Strengthening Literacy Programs and Instruction

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President Barack Obama's framework for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), *A Blueprint for Reform* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), outlines a re-envisioned federal role in achieving the 2020 national goal of a world-class education for all students. Viewing this goal as a prerequisite for success, a national priority, and a moral imperative, President Obama is convinced that this investment will make postsecondary education more accessible and will result in improving teaching and learning for all students. This blueprint builds on key priorities:

1. College- and Career-Ready Students
2. Great Teachers and Leaders in Every School
3. Equity and Opportunity for All Students
4. Raise the Bar and Reward Excellence
5. Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Encompassed within the first priority, College- and Career-Ready Students, and within the broader context of a complete education in all content areas for all students, is literacy. This blueprint requires that states design and implement comprehensive, evidence-based, preK–12 literacy plans; they must also align federal, state, and local funds to provide high-quality literacy instruction. In addition, states must provide a) high-quality, effective professional development that focuses on high-quality state- and locally-determined curriculum, instructional materials, assessment and interventions that ensure that all students must be served appropriately; and b) language- and text–rich classroom environments that engage and motivate students. States may also include professional development on family literacy, improved library services, and other reform efforts to improve literacy.

To provide support for this enormous task, this issue of the eBulletin focuses on literacy, specifically on how states can strengthen their literacy programs or plans and provide effective professional development and technical assistance for high-need districts in their efforts to implement quality literacy instruction.

Steps to Take

In order to accomplish this task or goal, states should consider taking the following steps:

1. Logistics
   a. Organize a task force with representatives from all stakeholder groups.
   b. Establish a working timeline.
2. Research Support
   a. Decide on a definition of literacy within the context of standards, a clear vision and mission, and comprehensive instructional needs.
   b. Gather and review key research and samples of other states' literacy plans.
3. Requirements
   a. Become knowledgeable about the requirements for an evidence-based, comprehensive statewide literacy plan.

Challenges

A review of the statistics on the literacy achievement of American students clearly shows why improving literacy achievement is at the forefront of educational reform efforts. Although some progress has been made, "the majority of students still do not read or write well enough to meet grade-level demands" (Graham & Hebert, 2010, p. 3). Consider the following causes for concern as stated in this 2010 Carnegie Corporation report, Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading:

- Forty percent of high school graduates lack the literacy skills employers seek (National Governors Association, 2005).
- Lack of basic skills costs universities and businesses as much as $16 billion annually (Greene, 2000).
- Poor writing skills cost businesses $3.1 billion annually (National Commission on Writing, 2004).
- Only one out of three students is a proficient reader (Lee, Grig, & Donahue, 2007).
- Only one out of four 12th-grade students is a proficient writer (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008).

- One out of every five college freshmen must take a remedial reading course (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2006).
- Nearly one third of high school graduates are not ready for college-level English composition courses (ACT, 2005).
- Three out of ten high school students do not graduate on time (Gewertz, 2009).
- Over half of adults scoring at the lowest literacy levels are dropouts (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005).

According to Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, and Sum (2007) approximately one half to two thirds of new jobs are projected to require a college education and higher-level literacy skills. The demands for higher-level literacy skills coupled with America's need to be competitive in a global age of information and communication technology places increasing pressure to strengthen and improve literacy instruction and programs.

Definitions of Literacy

For many years, literacy, or simply reading, was viewed as decoding or having the skills to interpret print. But, our ever–changing world has also meant changes in not only how we view literacy, but also in the skills needed to be literate in today's society—analysis, evaluation, synthesis, inference, and interpretation of complex representations from a variety of disciplines and subjects, including texts, artwork, photographs, and data.

According to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Section 203, and as listed on the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) Web site (updated 2009), literacy is "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society."

Patricia Edwards, president of the International Reading Association, argued that one way to address the needs of the increasingly diverse student populations and today's society is by expanding or reconceptualizing the field's definitions of literacy, emphasizing in *Reading Today* (June 2010) that there is a wide range of terms and definitions currently being used (e.g., 21st century literacies, internet literacies, digital literacies, financial literacies, new media literacies, multiple literacies, information literacy, ICT [information and communication technologies] literacies, computer literacy, etc.).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the "Nation's Report Card" and considered to be the national indicator of what American students know and can do, separates literacy into reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. NAEP defines reading as "an active and complex process that involves understanding written text, developing and interpreting meaning, and using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation" (National Assessment Governing Board, 2006, p. iv). In fact, the 2009 NAEP called for two types of text on the assessment with both literary (e.g., fiction, literary nonfiction, and poetry) and informational (e.g., exposition, argumentation, persuasion, and procedural documents) content being assessed.

However, the definition that seems to align most closely with *A Blueprint for Reform* is the one developed by Torgesen et al., (2007), which narrows down literacy to school or academic literacy, and is defined as

> the kind of reading proficiency required to construct the meaning of content-area texts and literature encountered in school. It also encompasses the kind of reading proficiencies typically assessed on state-level accountability measures, such as the ability to make inferences from text, to learn new vocabulary from context, to link ideas across texts, and to identify and summarize the most important ideas or content within a text. Notice that the definition of academic literacy includes not only the ability to read text for initial understanding but also the ability to think about its meaning in order to answer questions that may require the student to make inferences or draw conclusions. Our definition of academic literacy also includes the ability to learn from text, in the sense that full comprehension of text meaning usually results in new understandings or new learning. (p. 3)

Key Research on Early Literacy

Birth to Grade 3

A quiet crisis among America's children from birth to 3 and their families, particularly of low-income, creates a readiness gap that continues through formal schooling and persistently leads to an achievement gap. Consider the following risk factors and how they serve to undermine the ability to improve literacy thus interfering with learning and school success.

- Low birth weight, premature births, congenital health problems or exposure to prenatal toxic substances
- Lack of participation in high-quality early childhood and prekindergarten programs
- Isolated parents
- Poverty (unsafe neighborhoods, higher incidence of health problems, and poor access to quality child care, health services, or family support programs)
- Lack of resources and opportunities for physical, linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development

(Fiester, 2010; Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994)

Hence, many children lack sufficient attention and interaction with their parents, such as being read to and having access to books. By age 3, children from wealthier families have heard about 30 million more words than children from low-income families (Hart & Risley, 1995). The Annie E. Casey Foundation's

2010 report, Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters, outlines recommendations to ensure that America solves the crisis in grade-level reading proficiency. The first recommendation is "to develop a coherent system of early care and education that aligns, integrates, and coordinates what happens from birth through third grade so children are ready to take on learning tasks associated with fourth grade and beyond" (p. 27). A more systematic approach to early care and education would replace fragmented efforts with a system that reflects good child development as well as makes economic sense.

