to the teacher. Such a response would not, in most cases, even be recognized then by the teacher as a meaningful response.

In the Indian community, the children were socialized to be cooperative and to care for siblings. They did not learn to compete for adult attention. The children were taught that it was improper to draw attention to themselves as individuals, to display knowledge, or to appear to know more than others. Talking out of turn was also considered improper behavior. Indian children would not interrupt one another or compete for attention in a group.

In the classroom, when the teachers tried to organize small-group activities, the Indian children did not participate. When the children were called upon one after another to talk, they often did not respond at all. Children who did not participate in classroom discussions were perceived as not paying attention, lacking motivation, or as less intelligent than the students who met the teachers' expectations of behaviors. Cultural differences affected the teachers' attitudes toward the Indian children and their assessments of the children's capabilities.

In my work with Mexican immigrant children, I have also noted cultural differences that affect teachers' attitudes toward children and perceptions of the children's language and literacy skills. In recent work with a community-based Head Start Program, we videotaped parent-child interactions in the homes and then videotaped the same children in their Head Start classrooms (de la Piedra and Romo in press). We found that many homes of recent immigrant, below-poverty-level children were rich in language, literacy socialization, and developmental activities. However, much as in the Philips study, the types of interactions observed in the homes were not necessarily similar to those expected in the classrooms. For example, a common assumption in the research literature regarding language and literacy socialization is that socialization transpires from adult (usually the mother but also the teacher) to child. However, in the immigrant home we found siblings played a primary role in socialization, in vocabulary building, in teaching toddlers preliteracy skills, and in language development.

In the home, adults and siblings modeled behaviors in physical ways. For example, older

Harriett D. Romo

We found that many homes of recent immigrant, below-poverty-level children were rich in language, literacy socialization, and developmental activities.

began to cry. A male student pushed her aside and blew out the candles.

After analyzing the home and classroom videos, we concluded that incompatibilities between the classroom and home teaching created a disadvantage for this child in the classroom. In the home, older children modeled appropriate behaviors and provided a supportive learning environment. For example, book reading took place as a social activity, with older children or an adult helping the toddler participate. In contrast, in the classroom she was expected to take the initiative for learning, to complete activities by herself, and to learn from verbal instructions.

In the home, the child appeared to be bright, motivated, and a quick learner. In the classroom, she appeared to lack motivation and did not participate in activities. Without an understanding of cultural differences, lack of participation might have been interpreted negatively by the teacher. The teacher's lack of understanding of these cultural differences caused the child to miss important learning opportunities.

Another incident observed in our work with Head Start illustrates how cultural differences may lead to parent-teacher misunderstandings. In an Early Head Start program serving infants and toddlers in a rural area of Texas with many Mexican immigrant families, a Mexican mother voiced concern about the treatment of the children by the teachers in the child-care center. I observed the classrooms and found the teachers to be warm and loving. Teachers followed all compliance standards of Head Start and seemed to be providing the highest quality of care. After exploring the mother's concerns in several home visits and interviews, I discovered that the mother came from a rural area of Mexico and believed in many traditional folkways. The mother explained the concept of *susto* (fright) or *mal ojo* (evil eye), a belief that if strangers startle an infant, the infant will fall ill. If adults do not kiss or touch the infant immediately, the infant may become seriously ill and possibly die. This mother had not seen the staff in the Early Head Start child-care center following any of these patterns of behavior and she was seriously concerned about the well-being of her child in their care. None of the staff, the majority of whom were U.S.-born Mexican Americans, had heard of this folkway. The teachers' lack of understanding of the mother's cultural beliefs thus led the mother to believe that teachers were not providing appropriate care for her child. If many parents held similar beliefs

sisters held a two-year-old's hand and moved it back and forth to color objects in a coloring book. They provided few verbal instructions. The mother patted a doll and then patted the two-year-old to show her how to care for a baby. Again, there were few verbal instructions. An older sister moved a toy back and forth as the toddler looked on, and then called for the toddler to try the action but gave no verbal instructions. In the home, most learning took place in small-group, social situations. Examples of these observed social situations included three older children knelt along a sofa coloring, the mother used an older child's school notebooks to share pictures with the younger child, and siblings elaborated the mother's comments. The children and their mother read English-language captions from Spanish-language television programs, laughing and helping one another with the words.

In the classroom, teachers used numerous verbalized instructions and directives but engaged in little physical modeling. In the classrooms we observed, individual children picked up books and "read" them independently or a teacher shared a book with one child. There were few shared, group-learning activities. When we observed the child we had videotaped at home in her classroom, she often stood watching and seldom participated in classroom activities. At her birthday party, she stood in front of the cake looking at the candles. The center director kept telling her in English, "Blow out the candles." Finally the little girl

and the misunderstandings were not resolved, the program would have a difficult time recruiting participants.

