

# The Link

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*Linking the knowledge from research  
with the wisdom from practice  
to improve teaching and learning*

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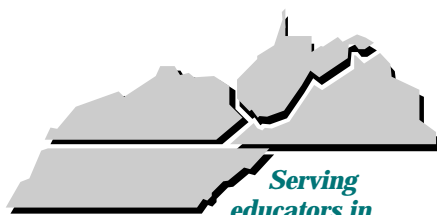
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educators in  
Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia,  
and West Virginia since 1966*

# Enabling Change

By Nancy Balow, AEL Staff Writer

Local school improvement efforts must balance the good of the few with the good of the many. Actions that benefit one group of students may be of no help or even detrimental to others. Views that seem true to one camp (*we must prepare students for a rapidly changing world*) can oppose views held by another camp (*the old ways have worked and will continue to work*). In advocating for the people or views they know best, some may find it hard to see the forest for the trees.

When an improvement or reform effort gets under way, often the biggest issue will be change and how to deal with it. Humans naturally resist change, which can create problems when trying to reach agreement about the need for change.

## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

### Lessons Learned About Change

AEL researchers have been studying school improvement since 1966; our experience has taught us some basic lessons about meaningful and lasting efforts.

- Improvement requires change, and change can require people to give something up—including a safe spot within their own comfort zone. Recognizing what's being sacrificed and helping its owner(s) deal with the loss is crucial.
- Depending on how it's perceived, change can either drive people further apart or bring them together. If someone resists change, it's good to find out why. Maybe there's a good reason.
- Change needs the support of leadership, preferably at both the school and district levels.
- Change efforts must be relevant to local needs.
- Change must extend beyond the school building to the whole community. Unless educators, parents, and other community members share a vision that incorporates education into their future, change efforts can fizzle or go off course.
- Change takes time. Some people will get on board immediately; others will resist for quite a while. Leaders must be prepared for the chaos that will sometimes seem to prevail.

### Blazing a Trail

Education researchers tend to look at schools as parts of a whole. We see value in creating an environment that nurtures the growth of all inhabitants rather than selectively supporting a few.

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, also referred to as the Obey-Porter initiative after the Congressmen who sponsored the legislation, reflects this view of education. It specifies nine criteria that schoolwide reform efforts must meet if schools are to receive program funding. Included among them are requirements that the effort must be research-based and demonstrate evidence of effectiveness and that parents, if not the whole community, must be actively involved.

These requirements leave a lot of room for applying different specific strategies so schools may customize programs to fit their local needs. To accomplish

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# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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the Obey-Porter goal of making reform efforts succeed in more schools, we need trail guides to get us through the forest.

AEL invited staff from the region's state departments of education to join with us and with developers of school-wide reform programs to think about how to create such a guide. This group agreed that leadership for reform belongs at the local level and that an effective implementation process should ease the way for settling differences while enabling members of all groups to identify their roles and build on their strengths.

These conversations with state departments of education, along with the national focus on comprehensive school reform and AEL's 32 years of experience, outlined a school improvement framework that AEL is refining and pilot testing in a small, rural community. The nucleus of this framework incorporates four major elements: community engagement, curriculum design/professional development, external facilitation, and formative evaluation (see box on page 3). Each of these elements shows promise of effectiveness by itself or in combination with other strategies. Implementing them in concert will be the key to helping high-needs schools achieve continuous improvement.

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**AEL's evolving school improvement framework includes four main elements: community engagement, curriculum design/professional development, external facilitation, and formative evaluation.**

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- **Community Engagement**

Research and experience suggest that schools enjoy greater success when they're fully integrated with and supported by their larger communities. Children are more likely to arrive at kindergarten ready for school when they have positive, stimulating experiences in home and day care settings. Students have more meaningful experiences in civics, career

planning, or community service when community agencies and businesses become active in their local schools. Schools can better prepare students for work when employers communicate with administrators and teachers. And parents can better understand how to support their children's learning when schools communicate with the community. The Rural Center at AEL contributes some of its extensive knowledge of community engagement to this program.

- **Curriculum Design/Professional Development**

AEL is developing a two-year process—Teaching and Learning Mapping Strategy—that incorporates both curriculum design and professional development. Teachers learn how to use student data to reveal the effectiveness of classroom instruction. They learn how to look at the curriculum vertically and horizontally across the school to see where their teaching and assessment match—or miss—the state's standards and tests. They describe classroom activities that illustrate how they teach and explain how they assess student mastery of standards. The strategy supports mapping of all content simultaneously, thus enabling teachers to identify potential areas for integration and reinforcement of learning across the curriculum.

A key component of the Teaching and Learning Mapping Strategy is an external facilitator who meets with teachers and administrators in workshop sessions and serves as a guide and mentor. The external facilitator works closely with a district facilitator and school site leaders to ensure consistency, progress, and commitment.

- **External Support**

External support is provided by an external facilitator, the person (or persons) who steps back and looks at the big picture of where the school is and where it needs to be going. The facilitator helps school staff build skills so they can use research-based knowledge to make decisions, can assess and evaluate school change, can identify and address problems, and can create collaborative relationships among school and community members. The facilitator works as a guide and mentor to help school and district staff ensure that new strategies work together to improve performance.

