

Spotlight

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Early Childhood Education Programs and Curricula for PreK Students

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires participating states to identify and employ educational interventions that are supported by scientifically rigorous evidence. Through the Rapid Response Request service of the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) states can obtain technical assistance to help meet this requirement. In the past year, the SECC has answered more than 15 requests on topics, such as school restructuring, improving achievement in high-needs schools, Response to Intervention (RtI) policies and practices, educating overage students, project-based learning, and others.

Recently, a state department of education served by the SECC requested information on early childhood education programs and curricula for PreK students that address both reading and math readiness. The SECC rapid response team researched the topic and developed a summary document of the findings as well as specific information on programs and curricula. Key takeaways from the summary document indicate that PreK curricula should have the following characteristics:

- Include the following critical components 1) performance standards for students, 2) ongoing assessment of students' skills, abilities, and development, 3) content in language and literacy, mathematics concepts, and scientific inquiry, 4) processes and experiences in a learning context that stimulate curiosity, and 5) interaction that balances teacher-directed and student-initiated behaviors and strategies.
- Focus on regulatory skills, and provide observable, measurable results.
- Align with state and national early learning standards as well as regulatory requirements, such as those from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), National Head Start Association, and other entities.

In addition to discussing criteria for PreK curricula, the summary document highlights a 446-page report entitled *Effect of Preschool Curriculum Programs on School Readiness*, which was prepared for the National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences, ED, by the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium. This report—published in July 2008—summarizes the findings of a comprehensive review of 14 preschool curricula. The report provides results by outcome and by curriculum (for preK and kindergarten students) as well as detailed evaluations for each curriculum. The researchers also provided student-level outcomes and classroom-level outcomes for multiple research sites in the following states: California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The full summary document, *Rapid Response—Early Childhood Education Curricula and Programs for PreK Students*, is available on the SECC Web site at this link: http://secc.sedl.org/orc/rr/secc_rr_00066.pdf

Highlights of State Work

Alabama

Response to Intervention

The SECC continued to work with the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Response to Intervention (RtI) Team through telephone conferences and meetings. The RtI team met on October 8, 2008, in Point Clear, Alabama, to plan modules for professional development training for implementation of the RtI approach in the State's schools and districts.

LEA Support Roundtable Meeting

The LEA Support Roundtable met on October 17 in its monthly meeting to plan and implement a seamless system of technical assistance and support to schools. The Roundtable focuses on the areas of curricula, instruction, fiscal responsibility, management, and leadership.

Regional Support Roundtable Meeting

The Regional Support Roundtable (RSRT) held meetings on October 15 at various locations across the State. As part of the State's seamless system of support for student achievement, the RSRT provides a venue for field staff to discuss ideas, collaborate on initiatives, and determine strategies for meeting the needs of individual schools and school systems.

Supplemental Educational Services

The ALSDE has asked the SECC to provide the following technical assistance services for enhancing supplemental educational services (SES) that are coordinated by the Alabama Federal Programs section:

- Examine state education department Web sites to identify models that might prove useful in tracking student attendance
- Determine at what point (how many sessions) student achievement improves as a result of SES tutoring
- Develop a method for providing more timely notification of SES eligibility to parents
- Document “record of effectiveness” in a more timely and effective manner
- Collect consumer satisfaction data—effectively track opinions, complaints, and comments concerning program effectiveness and business management that are reported to the ALSDE
- Increase participation in SES by using an established database to maintain initial contact information
- Increase efficiency of administration of the SES program at the local district level and the state level

Georgia

Focus on RtI and Standards, Instruction, and Assessment

Glenda Copeland, SECC Georgia State Liaison, reviewed a draft of the Response to Intervention (RtI) document that was developed by the Georgia Department of Education and provided feedback for revisions. In addition, the SECC Program Manager Robin Jarvis, as well as SECC Program Associates Como Molina, Ramona Chauvin, and Camille Chapman, met with the Department’s standards, instruction, and assessment group to identify additional technical assistance needs. As a result, SECC staff will be working with the GDE on the issues of adolescent literacy and the development of a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) initiative. SECC staff will serve on the Georgia Literacy Taskforce and will assist with research and information in both of these areas.

Thinking Maps Training

Approximately 100 GDE staff participated in the training-of-trainers Thinking Maps® workshops that were held in October. This mapping process focuses on helping students to deepen their thinking skills and improve their understanding of subject matter across content areas. In the next few months, department staff members will begin utilizing the strategies presented in the training in their work.