The examples above demonstrate cultural misunderstandings that result in lost educational opportunities. Valdés (1996, 190) noted that Mexican-origin children start school full of positive expectations. As they experience the harsh realities of cultural differences, their excitement becomes resentment and they sit sullen and silent among their more successful peers. Valdés found that teachers are unprepared to teach students who do not speak English or who come from cultural backgrounds the teachers know little about. Despite the fact that Mexican-origin families love and care for their children and are intensely concerned about their futures, teachers often believe the parents are failing their children. The Mexican parents in the Valdés study did not respond to school communications, help their children with schoolwork, or volunteer at the schools. The families had different views about childrearing and parents' responsibilities in the schools. Valdés argues strongly that when schools and teachers attempt to change parents without an understanding and an appreciation and respect for the internal dynamics of their families and the legitimacy of their values and beliefs, those intervention efforts may have negative effects on the families.

Celebrating Diversity Recognizes Different Expectations

A celebration of diversity recognizes different behavioral expectations, different ways of defining success, different patterns of socialization, and different ways that parents are involved in the education of their children (Stanton-Salazar 2001, Valdés 1996). A celebration of diversity means that teachers will accept different types of behavior in a classroom and will not make assumptions about students' abilities without thoroughly knowing each student's cultural background and experiences. It also means teachers will get to know their students' home and community cultures and appreciate diverse ways of teaching and learning that might be found in their students' cultures.

Teachers should also learn about different patterns of socialization and appreciate the different ways parents support their children's school success. For example, many parents of Mexican origin children work several jobs to make ends meet and do not have time to attend school meetings or volunteer in traditional ways. Some parents are illiterate in both English and their home language and cannot read to their children or help them with homework. Others speak only their home language and are reluctant to come to the schools because they have had few experiences with formal education in the United States. Rather than assume that these parents are not interested in the education of their children — which is certainly not true, since most families look to education as a way of improving the lives of their children — a celebration of diversity would look for the positive, but perhaps nontraditional, ways these families support the education of their children.

What does this mean for teachers, administrators, and students? There are a number of actions that each group can take to assure that a celebration of diversity has an impact on the school success of students. The following ideas are drawn from the work of scholars who celebrate diversity (Delpit 1995; Giroux 1992; Guthrie 2000; Nieto 2000; Sleeter 1996; Tatum 1997).

First, each of us can acknowledge the complexity of diversity and be willing to become engaged in dialogue regarding diversity. We can help students and adults in our schools and communities to understand the meaning of stereotypes (Guthrie 2000). We can explore the ways in which our social heritage involves deeply embedded cultural stereotypes that are

A celebration of diversity would look for the positive ways these families support the education of their children.

To truly celebrate diversity we must take postive steps to diversify our faculty and administration, and our community and school organizations.

too frequently accepted unquestioningly. We can analyze the effects that stereotypes can have on our thinking processes. To do that, we must urge students and adults to actively question the adequacy of stereotypes as a basis for an evaluation, a decision, or an action. We must encourage individuals who are meeting someone different from themselves or learning about an unfamiliar place to suspend judgment while getting to know the individual or place. We can assist students in understanding the role of evidence in the formation and justification of a viewpoint and help them weigh and evaluate evidence. We can encourage them to take stands on controversial issues based on evidence instead of commonly held stereotypes.

We can help students appreciate the richness of multiple interpretations. Many students — even at the college level — want the "expert" to tell them the right answer. They do not realize that many interpretations contribute to a fuller understanding of the subject at hand.

We can incorporate an affirmation of diversity throughout our curriculum and our school activities (Nieto 2000), and not just for such special occasions as Black History Month or Mexican Independence Day. This means, for example, that math problems might have examples of calculating the distance in kilometers as well as miles, that word problems might involve cooking, auto repair, or Navajo rug weaving. Writing assignments can reflect a diversity of topics, and library books should be available in English and in other languages that are represented in local communities. Music classes might include salsa, gospel singing, and folksongs as well as classical music.

To truly celebrate diversity we must take positive steps to diversify our faculty and administration, and our community and school organizations. Learning and working alongside others of different racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds significantly enhances our own educational experiences. Often, we live in communities, work with, and socialize only with people of our same ethnic or socioeconomic group (Tatum 1997). Research has shown that *all* of us are enriched through interactions with other racial and ethnic groups. Building communities within and across diverse racial and ethnic groups results in our building a knowledge base and enhanced skills that allow us to engage in actions that are proactive or preventive in nature, rather than being responsive or reactive to negative incidents as they occur.

We can all seek new experiences that will expose us to diverse people, ideas, and ways of doing things. The tragic events of September 11 made us aware of how little we know about the Islamic religion or the Muslim community in the United States. We can read about other groups and read what they write. Fiction and poetry, as well as nonfiction can help us understand different cultural perspectives.

We can visit religious institutions, museums, schools, and community-based organizations in racial or ethnic neighborhoods that are different from our own. We can go with a friend to an ethnic event — a religious service or ceremony, a special celebration, a musical or art event, or just a tour of the neighborhood — that is different from our own.

