



Regional Educational Laboratories

Responding to Regional Needs & National Priorities

2004

Annual Report



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Responding to Regional Needs & National Priorities

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Network: Responding to Regional Needs and National Priorities

More people in the United States are better educated today than ever before. Raising standards to ensure that everyone is well educated is the overarching goal of the current federal commitment to successfully educate every child. The U.S. Department of Education's regional educational laboratory (REL) network is an integral part of this effort to improve education for all of the nation's children. The 10 RELs—which are private, nonprofit, or public agencies—are regionally governed and situated and thus strategically poised to respond to particular regional needs and to help state and local education agencies, districts, and schools implement federal initiatives. Whether it is the challenges experienced by children who travel long distances before their school day begins or working with schools with overwhelming numbers of second language learners, each laboratory conducts regional work that can ultimately benefit students across the nation.

A National Network

The RELs' efforts to respond to federal initiatives and those of each of the states within the 10 regions enables RELs to be a quick-response national resource for meeting the needs of their clients as they work to link research to policy and practice. In carrying out their mission, the RELs respond to the myriad needs of clients—from state policymakers, school district superintendents, and principals, to classroom teachers working to meet the needs of individual students.

How Are We Doing?

The RELs develop and disseminate a large number of products and provide many services to clients—more than 1.2 million product items and more than 88,000 services during the last fiscal year. Advances in technology, such as the use of the Internet for electronic dissemination of products, have greatly increased the network's capability to have an impact on the work of educators and policymakers: Clients accessed the 10 REL websites and the REL network website more than 50 million times during the last 12-month period.

The RELs

The nation's regional educational laboratories are funded by the U.S. Department of Education as authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and that act's reauthorization in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. Current primary functions are defined in the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002.

The Charge of the RELs

- Identify and serve the needs of the region
- Develop and disseminate scientifically valid educational research
- Provide professional development and training for school administrators, teachers, and parents
- Collaborate with clients in order to provide technical assistance as needed
- Respond to the needs of policymakers, school districts, schools, teachers, families, and communities in ensuring the academic success of all students

But sheer numbers, though impressive, are not the most important measure of how the RELs are doing. To gauge client satisfaction with the quality, relevance, and utility of the products and services offered by the laboratories in 2003, the network contracted with an independent research firm to survey REL clients, including teachers, principals, superintendents, and state and national education leaders. Results of the survey reveal that the regional educational laboratories are hitting the mark:

- 92% or more of clients rated REL products and services highly for overall quality (96%), relevance (92%), and utility (93%).
- 94% rated REL products and services as excellent or good for their grounding in sound theory and research.
- 91% said REL products and services provide a balance of information derived, on one hand, from research and, on the other, from the practical experience of educators.
- 92% reported that REL products and services address education problems of national and regional significance.
- 95% rated the information provided by the RELs as easily understood and well organized.
- The majority of clients shared REL products with someone else. Building-level educators—teachers and principals—tended to share REL products with up to 10 people. District, state, and national clients disseminated the products and services even more widely, usually to more than 50 people.

Meeting Regional Challenges and National Priorities

Although all areas of the country share certain educational challenges—such as having quality teachers in every classroom; making every school a peaceable, safe environment in which to learn; and ensuring that every child learns to read well and comprehends science and mathematics at a functionally high level—each region confronts a unique set of obstacles in overcoming these challenges and may, as a response to its distinct regional needs, prioritize them differently. Through an established regional infrastructure, each REL seeks to help schools, districts, and states within its region access the equally unique means to overcome those obstacles. In addition to its regional responsibilities, each REL assists the others by maintaining a repository of current expertise on a specific educational topic of pressing national concern, for example, combining technology and learning, teaching diverse students, assessing academic achievement, building family and community connections, improving curriculum and instruction, and helping schools negotiate standards-based reform.

To show the scope of the REL system's work, the 10 regional laboratories describe, in the pages that follow, their contributions to the national priority topics and their particular responses to distinctive regional education problems. These illustrations of the RELs' work reveal a system that is fluid and ever changing to meet evolving regional needs, a system seeking to improve access to a quality education for all of our children.

The Regional Educational Laboratory at AEL

Linking Research and Practice to Deliver Targeted Professional Development



"AEL translates research findings into practice to help schools infuse this knowledge into their school culture through professional development experiences that are aimed at improving student achievement and supporting equitable education for all children, including those in areas with high poverty rates and low resources."