BRIDGE Project Advisory Board

Glenda Copeland has been invited to serve on an Advisory Board for the BRIDGE project of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The BRIDGE project is a web-based resource that supports alternatively certified teachers in the State.

Louisiana

Statewide Systems of Support

Darlene Morgan Brown, SECC Louisiana State Liaison, along with representatives from the Louisiana State Department’s NCLB Program Division and Division of Educational Improvement and Assistance, attended the Third Annual Institute for School Improvement and Education Options event, held in Rosemont, Illinois, September 22–23, 2008. The Institute’s topic was Linking Systems: State, District, School, Classroom. Participants reviewed research on statewide systems of support (SSOS) and examples of the implementation of the Center on Innovation & Improvement’s SSOS process in various states. Attendees also had the opportunity to interact with researchers, comprehensive center staff, and content center staff. To view the agenda, presentations, and support documents from the Institute, use this link to the CII Web site: <http://www.centerii.org/techassist/isieo/>

Certification and Preparation

The SECC staff assisted the Department’s Division of Certification and Preparation in researching various alternative certification programs that are being implemented in surrounding states in preparation for the Teacher Quality Task Force meeting, which was held September 24, at the Division of Leadership and Technology in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Response to Intervention

As a follow up to the planning meeting with educational improvement and assistance as well as literacy and numeracy staff at the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE), the SECC has coordinated a conference call between the LDE and the Mississippi Department of Education to discuss Mississippi’s Response to Intervention (RtI) statewide planning process. The SECC staff has provided extensive technical assistance for this project and is planning subsequent meetings to further define and develop the RtI process in Louisiana.

Corrective Action Plan

Recently, the SECC staff helped the LDE to develop a corrective action plan to address findings in the areas of English Language Learners (ELLs) and parental involvement. To further develop the plan and adhere to the established timeline, the SECC staff has scheduled videoconference calls between the LDE and the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center. In addition, the SECC and the LDE are holding ongoing meetings to develop a long-term professional development plan to address academic learning throughout the State.

In preparation for the ED monitoring visit in February 2009, the SECC staff continues to provide technical assistance to the LDE. This includes assisting the LDE with revising and enhancing the statewide parental involvement plan, revising the Title I Part A Parental Involvement Checklist, addressing parental notification issues, and developing professional development to address parental notification and compliance issues.

Mississippi

Professional Development and Technical Assistance Services

During September and October, the SECC collaborated with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) in providing a number of professional development and technical assistance activities in Mississippi.

The SECC staff facilitated the Mississippi Blue Ribbon Commission for the Redesign of Administrator Preparation Task Force Report work session, the statewide system of support self-assessment meeting, and the Office of Student Performance's planning retreat. The SECC also assisted the MDE with the planning and facilitation of the follow-up "coaching of coaches" professional development activity for the Office of Leadership and Professional Development. In addition, SECC staff provided technical assistance in the area of RtI, which included serving on the RtI manual subcommittee and the RtI coordinating council.

The SECC staff participated in several follow-up technical assistance activities, including the revision of the MDE's local education agency migrant education monitoring instrument, review and feedback of the ELL proficiency standards, state education agency (SEA) capacity building in the implementation of dropout prevention plans, and continued review of the Mississippi charter schools law.

In addition, the SECC staff participated in the following activities for the ED monitoring visits:

- Review of Title I submission information for the 11/08 Title I monitoring visit
- Review and feedback of the 6/08 Title II/Highly Qualified Teacher monitoring visit response
- Review and feedback of the 1/08 Title III monitoring report

Debbie Meibaum, SECC Mississippi State Liaison, and other SECC staff members worked with MDE staff to plan additional technical assistance in several key areas—alternative education, Tier II math interventions, follow-up social studies framework revision, and the Office of Healthy Schools work.

South Carolina

Assessment Changes: SC Says Goodbye to PACT, Welcomes PASS

Fall 2008 marks the last year that the South Carolina Department of Education (SDE) will report scores from Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) for students in grades 3–8 in its public schools. The final set of marks showed significant improvement across the board.

More students in grades 3–8 scored proficient or advanced in all 24 test categories, a significant improvement over 2007. African-American students and students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals made progress in reducing achievement gaps in English/language arts, science, and social studies, according to data released by the SDE. During May 2008, the SDE tested more than 300,000 students in those three subjects plus mathematics. Scoring levels

were below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced; students meet state academic standards by scoring basic or above. PACT has been administered statewide since 1999 but will be replaced next year by a new standardized testing system—the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards, or PASS—which will feature more detailed information on individual students and a faster turnaround on score reporting.