Above all, we must make certain that our school is a setting that values diversity and promotes community among all persons. In addition to teaching about the value of diversity in our classrooms, we must also address incidents of intolerance whenever we see them. To fail to do so is to be seen as concurring with them.

We can encourage diversity courses or in-service sessions for our staff members. Research has shown that persons who participate in effectively structured diversity courses show changes in attitudes and knowledge as a result of their participation (Humphreys 2000). Sometimes we do not even realize we hold certain biases or stereotypes about a group or groups until we are allowed to examine issues of power and oppression,

attitudes toward particular cultures or languages, and our own levels of tolerance. Well-developed and well-taught diversity courses can affect our perspectives and behaviors in the school context, on our skills in working with the public, and in our attitudes and behaviors outside the school context.

Responsibility for Celebrating Diversity Is Everyone's

Celebrating diversity is everyone's responsibility. Schools have a culture of their own. A school that celebrates diversity sponsors extracurricular activities that reflect diversity and assures that all students can participate. This means considering cost, transportation, scheduling, and parental values about participation in the activities. Schools can also be organized to avoid academic tracking that is identifiable by racial or ethnic group. It takes the effort of all school staff to establish an environment for safe discussion of diversity issues.

Teachers are key agents in assuring the academic success of all students. Celebrating diversity means that teachers must have high academic expectations of all students. Teachers must be able to form caring and mentoring relationships and provide positive role models across many different cultural and language groups. Research has shown that teachers do make a difference (Romo and Falbo 1996; Valenzuela 1999). Teachers who take the time to get to know their students as individuals and

to learn about their students' experiences and cultures can mean the difference for some youths between staying in or leaving school.

Administrators must provide leadership that affirms diversity. That means taking opportunities to speak out for diversity and supporting teachers who celebrate diversity.

Communities can provide resources, extracurricular activities promoting diversity, and an environment that celebrates diversity.

Parents may not become engaged in the school in traditional ways (Lareau 1989; Valdés 1996), but they can still celebrate diversity. All parents can see that their culture is accurately represented and can share experiences that help students better understand and develop pride in their own ethnic background and culture. Parents can also assure that their children respect the cultures and experiences of others.

Research has shown that students are capable of crossing cultural boundaries. Those who develop the skills to do so are more successful in school and in their communities than those who do not develop such skills. Children from all groups come to our schools eager to learn. Children and parents from all groups look to education as a way to have a better life. Teachers, administrators, and families can make a difference. We can help students cross cultural boundaries if we are willing to cross them ourselves. If we truly celebrate diversity, we will look beyond festivals, foods, fashions, and folkways for ways to structure our classrooms, our schools, our communities and our programs in ways that affirm diversity and promote success for all.

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SEDL

Dr. Harriet Romo is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is principal investigator for the UTSA Head Start-Higher Education Latino Service Partnership and a co-principal investigator for "A Study of San Antonio as a Transnational City," funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.

The Promise of EBIT
Improving Achievement among Students with Disabilities

By Johanna Franke

A teacher has a student with a hearing impairment among the 25 fifth graders in her classroom. She wants to teach a lesson using virtual-rainforest software to help her students experience the sights and sounds of the rainforest. She realizes the student with a hearing impairment will not be able to hear the animal sounds, but she decides that the student will pick up enough from the lesson by watching the program on the computer.

A second teacher is teaching the same lesson with the same software to the same types of students. He thinks the student with a hearing impairment should experience as many of the sounds on the virtual rainforest software as possible, so he obtains the captioning for the software and imports it into the program.

A third teacher also is using the software to teach the same lesson to the same types of students. Like the previous teachers, she wants her students to learn how animals communicate and use sounds as warnings. Using the virtual-rainforest software as a tool, the teacher creates an assignment for which her students are tribes living in the rainforest. She asks each tribe to develop a warning system that can be used by everyone, including the tribe member with a hearing impairment. The students take a cue from the animals in the rainforest for their warning system — when they sense danger, they become very still. They sign the word "danger," which they learned how to do from their hearing-impaired classmate. This student-centered, problem-oriented approach includes the student with a hearing impairment and teaches the students in the class that hearing impairments are physical differences that are part of society and need to be considered not only in the development of a warning system but also in other facets of life.
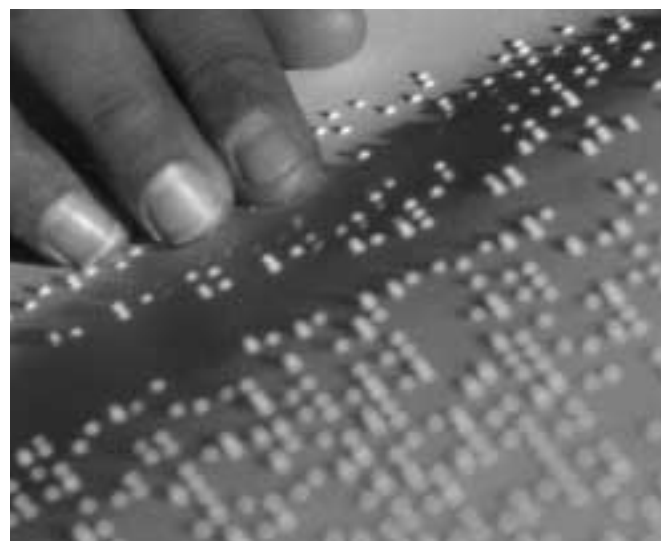
Software and computer technologies are commonplace in classrooms, but the scenario given makes it apparent that how technology is used in the classroom can make a difference in student learning. In this scenario, provided by Pat Guerra, a Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) program associate working in the Special Education and Rehabilitations Services Program, three different teachers are using information technology or IT, in their lesson plans.