A coordinated system encompasses a seamless transition on a continuum of child development and education at each stage, such as birth through 3, prekindergarten, and K–3. In addition to a seamless transition, several other resources and tools are necessary to build capacity for achieving the targeted result of grade-level reading proficiency by grade 3 and thus improve literacy achievement for all of America's students:

- Consistent aligned expectations for health development from birth to grade 3

- Appropriate comparable instruments for measuring results

- Content-rich developmentally appropriate curricula linked to standards and assessments

- Infrastructure to track children's progress toward results, individualized teaching strategies and interventions

- Aligned professional development system and sufficient compensation to ensure a well-trained, competent, and qualified workforce

- Provision of high-quality resources, networks, services, and programming

- Encouragement for reading embedded in the agencies and institutions that interact with young children and families

- Funding that is linked to compliance with common quality standards and is flexible, blendable, and sufficient for the continuation of services to support children

- Universal access to, and greater use of high-quality programs

- Access to high-quality, affordable comprehensive health care

- Establishment of medical homes and primary care practices that focus broadly on children's healthy development such as Help Me Grow and Reach Out and Read

(The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, pp. 27–28)

The second recommendation from The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) recognizes the crucial roles of parents, families, and caregivers in producing good outcomes for the children in their lives. These individuals need to understand what critical literacy skills they can introduce at home with children such as reading aloud, having conversations, and encouraging a love and joy for learning. In addition, parents, families, and caregivers are partners in making sure children are present each day at school. Parents and others who have difficulty reading should be encouraged to develop their literacy skills or if necessary English language skills.

Birth to 5

Birth through 5 represents a critical time for children's learning. The National Early Literacy Panel (2002) contributed greatly to building knowledge and understanding of early childhood literacy teaching and learning. This research panel's key findings identified the domain of early literacy skills. Early literacy skills are strongly related to conventional literacy skills, such as decoding, oral reading, fluency, reading comprehension, writing, and spelling (Goodson, Layzer, Simon, & Dwyer, 2009).

The authors indicated that the strongest and most consistent predictors of later literacy are

- Knowing the names of printed letters

- Knowing the sounds associated with printed letters

- Being able to manipulate the sounds of spoken language— breaking words into smaller sound units such as syllables or phonemes, adding or deleting sound units

- Being able to rapidly name a sequence of letters, numbers, objects, or colors

- Being able to write one's own name or isolated letters

- Being able to remember the content of spoken language for a short time

Moderate predictors included:

- Knowing some of the conventions of English print including how to use a book or printed materials

- Being able to recognize and identify environmental print

- Knowing how to put concepts, thoughts, and ideas into spoken words, and understanding others when they talk

- Being able to see similarities and differences between visual symbols, i.e., visual processing

(Goodson, Layzer, Simon, & Dwyer, 2009)

Both strong and moderate predictors consistently predicted later literacy achievement for both preschoolers and kindergartners. Although more research is needed to develop a deeper understanding of instructional approaches to support preschoolers' development of literacy skills, the findings of the National Early Literacy Panel (2002) will help to build teacher knowledge and practices that promote the development of early literacy skills.

The National Research Council (1999) stated, "central to achieving the goal of primary prevention of reading difficulties is the preschool teacher's knowledge base and experience, as well as the support provided to the teacher" (p. 58). Nationally there is an intensive effort to help preschool teachers build a knowledge base of research in early language and literacy skills and awareness of the structure of the English language (Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan, 2009). Head Start now includes more direct instruction in preacademic skills and collects data that may inform the success of such efforts (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003), while many states include emergent

literacy skills in their preschool standards. Initiatives such as Early Reading First fostered the development of emergent literacy skills through increasing teacher content knowledge and investigating the effectiveness of preschool interventions. Places where parents and children visit such as pediatricians' offices, clinics, and libraries are including the types of activities that promote literacy development in their services. Cunningham, Zibulsky, and Callahan (2009) suggested that it is critical that preschool professional development opportunities are immersed with the needs of beginning readers, especially those in low-performing, high-poverty schools. In addition, they also stated that professional development for preschool teachers should focus on curriculum, assessment, or a preschool role in kindergarten readiness.

Kindergarten to Grade 3

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five essential components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These components are also included in the Foundation Skills section of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). In addition, lessons learned from scientific findings point to the following research-based practices that teachers need to employ to reduce reading failure:

- Early identification of children at risk of reading failure

- Daily training in linguistic and oral skills to build awareness of speech sounds or phonemes

- Explicit instruction in letter sounds, syllables, and words accompanied by explicit instruction in spelling

- Teaching phonics in the sequence that research has found leads to the least amount of confusion, rather than teaching it in a scattered fashion and only when children encounter difficulty

- Practicing skills to the point of "automaticity" so that children do not have to think about sounding out a word when they need to focus on meaning

- Concurrently with all of the above, building comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge through reading aloud, discussing, and writing about quality children's literature and nonfiction topics

- Frequent assessment and instructional adjustments to make sure children are making progress

(Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006)

Teachers need appropriate and intensive training to develop expertise in knowing when and how to teach specific strategies. In particular, teachers need to know how children learn to read, why some children have difficulty reading, and how to identify and implement instructional strategies for different readers. "The persistent reading struggles and reading failure of nearly 40% of all of American children, little improved over time, has led to aggressive government-funded effort in school

districts to train veteran teachers in the science of reading" (Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006, p. 5). Initiatives such as Reading First promoted professional development to increase teacher knowledge of beginning reading instruction along with the use of assessments and tiered interventions to improve children's literacy outcomes. However, in addition to The Annie E. Casey Foundation's suggestion of promoting a coherent system of early care and education and encouraging and enabling parents and families, the foundation also recommends prioritizing support and investment in results-driven initiatives to transform low-performing schools into high-quality teaching and learning environments for all children. A final recommendation from the foundation is to find solutions for two major contributors of underachievement—chronic absence from school and summer learning loss.

Another area that attention has been placed on is how future teachers are being prepared to teach reading. A study published by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2006) revealed that only 15% of the education schools provide teachers with at least minimal exposure to the science of reading. Also, course syllabi do not include the scientific research in reading, while only 227 texts were rated as acceptable for general use as a comprehensive textbook. To address these issues and others, NCTQ (2006) made the following recommendations:

- States need to develop both strong reading standards and licensing tests based on those standards.

- Education schools that do not teach the science of reading should not be eligible for accreditation.

- The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) needs to be an active champion for the science of reading, providing professional development opportunities for teacher educators to retool their skills.

- Elementary teachers should be required to pass a test to achieve "highly qualified teacher" status.

- Education schools should be eligible to receive Title II professional development funds to improve faculty expertise in reading.