South Carolina recently passed legislation that formalizes changes to its statewide assessment program and includes the following key elements:

- Eliminates PACT and replaces it in 2009 with new end-of-year accountability tests that feature "essay" exams in March and more easily scored multiple-choice exams in May. Schools will get final results within a few weeks of the May tests, compared to late July with PACT.
- Revises the content of annual school report cards to make them more understandable and useful for parents, while simultaneously ensuring that any revisions are in full compliance with NCLB.
- Supports "formative" assessments in English language arts and mathematics to provide teachers with immediate feedback on individual students' strengths and weaknesses and allow them to customize instruction based on those needs.
- Eliminates burdensome paperwork requirements for teachers.
- Brings SC's student performance targets into alignment with other states. Changes student performance indicators on state standardized tests from four levels to three (exemplary, met, and not met).
- Reviews SC's school accountability system every 5 years to ensure that it's working efficiently and effectively.

"These changes are what teachers and parents have been asking for," explained Jim Rex, SC State Superintendent of Education. "They will make our accountability system more practical for educators, more effective for schools and more useful to parents."

Center on Innovation and Improvement

The Center on Innovation and Improvement (CII) is one of five national content centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education to help regional centers in their work with states to assist districts, schools, and families. The Center, which provides information, resources, and technical assistance, is administered through a collaborative effort of the Academic Development Institute, Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education, and Little Planet Learning.

CII provides information and resources on charter schools, restructuring and turnarounds, school and district improvement, statewide systems of support, and supplemental educational services (SES). The CII Web site has a searchable database of publications and Web sites that include reports, research documents, issue briefs, reports, and practice guides on various issues and topics

that are related to NCLB. The database is available at the following link: <http://www.centerii.org/centerIIPublic/>

On its SES web page, the CII has highlighted a brief entitled *Examples of State Monitoring and Evaluation of Supplemental Educational Service Providers* (Colasanti, 2007). This brief details state policies and procedures for evaluating SES providers for the following states Georgia, New Mexico, and Tennessee. To access the brief, use this link: <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/76/45/7645.pdf>

On its statewide systems of support web page, the CII has highlighted a brief entitled *State Systems of Support Under NCLB: Design Components and Quality Considerations* (Le Floch, Boyle, et al., 2008) that provides data from a national survey on common components of statewide systems of support. To access this research brief developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), use this link: <http://www.air.org/news/documents/Research%20Brief%20II%20State%20Systems%20of%20Support%20091508.pdf>

For more information on the CII, contact the Center's Director Sam Redding at 217-732-6462, extension 11, or access the Center's Web site at <http://www.centerii.org/>

Calendar of Events

Mississippi Department of Education Statewide System of Support November 4, 2008

Jackson Marriott, Jackson, MS

In this 1-day session, the MDE Self-Assessment Team will complete a Statewide System of Support Self-Assessment interview. The team will develop its perspective related to the services the MDE system of support services provides to districts and schools.

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English as a Second Language Institute November 5-7, 2008

Renaissance Pere Marquette Hotel, New Orleans, LA

The SECC at SEDL is hosting an English as a Second Language Institute: Jazzin' It Up: A Medley of Notes for Creating a Culture That Supports English Language Learners. The goal of the Institute is to increase participants' knowledge, awareness, and use of research-based practices for meeting the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs). The SECC has invited participants from SEA staff within its region to attend the Institute (participation is by invitation only).

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Response to Intervention Regional Summit on Funding Models February 25-26, 2009

Renaissance Atlanta Airport Concourse Hotel, Atlanta, GA

The SECC at SEDL is hosting a Response to Intervention (Rtl) Regional Summit on Funding Models that is designed to build the capacity of SEAs to implement Rtl using various funding methods. This regional meeting is designed for six-member state teams consisting of superintendents and directors who have programmatic and/or budgetary responsibilities. The SECC has invited participants from SEA staff within its region to attend the summit (participation is by invitation only).

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The Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) is one of 16 regional centers established by the U.S. Department of Education. The primary goal of the regional centers is to build the capacity of the state education agencies and statewide systems of support to implement NCLB. Links to the other regional centers, the content centers, and the U.S. Department of Education may be found on the SECC Web site (secc.sedl.org).

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