The LINK

AEL—linking the knowledge from research with the wisdom from practice to improve teaching and learning

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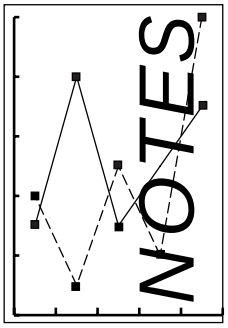
In this issue:

AEL
more than
30 YEARS
OF SERVICE
to educators in
Kentucky,
Tennessee,
Virginia, and
West Virginia



Parent Involvement in Schools: Researchers Look at Parents' Perspective

Parent involvement has long been a topic of interest among those concerned with optimal outcomes for students. For many years, education research has supported the conclusion that parental involvement generally benefits children's learning and school success. A new synthesis of the research literature, appearing in the Spring 1997 *Review of Educational Research,* suggests that parents' involvement decisions and choices are based on their own ideas and experiences, as well as on other factors growing out of environmental demands and opportunities. Three major factors appear to account for parents' decision to become involved in the education of their children: (1) parents' beliefs about what is important, necessary, and permissible for them to do with and on behalf of their children; (2) the extent to which parents believe that they can exert positive influence on their children's education; and (3) parents' perceptions that the child and school want them to be involved.

Researchers Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler (Vanderbilt University) reviewed psychological theory and research that appear to influence parents' involvement. They defined parent involvement as the broad range of activities cited in the involvement literature, including home-based activities related to children's learning in school (for example, reviewing the child's work and monitoring the child's progress, helping with homework, discussing school events, and talking by phone with the teacher). The researchers also looked at school-based activities such as driving on a field trip, coming to school for conferences or informal conversations, volunteering at school, or serving on a parent-teacher advisory board.

The researchers point out that parents, having made the basic decision to become involved in their children's education, choose involvement activities that are shaped by their perceptions of their own skills, abilities, and interests, as well as other demands on their time and energy. For parents who lack a firm belief that they should be involved in the child's education, neither a sense of efficacy

Schools Learn New Ways to Involve Parents in the School Improvement Process

Several school teams across the Region are collaborating to improve their schools, but they are not following some predetermined, step-by-step process. In retreat-like settings, AEL is helping school teams design their own unique improvement plans. Some are discovering innovative ways to include parents.

- A high school team came to the first retreat with a principal and two students but, for the second meeting, invited a parent to join them. Invigorated by the experience, the parent wrote a grant for the school to conduct—with the involvement of the greater school community—activities to help them more clearly define their vision. With the administrator's support, this parent has expressed the commitment to complete these activities with or without the grant money.
- One junior high school team met with a carefully selected group that included parents of high, average, and low achievers. Intent on hearing parents' views, the team used a process learned at an AEL retreat to ensure that everyone had an equal opportunity to be heard.

Both of these schools have made the vital connection between involving parents and improving their schools.

Would a team from your school like to get involved in a continuous quest for school improvement? Contact Beth Sattes (sattesb@ael.org) or Sandra Orletsky (orletsks@ael.org). Also, see related story on page 11.

nor the parent's perception of general invitations to become involved appear sufficient (in most circumstances) to move a parent toward involvement.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler recommend that communities and school districts include parents as an explicit part of the schools' mission. They also recommend that schools and teachers be enabled to spend at least a portion of the work week interacting with parents. Finally, the researchers conclude that those who wish to increase parent involvement and extend the benefits it offers must focus, in part, on the parent's perspective in the process.

For more information or a free single copy of the article, contact Denise McKeon or Mary Meyers at the American Educational Research Association, 1230 17th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-3078; 202/223-9485, fax 202/775-1824.

Weekly Guides Get Families Involved

Looking for a school-to-home communication tool that's simple to use and inexpensive? AEL's series of weekly guides, *Family Connections*, have found their way into more than 65,000 homes in 47 states. Schools send these colorful four-page guides home with children weekly—each child receives 30 different issues.

Family Connections 1 was designed for families of preschool children. *Family Connections 2* was developed for families of kindergarten and early primary children. Each issue offers a brief, easy-to-read message for parents concerning such topics as the importance of reading aloud, how children learn through play, or using the public library. A read-aloud selection is found in every issue as well. The guides' do-at-home activities are educational and fun for both parents and children. They use materials commonly found in most homes and require little preparation.