- Textbook publishers need to identify legitimate experts in the field and hire them to develop and write better reading textbooks.

- Education schools need to build faculty expertise in reading.

"Future teachers need the knowledge and skills to understand sound reading strategies for themselves and to be able to transmit these to their students. With the scientific discoveries that began at the end of [the] Second World War, we now have the good fortune of holding the keys to the locks. It is time to put those keys in the lock and start turning them" (NCTQ, 2006, p. 49).

Bringing Literacy Strategies into Content Instruction—Adolescent Literacy (Grades 4–12)

Five scientifically based areas of instructional focus and improvement were recommended by Torgesen and his colleagues in Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: A Guidance Document from the Center on Instruction (2007). These recommendations narrowed the instructional focal points and improvements, listed below, that content-area teachers can make to improve reading comprehension for adolescent learners:

- Strategy instruction
- Discussion-oriented instruction
- High standards
- Motivational context, and
- Strategies to teach essential content

(Kosanovich, Reed, & Miller, 2010, p. 9)

In addition, the authors recommended that all teachers should:

1. Provide explicit instruction and supportive practice in effective comprehension strategies throughout the entire school day.
2. Increase both the amount and the quality of open, sustained discussion of text accessed.
3. Set and maintain high standards, especially for text selections, structured conversations/discussion, questions, and vocabulary.
4. Increase motivation and engagement with text.
5. Teach critical content knowledge so that all students master essential concepts.

These recommendations must be implemented in thoughtful, planned, purposeful, systematic contexts, which will require high-quality professional development.

Professional Development

While a consensus exists in the literature on "best practices" of effective professional development, experimental research studies have not indicated which aspects of professional development work better than others. Additionally, little evidence exists about the specific features that make a difference for student achievement. Furthermore, no research currently exists to support online or web-based professional development in vocabulary and comprehension instruction for secondary content area teachers that demonstrates both teacher change and subsequent improvements in adolescents' reading achievement. Relative to content-area professional development, research does illustrate a positive impact on teacher change and student achievement if the professional development is designed specifically to participants' subject areas (Kosanovich, Reed, & Miller, 2010).

In spite of the lack of experimental research regarding professional development, several research syntheses were cited by Kosanovich, Reed, and Miller (2010) as identifying common characteristics of high-quality professional development. The syntheses indicated that professional development should be

- ongoing, intensive, interactive, connected to practice, and supported continuously
- designed to address the teaching of specific curriculum content
- directly connected to student learning
- aligned with school improvement goals
- designed to build strong, professional relationships

Statewide Literacy Plan and Program Improvement Requirements

The evidence-based, comprehensive statewide literacy plan must

- Address needs of children from birth through twelfth grade
- Improve alignment and transition between grades
- Include all of the key components of an effective state literacy system:
  1. Clear standards
  2. Assessments that inform instruction
  3. Guidance on the selection and use of curriculum and interventions
  4. Teacher preparation and professional development that are aligned with standards
  5. Data collection system
  6. Evaluation and accountability

(U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

The information detailed above provides an overview of the components of an effective statewide literacy plan, but it is not an exhaustive summary. For more information on this topic, see the References below and the state highlights section of this publication, which features literacy programs and initiatives implemented by the states served by SECC. To obtain specific information on how SECC can assist an individual state with its literacy initiatives, contact a SECC state liaison at http://secc.sedl.org/about_us/index.html

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State Literacy Programs and Initiatives

Strengthening Literacy Programs and Instruction in Alabama

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From its beginning in 1998, the goal of the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) has been to support every student in becoming a skillful reader of grade-level text. As the No Child Left Behind Act deadline of 2014 approaches, there is an increased sense of urgency related to this goal. Success in reaching the goal requires strengthening literacy programs and instruction through professional development that helps teachers translate scientifically based research in reading into daily practice in the classroom. It is not enough for teachers to **know** what the research says about effective reading instruction; student success requires that research-based instruction becomes **daily classroom practice**. The format and the scope of ARI professional development has changed over time to better equip teachers to do just that.

Professional Development Structures for Classroom Teachers

ARI professional development has always been a schoolwide reform effort that requires a commitment of 85% of the school faculty and the principal. In the early years, the initial ARI training was 10 days of research-based study in the summer. Beginning in Summer 2004, the format of the training was changed to provide more opportunity for teachers in grades K–3 to observe, plan, and practice lessons based on the research. The new format provided 5 days in the summer with content study in the afternoon and practice with students in the morning. These 5 summer days were followed by 5 days of advanced study and practice with students during the school year.

In Summer 2006, ARI completed initial professional development for every Alabama school that had any configuration of grades K–3. Following this initial professional development, each school received an annual allocation to fund a reading coach to provide ongoing, differentiated professional development based on local student and teacher needs. These 800 reading coaches receive professional development and support from the state and regional ARI staff. ARI began a small pilot in 14 schools with grades beyond K–3. The Alabama Reading Initiative Project for Adolescent Literacy (ARI-PAL) was intended to help us learn how to support literacy instruction for adolescent learners in the content areas. Limited funding has allowed only limited expansion, but we have learned valuable lessons about how to strengthen reading instruction in adolescent content classrooms.

In the 2010–2011 school year, ARI will expand professional development and support beyond the reading coach to a school literacy team composed of the coach, principal, a lead teacher, and a local education agency (LEA) representative. This training will focus on strengthening and sustaining each school's literacy plan. Each member of the school team will understand his role in supporting the reflective practice and ongoing learning of all teachers.

Professional Development Structures for Preservice Teachers

Along with the need for ongoing professional development for teachers in the classroom, there is a need to collaborate with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to provide professional development to new teachers. As the sense of urgency for highly skilled reading teachers has increased, principals want to be sure that newly hired teachers are prepared to fill that role. They often ask applicants if they have had "ARI training." Some of the teacher preparation institutions contacted ARI with the desire that their graduates have this professional development opportunity. In Spring 2008, the ARI staff met with the deans of five of the most persistent IHEs to discuss possibilities for providing ARI professional development to teacher education candidates.

As a result of this meeting, a pilot program was planned for these five IHEs. ARI staff members provided a three-day professional development session to interns during the first 3 days of their internship semester. For elementary interns, these 3 days were a review of research in reading with viewing and reflection on recorded lessons showing application of the research. The interns had follow-up assignments to be completed during the course of their internship semester. Upon completion of the assignments, the interns received a professional development certificate from ARI. For secondary interns, the 3 days were an overview of the research on adolescent learners with opportunities to experience lessons with application of the research in each of the core content areas. When the graduates applied for a teaching position, they were able to say that they had participated in initial ARI professional development.