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## Implementing Schoolwide Programs

The U.S. Department of Education just published *Implementing Schoolwide Programs: An Idea Book on Planning*. Available free both on-line and from the publications office, the book includes an overview of the schoolwide planning process, step-by-step discussion on planning for change, information about high-quality technical assistance, advice on sustaining programs through accountability and continuous improvement, and resources to support implementation.

There are three ways to obtain the publication: call the department's publications office at 877-4-ED-PUBS, use the on-line ordering site at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html>, or print out a copy at [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Idea\\_Planning](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Idea_Planning).

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In June, AEL's External Facilitators Academy will begin training its first group of facilitators in the region. Many of these individuals will begin working with schools this fall. Over a two-year period, their training and work as school facilitators will contribute to successful implementation of reform programs at their assigned schools. Their observations will inform a formative evaluation process and regional research study that AEL is conducting in partnership with the Center for Research in Educational Policy at the University of Memphis (see "Not Tested on Animals" in *The Link*, Vol. 17, No. 4).

- **Formative Evaluation**

Frequent, well-designed progress checks can mean the difference between success and failure of an improvement plan.

AEL and the center have pooled complementary skills to develop materials and processes to conduct yearly formative evaluations specific to schoolwide reform. Researchers will help schools set implementation benchmarks, then will annually interview and survey teachers, students, and parents. They'll look at test scores and observe classroom activities and school events. This ongoing data collection process will be assisted by external facilitators and will provide information for annual reports, including recommendations which school leaders can use to plan the next stage of implementation.

In addition to site-specific evaluation services, the staff of AEL and the Memphis center will convene a series of evaluation forums open to all schools. As school staff learn about the techniques for and uses of formative evaluation, they will build local and district capacity to better evaluate school performance. ■

## A New Start for "Pilot" County

When the request for help came from state school officials last year, AEL staff were nearly ready to test elements of a new schoolwide reform program. The match was made, and the test began last fall.

Rural "Pilot" County school district is very isolated, has a meager tax base, and had experienced a long history of low performance on state tests. It recently emerged from a period of poor leadership, leaving it under close state scrutiny in probationary status.

New school leadership, supported by AEL's external facilitation and the state department of education, has helped classrooms, schools, and community involvement change for the better. AEL strategies are all directed at building knowledge and skills within the county so that improvement will continue after AEL departs.

Work began simultaneously in the community and in the schools. AEL staff helped school and local government officials convene strategic planning meetings with community members. Participants at these meetings have developed a vision statement that expresses their hopes for providing outstanding schools, creating new jobs, and preserving the area's cultural heritage—all of which should contribute to building a community their children will want to live in rather than leave.

Community members are applying this vision for the future to various areas of concern—education, culture, health care, industry, natural resources, adult education, and vocational education—so they can pay attention to maintaining and/or improving each.

In the schools, equally careful attention is being paid to issues of instruction, curriculum, and assessment through the application of AEL's Teaching and Learning Mapping Strategy. Training will take two years and give teachers a

practical, user-friendly way to help students achieve at higher levels. When introduced to the strategy, teachers were pleased. "We can do this," they said.

Although the strategy can eventually lead to curriculum reform, "it doesn't ask teachers to make immediate, drastic changes," says AEL codeveloper Becky Burns. "It assists schools and districts in three ways. First, by aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state standards and test objectives. Second, by increasing understanding of results-oriented teaching. And third, by improving teacher communication across and between grade levels and courses."

Assisting with implementation is AEL facilitator Joy Runyan. She'll work with "Pilot" County teachers and administrators during the two years it takes to get the strategy fully implemented. As she helps the district facilitator and school site leaders gain a working understanding of the strategy, Runyan will also assist with workshops and professional development activities for teachers.

"I'm a mentor," Runyan explains. "Teachers don't always have time to study something new. They can't sit back and look at how its pieces fit into what's already happening in the classroom, but that's what I'm supposed to do. Between what I see and what teachers tell me, we make the transition as smooth as possible."

Also smoothing the way to improvement will be formative evaluations of the county's innovations. As AEL staff help county and school leaders set benchmarks, they will make plans to measure the district's progress. Test scores, school and classroom observations, and surveys of teachers, students, and parents will all contribute to decisions about what happens in the future.

## Managing Change

“Just imagine how long it takes to move 3,000 kids six times a day,” says Pam Brown, principal of Woodbridge Senior High School in Virginia’s Prince William County School District. “On a traditional 55-minute class schedule, we had maybe 40 minutes of actual class time. Making time for quality instruction was a big factor in changing over to block scheduling three years ago.”

Woodbridge and district staff believe in working toward continuous improvement and try to stay on the cutting edge of education thinking. That’s why Brown decided to join AEL’s Quest project.