— Doris Redfield,
President and CEO

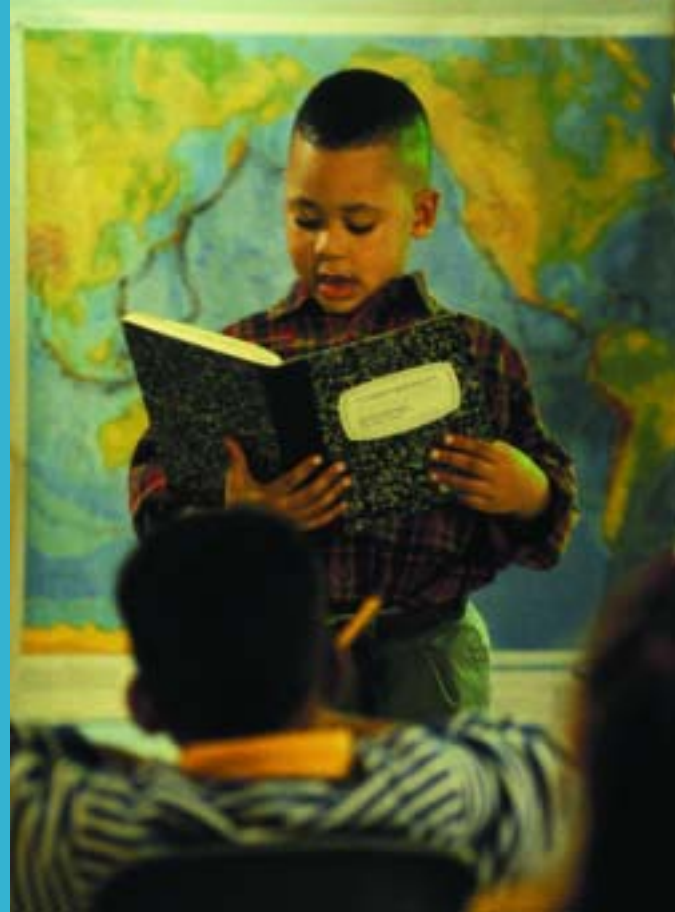
The Regional Educational Laboratory at AEL serves Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia—a region that is largely rural with pockets of deep poverty.

As a result, a lack of resources and, sometimes, the absence of a nearby college or university, challenge school efforts to make lasting improvements and boost student achievement.

By helping states and districts provide professional development for teachers, AEL supplements local resources and fills a gap that might otherwise be filled by local colleges and universities if they were nearby.

Research has confirmed that improving teaching quality holds the greatest potential for improving student achievement. But research and experience also tell us that such improvement is more likely to come about—and to last—in schools with a culture of continuous improvement and mutual support among teachers and leaders. To better understand the causes and manifestations of low performance, AEL convened researchers and education leaders at an international colloquium on sustainable school reform, followed by the publication of *What Works With Low-Performing Schools: A Review of Research*.

AEL also established a network among school improvement specialists who were working in schools across the region, then documented their role in developing the capacity of low-performing schools to initiate and sustain



improvements on their own. AEL staff used this knowledge to develop a training module for school improvement specialists at other locations.

Additionally, AEL partners with states and districts to help them find ways to focus and leverage their resources in building the capacity of schools to become high-performing learning communities.

Because research and experience have shown that fragmented or isolated interventions are not powerful enough to effect lasting improvements, ongoing support and consultation are a regular part of AEL's targeted professional development services. For example, when AEL trained nearly 100 retired exemplary educators to work one on one with Tennessee's low-performing schools, the training program included regular seminars, a Listserv, and phone consultations with AEL trainers.

National Leadership Area: Educational Technology

The Institute for the Advancement of Emerging Technologies in Education (IAETE) at AEL manages the national leadership area—supporting the use

of new and emerging technologies to improve teaching, learning, and school management. This work is guided by an advisory board of nationally recognized education researchers, practitioners, and technologists.

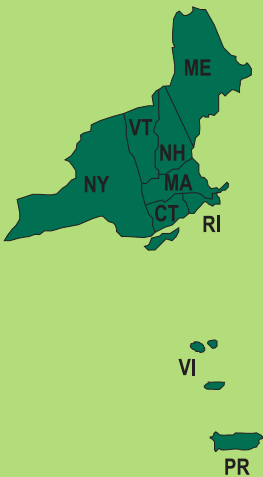
IAETE held a series of national symposia to address technology's role in generating and supporting more intelligent assessment systems that directly affect classroom practice and support school accountability.

In addition, IAETE developed customized online and print-based tools, resources, and professional development materials to support the effective integration, evaluation, and management of technology in schools.