Some of these activities will soon be featured on AEL's web site (http://www.ael.org). From the *Family Connections* page, users can see

- a message to parents,
- a read-aloud selection for young children, and
- an activity that can be replicated at home.

A Spanish version of the guides is also available. Head Start programs and others that serve Spanish-speaking populations have found *Relaciones Familiares 1* to be a valuable tool for enhancing home-school partnerships.

Want to know more about *Family Connections*? Contact AEL to request pricing information and a free sample.

Defining Purpose Is the First of Many Steps in Creating an Effective Assessment System

Clearly defining the purpose, or purposes, of an assessment is the first, crucial decision states face when implementing assessment programs. But it is just one of five major challenges on which the success of the endeavor rests, says author Linda A. Bond in a report by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Setting the assessment system's goals requires deciding whether it will serve as a measuring tool of student performance or an instrument of curricular reform, and determining what students will be tested on, Bond explains.

Other challenges states must meet include the following:

- Technical requirements—The reliability, validity, and legal defensibility of assessments are essential, as is their ability to be implemented with the resources available.
- Capacity issues—Educators will need technical assistance and professional development to administer the tests and interpret and respond to the results. States should also help the public understand the tests' limitations.
- Impact on management and governance—The possibility exists that state-level assessment programs can (intentionally or not) limit teachers' flexibility in the classroom and move some control over education policy from the local to the state level.
- Difficulties associated with creating innovative assessments—Designing new testing technologies, such as essay-based tests or performance assessments, carries its own set of challenges because "agreement about quality control criteria" is not well established, and it

can be difficult to design, explain, and defend such tests.

To Order: *Challenges in the Development of State Assessment Programs That Support Educational Reform* is available from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1900 Spring Rd., Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60521-1480; 800/356-2735 (cite order no. RPIC-CD-95, 14 pages, $5.95 prepaid).

Adopting Approach That Reading Is Entertaining Helps Young Children's Literacy Development

A new study by the National Reading Research Center finds that growing up in a home where reading is viewed as a source of entertainment is a better means of preparing young children to read than growing up in a home where reading is viewed as a set of skills to be learned.

A research team led by Susan Sonnenschein, Linda Baker, and Robert Serpell examined the relationship between prekindergarten and kindergarten children's home environments and their early literacy skills development. The researchers categorized the home environments based on parents' responses to questions about ways to help their children learn to read and parents' journal entries about their children's reading activities.

The researchers' findings about "the importance of an entertainment approach to fostering literacy-related skills seems to be consistent with frequently recommended pedagogical practices," such as having children "read trade books rather than basals" and teaching phonics skills within a reading context. Such practices emphasize reading as a fun, worthwhile activity—not simply an accumulation of skills acquired through the use of flashcards and workbooks.

These findings come from an ongoing longitudinal study, making it possible to determine the relative effectiveness of the entertainment and skills approaches as children continue through elementary school.

To Order: *Strands of Emergent Literacy and Their Antecedents in the Home: Urban Preschoolers' Early Literacy Development* is available from the National Reading Research Center, Dissemination/Publications, 318 Aderhold Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-7125 (cite report no. 48, 40 pages, $4 prepaid; make checks payable to NRRC).

Videotape Stresses Importance of Reading Aloud

The Magic of Reading Aloud is a 14-minute videotape produced by the *Family Connections* staff at AEL. The video emphasizes the importance of reading aloud to create successful, happy readers. Patricia Penn, who wrote the script and produced the videotape, emphasizes that it is meant to be motivational for families, not instructional.

"It does include some how-to, but is primarily designed to stress the enjoyment of reading aloud," Penn said. Most of the readings used in the video are taken from *Family Connections*, AEL's colorful guides to early learning (see box, p. 3). Accompanying the videotape is a book, *Horace the Hugging Hippo*, written by Penn and illustrated by Royce Stanley Dunn. The book is featured as a read-aloud selection in the tape.