Quest schools work individually and as a network to build learning communities that include teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Assisted by a listserv, visits to one another’s schools, and rallies that bring network members together, Quest school teams and their AEL facilitators employ various strategies to help them become more effective learners. AEL’s Quest staff members also belong to the School Change Collaborative project of the regional lab network, which is examining the benefits of learning communities and developing improvement and evaluation processes.

To give Woodbridge’s new schedule a fair test, Brown and staff committed to block scheduling for four years, with the intention of doing formative evaluation along the way. Last summer they began by surveying students and teachers. The school has since conducted focus groups with students. In December the evaluation process continued with the use of a school self-study tool called Data in a Day. (See AEL’s Web site, <http://www.ael.org/rel/quest/dataday.htm>, for a complete description.)

Brown credits Quest and the processes it promotes for helping her school understand and manage change. “Our Quest team is very active. After the first rally, we had parents come back and do things like put up signs to make the campus more user-friendly. Now they understand that school climate can be just as important as academics. The students have used Quest processes in student government to help them recognize and address issues such as diversity. They’ve created organizations for groups that were being left out before Quest. It’s given them a foundation and tools to help them function as part of the school community.

“Quest introduced us to Data in a Day, which is so good at giving a quick snapshot of what’s happening right now in teaching and learning. I don’t know anything that does it better. One of its greatest benefits is getting all segments of the population thoroughly involved and focused on student achievement. We had 48 parents, students, and teachers acting as our researchers. We started one afternoon and finished the next, and it was interesting to watch the transformation in the parents over those two days. At the end they realized that they were really being heard and becoming part of the process.”

Brown believes that sense of involvement and ownership means just as much as the data that were collected. “Whatever decision we make about the future of block scheduling, it won’t be unilateral; everyone in the community will have a voice. Let me tell you, it’s a scary thing to open up your building and say ‘Come on in’ to people you don’t see every day, but we

can’t truly learn together unless we create a shared understanding. That understanding will help us communicate and arrive at agreement about change.”

*For information about the effectiveness of block scheduling in Virginia high schools, see “Block Scheduling Can Enhance School Climate” by Thomas L. Shortt and Yvonne V. Thayer in the December 1998-January 1999 issue of Educational Leadership. ■*

*This excerpt comes from a letter written by parents of a Woodbridge student to the editor of the Potomac News in Woodbridge, Virginia.*

We were recently participants of a 48-member team, consisting of staff, faculty, parents, and students, that did an evaluation of the 4 x 4 curriculum. Over a two-day period, this evaluation team examined previous survey data, observed 48 classes, and listened to very candid faculty, parent and student focus groups. . . .

We would like to commend Pam Brown, principal of WSHS, for her initiative and courage to conduct such an innovative, introspective evaluation. With total Woodbridge community involvement, teamwork, and commitment to continued evaluation of the educational process, Woodbridge Senior High will remain on the leading edge of educational excellence.

We urge all parents to become involved in their children’s school. A wonderful experience is waiting for you right in your own backyard!

# OFF TO A GOOD START

Children have the best chance of benefitting from school when adults in the community share responsibility for preparing them for it. This means helping ensure that children's health and nutrition needs are met; that parents have the support and training they may need to be effective as their children's first teachers, and that children have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs. These principles lie at the heart of National Education Goal One: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

Partnerships among schools, businesses, service providers, and other organizations have moved many communities closer to making this first goal a reality during the ten years since the na-

tion's governors and President George Bush established the National Education Goals. Various efforts have focused on five critical dimensions of children's growth: physical well-being and development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language usage, and cognition and knowledge.

Local innovation, coupled with education research, offers hope for addressing these five interrelated dimensions so that children start school ready to learn. If you're inspired by the ideas presented below and the stories that follow, visit the National Education Goals Web page at <http://www.negp.gov> for in-depth reports on early childhood education efforts and a community action toolkit.

## Learning Starts Before School Begins

By Suzie Boss, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Ask young children when "real school" begins and they'll typically say, "Kindergarten." But according to researchers, children start learning the complex skills they'll need to become competent readers and writers long before they take their first baby steps.

*Learning to Read and Write: A Place to Start*, by Rebecca Novick of the Child and Family Program at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), synthesizes current literacy research to guide educational practices for the preschool and primary grades. Although the book highlights studies in fields ranging from linguistics to child development to neuroscience, the style is accessible, with colorful classroom examples and suggested activities used to illustrate key concepts.

The book begins with an in-depth look at the preschool years, when babies and toddlers acquire oral language skills in the context of relationships. "Sensitive, responsive, loving care is all that infants need to grow and thrive," the author reports. Parents and other caregivers can nurture what researchers call "emergent literacy" by providing opportunities and encouragement for children to speak, hear, read, write, view, think, and explore. Far from being passive learners, infants actively respond to stimuli and

are "profoundly social," Novick points out.

Researchers understand language development to be an innate, natural process. In a passage about baby talk, for example, Novick shows that parents' instincts for how to communicate with their babies—using short, repetitive utterances and a singsong

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**Parents and caregivers can nurture "emergent literacy" by providing opportunities and encouragement.**

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delivery; exaggerating facial expressions; exchanging "coos" or smiles—dovetail with infants' attraction to stimulation and need for emotional connection. As toddlers begin uttering solitary words, then putting phrases together, parents and caregivers are wise to avoid correcting grammar. Instead, the author describes how adults can "provide, expand, and idealize language."