This preservice professional development model has been expanded each semester since Fall 2008. The content of the elementary professional development session has also been expanded to include a review of how the research is applied through daily use of core reading programs. In Fall 2010, approximately 900 interns from 17 IHEs participated in ARI professional development during their internship semester.

Collaboration with Universities to Support Effective Reading Instruction

To strengthen instruction in reading, a strong knowledge base and ongoing reflection and refinement of practice are required. The Alabama Quality Teaching Standards and the Alabama Continuum for Teacher Development support this model for teacher learning and growth. In Fall 2008, ARI invited reading faculty from all 27 teacher preparation IHEs to participate in a Literacy Partnership to begin conversations about how we might collaborate more effectively in supporting this model for teacher development.

In November 2008, the Literacy Partnership met in three locations in the south, central, and north regions. All members of the ARI state staff and reading faculty members from 17 IHEs met to discuss opportunities and challenges that we face in supporting reading teachers. The format for these meetings was small group conversations around specific questions related to our work with teachers. These conversations helped us find common ground and identify gaps in our support. We agreed that there is a need for us to learn together to develop a common vision of highly skilled reading instruction and to work together to support pre-service and in-service teachers in developing the skills to deliver such instruction.

The Literacy Partnership met again in October 2009 to continue discussions. At this meeting, reading faculty from 19 IHEs participated. While there are still some differences in philosophy, there is agreement that we should continue our collaboration to provide more seamless and coordinated support to teachers to strengthen reading instruction for all students.

The Vision

The vision of the Alabama State Department of Education is to provide the standards, resources, and support LEAs need to ensure ALL students graduate college- and/or career-ready. The Alabama Reading Initiative was created to ensure that all students become skillful readers. We will continue to evaluate and refine our role of providing ongoing professional development and support to schools in order to strengthen literacy programs and instruction to equip ALL students with the reading skills they need to be successful.

Focus on Early Childhood and Adolescent Literacy in Georgia

By Mary Stout, former staff member, Georgia Department of Education
Glenda Copeland, MA, SECC State Liaison

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) literacy initiatives continue to promote the necessity of providing students with 21st century literacy skills. Since Georgia's literacy plan notes the importance of content literacy, the literacy team members are collaborating with Forsyth County and the Literacy Design Collaboration Initiative—funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—to develop content literacy modules that can be inserted into English language arts (ELA), social studies, and science units. These "plug and play" modules support critical thinking through the reading and writing connection as supported by the Common Core State Standards. A team of Forsyth teachers will not only create the modules but also implement them in their classes during the 2010–2011 school year. Data will be collected on the effectiveness of the modules. The state education department's literacy team will also be involved in monitoring the progress and providing other school districts with these modules during the school year. The intent is to create modules that content teachers can use to ensure that all of their students can read, write, and think critically about course content, which supports the Georgia literacy plan's recommendation that content teachers promote this goal.

Georgia has also been active in providing reading strategies, models, and various Lexile articles for math, social studies, Career Technology Agriculture Education (CTAE), science, and English language arts (grades 6–12). In collaboration with MetaMetrics, Inc., the creator of Lexile, the Georgia Department of Education Standards, Instruction, and Assessment content teams provided standards from their respective content areas. The Phase II section of the Georgia Lexile Education Plan—Lexile in Action—is available for teachers (georgiastandards.org) to view and use research-based reading strategies and Lexile articles to enhance

comprehension in content areas. Phase II of the Lexile Education Plan supports the content literacy initiative as noted in the Georgia literacy plan.

Georgia DOE literacy team members have also been active in the Achievement Gap Project that was initiated to target high schools that are low performing on the SAT. The literacy team's responsibility was to develop a six-hour workshop that focused on improving writing scores. The team delivered the workshop to approximately 95% of the targeted 33 high schools. The focus was to promote the need to connect reading and writing and to create writing assignments in all content areas. The workshop centered on effective writing and reading strategies, and its purpose supports the Georgia literacy plan recommendations. The materials from that workshop are posted for all Georgia teachers to use.

A reading task force has been formed to discuss and suggest ideas on how Georgia can improve the preK–3 grade-level reading scores. The task force is studying the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 Reading Framework, as well as state assessment results, to determine what professional development the literacy team can create and deliver to assist teachers as they work in early literacy efforts.

GaDOE has already taken an innovative step toward scaling up professional development for early literacy teachers. We have created a comprehensive series of online courses designed to sustain the progress achieved through Reading First. Extensive in scope, these courses address every major aspect of primary reading. They are fully interactive and allow teachers to explore topics in depth through a host of creative activities. Their appeal is enhanced by blending text with a wide range of multimedia resources, such as podcasts and video clips. During production, the state education department collected a large number of classroom videos to illustrate instructional approaches while showcasing Georgia's teachers. Through this initiative, GaDOE is providing a dynamic new means of extending professional development to teachers across the state.

As part of Georgia's literacy efforts, GaDOE sponsors a statewide Young Georgia Authors (YGA) Competition. Each school can participate and submit student writings to their district competition. Once the district chooses its winning entries, those entries are sent to the state competition, and winners are recognized for their success. YGA is a popular initiative, and approximately 85% of the districts participate.

The Georgia literacy plan supports early literacy and adolescent literacy, as well as the literacy components of the ELA Common Core State Standards. Georgia continues to make literacy a priority and plans to develop more professional development and resources for its educators.

Strengthening Literacy in Louisiana

By Kerry Laster, PhD, Executive Director, Literacy and Numeracy, Louisiana Department of Education
Robyn Madison-Harris, EdD, SECC State Liaison

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) created the Louisiana Literacy Plan: Literacy for All in 2006 to improve literacy for all students K–12. The plan is based upon key components that are supported by national, scientifically based research and that have proven effective in improving outcomes for students when implemented with fidelity and integrity in schools.

Louisiana's Adolescent Literacy Plan for grades 4–12 describes in detail key areas as well as the specific actions and scaffolding necessary to improve literacy for all students, including those who are limited-English proficient and those with exceptionalities. Key components of the plan include literacy-based instructional strategies, ongoing assessment to inform instructional decisions, differentiated interventions, and job-embedded professional learning.

This plan was adopted by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in March 2010, and soon after LDE hosted a series of webinars to introduce the plan to districts and schools. Regional meetings are planned for the 2010–2011 school year to assist stakeholders in implementing the plan. Literacy staff will provide targeted technical support to six middle schools and 14 high schools based on the results of a school capacity survey provided in the adolescent literacy plan. Schools will also receive funding to provide research-based interventions for students reading 2 or more years below grade level.