A limited number of copies of the videotape's first cut, along with a copy of *Horace*, are available on a first-come, first-served basis to *Link* readers. Send a check for $5, made payable to AEL, to cover shipping and handling. Direct your request to

AEL
Family Connections
Read-aloud Videotape Offer
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348

Rural Students Tell What They Like and Dislike About Their Schools

Rural students' likes and dislikes are similar to those of many students across the country. Reflections of rural students can be heard on an audiotape produced by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Although school can potentially offer a reprieve from boredom, some rural youth say they dislike or hate school. One complaint is being bored in classes in which they passively fill in worksheets or listen to the teacher lecture. "I think the classes that are most interesting are the ones that have hands-on work," one student says. "Really good teachers... talk to you, show you, and then let you do [the work]." Students agree that the best teachers present material imaginatively. One student describes how her teacher cut an apple into many parts to show what proportion of the earth is topsoil. "That got everyone involved, and they had fun," the student says.

In addition to having teachers who present subject matter creatively, students want teachers who care about them. "Teachers shouldn't be teachers unless they want to help students and watch them grow," another student comments. Another complains that too many teachers "don't make students feel like they're wanted in the class. Teachers say [the students] won't amount to anything."

In other parts of the audiotape, rural youth read excerpts from their writings about friendships, parents, racism, what it's like to grow up in a rural area, the need for security, and other concerns.

To Order: *Rural Audio Journal: Young Voices From the Rural Midwest* is available from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1900 Spring Rd., Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60521-1480; 800/356-2735 (cite order no. RAJ-V4-1, 60 minutes, $9.95 prepaid).

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools at AEL Offers New Digests

- Perspectives on Rural Child Care
- Unschooled Migrant Youth: Characteristics and Strategies to Serve Them
- Child Labor in Agriculture
- Learning from Gangs: The Mexican American Experience
- Why Bilingual Education?

These new two-page summaries of the education literature are available free from AEL or can be downloaded from the web at http://www.ael.org/erichp.htm.

Students Speak to AEL About School Reform

Student perceptions of their learning and the extent to which their education has prepared them for the future are rarely reported in the literature. But that is precisely the focus of AEL's 1997 Education Issues Forums, held this spring. At four high schools in each of our states, AEL's trained facilitators captured, in rich detail, the impressions of 10-12 seniors during two-hour focus group sessions. Students talked at length about their learning, the ways schools help them learn, and the effects of reform efforts such as block scheduling, technology-based instruction, and school-to-work programs.

AEL began its annual series of Education Issues Forums last year. The type of community visited in each state changes each year. Given the rural nature of much of AEL's Region, meetings in two states always focus on rural communities and schools.

AEL uses the knowledge gained through the forums to target its work to reflect local needs. Equally important, AEL expects the findings to contribute to an understanding of the issues facing schools and whether issues vary in different types of communities.

NOTEWORTHY

International Math-Science Study Finds United States Better in Science, But in the Middle Overall

According to the most thorough international study of math and science education ever conducted, U.S. students are above average in science and below in math. Overall, American students are above average in life sciences and environmental issues; average in fractions, algebra, and physics; but struggle with measurement and geometry.

Pursuing Excellence: A Study of U.S. Eighth-Grade Mathematics and Science Teaching, Learning, Curriculum, and Achievement in International Context, reports U.S. scores in both math and science as not significantly different from those of England or Germany. In science, among participating G-7 countries (United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and Italy)—America's major economic and political allies—only Japan scored significantly higher than the United States. Italy did not participate in the test.

Among the findings drawn from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS):

- eighth-grade mathematics classes in the U.S. are not as advanced and not as focused as those in Japan and Germany;
- topics taught in U.S. eighth-grade mathematics classrooms are at a seventh-grade level by international standards;
- the content of U.S. mathematics classes requires less high-level thought than classes in Germany and Japan;
- U.S. mathematics teachers' typical goal is to teach students how to do something, while Japanese teachers' goal is to help them understand mathematics concepts.

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley said states and local school districts should review and toughen their academic standards, and cited materials prepared by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as an example of how to improve the teaching of math. Based on videotapes of actual classroom instruction, the researchers found that U.S. math classes still largely focus on how to solve problems, while Japanese teachers do a much better job at helping students understand the concepts behind the solutions.