IT includes software applications and operating systems; Web-based information and such applications as distance learning, telephones and other telecommunications products, video equipment and multimedia products that may be distributed on videotapes, CDs, DVDs, or the World Wide Web; calculators; and computer hardware. Because it is being used in classroom instruction, the rainforest software is a particular information technology called education-based information technology, or EBIT.

While the first two teachers in the scenario allow the technology to deliver their lessons, according to Guerra the third teacher has effectively applied EBIT to introduce all of her students to the rainforest. She not only gives her hearing-impaired student access to the software but also uses the technology as a tool to help the students solve the problem of communication in their simulated rainforest.

The Role of Technology in Teaching Students with Disabilities

About 96 percent of children with disabilities attend regular schools, and three-quarters of students with disabilities are being educated in regular education classrooms with nondisabled children for a significant part of the school day. Despite this, many students with disabilities still lack access to the kind of instruction their classmates receive, and consequently to the lessons they are learning. In classrooms throughout the country, many of the students with disabilities are participating in "drill and kill" activities while their classmates forge ahead on assignments based on increasingly higher state standards.

In the past decade, educators have come to recognize the powerful role that properly implemented technology can play in helping all students — including those with disabilities — master mandated curricula. But just as students with disabilities do not necessarily have the same access to instruction as their peers, they do not have the same access to technology as their nondisabled classmates, says John Westbrook, director of SEDL's Special Education and Rehabilitation Services Program. "A variety of information technologies are being used more frequently as instructional tools in America's classrooms, but the misuse of education-based information technologies threatens to place students who cannot fully use or benefit from them at a significant disadvantage from their peers," he says.

Before the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 (IDEA), "children with disabilities were segregated and given different types of instruction because people thought they could not join a regular classroom," says Wendy Wilkinson, project director for Southwest Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center (Southwest DBTAC), based in Houston. "This is the challenge with technology, too. We have to make sure these children are not segregated by virtue of their being unable, through the lack of accessible information technology, to access the world of learning opportunities available via technology."

All too often, however, schools spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on technology, only to realize the technology they have acquired does not match the needs of the students with disabilities or that teachers lack the skills to integrate the technology into the curriculum. An expensive piece of equipment ends up underused or collecting dust on a shelf. But what would happen if a school had the resources to purchase and offer all students access to information technologies? What if each student's carefully considered needs dictated the purchase of technologies rather than a vendor's marketing expertise? What if teachers received the proper training that enabled them to incorporate technologies into student centered instruction? Then students with disabilities would have a better chance at keeping up with their peers, who, in turn would develop a better understanding about their classmates with disabilities. Such a result is the promise of education-based information technologies that are accessible to students with disabilities and appropriately infused into the instructional strategies of their teachers.

A Partnership to Support Improved Access and Instruction

Last year the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) charged the nation's 10 DBTACs with providing children, youth, and adults with disabilities access to information technology. NIDRR also established the National Center on Accessible Information Technology in Education (AccessIT), based at the University of

Useful Definitions

The Assistive Technology Act of 1998 defines **assistive technology** as any item, piece of equipment, or system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is commonly used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Examples include wheelchairs, hearing aids, keyboards with large keys, text telephones, and software that reads text on the screen in a computer-generated voice.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 defines **information technology** as any equipment or interconnected systems or subsystem of equipment used in the creation, conversion, or duplication of data or information.

The U.S. Department of Education defines **education-based information technology** as any information technology that is used by either students or employees of educational entities, including, but not limited to, teachers, administrators, and administrative staff.

Washington in Seattle, to collaborate with the DBTACs and develop materials on making EBIT accessible.

The Southwest DBTAC which serves the same states that SEDL does — Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas — has partnered with the Better Business Bureau Consumer Education Foundation, the New Mexico Technology Assistance Project, the Region VI Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program, SEDL, assistive technology projects in each state, such as Communications Accessibility for State Associates (CASA) Network, and several centers for independent living to carry out NIDRR's mandate.