Reinforcing the basic concept that "reading is language," Novick points to three key areas in which teachers and parents can optimize literacy development during the preschool years:

- Oral language development, nurtured through activities such as conversation, pretend play, and storytelling
- Print awareness, enhanced by immersing preschoolers in a print-rich environment
- Phonemic awareness (an "ear" for the separate sounds in words), encouraged through reading nursery rhymes, singing songs, and engaging in language play

How do children navigate the transition from oral language to written language—from being speakers to being readers and writers? A chapter devoted to the primary years highlights the major research insights into the reading process and translates them into useful strategies and practices teachers can incorporate in the classroom. "Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are all aspects of literacy," the author notes, "and develop in an interdependent manner."

This interdependence among literacy skills is reinforced throughout the book. When reading and writing are taught together, for example, "the benefits are greater than when they are taught separately," Novick reports. Similarly, more complex tasks—fol-

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## Building Excitement About Learning

When Monday morning rolls around, young children in Covington, Kentucky, embrace the new week enthusiastically. They look forward to reading, singing, and playing with their teachers, who treat the children like family. Youngsters also enjoy studying theater, writing, quilting, or other arts with an artist-in-residence.

Diane Roketenetz directs the James E. Biggs Early Childhood Education Center. With a staff of 27 lead, assistant, special ed, and home-based teachers and about 100 parents, the center helps 370 youngsters get off to a good start in school.

The 3- and 4-year-olds who participate in the Biggs Center programs develop an excitement about learning that gives them a measurable boost when they reach elementary school. And their families, who may spend nearly as much time at the center as their children do, become learners and teachers themselves.

Roketenetz credits parents with much of the center's success. "By breaking down the walls that were keeping families away, we've achieved high levels of participation. We offer drop-in child care and let parents ride the school buses with their children. Every year we train about 100 parents in how to read to their children, how to promote language development, and how to have fun with learning. The parents receive a small stipend for time they spend helping in the classroom, and they take their new skills home with them."

Four-year-olds spend mornings or afternoons at the center every Monday to Thursday. Fridays they stay home for visits from the teachers, who demonstrate ways to turn everyday activities and simple games into

learning experiences. They bring baskets filled with books and other materials, some of which help with developing parenting skills.

Three-year-olds travel to the center only on Fridays and receive visits at home on other days.

Plenty of other activities make it easy for working parents to be part of center life. Events such as Dad's Nights routinely draw large numbers of fathers and grandfathers, and whole families enjoy events such as Biggs Bingo, which culminate in celebrations attended by as many as 500 community members.

Seventy percent of Covington families meet federal free lunch guidelines, which would cause many educators to label these youngsters as "at-risk." Roketenetz resists, preferring to call her students "at-potential," saying "they're perfectly capable of learning, they just need the opportunity."

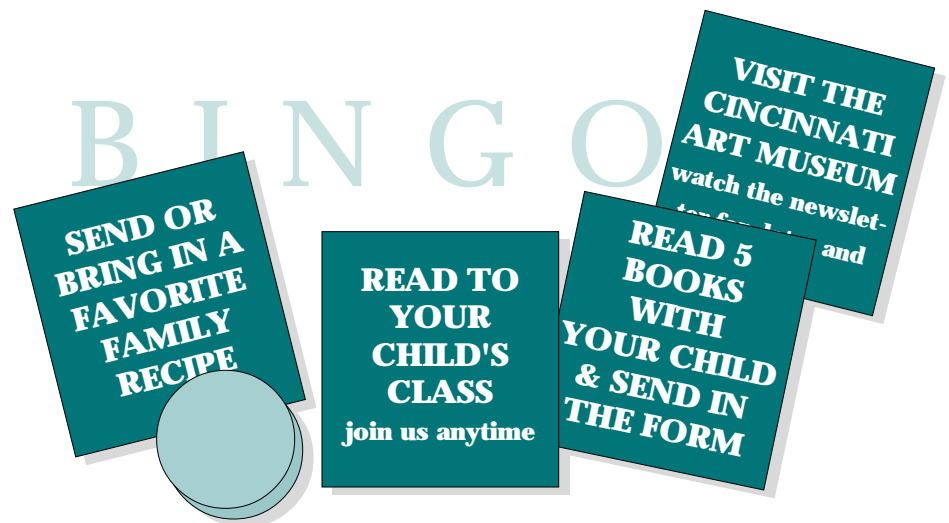
Before 1990, Covington had only a Saturday program for preschool children. When the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) passed, the Cov-

ington Independent School Board committed wholeheartedly to its early intervention policies. The board remodeled an abandoned building into a warm, welcoming environment for families. In addition to eight pre-school classrooms, the center houses a family resource center, which offers career programs, GED classes, and life skills training to adults.