A unique feature of the plan involves a K–12 implementation of a Literacy Pilot model across a group of schools— elementary, middle, high—that share a common attendance zone within a district and represent a feeder system. The plan also requires substantial district and school leadership support. In 2006–2007, five districts were selected through an application process to pilot implementation of the plan. In 2007–2008, four more districts were brought into the program.

After 3 years, the percentages of pilot school students at basic or above on statewide tests have increased substantially. For example, the percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade students in literacy pilot schools that scored basic or above on the LEAP test increased from 62% to 70.2% in reading and 55.2% to 66.2% in English language arts; the percentage of third- through ninth-grade students (except fourth and eighth) in K–12 literacy pilot schools that scored basic or above on the *iLEAP* test increased from 50.4% to 63.3% in reading and from 46.3% to 62.2% in ELA. Overall, students in the pilot schools showed greater gains than those in the nonpilot schools.

In addition to the K–12 pilot initiative, LDE also implements Ensuring Literacy for All (ELFA), a preK to fourth grade initiative that has supported 216 schools—with state funding through an application process. Like the K–12 pilot, ELFA combines scientifically based reading research with professional development, assessments, and materials into a comprehensive instructional approach for reading. Literacy coaches and interventionists are key to the initiative in supporting Response to Intervention (RtI) in the schools.

Findings from a recent ELFA evaluation indicate that the program has achieved substantial growth, with students in ELFA schools outscoring their non-ELFA counterparts in ELA. Also, the gap closure has been greater in ELFA schools; for example, free and reduced lunch students in ELFA schools are improving their reading skills faster than their nonfree and reduced lunch counterparts in the same schools.

While results have been promising for the K–12 pilot and ELFA schools, lessons learned from both initiatives have led to a comprehensive vision of what is needed in all Louisiana schools to adequately prepare students for the demands of college- and career-readiness.

LDE, with the approval of BESE, has developed nine critical goals aligned with the vision of creating a world-class education system for all students. These goals are

1. Students enter kindergarten ready to learn
2. Students are literate by third grade
3. Students will enter fourth grade on time
4. Students perform at or above grade level in English language arts by eighth grade
5. Students perform at or above grade level in math by eighth grade
6. Students will graduate from high school on time
7. Students will enroll in postsecondary education or graduate workforce-ready
8. Students will successfully complete at least 1 year of postsecondary education
9. Students will achieve all eight goals, regardless of race or class

These goals guide all improvement efforts. For example, a committee of districts administrators, curriculum coordinators, principals, literacy coaches, teachers, university personnel, and state staff representing various divisions at LDE convened and began mapping a plan to increase the effectiveness of the Louisiana Literacy Plan, specifically at the adolescent level. In a detailed analysis of the research, policy documents, and recommendations, several broad areas emerged that recognize the need for support in various ways and at multiple levels across schools and districts: Leadership and Sustainability, Standards-Based Curricula, Instruction and Intervention, Assessment, and Professional Learning. These five critical areas will guide the

implementation of quality literacy initiatives in Louisiana schools. Through partnerships with districts, schools, and organizations such as SEDL, the strides made in literacy in recent years will continue as we focus on our nine critical goals.

Transforming Literacy Instruction in Mississippi

By Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Curriculum and Instruction
Debra Meibaum, MAT, SECC State Liaison

Mississippi is building on past efforts to strengthen literacy instruction along different avenues. Working with various stakeholder groups in the state, Mississippi can and will create partnerships to transform students' literacy achievement levels. The Mississippi State Board of Education's vision is "to create a world-class education system that gives students the knowledge and skills that will allow them to be successful in college and the workforce and flourish as parents and citizens." With this vision serving as a guide, Mississippi recognizes that literacy is the key that unlocks the door to academic and personal success for all Mississippians.

First, Mississippi works to strengthen literacy instruction at the preservice teacher level in the state. In 2006, Mississippi instituted a six-hour early literacy coursework requirement for all elementary education majors with a required total of 15 hours in literacy coursework. To assist in that effort, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) requested that all teacher preparation programs in the state participate in designing the early literacy coursework requirement. The group of institutions of higher learning (IHL) faculty, along with MDE and Barksdale Reading Institute personnel, became the Higher Education Literacy Council (HELC). This group continues to work to strengthen teacher preparation programs in the area of literacy instruction. In fact, IHL faculty participated this summer in a four-day Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) Foundation training to strengthen content knowledge in the foundational areas of literacy instruction with the support of Barksdale Reading Institute and the Mississippi Center on Education and Innovation. HELC also works to strengthen the early literacy courses by reviewing syllabi and providing feedback to programs. Mississippi believes that teacher preparation is foundational in transforming literacy achievement in the state.

In addition, Mississippi is committed to continued professional development for in-service teachers and leaders. This summer, the six regional education service agencies (RESAs) located across the state provided over 1,200 school leaders with a four-day literacy leadership professional development opportunity funded by the MDE through a grant. Leaders learned how to create a literacy culture and how to serve as literacy instructional leaders in their schools and/or district. These leaders analyzed school

data to identify literacy improvement areas and created an action plan to address those areas. For the last day of the training, the six RESAs hosted Ray Reutzel, PhD, a national reading researcher, to work with the leaders for an entire day during the week of August 27–30 in each of the service area regions. The RESAs also provided teacher professional development through the grant from the MDE. Approximately 800 teachers participated in the LETRS Foundation training for professional development that builds teachers' content knowledge around the process of learning to read.

As a mechanism to build statewide support for literacy initiatives, MDE established a Literacy Collaborative in December 2009 that consisted of various stakeholders throughout the state to foster a more comprehensive effort for literacy achievement. The Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) at SEDL assisted the collaborative by allowing program associates Debra Meibaum and Ramona Chauvin to participate in the work of this group. Collaborative members included staff from IHL, MDE, Mississippi Library Commission, Mississippi Public Broadcasting, Mississippi Early Childhood Institute, Barksdale Reading Institute, Mississippi Center on Education and Innovation, and other representative groups. The literacy collaborative worked to establish goals and action plans to improve literacy achievement in the state. One area of considerable work involved the decline in reading achievement levels during the summer months. To assist in preventing this tremendous loss, Walmart provided gift cards to public library patrons and Barksdale Reading Institute school students as incentives for students to read more during the summer months. Mississippi can build on this work to establish a more formal process for developing a comprehensive literacy plan for the state.