Wilkinson and DBTAC partners, including Bill Newroe, an assistive technologist with CASA Network in Santa Fe, New Mexico, are reviewing state education technology and procurement plans to learn what the five states ask of their schools in terms of requiring that their information technology be accessible. Then the DBTAC partners will be available to provide assistance to state education policymakers in

Equal Access Guaranteed by Law

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 defined the rights of children with disabilities to attend public schools, while Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA provided additional protections to a broader class of children, including requiring new schools to be architecturally accessible. Section 504 and the ADA also require that students with disabilities have access to the same academic services, programs, and activities as their nondisabled classmates, which includes access to their schools' technological infrastructures.

adjusting these guidelines to make sure they meet technological accessibility standards.

Newroe said CASA Network will work with K–12 and postsecondary school network administrators as well as classroom computer teachers to "ensure accessibility to information technology in resource rooms, computer labs, and other areas where all students access information through information technology systems." In the next six months, Newroe hopes to develop an electronic and information technology accessibility resource exchange and expert consultation registry of information technology personnel and their school systems. CASA Network will offer an information technology expert referral service, technical assistance, and training for primary and secondary schools in the five states.

EBIT and Student-Centered Teaching and Learning

While other partners work to ensure accessibility in the five states, SEDL is working to expand the definition of EBIT into a student-centered model of teaching and learning to help special education staff integrate technology into their classroom practice. Westbrook sums up the challenge: "Public schools' education-based information technologies must be carefully chosen and *implemented* to ensure the maximum accessibility to the school curriculum and classroom by all students."

"If you appropriately use technology, doors will open for all students, including those with disabilities," Westbrook says. "But it's not just about training on how to use technology. It's about the way teachers teach."

Implementing education-based information technology in the way Westbrook describes requires professional development that includes raising a school staff's awareness of EBIT to modeling student-centered teaching so teachers can change their philosophy and practice of teaching to offering teachers the training and technical assistance they need to effectively use EBIT in their classrooms.

SEDL plans not only to make the technology more accessible but also to model and support teaching with technology by infusing technology into curriculum instruction and offering EBIT professional development and technical assistance. In doing so, Westbrook, Guerra, and other SEDL staff will draw upon SEDL's previous technology work that helps teachers create student-centered learning environments supported by technology. This earlier work —

rooted in the constructivist theory of learning, which is informed by cognitive psychology, educational research, and neurological science — says that learners take in information, process it to fit their personal frameworks, and build new understanding. SEDL's professional development modules and technical assistance program inform teachers about constructivism, or "student-centered learning" and show what it looks like in a classroom. SEDL also models how teachers can use technology as a tool to further instruction.

Westbrook believes this same learning theory, professional development, and technical assistance adapted for special education teachers could improve achievement among students with disabilities and make better use of a school's education-based information technologies. Because of SEDL's experience in creating student-centered models of learning and the networks of teachers and professional development providers that SEDL staff have built through programs such as the Regional Education Laboratory, the Southwest Consortium for the Improvement of Mathematics and Science Teaching, and the SouthCentral Technology in Education Consortium, Westbrook says "SEDL was an obvious choice" to partner with Southwest DBTAC in helping public schools to effectively weave the constructivism-EBIT combination into K–12 curricula.

SEDL will provide the mechanism for reaching, informing, and educating school personnel about the acquisition and use of accessible information technology hardware and software for students with disabilities. SEDL also will produce an education-based information technology (EBIT) Web site and publications, develop modules for teacher professional development programs, and establish an EBIT listserv for school personnel.

Through their efforts, all Southwest DBTAC partners expect to help schools overcome the hurdles to accessible EBIT and assistive technology to improve achievement not just among students with disabilities but all students, Wilkinson explains. "Accessible technologies work for everyone."

Johanna Franke is a SEDL communications specialist. You may contact Johanna at jfranke@sedl.org.

Online Technology Information for Special Education Staff

The following organizations, publications, and resources feature information on education-based information technology legislation, events, funding, and product reviews.

AccessIT

The National Center on Accessible Information Technology in Education (AccessIT), based at the University of Washington in Seattle, serves to increase the access of individuals with disabilities to information technology in educational institutions at all academic levels nationwide. The U.S. Department of Education's National Institute onDisability and Rehabilitation Research funds AccessIT and its site at **www.washington.edu/accessit**, which contains case studies, promising practices, and a growing database of frequently asked questions on accessible information technology in education.

Closing the Gap

Closing The Gap, Inc., at **www.closingthegap.com**, focuses on computer technology in special education and rehabilitation through its bimonthly newspaper, annual international conference, and Web site. The site's resource directory features a "product of the week."

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

The CEC, at **www.cec.sped.org**, is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and the gifted. The site includes discussion forums and information about publications and professional development events.