The center offers a series of 12 Parent Power classes that give parents insight into how the school system operates and how to become advocates for their children. Other classes involve parents' attendance at school board and site-based council meetings, followed by informal discussions of the experience.

While the Biggs Center has won awards and recognition from local, state, and national education groups, Roketenetz takes most satisfaction from the community response. "We've been able to make these great gains because our families come and work side by side with us. The center really belongs to the community."

*For more information, contact the Biggs Early Childhood Center, 1124 Scott Street, Covington, KY 41011, phone 606-292-5895. ■*



Biggs Bingo and similar programs last several weeks and involve whole families. These pieces of a bingo board show some of the activities adults and children can enjoy. When the program period ends, everyone brings the completed boards to a celebration that includes food and prizes.

## A Moral Imperative to Share

“You could say it was serendipity—teacher Amy Brillhart saw a mom, who was obviously a day care provider, dragging an assortment of six kids with her and wondered, ‘How can we reach the people who take care of our babies?’”

That’s how Jamie Chapman, former director of the Virginia Beach

“We created workshops that were great for 16 people, but we knew there were lots more parents of preschoolers out there. In fact, approximately 30,000 children younger than age 5 live in Virginia Beach, so about 6,000 enter kindergarten each year, and many simply aren’t ready. In 1997-98, 20 percent of the children

appropriate activities. Through the Virginia Beach City Public Schools they recruited four elementary schools into the project, then asked for their help in identifying local home-based day care providers.

Next, working with child development experts from Tidewater Community College and Old Dominion University, and leaders from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the team added two high school teachers and their child care occupation students at the Virginia Beach Technical and Career Center.

Special education teachers and their students in the vocational education program at Princess Anne High School came on board, as did fourth and fifth graders from the elementary schools. Together, these groups form the Ready to Learn Teams and Partnerships that make the program work.

The program is elegant in its simplicity. The child care students at the career center design materials for a kit that contains a month’s worth of activities for youngsters and parents. The kits are produced by the special education students at the high school, then delivered to the elementary schools for students who live near the day care providers to carry home on school buses and deliver. As parents bring their children to and from day care, they borrow videos and learn about activities they can continue at home. Recently the providers also began using AEL’s *Family Connections I Parent Notebooks*.

The project is small but growing—the original nine providers and four el-

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Jamie Chapman

Julie Cheatwood of the Rainbow Room Pre-school gets help from Logan Randolph, Connor Gannucci, and Jenna Corey as she opens February’s Ready to Learn Kit.

Education Association, describes the genesis of the Ready to Learn Kit. At their 1996 Summit for Children, teachers in the Virginia Education Association committed to the development of an early childhood education program. Believing that parental involvement in children’s education, from birth through high school, is the factor most likely to help children succeed, they started with the tried-and-true parenting workshop.

were so far behind that they qualified for a remedial program in kindergarten. Fortunately, when Amy saw that home day care provider, the light went on.”

Chapman, Brillhart, and other teachers brainstormed an idea to build partnerships between schools, home day care providers, and parents for the purpose of giving infants, toddlers, and preschool children opportunities to participate in developmentally ap-

### Preventing Reading Difficulties

*National Research Council*

A 1998 report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, states that 40% of American fourth graders failed to read at a basic level in a 1994 national assessment. The report calls for an end to the “reading wars” and for specific actions, from early childhood through elementary school, to boost reading achievement.

The report, and activities related to literacy, can be found at the U.S. Department of Education Web site, <http://www.ed.gov/inits/readingsummit>. To order a print copy of the report call 800-624-6242. For free publications and videos on child literacy, call 877-4-ED-PUBS.

## Learning Starts

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lowing a complicated plot or argument, or expressing ideas in writing—call for the very reasoning skills that children hone by listening to stories and engaging in dramatic play.

“The five-year-old who makes up her own stories, invents new rhymes, writes pretend messages, discusses books that have been read to her, sings complex songs, and reads a book she has memorized is demonstrating that she has a great deal of knowledge about reading and writing,” Novick says.

*Learning to Read and Write* doesn't shy away from the hard questions about literacy: Why do some children

fail to acquire reading skills in the primary grades? What causes some young readers to hit a slump around the fourth grade? What puts children from poor families more at risk of school failure? Novick delivers answers grounded in research and buttressed with examples from the real world.

The book includes profiles of five schools that demonstrate “innovative and culturally responsive educational practices.” In these engaging site pro-

files, creative teachers bring research concepts alive in their classrooms, demonstrating the author's intent to tie theory with practice.

The book concludes with materials to use in workshops for parents and teachers. Handout topics range from the benefits of story reading to the latest news in brain development.

*Reprinted courtesy of NWREL, this story originally appeared in the January-February 1999 issue of Northwest Report. ■*

To order a copy of *Learning to Read and Write: A Place to Start*, contact NWREL's Document Reproduction Service, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204-3297. Telephone 503-275-9519 or e-mail [products@nwrel.org](mailto:products@nwrel.org). The 202-page softcover book costs \$20.00, shipping included.

## Assessing Readiness

According to the first of the six National Education Goals (1991), “all children in America will start school ready to learn.” What assessments are available for teachers to use in evaluating children's readiness for kindergarten? How valid are they for different instructional and policy purposes?