MDE is also working to build upon the Reading First efforts in the state. This grant afforded many schools in Mississippi with resources to provide children with evidence-based literacy instruction. As federally funded opportunities arise, Mississippi is poised to move beyond the Reading First efforts. The first opportunity is the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program (SRCL). SRCL is a federal initiative to provide formula funding for states to develop a statewide comprehensive literacy plan. As a requirement for this grant program, Mississippi will establish a State Literacy Team to develop a comprehensive literacy plan that includes birth through grade 12. MDE is excited about the opportunity to devise and implement a cohesive, statewide literacy plan that addresses the needs of all children beginning at birth and continuing to high school graduation. In the future, MDE will submit a proposal to the SRCL discretionary grant program. The discretionary program will provide funding to implement the comprehensive literacy program from the statewide literacy plan that the state creates using the formula funding opportunity. While Reading First concentrated on literacy instruction in kindergarten to grade 3, it is simply not enough.

Researchers realize that reading at grade level by grade 3 is an important milestone, but as Catherine Snow (2010) stated "good early literacy instruction does not inoculate students against struggle or failure later on." The MDE will work to address the entire spectrum of literacy development by ensuring effective, evidence-based literacy instruction from birth to grade 12 so that all students will have the opportunity to achieve personal and academic success!

Angela Rutherford, PhD, director of the Center for Excellence in Literacy Instruction at the University of Mississippi, as well as others, are working with MDE in preparation for the development of a statewide literacy plan. For questions about the content of the article, please contact Trecina Green, director of the Office of Curriculum and Instruction at MDE.

A Comprehensive Plan for Improving Literacy in South Carolina

By Pam Wills, Unit Leader Literacy and Early Learning, Division of Standards and Learning, South Carolina Department of Education
Beth Howard, EdD, SECC State Liaison

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) developed the LiteracySC Framework, which is designed to maximize effective literacy instruction for all students and address the problem of low attainment of literacy in South Carolina schools. It provides a comprehensive preK–12 approach to literacy, offering needed strategies and emphasis on acquisition, intervention with support in acceleration, and innovation. SCDE is facilitating the process for the development of guidance documents in support of LiteracySC and will support the implementation of the LiteracySC Guidance Document to ensure the execution, communication, and fidelity of implementation, as well as the measurement of LiteracySC.

South Carolina has set ambitious goals to improve the education of all students. A reasonable, ambitious expectation for improvement across 4 years is ten percentage points, staggered over time to reflect typical patterns of change.

- Improve South Carolina students' literacy acquisition rates as measured by the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) showing incremental growth by two percentage points (2010–2011), three percentage points (2011–2012), three percentage points (2012–2013), and two percentage points (2013–2014) over the next 4 years.

- Improve the High School Assessment Program (HSAP) first-attempt passage rate by two percentage points by the end of the 2010–2011 school year.

- Improve South Carolina students' performance on the NAEP in grades four and eight (administered every 2 years) by two percentage points per year.

A LiteracySC Implementation Rubric will determine the degree to which the districts will utilize/implement the components of the guidance document to improve literacy scores.

The Literacy and Early Learning Unit in the Division of Standards and Learning has collaborated with the Palmetto Priority Schools (PPS) Office to offer specialized literacy professional development to designated elementary, middle, and high schools. Selected sites will receive an overview of the essentials of reading instruction, with emphasis being placed on the key knowledge of reading to include comprehension, vocabulary development and word study, fluency, and writing. The overall goal is to equip teachers with the knowledge that will help them make curriculum/instructional decisions and to make a significant impact on literacy acquisition. Participating schools will also receive customized professional development based on identified needs that will offer a comprehensive review of literacy instruction.

As part of the comprehensive professional development plan, three pilot projects will begin during the 2010–2011 school year. These pilots will focus on literacy acquisition, intervention, and acceleration. Schools will be supported with literacy specialists providing on-site assistance. Also, data will be collected through an all-inclusive evaluation to monitor and report student achievement.

LiteracySC Target Instruction Pilot

The LiteracySC Target Instruction Pilot provides the opportunity for school teams to participate in a yearlong professional development pilot program designed to offer a comprehensive approach to maximizing effective literacy instruction. SCDE has developed a targeted instructional process that includes standards-based curriculum focusing on teaching and learning, benchmark tests to inform instruction, analysis of data focusing on classroom and curriculum practices that promote student achievement, and professional development to build internal capacity and provide periodic monitoring of progress.

Power of Teaching Pilot

Power of Teaching Pilot sites will participate in intensive training based around the two domains and six power sources, which comprise the *Power of Teaching. Power of Teaching* provides a structure for examining teaching behaviors that are "researched-established" to substantially affect student learning. These practices help to advance student learning. Training will include examining effective and ineffective teaching behaviors. The main purpose is to assist in objectively analyzing what works. *Power of Teaching* is about the measurement of teaching behaviors, development of sound practices, and the support of teachers.

Literacy Academy Pilot

Literacy Academy Pilot Sites will identify struggling readers from schools participating in LiteracySC professional development pilots. The academies will provide additional support and instruction that may occur at alternative times, before, within, or after the school day. Literacy specialists will assist schools in identifying struggling readers using formative and summative data as well as creating a process for monitoring student growth. Professional development will be provided on specific evidence-based strategies to accelerate learning with the teachers working with the academies. The pilot will assist schools in monitoring student data as they work to close the achievement gap.

In addition, the Literacy and Early Learning Unit will offer a variety of learning opportunities aimed to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional development in literacy. Through these literacy projects, schools will receive varying levels of support to ensure effective literacy instruction and improve student achievement.

Spotlight on SECC Work

During Year 6, SECC will continue its work with Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina to enhance the capacity of state department of education staff to meet the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as well as key priorities set forth by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). This includes assistance with school improvement efforts, professional development, and technical assistance to improve support and assistance for high-need schools and districts. Below are highlights of SECC's work with the states in its region.

Alabama
By Mary Lou Meadows, EdD, SECC State Liaison

Regional Support Coordinators Group Reconvenes

The Regional Support Coordinators group met September 22, 2010, in Montgomery to discuss activities, support updates, and refinement of coordinator support information. Also, Mary Lou Meadows, EdD, SECC Alabama state liaison, provided an update on ED's proposed priorities and focus areas for the regional comprehensive centers in 2010–2011.

Common Core State Standards Initiative Meeting

State liaison Meadows attended a meeting on the Alabama Update of the Common Core State Standards Initiative in Montgomery on September 17. The presentation addressed Alabama's process, review of standards, public review and recommendations, comparison of CCSS to Alabama's

standards in mathematics and English language arts, task force recommendations, and updates to the state's standards.

Local Education Agency Program Evaluation Training

On September 20, Erin McCann, PhD, SECC program associate, conducted a professional development session at the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) with assistance from state liaison Meadows and Brooke Blair of ALSDE. The session focused on evaluating program effectiveness and was directed toward state education department staff that work with LEA federal program coordinators.