Northeast & Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)

Restructuring High Schools Through Personalization



In the Northeast, closing the achievement gaps among diverse populations of students, especially at the high school level in both urban and rural areas, is critical because changing demographics show increases in immigrant groups, foreign languages, and poverty levels.

LAB is addressing this need through urban and rural projects focused on personalizing high schools to eliminate anonymity, increase student engagement, and ensure that every student meets high standards. Personalization is a learning process in which schools help students assess their own talents and aspirations, plan a pathway toward their own purposes, work cooperatively with others on challenging tasks, maintain a record of their explorations, and demonstrate their learning against clear standards in a variety of media, all with the close support of adult mentors and guides.

High schools throughout our region are redesigning their schools to incorporate personalization techniques in their reform strategies, i.e., forming smaller learning communities, creating advisory programs, integrating assessment, teaching to different learning styles, and using personal learning plans for students. To support these schools in their reform efforts, we have designed the *Changing Systems to Personalize Learning* workshops, which help high school change teams increase their understanding of personalized learning at different levels of the school system. Workshops include *Personalized Learning*, *The Power of Advisories*, and *Teaching to Each Student*.

"Educators at the elementary school level are making progress in closing the achievement gap among students and getting more students to meet standards. It is at the secondary level that educators are seeking support in figuring out what structures, strategies, and practices can make a difference in closing the achievement gap among students."
— Mary-Beth Fafard,
Executive Director



In our applied research around restructuring high schools, we assist high-poverty, low-performing urban schools in creating smaller learning environments. We work with school staff to align standards with curriculum, implement personalization strategies, and use data on student performance for decision making.

In addition to investigating the processes and effects of systemic reform at these schools, we are also providing technical assistance and creating tools and resources to guide future efforts to improve low-performing schools.

***National Leadership
Area: Teaching
Diverse Learners***

By informing teachers and administrators about the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse

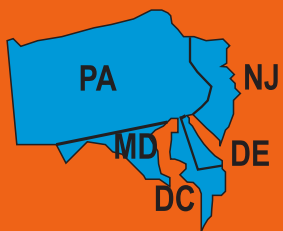
learners, LAB works to accomplish NCLB's goals of having English language learners meet the same challenging standards required of all students. LAB identifies and disseminates research-based practices for teaching diverse learners in products such as *The Diversity Kit* and *Claiming Opportunities*; convenes national research conferences; provides online resources through our Teaching Diverse Learners website and the Knowledge Loom's Early Literacy Spotlight; and consults with a national panel of experts who offer perspectives on the education of diverse students.

Additionally, LAB provides technical assistance to state departments of education and school districts, works with teacher unions such as the National Education Association and the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, and with the National Association for Bilingual Education, the National Council of La Raza, and the National Council for Multicultural Education.



The Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University (LSS)

Recognizing the Best and the Brightest New Teacher Candidates



Imagine walking into a classroom buzzing with activity. There is a math story problem written on the board. Some students are working together in the corner to try to solve the problem. Other students are sitting at their desks, testing possible solutions on their own. They quietly write on scratch paper or in their notebooks. Another group is clustered around a table, using blocks to represent the items in the word problem so that they can visualize the mathematical function needed to solve the problem.

What is exemplary about this classroom? Is it the students? Is it the techniques they are using to solve the math problem written on the board? Or is it the fact that their teacher is willing to guide students in their learning by allowing them to test different problem-solving strategies until they find one that works best for them?

"The MARTP brings clarity and definition to the nature and quality of teacher supply in the mid-Atlantic region. The new MNTC credential is an important by-product of its work and should pay a significant dividend in the region."
— C. Kent McGuire, Dean,
Temple University College
of Education

Research tells us that the most important factor influencing student success in school is a highly qualified teacher. However, the term "highly qualified," as written about in legislation, refers merely to teacher licensure and credentialing. In reality, "highly qualified" must be taken a step further—students flourish when being taught by a *highly effective* or *meritorious teacher*, the sort of teacher who will be present in the aforementioned hypothetical classroom. Teacher quality and supply are two of the largest barriers to successful implementation of educational improvement initiatives in the mid-Atlantic region. In 1998, the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the Maryland State Department of Education, and the Council for Basic Education



founded the Mid-Atlantic Regional Teachers Project (MARTP) to study teacher supply and demand in the region. A result of this collaboration is the Meritorious New Teacher Candidate (MNTC) designation, which signals that the candidate has fulfilled the criteria to be chosen: a 3.5 GPA, 400 hours of supervised internship experience, and upper quartile scores on the verbal SAT, ACT, or GRE.