The study found that common culprits, such as television watching and lack of time devoted to study, could not account for the below-average U.S. math scores. Heavy TV watching was found to be about as common in Japan—one of the highest scorers—and U.S. students actually spend more classroom time on math and science than students in both Japan and Germany.

The TIMSS report includes other findings:

- There was little difference in how U.S. boys and girls scored in both math and science.
- Japanese teachers have more opportunities to discuss teaching-related issues with their colleagues than do U.S. teachers.
- U.S. teachers assign more homework and spend more class time discussing it than teachers in Germany and Japan. U.S. students report about the same amount of out-of-

Free Standards-Based Workshops in Mathematics and Science

Free workshops on standards-based teaching in mathematics and science are available to K-12 teachers in AEL's four states—KY, TN, VA, WV—a service provided by the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education.

The workshops not only address national standards in mathematics and science but are tailored to focus on each state's standards as well. Featuring hands-on activities, cooperative learning, and reflective discussions, the workshops were customized for each state by teams of teachers, state department representatives, and professional development experts. Teachers in each state have been trained to conduct the workshops at the local level.

Three- or six-hour workshops may be scheduled at local schools during the school day, after school, on Saturdays, or during the summer for a *minimum of 15 teachers*.

To schedule a workshop, the school principal or district administrator should contact the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at AEL.

school math and science study as their Japanese and German counterparts.

- U.S. teachers generally receive more formal education, but not as much hands-on training and daily support for quality teaching as their Japanese colleagues.
- Although most U.S. math teachers report familiarity with reform recommendations, few apply the key points in their classrooms.

Additional TIMSS reports, examining the math and science achievement of 4th- and 12th-grade students, are being prepared. In all, nearly 500,000 students participated in TIMSS—40,000 in the United States.

An additional report, *Splintered Vision: An Investigation of U.S. Science and Mathematics Education*, focuses on textbooks and curriculum in mathematics and science. *Pursuing Excellence: A Study of U.S. Eighth-Grade Mathematics and Science Teaching, Learning, Curriculum, and Achievement in International Context* draws from the many reports and parts of TIMSS to summarize the most important findings concerning achievement and schooling in the eighth grade.

Reports of the data are available on the Department of Education's Web site at http://www.ed.gov/NCES/timss. Printed copies are available while they last from the National Library of Education at 1-800/424-1616. The report also will be available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

AEL staff, especially those in the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education, are well versed in the TIMSS study. Consortium staff are meeting with steering committees in each of the four states to discuss ways to share the study results as information becomes available. AEL has distributed copies of the report to many education leaders and policy makers across the Region. Staff continue to investigate ways to promote effective discussion of the meaning of the data. AEL can be a valuable resource—for information, explanation, learning, and discussion—about the TIMSS findings.

Neuroscience Offers New Understanding of Dyslexia

Learning to read is fundamental to school achievement, yet one in five school children experience "an unexpected difficulty learning to read despite intelligence, motivation, and education" (p. 99). By definition, these children have dyslexia.

Once thought to be a visual problem, dyslexia is now understood by neuroscientists to result from a deficiency in the specific area of the brain that automatically and unconsciously processes the units of sound—phonemes—that make up words, both spoken and written. Brain regions responsible for higher-order linguistic functions—e.g., syntax, semantics, comprehension, and discourse—are not affected. Neither is intelligence.

In reading, children must learn to associate letters with their sounds, transforming the visual into the linguistic. To read the word "cat," for example, the reader must break the word into three letters with distinct sounds—kuh-aah-tuh—then reassemble the sounds into a one-syllable word. This part of the reading process is called decoding. Only after the word is decoded or identified does the reader have access to its meaning.

As reading proficiency develops, the part of the brain responsible for phonological processing shifts into automatic gear, breaking apart and reassembling the distinct sounds in words without conscious effort. In children with dyslexia, dysfunction in this part of the brain prevents the process from becoming automatic. Even dyslexic children who excel academically continue to read slowly and laboriously, with great conscious effort.