Information Technology Technical Assistance Training Center (ITTATC)

ITTATC, at **www.ittatc.org**, promotes the development of accessible electronic and information technology by providing technical assistance, training, and information. The site contains information on upcoming Web casts and events, as well as technical assistance, training, and publications.

National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum (NCAC)

NCAC, at **www.cast.org/ncac**, works to show how the combination of new curricula, teaching practices, and policies can create practical approaches for improved access to the general curriculum by students with disabilities.

National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)

The National Center on Educational Outcomes, at **www.education.umn.edu/nceo**, provides national leadership in the participation of students with disabilities in national and state assessments, standards-setting efforts, and graduation requirements. This site features information on accommodations, accountability, alternate assessments, and universal design, and includes a new online accommodations bibliography that allows users to search a compilation of empirical research studies on the effects of various testing accommodations for students with disabilities.

Online Publications

Connecting Student Learning and Technology

This 1999 Southwest Educational Development Laboratory online publication at **www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/tec26.html** discusses constructivism, a theory of learning that provides a valuable framework for using computers and other technology in productive, interesting ways. This is not a nuts-and-bolts manual, but it examines using technology in environments that support learning.

Constructing Knowledge with Technology: A Review of the Literature

Another Southwest Educational Development Laboratory online publication produced in 1999, *Constructing Knowledge with Technology* begins with a review of the literature on constructivist learning theory and outlines some of its implications for the classroom. Next, the various characteristics of a constructivist learning environment are explored, followed by a discussion on how technology, specifically computers and online networks, can support changes in classroom practice aligned with the implications of constructivist learning theory. A full-text version is available at **www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/tec27.html**.

Empowering Rural Students with Disabilities through Assistive Technology

This 1995 Southwest Educational Development Laboratory online publication at **www.sedl.org/rural/seeds/assistivetech/welcome.html** is still pertinent today, as it provides an overall perspective on the field of adaptive and assistive technology and issues related to its use in rural schools. The discussion addresses devices available for students, the legal mandates related to the use of assistive technology in schools, funding for assistive technology devices and services, existing support systems in the Southwest Region, implications for rural school administration, and resources to help educators who are planning and implementing assistive technology programs.

Twenty-Five Years of Educating Children with Disabilities: The Good News and the Work Ahead

A PDF version of this publication is available through the American Youth Policy Forum site at **http://64.226.111.21/pubs.htm**. It includes statistics showing the progress made during the past quarter-century in educating children with disabilities and how much more needs to be done to prepare all students with disabilities for a productive and independent future.

What Are the Barriers to the Use of Advanced Telecommunications for Students with Disabilities in Public Schools?

In 1996, the National Center for Education Statistics surveyed approximately 1,000 school administrators about the use of advanced telecommunications in their school, including use by students with disabilities. The results of this survey are posted at **http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/qrtlyspring/4elem/q4-7.html**.

Hatch

Hatch Valley Public Schools On the Road to Higher Achievement

By Leslie Blair

Nestled against the Sierras de las Uvas in southern New Mexico, the Hatch Valley is steeped in a tradition of family-owned farming and ranching. Hatch is a quiet community surrounded by chile fields and pecan orchards dependent on the Rio Grande for irrigation. Many area families rely upon migrant farm work, although they reside most of the year in the valley. Students from migrant families are likely to miss the beginning and end of the school year and return late to school after the Christmas break. This attendance pattern, coupled with a high percentage of students (75 percent) with limited English proficiency, creates instructional challenges that the district must address in order to raise achievement.

Like the more than 400 schools labeled as low performing in SEDL's five-state region, Hatch Valley Public Schools have low standardized test scores and lack the capacity — skills, knowledge and resources — to make significant, lasting improvements in student achievement by themselves. Unlike many of these schools, however, the Hatch schools are on the road to improvement. The school district has spent the past two years creating a climate in which instruction can flourish. Superintendent Billy Henson has overseen the upgrading of facilities, which have been described as the jewels of the community. The school buildings, however, are not the district's only assets.

"Our biggest asset," says associate superintendent Georgia Lane, "is our staff. Everyone wants to figure out how to better serve our students — from the central office staff to the principals, teachers, and custodians."

Not only are staff members on board, but the students themselves are as well. Lane reports that the secondary students see the need to achieve at higher levels. "This year we've pushed hard and opened their eyes to the need to do better," she says. "They want to send out a different message than we're sending out now through our test scores."

Hatch Valley is one of about twenty districts that SEDL is working with in a systemic way

The Rio Grande provides life-giving water to crops in the Hatch Valley.

to help transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities by building the capacity of the schools and districts to improve teaching and learning over the long run. Two schools in each district are participating in the five-year project along with the central office. This work is being conducted under SEDL's Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) with the U.S. Department of Education.