The MNTC credential requires excellent performance across multiple domains and grants full regional reciprocity for the duration of the license. The MNTC designation allows schools to identify and hire the most promising new teachers with the skills and preparation to succeed in helping students learn.

***National
Leadership Area:
Educational
Leadership***

LSS carries out its educational leadership mission through concentration of efforts in three key areas: capacity building through the provision of technical assistance and evaluation support

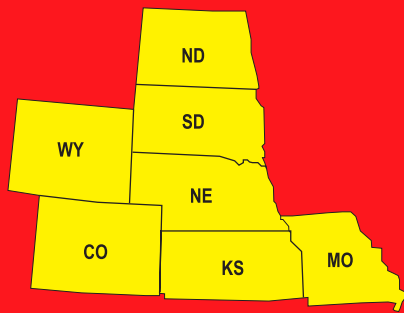
at the state, district, and school levels, including forums for policy discussion; leadership development through activities that focus on content knowledge and pedagogy and promote the use of best practices for curriculum and instruction; and maintenance of an ongoing synthesis of current research on educational leadership.

These efforts enable LSS to enhance the ability of school leaders in the mid-Atlantic region to create and sustain high-quality learning environments for students.



Mid-continent Research for Education & Learning (McREL)

Advancing School Improvement in Rural Communities



It is a common scene in some communities across America: children clustered together on corners and in cul-de-sacs, waiting for the familiar yellow buses that take them to school. In rural communities, however, this routine can be very different.

In some stretches of McREL's central region service area, children commute 100 miles, one way, to reach their classrooms. This geographic isolation, coupled with small school sizes and declining enrollment and budgets, affects the day-to-day work of rural schooling.

"Rural schools make up much of McREL's region, and they often face crippling shortages of teachers and resources. By working with rural schools to overcome these hurdles, McREL is helping rural schools maintain their legacy of educational success."
— Louis F. Cicchinelli,
Executive Director

In addition, teachers have smaller collegial networks and fewer opportunities for ongoing professional development. One way McREL helps rural educators overcome these challenges is through its Rural Initiative.

At the Initiative's outset, McREL examined the past two decades of rural education research to identify gaps in the knowledge base. Having discovered that much of the available rural research lacks the scientific rigor needed to support decision making, McREL developed a formal rural research agenda to guide future work and solicited proposals for study designs from researchers nationwide.

The technology component of the Rural Initiative is being field-tested in schools across the central region. This component, dubbed the Rural Technology Initiative, creates an online "virtual community" for educators.



The goal of the virtual community is to provide networking opportunities and quality staff development to both teachers and administrators without the expense of travel, substitute teachers, and lodging.

McREL conducts much of its rural work through intensive onsite technical assistance and consulting sessions. For example, McREL works with a four-school consortium under the South Dakota School Improvement Initiative, which brings staff together periodically to work on common issues, such as enhancing instructional practices and developing leadership skills.

These research, development, and service activities make up part of McREL's coordinated approach to addressing the needs of its largely rural service area. The findings from this work will inform McREL's approach to assisting rural educators in helping all children meet high standards.

***National Leadership
Area: Standards-Based
Educational Practice***

McREL's leadership in the area of standards-based instruction encompasses the development of a range of products and services that meet the

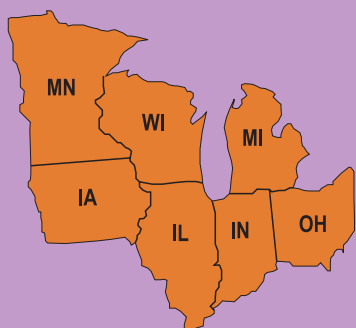
needs of practitioners across the nation. In an effort to better integrate its laboratory work, in 2003 McREL began developing products in the broad areas of standards, teacher quality, leadership, and systemic reform.

McREL staff completed a research synthesis on the effectiveness of out-of-school-time strategies; expanded and updated the online database of K-12 standards and related resources; and provided guidance to practitioners and policymakers through policy briefs, quarterly newsletters, and an annual research-based journal.



North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)

Use the Power of Data to Drive Good Decisions



"The north central region is a diverse mix of urban centers and rural countrysides with seas of suburbs in between. Using data to drive good decisions about education improvement is a challenge faced by educators and policymakers in our region every day. NCREL provides support by leveraging resources, delivering research-based solutions, and developing tools and strategies to promote better decision making for better student achievement."