Year 6 Plan of Work Meeting

SECC staff Robin Jarvis, PhD, program manager, and Meadows, state liaison, met with Thomas Bice, EdD, Deann Stone, PhD, and Sherrill Parris, from ALSDE, September 16. The group planned new projects and activities for SECC's Year 6 Plan of Work and discussed ED's priorities and new focus areas for the comprehensive centers. The team requested assistance with two major projects that would incorporate several of the 10 priority areas:

1. Train ALSDE staff in the Concerns-Based Adoption Model to assist with developing a process for monitoring some of the state's School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools regarding implementation of intervention strategies by LEAs

2. Work with ALSDE staff to develop a compilation of strategies and best practices that would be effective with special education students and diverse learners

Georgia
By Glenda Copeland, MA, SECC State Liaison

School Improvement Grants Conference

School, district, and teacher leaders participated in a three-day School Improvement Grants Conference September 22–24, that featured consultant Karen Bailey leading a session on professional learning communities (PLCs) and use of common assessments to improve instruction. Also, David DeScheyver, of Brustein & Manasevit, presented an analysis of SIG requirements under Title I, Part A. All SIG schools in Georgia are implementing CLASS Keys, the new teacher accountability process, as part of their improvement plans. During the conference, attendees participated in an introductory session on the process.

In addition, Heidi Hayes Jacobs and Bill Sheskey presented a session on *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World*—her new book—focusing on changes needed to prepare students for a global economy. The presenters also identified free resources available to assist educators with modifying instruction to improve effectiveness. On the last day of the conference,

superintendents, principals, and other participants heard updates from GaDOE staff Diane Bradford, Barbara Lunsford (federal programs), and Billy Hooker (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act [ARRA] funds). They also met in job-alike groups to learn from each other and process learning from the previous 2 days.

School Improvement Activities

In September, Glenda Copeland, MA, SECC Georgia state liaison, attended the monthly school improvement meeting of GaDOE, during which Lynda Martin, associate superintendent for school improvement, provided a report on the status of funding, assignments, and the organizational structure of the division.

As a continuation of the focus on School Keys Standard 2—a component of CLASS Keys teacher accountability process— and development of the focus for the coming year, GaDOE sponsored a School Improvement Training Conference on September 22–24. Day 1 focused on a review of CLASS Keys and changes made to the process following the field study. The process has been streamlined, and interest in being included in the process has outpaced expectations. A series of training modules has been developed to support building principals or their designees in leading staff in a preparation year of study prior to implementing the process. On Day 2, presenter Karen Bailey focused on the rationale for a data-informed culture, the need for a balanced assessment program, the role of common assessment data, setting SMART goals, and critical factors for success.

Supplemental Educational Services Parent Outreach

SECC program associate Sally Wade, EdD, hosted a conference call with Michelle Tarbutton, parent engagement program manager for GaDOE, and Anne Henderson, senior consultant, Community Organizing and Engagement, Annenberg Institute for School Reform. The purpose of the conference call was to provide an expert review of and to raise awareness about the Georgia Virtual Family-Friendly School, which was developed by GaDOE and the Georgia Parental Involvement Resource Center.

Participants provided positive feedback and discussed suggestions regarding implementation, dissemination, and enhancements of the virtual school. As a result of the conference call, the Georgia Virtual Family-Friendly School link was disseminated on the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education listserv.

Thinking Maps Initiative

In Summer 2010, SECC's Copeland met with Erin Barnette, director of State-Directed Schools; Terri Gasperik, interim director Needs Improvement Schools; Kathy Carrollton, program manager

for Professional Learning; Kristy Kueber, program manager of School Performance; and 10 GaDOE school improvement specialists along with Chris Yeager, lead consultant, and Cory Byrd, sales manager, from Thinking Maps (TM). The group reviewed an analysis of data from Year 1 implementation and planned support strategies for schools implementing TM during the 2010–2011 school year. Also, small work groups developed guidance documents to assist state directors in providing implementation support. An additional work session was held August 24 at Central Georgia Conference Center in Forsyth.

Evaluation also plays a big part in measuring the effectiveness of the TM process in Georgia's schools. As part of ongoing support for evaluation, SECC program associates Erin McCann and Copeland participated in a work session with Carrollton and Kueber, GaDOE staff heading the TM program. The session focused on setting up a structure or framework for synthesizing and reporting data findings for Year 1 of TM implementation. The group reviewed samples of different frameworks and report templates and developed a design for data reporting. Feedback will be provided via e-mail, and a tentative meeting date was set to review the focus for the Year 2 evaluation and to revise evaluation documents.

In addition, Copeland met with Carrollton and Kueber, 10 school improvement specialists, and TM staff Yeager and Byrd to review documents developed to assist state school improvement specialists, principals, and implementation leaders at the schools that are implementing TM. Small groups reviewed and edited the documents, which then were submitted for reproduction. Further training for staff assigned to schools that are implementing TM was planned at the September school improvement meeting.

Louisiana
By Darlene Brown, PhD, SECC Project Director (former state liaison)

DIBELS Intervention Team

Kathleen Theodore, MA, SECC program associate, continues to work with the DIBELS intervention team at the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) in development efforts and training for the DIBELS Next intervention process. Over the past 3 months, the team has made exceptional progress in these efforts.

On October 11, Roland Goods, PhD, an associate professor of the School of Psychology at the University of Oregon and a coauthor of DIBELS, facilitated the DIBELS Next Data Interpretation Workshop at the State Library in Baton Rouge. On October 12–13, the intervention team completed rough drafts of the DIBELS Next Intervention presentation entitled "Navigating Student Learning," and on October 14 and 19–21 the team reviewed and edited final presentation drafts. In November and December, the intervention workshop was conducted for additional staff in Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and Bossier City.

Information Requests

Over the past few months, SECC assisted LDE in promptly addressing queries from policymakers by providing research-based reports that also informed aspects of state department work. Specifically, SECC collected relevant research and summarized information from other state departments of education on retention policies in elementary grades, the use of RtI in mathematics, and various math assessment tools that are used to measure academic growth in lower elementary grades.

Response to Intervention Task Force

The Louisiana RtI Task Force kicked off the year with its first meeting on September 8. Members addressed the state education department's RtI focus for the 2010–2011 school year, which includes collaborating with the National Center on Response to Intervention for intensive technical assistance (TA), developing the TA action plan, and continuing work on the RtI guidance document and surveys to determine the support needs of the districts. The next meeting is scheduled January 2011, at which time, Ada Muoneke, PhD, SECC program associate, will attend.