Most of the schools and districts with which SEDL is working have adopted multiple improvement programs. Joan Buttram, SEDL executive vice president and chief operating officer, explains, "Many of these schools find a problem, then find a program to address

Associate superintendent Georgia Lane

Below: Hatch Valley Middle School principal Mario Zuniga participates in a staff seminar. Zuniga was awarded one of SEDL's Education Leaders Fellowships. The fellows will come to Austin this summer to work with SEDL staff on a number of issues and research projects.

that problem. They find *another* problem and another program to address that problem. But then they face the task of how to fit all of the programs together to build coherence for teachers and students. We want schools to move away from that piecemeal, revolving-door approach to improvement, to a concerted effort to ensure long-term student success."

SEDL's partnership with the schools and districts includes long-term technical assistance in assessing school and district needs, focusing improvement efforts, and implementing strategies to strengthen instruction, especially in the core subjects of reading and math.

Because the systemic approach requires all components of the educational system — standards, curriculum and instruction, assessment, policy and governance, professional staff, resources, and family and community — to be integrated in the improvement process, it helps build strong school cultures that foster professional and student growth. Five competencies must be mastered by the schools and districts in order to address each of those components:

• collecting, interpreting, and using data,
• creating coherence,
• forging alliances,
• building capacity, and
• promoting innovation.

A vital element of SEDL's partnerships is a research component that will help determine how schools best make the transition to a high-performing learning community. The research examines how schools and districts can work simultaneously on multiple levels and master the competencies needed to become a high-performing learning community. The research also identifies the pathways that are most successful in supporting the transformation and include the development of tools and strategies to help schools and districts make the transformation.

SEDL program manager David Rainey, who is leading the REL field work, describes SEDL's initial work with Hatch and other partner districts: "SEDL is helping the staff take a close, critical look at student and other data. We're facilitating discussions of the data at multiple levels of the system, district, and school to get to the root causes of the schools' problems. We are also assisting schools and districts in developing strategies to address those problems."

And that type of assistance is what Georgia Lane has seen as so valuable in the district's first year of working with SEDL. "The SEDL partnership has provided us with an avenue

to explore the possible causes of the areas of concern in our district," she says. "It has given us the opportunity to analyze data and not just use perception as a tool to make decisions." Lane says that for her staff, "working through misconsceptions has been difficult." She explains, "People do not want to give up their beliefs even if they are not supported by data."

Hatch staff are not the only school team members struggling with data and perceptions. Rainey reports that many schools and districts have been surprised by their school profiles that emerge from the extensive data collection and analysis process, called a data scan. It includes gathering standardized and state-mandated test scores and school assessment scores, all disaggregated by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, grade, subject, teacher, and objective as well as by such special populations of students as special education students, students with limited English proficiency, and gifted and talented students. The data scan also includes gathering and analyzing other sources such as the district and school improvement plans, the school calendar, the faculty staff handbook, the student handbook, district and school budgets, internal communications, and regularly published and disseminated communications, such as parent or staff newsletters.

"The staffs learn that their perceptions aren't supported by the data collected. They are also amazed by the number of fragmented programs that become apparent once the data scan is completed," Rainey says.

After the data scan is complete, SEDL staff members help the districts develop vertical leadership teams. Rainey stresses the importance of the diversity of the leadership teams to working systemically. The teams therefore

What is a High-Performing Learning Community?

In response to continuing low achievement in many of our nation's schools, the Office of Educational Research & Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education gave the ten Regional Educational Laboratories this charge for the years 2001–2005: to support the efforts of states, districts, schools, communities, institutions of higher education and others to transform low performing schools into high-performing learning that meet the needs of all students. But what is a high-performing learning community?

High-performing learning communities produce high levels of achievement for all students and are able to sustain these high levels of achievement as their environment changes and challenges arise.

Schools and districts that are high-performing learning communities are characterized by having

- a shared vision that links students to high learning standards;
- a supportive organizational structure that organizes space, time, and resources to maximize student learning;
- a challenging curriculum and engaged student learning that reflects high standards in all content areas and high expectations for all students' learning;
- a collaborative culture that is supportive of continuous improvement by students, teachers, and other adults;
- proactive community relations that encourage schools to become not only a community resource but also a place where parents and community members are active participants in student learning and in the life of the school; and
- facilitative leadership that makes it possible for the school or district to move forward in the change process by guiding and supporting faculty and staff and by instituting policies and procedures that help them move through the process and meet the needs of all students.

Sources:

Berman, P., J. Ericson, S. Aburto, A. Lashaw, and M. Thompson. (1998). *Understanding High Performance Learning Communities: A Literature Review.* Emeryville, California: RPP International.

Hord, S. M. (1992). *Facilitative Leadership: The Imperative for Change.* Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

SEDL program manager Shirley Hord interviews Luis Barreras, the sole counselor for Hatch Valley Middle School.

Maria O'Brien, from the Hatch Valley Public Schools central administration office, discusses district data with SEDL program associate Joe Parker.

include a cross-section of stakeholders — classroom teachers, school and district administrators and support personnel, parents, and community leaders. The teams are engaged in collectively interpreting the findings from the data scan, and also make a decision about whether the district should begin working systemically on improving mathematics or reading achievement.