Dyslexia affects speech as well as reading, causing problems with the pronunciation of long or new words, or with names of objects shown in pictures. Phonological weakness

causes particular problems with rote memorization, where words are separated from their context, and with rapid retrieval of words, such as when children are called on to answer questions in class. Without the pressure of time, however, children with dyslexia may display excellent oral skills. Dyslexic individuals use their strengths in other brain regions to help compensate for their weakness in phonological processing, using context, concepts, models, and ideas (the big picture) to help them decipher words and remember specific details.

Standard classroom practices, such as timed tests and multiple choice tests, that isolate words from their context "excessively penalize" dyslexic students of all ages and prevent them from showing teachers what they know (p. 104). Appropriate classroom accommodations would, therefore, include allowing them to take tests without time limits and to substitute oral examinations and essays for tasks involving rote memorization and multiple choice. Most important, deliberate phonological training must be provided as part of early reading instruction.

More help may soon be forthcoming, if the results of a small study can be replicated with larger numbers of children, especially children with dyslexia. Researchers Paula Tallal and Michael Merzenich used video games with language-impaired children to stretch (or slow) speech, helping the children to process the sounds of letters. Children in the study made two years' progress in reading in only one month. An expanded study will involve up to 500 children across the country, and if results hold, a CD-ROM with the video games may be available to certified locations next year. Tallal is co-director of the Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience at Rutgers University, and Merzenich is with the Keck Center for Integrative Neuroscience at the University of California at San Francisco.

This story is summarized (by Soleil Gregg, AEL staff) from two articles published in the November 1996 issue of Scientific American: "Dyslexia" by Sally Shaywitz, pp. 98-104; and "Playing Past Learning Disabilities" by John Horgan, pp. 102-103.

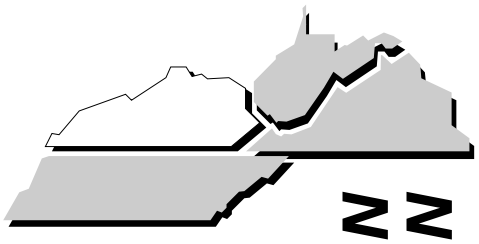
AEL at White House Conference on Brain Research

AEL staff attending the April 17 *White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning: What New Research on the Brain Tells Us About Our Youngest Children* say the event focuses the country's attention on the relationships between brain development and early learning—before most children have entered school. Secretary of Education Richard Riley welcomed conference participants and expressed the Department of Education's interest in the new brain research and its implications for school readiness and learning.

A message from President Clinton carried his desire to do four things to help children ages birth to three: (1) improve child care, (2) provide health insurance for children, (3) expand enrollment in Early Head Start, and (4) protect children's safety.

Patricia Kuhl, a researcher in speech and language development at the University of Washington, reported that language is mapped out during the first 6 to 12 months of life. She described the process this way: At birth, babies are global citizens, able to hear and distinguish all the sounds in all the world's languages. By six months, children can focus on the distinct sounds of their native language, and use listening to code or map sound structures in their brains. By 12 months, the brain is culture bound. For example, Japanese children can no longer distinguish between the sounds for "r" and "l" since the Japanese language has no "l." What is used is strengthened, what is not used is pruned. According to Kuhl, language develops through social interaction, as opposed to listening to a TV or radio. Social interaction stimulates hormone levels that, in turn, help lay the tracks to program the brain. She pointed out that preschoolers can learn a second language much easier than adults, but most foreign languages are taught at the secondary level of schooling.

Brain research, particularly as it relates to learning disabilities, is an area of special interest to Soleil Gregg. Readers who share this interest can contact her at AEL (greggs@ael.org).



FOCUS ON INSTRUCTION

Featuring articles from teachers in the four AEL states—this issue, Kentucky and Tennessee

The "Four-Column" Approach to Open-Ended Response Questions

by Cheryl Hayes, Teacher, Bowling Green, KY

Since the inception of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, Kentucky students are answering far more open-ended response questions. Because their answers are not always complete, our school adopted a method—the four-column approach—to help them think through this type of question (see Table 1). Students use the questions in the top row to read a question critically, think through a plan, and write an outline for an answer.