In a new paper, Samuel J. Meisels of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement addresses various meanings of the term “readiness” and the methods that have been devised to assess children's learning at the outset of formal schooling. Meisels identifies four interpretations of “readiness,” which each suggest a different approach to teaching young children and assessing their learning.

A copy of CIERA Report #3-002, *Assessing Readiness*, is available on-line at <http://www.ciera.org>. A printed copy costs \$6.50, shipping included, and may be ordered from CIERA/University of Michigan, 610 E. University Ave., Rm. 1600 SEB, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259.

## A Moral Imperative

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elementary schools have increased to 20 providers and seven schools—and Chapman expects more growth as new funding becomes available. “We started with a minigrant from the Virginia Education Association. We estimate the total cost to be \$20 per preschool child per year, for which we're getting huge returns.

“Our child care occupation students know they're creating activities that will be used by real people, not in some theoretical situation. Their studies about early childhood brain and language development have true immediacy. When they learn about the ‘best practices’ of parental interaction, they know they'll be applying what they learn to creating videotapes and printed materials for actual use. That matters.”

The special education students get similar satisfaction from making and assembling the kits. Elementary students enjoy being responsible for delivery, and their parents like building stronger relationships with neighbors.

There's a strong public policy aspect as well, Chapman believes. “Given what we now know about the importance of early childhood

experiences, public educators have a moral imperative to share this information with parents. Time could be running out on public education funding unless we get smart and work on things we really know can make a difference.”

*Although the Ready to Learn Kit program began in an urban setting, Chapman expects to replicate it in the more rural peninsula area to which he recently moved.*

*For more information, contact Jamie Chapman at Colonial UniServ Unit. Phone 757-867-7331 or e-mail [jamiec0202@aol.com](mailto:jamiec0202@aol.com). ■*

## AEL's *Family Connections*

learning guides have been used by kindergarten and Head Start programs for several years and remain popular across the country. Each guide includes fun activities requiring ordinary household materials as well as reading selections and more. The *Parent Notebook* makes these guides available to everyone. See order form/insert for price and ordering information.

# RESEARCH NOTES

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Information funds research through regional laboratories, national centers, and field studies. The following are summaries of recent reports. Information on finding the complete text includes a Web address (for downloading) as well as contact information for obtaining printed copies.

## A Look at State Reading Standards

From the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement

How do state language arts standards influence the way teachers teach and, ultimately, what and how children learn?

To begin the task of evaluating the impact of state standards on American students, researchers compared the structure and information of state language arts standards, focusing on the 14 state documents that provided benchmarks or objectives by grade level for grades K-3.

Analysis of the documents led to several recommendations, including the following.

- The organization of state standards and benchmark documents should conceptualize reading in a manner that is simple enough to support manageable systems of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting, but not so simple that important areas of emphasis are overlooked.
- The content of early reading/language arts standards and benchmarks should derive from information based on current research conducted from a variety of perspectives.
- State standards should invite conversation about what students should be able to do.

The criteria used for this analysis should be useful to districts in evaluating their state standards for early reading/language arts.

Karen K. Wixson and Elizabeth Duto, *Standards for Primary-Grade Reading: An Analysis of State Frameworks*, CIERA Report No. 3-001. Download at <http://www.ciera.org> or mail to CIERA/University of Michigan, 610 E. University Ave., 1600 SEB, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259. Print version costs \$6.50, shipping included.

## Why Cross Boundaries?

From the Center on English Learning and Achievement

This paper describes the arguments, made for using interdisciplinary approaches in school curricula. *The Logic of Interdisciplinary Studies* reviews the historical antecedents, looks at how interdisciplinary studies are organized, and looks for answers to several questions. Are there differences across content areas? What general assumptions about teaching and learning are made? And how are interdisciplinary studies

presumed to improve upon traditional approaches to school curriculum?

The authors don't attempt to examine the empirical evidence about whether or not interdisciplinary studies 'work,' as little research of this sort exists. The focus here is on frameworks, justifications, and reasons that may be built in part on empirical evidence but also on assumptions about teaching and learning.

Sandra Mathison and Melissa Freeman, 1998. *The Logic of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Report Series 2.33 (11004). Go to <http://cela.albany.edu/logic/logic/html> or mail to CELA at University at Albany, School of Education, ED-B9, 1400 Washington Ave., Albany, NY 12222.

## Students Need Health and Work Skills

From the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory

Americans consistently rated health information and work skills high on the list of content areas that "definitely" should be included in a kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum, according to a new study by McREL. Language arts, technology, and mathematics rounded out the top five rated areas.

Results from a national survey conducted by the Gallup Organization are featured in the report *What Americans Believe Students Should Know: A Survey of U.S. Adults*. The survey asked American adults to rate the importance of over 250 academic standards from multiple content areas.

The survey items were created from McREL's nationally recognized database of content standards, *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)* (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>). The work-related competencies were derived from documents that represent opinions of employers.