The next stage of the SEDL process is a systems exploration — a district self-assessment that will lead to the leadership team's developing a problem statement and determining the root causes of the challenges facing the district. SEDL has developed a self-assessment instrument which addresses the six characteristics that help define a high-performing learning community — shared vision, supportive organizational structure, challenging curriculum and engaged student learning, culture of continuous inquiry and improvement, facilitative leadership, and supportive relationships between the system and surroundings. Each team member completes an assessment and the team works through the issues brought out in the assessments. Providing evidence and data for each item on the assessment instrument is an important piece of the overall self assessment. The assessment is then used to plan future work and activities that promotes becoming a high-performing learning community.

Becoming a high-performing learning community is a long-term, difficult process for the schools. Rainey explains that most schools are accustomed to quick fixes. In the case of low test scores, for example, the initial

SEDL program specialist Tara Leo reviews a school survey with social studies teacher Doc Lopez.

The Power of Data

SEDL staff have been helping school staff learn to disaggregate and analyze data. Data analysis is one of the skills important to schools in meeting their immediate needs, such as a short time line to pull up state test scores, but it is also necessary to sustain long-term school improvement.

As a testament to the power of disaggregating data, Hatch Valley Schools associate superintendent Georgia Lane relays a story of one of the Hatch High School teachers. During the district's new teacher induction program, one of the days is devoted to disaggregating the data of students who will be in individual classrooms. The teacher came to Lane after a long day of analyzing data and making charts. She told Lane, "Now I am going to have to redo my lesson plans. My students are nowhere near at the level I thought they would be. I am going to have to rethink what I will do in the classroom." Lane reports, "I am very pleased to say that she was the most successful teacher this year in terms of state-mandated tests. We just received these scores. Her students did extremely well."

reaction may be to rush in with staff development. "But the problems are more complex," he says. To help sustain the work, SEDL is working to build staff skills and capacity to meet the immediate needs of the district while building the structures and support needed to become a high-performing learning community and maintain it over time.

SEDL staff who are working intensively with the 20 districts stress that SEDL's role is not to provide answers but to help provide school staff with the resources and skills *and* the pressure and support they need to work through the improvement process. And that is just the sort of help Lane realized her staff needed. "We're really excited. Our teachers have just worked so hard at improvement, but we've gone as far as we can go by ourselves. We hope that SEDL can get us there a little faster. You can make the leaps required for school improvement if you know how to do it." **SEDL**

Leslie Blair is a SEDL communications associate and editor of SEDLetter. *You may reach Leslie at lblair@sedl.org.*

Superintendent Billy Henson is always happy to show off the student artwork on display in the central office.

A new high school is now under construction.

Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center

and assessment tools, and data collection and analysis to inform instruction and determine the most effective intervention strategies. Parkin Principal Becky Gibson believes RSN put the school on the road to improving teacher performance, raising student test scores, and getting the district off the academic distress list.

After two years of participating in RSN, Parkin experienced the highest gain in reading scores in Arkansas for the students in the bottom quartile. And consequently, was removed from the academic distress list in May 2001.

"The networking was the most important thing," said Gibson. "With more access to learning opportunities, the students are better able to measure up to outside standards."

Parkin wasn't the only school that has showed great improvement. Regional RSN evaluations for the 2000–2001 school year showed an increase of 31 percent of second graders reading on or above grade level, and an increase of 35 percent of third graders reading on or above grade level. **SEDL**

Spotlight on the

Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center

Delivering Professional Development and Technical Assistance that Helps Educators Improve Student Learning

SEDL's Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC) focuses on improving learning for all students in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia. One of 15 comprehensive technical assistance centers authorized by the U.S. Department of Education under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, SECAC works with tribal governments, state education agencies, intermediary education agencies, districts, and schools on issues as diverse as reading, English as a second language, schoolwide planning, and safe and drug-free schools. SECAC has a state team leader for each of the five states who coordinates activities in his or her state, and keeps other SECAC staff members abreast of the educational climate in the state. Much of SECAC's work is tailored to meet the individual needs of the agency, district, or school with which SECAC's staff is working

Reading Success Network Helps Increase Reading Achievement

The Reading Success Network is one of the most successful projects of the 15 Comprehensive Assistance Centers across the country. Here is how SECAC and RSN helped one Arkansas school.

Parkin Elementary had been on the Arkansas distressed school list since the list was started. In 1999, 88 percent of the district's fifth graders scored in the lowest quartile on the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) norm-referenced test. SECAC introduced Parkin to the Reading Success Network (RSN) process, a collaborative effort by all of the Comprehensive Assistance Centers process used in the Reading Success Network (RSN). RSN supports a teacher's efforts in the classroom through a combination of activities that include peer coaching, the use of reading