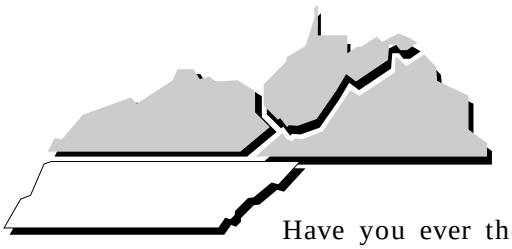
Columns 1 and 2 require critical reading, column 3 requires integration of process and content, and column 4 makes connections and moves students beyond proficiency.

Our students have found success with this process; in fact, one group of high school students conducted a workshop for teachers and students to demonstrate its use! What a wonderful exchange—to see all levels of students using this approach to respond completely to questions that previously may have stumped them. Not only did they find success with open-ended response questions, their self-esteem and morale received a boost as well!

For more information, contact Cheryl Hayes, seventh-grade math teacher, Drakes Creek Middle School, 704 Cypress Wood Way, Bowling Green, KY 42104; fax 502/782-6138.

Table 1. Open-Ended Response Analysis Chart

Knowledge (Know)	Processes (Do)	Level of Proficiency (Answer)	Connections (Apply)
• What are we talking about?	• What do I have to do? Identify verbs and key words. • How many questions do I have to answer? • How many times do I need to do it?	• What do I know that can answer these questions? • Is my answer complete? • Did I answer all parts of the question? How well did I do?	• How can I make this answer better? • How does this apply to other things? What other examples or effects can I think of?
• Students write down what the question is about—using the language from the question. • This involves a look at critical vocabulary and sets the parameters for the first step of reading and thinking.	• Students write down power verbs, key words and numbers. • This delineates processes, content, and amount needed.	• Students focus on the content and the number of requirements in the questions to assure a complete answer. • This moves students to the proficient level—they must answer all parts for proficiency.	• Students make connections with previous knowledge. • This process enhances breadth and depth of answers and may prompt additional ideas if the student is "stuck."



Nifty Fifty—
A Trip Around the United States

by Carolyn Smith, Teacher, Knoxville, TN

Have you ever thought of taking your students on a trip around the United States? They can take the trip while practicing their reading, English, social studies, mathematics, handwriting, spelling, and art.

This year-long project is a lot of fun for everyone. Here is how it works. At the beginning of each school year, my students bring a spiral notebook containing more than 100 pages. I ask them to pretend that they have just won a vehicle of their choice and $1 million—from a quiz show, lottery, sweepstakes, etc.—it's their choice.

In the first assignment, students explain how they won the money. Next, they create illustrations of their vehicles and write descriptions of them.

To begin their travels, I tell them they are being flown to Washington, DC, to accept their money. While there, they will also be sight-seeing. Each student chooses two places to visit in Washington. Their next assignment is to write about the trip—the flight, receiving the prize money, and the places they visit. I check out books from the school and public libraries to help with this task. Students can also get a lot of information from the Internet, if access is available. At the end of this task, students find out where their tour begins—the state in which they pick up their vehicles. Each student could depart from a different state.

Next, we work on learning how to use the AAA tour books—the basis for their research as they travel from state to state. Again, the Internet can be an excellent tool for doing some of this research.

The last four pages of the notebook are used to keep a detailed log of the expenses incurred while traveling around the United States. At the end of the year, students calculate their expenditures in each state. I give them the cost of gasoline and tell them how many miles per gallon their vehicles get. After adding gasoline costs to amounts they spent for other things, they calculate how much of their $1 million is left. Students reserve several pages before the expense log to explain how they will spend any remaining money, and illustrate those plans.

At first, we work 45-60 minutes on this project once a week, covering only one state per week. After three to four weeks—when I'm sure students understand what to do—I assign two states per week. They still have 45-60 minutes to work at school; however, anything not completed during that time has to be done on their own time.

One possible spin-off from this project is to assign each student a single state on which they do an in-depth project. Since each student will have had a brief overview of all 50 states, they will have some basis for making such a selection.

Nifty Fifty culminates every year with a states fair presented for parents, who have been very pleased with the project. In fact, one of my students was given the responsibility for planning the family's summer vacation.