The questionnaire used in the survey was designed so that states or local school districts can replicate this study in their communities to determine what knowledge educators, the general public, or other key groups believe is important for students to master. The survey questionnaire is included in the on-line version of the full report.

Print and on-line versions of both the executive summary and full report are available. Go to <http://www.mcrel.org/survey/summary.asp> or [www.mcrel.org/survey/index.asp](http://www.mcrel.org/survey/index.asp). For print versions, phone 303-337-0990 or e-mail [info@mcrel.org](mailto:info@mcrel.org).

## School Improvement via the Web

From the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

In an attempt to make research more accessible to the education community, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) has developed a research-based Web

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site on school improvement issues. The Pathways to School Improvement site is primarily designed to provide school improvement teams with the most up-to-date research-based information on school reform for use in designing individual school improvement plans. NCREL researchers have organized the material in an easy-to-use format. For example, when you visit the site, you begin by identifying a critical issue. Each issue has eight components.

1. Issue: Concisely states the issue or the problem
2. Overview: Discusses the issue and why it is critical for schools to consider it
3. Goals: Lists goals developed from research and best practice
4. Action Options: Identifies strategies teachers, administrators, parents, and the community can implement
5. Implementation Pitfalls: Alerts user to problems frequently encountered
6. Different Points of View: Acknowledges and outlines alternative points of view related to the critical issue
7. Illustrative Cases: Describes experiences in real schools
8. Contacts: Explains how to get in touch with agencies that help school teams

In addition, the resources are set up so that the teams may develop a "customized school improvement profile" that can be used to check their progress.

Pathways to School Improvement is at [www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm).

### Guidebooks, Reports, and Sample Assessments

#### *From the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing*

This center's Web site provides a wealth of tools for administrators and teachers. Guidebooks to assist with implementing assessment reform practices include one titled *Portfolios and High Technology Guidebook*. It addresses the use of portfolios and provides practical advice on defining standards, content guidelines, and scoring criteria to make sense of the portfolio process.

Reports cover many aspects of assessment and include several from studies done in Kentucky. Among these is *Writing Whirligigs: The Art and Assessment of Writing in Kentucky State Reform*. It follows one exemplary seventh-grade Kentucky teacher as he teaches the art of writing while simultaneously addressing the demands of the state evaluation.

Under "What's New," look for *Sample Performance Tasks*, a collection of tools the center prepared for the Los Angeles Unified School District that can be easily adapted for use elsewhere.

All of the above, and much more, can be downloaded at <http://www.cse.ucla.edu>. For information about print versions, contact CRESST/UCLA, 301 GSE&IS, Box 951522, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1522, phone 310-206-1532. ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION

### Professional Development for Practitioners

*Only one in five teachers feels "very well prepared" to work in a modern classroom, according to a recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). One reason, Secretary of Education Richard Riley notes, is that many teachers have inadequate*

*opportunities for professional development. AEL has planned several activities for educators to build their skills; we hope to see you at one. Visit the Training and Conferences page of our Web site (<http://www.ael.org/training.htm>) for more information.*

#### Equity Conference 1999: Mathematics, Science, and Technology for ALL Children May 6-8, Nashville, TN

Sponsored by the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education and the Region IV Comprehensive Center at AEL, with support from the Virginia Space Grant Consortium, this conference will emphasize gender equity, multiculturalism, and students with special needs. The conference will address the latest research about equity issues, classroom practices, and resources for

implementing equity strategies in schools. Keynote speakers include David Sadker, author of *Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls*, and Dr. Vinetta Jones, Executive Director of EQUITY 2000.

Teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, school-to-work educators, higher education faculty, preservice teachers, and anyone interested in mathematics, science, and technology education will enjoy this conference.

Register early, as space is limited. Through April 1, registration is \$65, thereafter the fee goes up to \$75.

For more information, visit our Web site or contact April Noble by e-mail ([noblea@ael.org](mailto:noblea@ael.org)) or phone 800-624-9120.

#### Effective Questioning to Increase Student Achievement: QUILT Training for Trainers June 20-25, Lexington, KY

QUILT—Questioning and Understanding to Improve Learning and Thinking—helps schools restructure their classrooms to make the learning environment more active, student-

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centered, constructivist, inquiry-based, and metacognitive. Designed to increase student learning by improving teachers' classroom questioning techniques, QUILT complements and supports many staff development and school reform programs.

This training-of-trainers helps districts prepare cadres of teachers who can train others in the schools, districts, and states. Typically, a local school team (two teachers and an administrator) attends the training. QUILT has been successfully implemented in elementary, middle, and high schools.

The QUILT program

- is nationally validated, certified by the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel as a "program that works"
- has a successful track record in more than 200 schools since 1991
- is research-based, incorporating practices and techniques linked to higher levels of student achievement

Registration costs \$675 per person.

For more information, visit our Web site or contact Sandra Orletsky or Beth Sattes by e-mail (orletsk@ael.org, sattesb@ael.org) or phone 800-624-9120.