Mississippi
By Debra Meibaum, MAT, SECC State Liaison

Adolescent Literacy Efforts

Ramona Chauvin, PhD, and Debra Meibaum, MAT, SECC program associates, conducted an interactive session entitled "Equipping Career and Technical Education with Skills for Success Through Literacy" as part of the Mississippi Association for Career and Technical Education Summer Conference on July 29, 2010, at

the Vicksburg Convention Center in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Approximately 40 student services coordinators examined career and technical textbooks, identifying text structures/organizations and features that can help readers access text effectively

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and efficiently. They also participated in several learning tasks designed around research-based vocabulary and comprehension instruction as well as an anticipation guide used in conjunction with the November 2009 Issue Brief "CTE's Role in Adolescent Literacy" by the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE).

In addition, Chauvin and Meibaum facilitated planning meetings on September 27 and 28 for the MDE's Office of Vocational Education at the request of Gail Simmons, supervisor of Student Services Coordinators Program. The goals of the meetings were to

1. Provide an overview of adolescent literacy research and instruction as they pertain to CTE to develop a common base of information about literacy (led by Chauvin);

2. Review the outcome/lessons learned from the pilot workshop at Lake Tiak-O'Khata (led by Simmons);

3. Develop a course of action plans, which define direction, timelines, and areas of responsibility for a literacy initiative for CTE, beginning with pilot partnerships among regional centers, school districts, and CTE student services coordinators (led by Meibaum); and

4. Create a name for the project to replace Literacy in CTE (led by Simmons)

Besides Chauvin, Meibaum, and Simmons, other participants included Marilyn Bowen, PhD, Professional Development, Research and Curriculum Unit; Shanta Durr, Tech Prep supervisor; Sherry Franklin, director, Pearl/Rankin Career Technical Center (CTC); Katrina Hunter, Student Services, Pearl/Rankin CTC; Carol Ann Drane, Student Services, Canton CTC; Sandra Hutchinson, Student Services, Madison CTC; and Kristy Robertson, vocational counselor, Madison CTC.

The group completed goals 1 and 2, began development of action plans, and compiled new names for the project. In a follow-up meeting on October 18, they completed all of the action plans, selected the new name, and assessed how sites will be selected.

Modifying Instruction for English Language Learners

On August 24–26, Maggie Rivas, MA, former SECC program associate, participated in Mississippi's World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) meeting, "Building Collaboration: Using ACCESS for ELL Data" and "ELP Standards to Modify Instruction for ELLs." Training topics included WIDA Consortium background, WIDA standards, myths and misconceptions regarding educating English language learners (ELLs), the difference between academic language and academic content, using ACCESS to diagnose English language proficiency (ELP) levels, and programmatic implications of ELP levels.

Planning Meetings

SECC staff members participated in multiple planning meetings with staff from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), which focused on data management, RtI, maintenance of student records, and school improvement.

In August, Meibaum met with staff from the Office of Management Information Systems to continue planning the August 17–18 MDE Mississippi Student Information Systems (MSIS) Data Collection Workshop. She also participated in the follow-up meeting September 1.

As part of an ongoing RtI initiative, Meibaum met with the RtI Coordinating Council on August 24 to continue the review of the implementation of the RtI action plans. Council members discussed updates for the Tier 2 and 3 training, RtI manual, RtI frequently asked questions document, RtI parent training PowerPoint, Teacher and Administrator Prep Program Outreach, and RtI implementation at the high school level. Additional meetings will be scheduled as needed.

Also, state liaison Meibaum facilitated the MDE Office of Curriculum and Instruction's Mississippi Cumulative Folders and Permanent Records Manual of Directions Revision Meeting on August 31. The purpose of the committee meeting was to revise the manual to provide more guidance to school districts in maintaining cumulative folders and permanent records as required by Mississippi law. MDE staff Trecina Green and Rhonda Smith will finalize changes to the manual.

In addition, SECC's Meibaum participated in planning meetings with staff from the MDE's Office of Innovative Support on July 27, August 6, August 8, and September 15. The purpose of the meetings was to continue planning the October 5 facilitator preparation meeting, the October 6–7 School Improvement Symposium training of trainers for school support team members, and the October 26–28 School Improvement Symposium.

South Carolina
By Sandra Lindsay, EdD, former SECC State Liaison

Literacy Guidance Document

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) developed the LiteracySC Framework, which is designed to maximize effective literacy instruction for all students and address the problem of low attainment of literacy in schools. The framework provides a comprehensive preK–12 approach to literacy, offering needed strategies and emphases on acquisition, intervention with support in acceleration, and innovation. Pam Wills, unit leader, Literacy and Early Learning, Division of Standards and Learning at the SCDE, requested that SECC assist in the review of a guidance document to be used by school districts in the implementation of the framework. Wills specifically requested

review of the draft document to produce a publication that was readable, useful and that would ensure the execution, communication, and fidelity of implementation, as well as the measurement of LiteracySC. Ramona Chauvin, SECC program associate, spearheaded the review and provided feedback to SCDE staff on the guidance document.

High School Assessment Task Force

SCDE in collaboration with the Education Oversight Committee has been tasked by legislative joint resolution to convene a task force to examine the feasibility of shifting from the use of the High School Assessment Program (HSAP) to end-of-course assessments for meeting federal assessment requirements. The task force is specifically asked to examine the utility of the HSAP and end-of-course assessment programs and the benefits and information each provides as well as implementation considerations, costs factors, and appropriate transition timelines the state may encounter in shifting from HSAP to end-of-course assessments. Findings of the task force are to be reported to the Senate Finance Committee, Senate Education Committee, House Ways and Means Committee, House Education and Public Works Committee, the State Board of Education, and the Education Oversight Committee by January 15, 2011.

Teri Siskind, PhD, deputy state superintendent, asked SECC for help in facilitating the work of this task force. The first meeting of the High School Assessment Task Force (HSATF) was held September 8 at SCDE. Liz Jones, director, Office of Assessment, gave the welcome, set the purpose of the meeting, and introduced Kris Kaase, PhD, SECC consultant, as the facilitator and Robyn Madison-Harris, EdD, SECC program associate, as the recorder and facilitative assistant. Task force members covered an expansive agenda during a full-day session. Meeting notes have been posted and are under review. Planning for future meetings is being accomplished through conference calls and e-mail as the work of the committee progresses. Additional meetings were held on October 29 and November 9.

Palmetto Priority Schools Professional Development Project

SCDE staff members in the Office of Special Projects provide ongoing support for a group of low-performing schools identified as Palmetto Priority Schools (PPS). Over the past few months, SCDE and SECC staff worked together to plan two regional collaboration meetings that were held in November in Walterboro for Lowcountry districts and in Columbia for the remainder of identified districts. Representatives from PPS and districts are required by agreement with the PPS office to attend the mandatory professional development sessions. Frequent planning sessions are held to refine program activities for the coming months.