For more information, contact Carolyn Smith, Farragut Intermediate School, 208 West End Boulevard, Knoxville, TN 37922; 423/966-6703.

AEL Brings Together School Teams in Continuous Quest for Improvement

In nontraditional, retreat-like settings, AEL is helping school teams—teachers, administrators, parents, and students—explore school transformation. At an April conference, high school team members became part of a collaborative effort in which AEL staff, school teams, higher education faculty, and other invited guests explored the how and why of continuous improvement.

If your high school missed the April meeting, it's not too late to get involved. More events are planned, and schools can join the effort any time. In addition, conferences will be scheduled for elementary and middle school/junior high teams.

> ***"I've never been to anything like this before . . . Usually conferences are boring. This is not another boring meeting about how to do [lesson plans] . . . step one, step two."***
>
> *—a conference participant*

Because the purpose of these conferences is to stimulate questions—not to provide answers—*Inquiry Into Improvement* does not feature the standard "how-to" programs about school improvement. Instead, nontraditional processes—storytelling, reflection and questioning, and inquiry groups—facilitate the events.

Some team members come to their first meeting expecting to sit through lectures and presentations, but instead, are quickly engaged in discussions and small-group work. Invigorated learners, pleased that the retreat demonstrates "learning by doing," replicate this approach at faculty meetings when they return to their schools.

Schools should attend future conferences if they

- are curious about how to get their school started on the continuous improvement journey,
- are interested in how to sustain school improvement efforts,
- want to network with other schools that are taking the journey, and
- want to investigate their own school and practice.

If your school is interested in joining this effort, call today and reserve a place for your team; ***registration is limited***. The fee of $50/participant includes five meals, refreshments, and materials. Fall conference dates will be confirmed soon.

For more information, please contact Sandra Orletsky (orletsks@ael.org) or Beth Sattes (sattesb@ael.org) at AEL.

INSIDE AEL

AEL Web Site Undergoes Major Remodeling

This is not just a facelift—it's major reconstructive surgery! AEL's web site is being redesigned to make it more dynamic, interactive, and product focused.

The site is changing from a "tell me" to a "show me" web site. For example, instead of simply telling users that AEL does research, our web site will provide research; in addition to describing a particular research project, our site will give tangible, immediately usable information related to the project's focus. You can expect to see teacher-developed activities from classrooms involved in various projects with AEL, directions for activities that parents can do with their young children, or helpful tips on implementing standards-based reform in math and science classrooms. The newly designed site should be up and running by the end of May.

We hope you'll like our site and visit it often (http://www.ael.org). Also, give us your views of its usefulness. Either e-mail aelinfo@ael.org, call 800/624-9120, or respond on-line to our new users' survey.

Teachers—
tell the story of your creative classroom in The Link!

Principals—
do you know of outstanding teachers who would like to share their stories?

See instructions provided in the insert to this issue.

School-to-Work Equity Kit

A new kit from the Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center offers a variety of resources intended to enhance and strengthen school-to-work programs. It comes complete with articles that examine the role of equity in school-to-work and skill standards; activities and guidelines for school- and work-based learning; a school-to-work fact sheet; information on key programs and publications and on disaggregating data; and the Center's school-to-work resource booklet, *School-to-Work: Equitable Outcomes* (order #2766; $15). For more information, contact Heidi Lynch, Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02160; 800/225-3088; fax 617/332-4318.

AEL Sponsors Fall Conference: Teaching and Learning for the Future November 7-8, 1997 • Nashville, TN

AEL's annual conference will feature sessions on technology, action research, equity issues, professional development, and services of the Region's technical assistance providers. One-day preconference training sessions on parent involvement, interdisciplinary teamed instruction, and other skills are planned for Thursday, November 6.

Nashville's Wyndham Garden Hotel (airport location) is the site for the event. The conference schedule of Friday morning through noon Saturday allows participants time to catch the sights and sounds of the home of country music. The Wyndham Garden will permit conference rates on rooms reserved any night from Wednesday through Saturday.

If you are interested in receiving the request for session proposals or further information on the conference, contact Jane Hange at AEL, hangej@ael.org.

The LINK

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