**Special for Kentucky schools:** The Kentucky Department of Education has grants available to help nine schools send teams to 1999 QUILT training. For more information, contact Shirley Keene by e-mail (keenes@ael.org) or phone 800-624-9120.

### Interdisciplinary Teamed Instruction: 1999 Summer Institutes

June 21-25, Salt Lake City, UT  
July 12-16, Lexington, KY

This school reform strategy builds collaboration and promotes integration across the school curriculum. It enables teacher teams, students, administrators, and community members to weave standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment into a rel-

evant, rich tapestry of learning experiences.

Each team leaves the weeklong Institute with these tools:

- a plan for implementing interdisciplinary teamed instruction
- a team-developed integrated unit
- specific instructional practices such as project-based learning, teaching to multiple intelligences, and community-based learning
- strategies for developing alternative assessments, performance criteria, and scoring rubrics
- resources for effective teamwork, community-building, and networking

Registration fee of \$450 per person will be accepted until June 1. Teams of six or more receive a 10% discount.

**Special to Kentucky educators:** The Kentucky Department of Education has scholarships available for the Lexington institute. Visit our Web site for more details, or contact Rebecca Burns at AEL by e-mail (burnsr@ael.org) or phone 800-624-9120.

### SEIR♦TEC Leaders Academy

July 20-23, Moneta, VA

The effective use of educational technology depends on a number of factors, including the need for a shared vision of technology's role, training, technical support, access, and time. Most important may be the support provided by a skilled administrator. This three-day academy will help education leaders develop their skills.

School or district teams are encouraged to attend this event, presented by AEL and SEIR♦TEC.

Participants will explore three strands related to technology in education. *Leadership in Technology* will build capacity to create shared vision and develop a climate conducive to change. *Technology for Leadership* will provide knowledge and skills about key areas of technology. *Voices From the Field* will present lessons learned from educators who have earned rec-

ognition for their use of educational technology.

Registration is free, but space is limited and applications must be received by April 30. For an application or more information, visit our Web site or contact Marcie Altice by phone, 540-483-5289, or e-mail, maltice@frco.k12.va.us.

### Inquiry Into Improvement: Quest for SMART Learners

July 26-27, Gatlinburg, TN

SMART stands for successful, motivated, autonomous, responsible, and thoughtful—all characteristics that can apply to teachers, administrators, and parents as well as students. All are invited to this symposium to discuss and learn more about authentic teaching, alternative assessment, motivation, and more. Presentations will include student-led conferences and a sharing of Quest schools' experiences.

For more information, visit our Web site or contact Beth Sattes or Shirley Keene by e-mail (sattesb@ael.org or keenes@ael.org) or phone 800-624-9120.

### The EDPubs On-Line Ordering System

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html>

This new system will help you identify and order U.S. Department of Education products. It offers search options to help you find specific products or arrange to borrow copies of videotapes.

### ASCD Education Bulletin

This free, biweekly, on-line newsletter from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development includes short items of interest to people who care about K-12 education (including early childhood). It covers such topics as curriculum, instruction, assessment, technology, equity, diversity, and maintaining strong support for public schools.

To subscribe, send an e-mail message to [listserv@listserv.ascd.org](mailto:listserv@listserv.ascd.org) (leave the subject line blank). Your message should say "subscribe bulletin," but don't use the quotation marks. ■

# NEW PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

## Professional Development “How-To’s”

The SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) has developed a “how-to” resource that assembles the current research on professional development and change for educators looking to accelerate their professional growth and to improve student learning. Researchers review the stages of building an effective professional development system and offer a framework for change:

- Develop a vision of effective professional development that takes into consideration such factors as the concept of change and adoption of new strategies.
- Examine the concept of schools as learning communities where all members—teachers, parents, students, administrators, support staff—learn with and from each other.
- Plan for professional development, using a process that includes the four major components of content, objectives, activities, and evaluation.
- Consider the investments necessary in creating and implementing a successful program, particularly such issues as finding time and developing external partnerships.
- Explore promising forms of continual assistance, such as

peer coaching and a robust form of collaboration called joint work.

- Develop a plan for assessing and monitoring the progress of professional development programs.

To order *Achieving Your Vision of Professional Development: How to Assess Your Needs and Get What You Want* by David Collins, contact SERVE at 1-800-352-6001 or go to <http://www.serve.org>. The 169-page book costs \$10. Named 1998 Book of the Year by the National Staff Development Council.

## Defining What’s Important

The Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) has just published *Essential Knowledge: The Debate Over What American Students Should Know* by Robert J. Marzano and John S. Kendall, with Barbara B. Gaddy. McREL’s examination of the core knowledge every American student should master explores such questions as How should essential knowledge be identified? Is there enough time to teach essential knowledge? What are Americans’ views on essential knowledge? (This question is partly answered by McREL’s recent research—see “Students Need Health and Work Skills” on page 9.) The book also looks at the powerful relationship between academic standards and vocabulary.

To order, contact McREL by phone at 303-651-2829 or fax 303-776-5934 or go to <http://www.mcrel.org/products/essentialknowledge.asp>. Cost is \$39.95 plus \$4.00 shipping.



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