— Cathy Gunn, Executive Director

State and federal accountability systems are placing a spotlight on student achievement levels. For Title I schools with limited English proficiency, special education, or minority students, the stakes are greater than ever.

If one of these subgroups falls behind, the entire school fails to meet adequate yearly progress standards. But data used well and wisely can propel schools off the watch list and toward success.

In 2003, several schools in Carpentersville, Illinois, District 300, were placed on the academic watch list by the Illinois State Board of Education.

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory at Learning Point Associates (NCREL) worked with school leaders to turn things around in order to meet state requirements and develop school improvement plans. Carmen Acevedo, the district's director of Title I, English as a second language, and bilingual education, said several areas of the school improvement plan dealt with data and data analysis, the areas where the schools most needed support.

"The relationship with NCREL was intended to provide these schools with support in the improvement process so that they could meet the state requirements," said Acevedo.

The first step was convening several "data retreats," at which Carpentersville educators gathered a variety of data and sifted through what was relevant and what wasn't needed.



“Participants found it meaningful to use their own school data,” Acevedo remarked. “It increased their awareness about using data to make decisions for improvement.” The proof of improvement is in the data. The schools in Carpentersville were removed from the academic watch list. Acevedo said the data retreats played a pivotal role in helping staff gather and analyze data and then establish goals and benchmarks for improvement.

According to data retreat survey results from District 300, 95% of the participants reported that they can apply their new knowledge and skills to their job. And 93% would recommend data retreats to other schools and districts.

National Leadership Area: Educational Technology

Too many educators lack the evidence-based knowledge and support required to effectively integrate technology into teaching and learning.

In order to improve student outcomes, NCREL works on a national level to research the best strategies and methods, develop solutions-oriented tools and resources, and deliver research-based technical assistance.

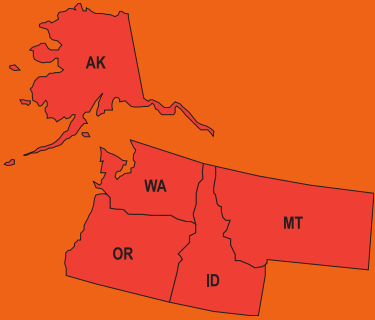
NCREL has established partnerships with school districts and state agencies, higher education institutions such as Harvard University, and organizations like the George Lucas Education Foundation and the International Society of Technology in Education to further the work around educational technology.

NCREL hosts an annual conference, coordinates a Blue Ribbon Panel, publishes a newsletter, and maintains a website—all of which are focused on educational technology for better teaching and learning.



Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)

Helping Teachers Learn Together



The need for assisting teachers and schools with focused collaboration is clear: In the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) 2004 regional needs assessment, more than 72% of the respondents identified "collaborating within and across grade levels and subject areas to improve teaching and learning" as an issue requiring "more" or "much more" attention.

"Creating ongoing opportunities for staff to share and reflect on data, research, knowledge, and skills" ranked almost as high, at 64%.

NWREL's Quality Teaching and Learning Team is researching new ways to support teacher collaboration. Its new publication, *Creating a Community of Learners: Solving the Puzzle of Classroom Management*, is

used to guide small groups of teachers working in collaboration. At Holmes Elementary School in Wilder, Idaho, Principal Sandy Maras has turned to the book as a framework for examining classroom management and discipline issues. "The book was recommended to me when I was looking for materials to guide our character education professional learning teams (PLTs)," says Maras.

"It's been helpful as we study the behaviors we should be seeing in children of different ages. As we branch out in other directions, I expect the resources in the book will come in handy." Maras says the publication will also help guide discipline teams getting underway in the middle and high schools in the 460-student district.

"The rich cultural and geographic diversity of the Northwest provides both a resource and a challenge for schools to effectively educate each of their students. Teacher collaboration is an important strategy for adapting research-based approaches to local needs, and educators are increasingly turning to us for help in building this capacity."
— Steven R. Nelson, Director



The NWREL team is also working intensively with seven schools on developing PLTs and field-testing material to be included on a website.

For example, at an elementary school in Great Falls, Montana, NWREL is helping teachers in PLTs dig deeper into their student data and research to change schoolwide instructional practices to increase student achievement in reading.

“Teacher collaboration is more than just two teachers getting together to design a unit on dinosaurs,” observes Jerian Abel, leader of NWREL’s Quality Teaching and Learning Team. “It’s about teachers sharing and discussing deeply their classroom practices, looking at data, analyzing the research, and supporting each other to make instructional improvements to better serve their students.”

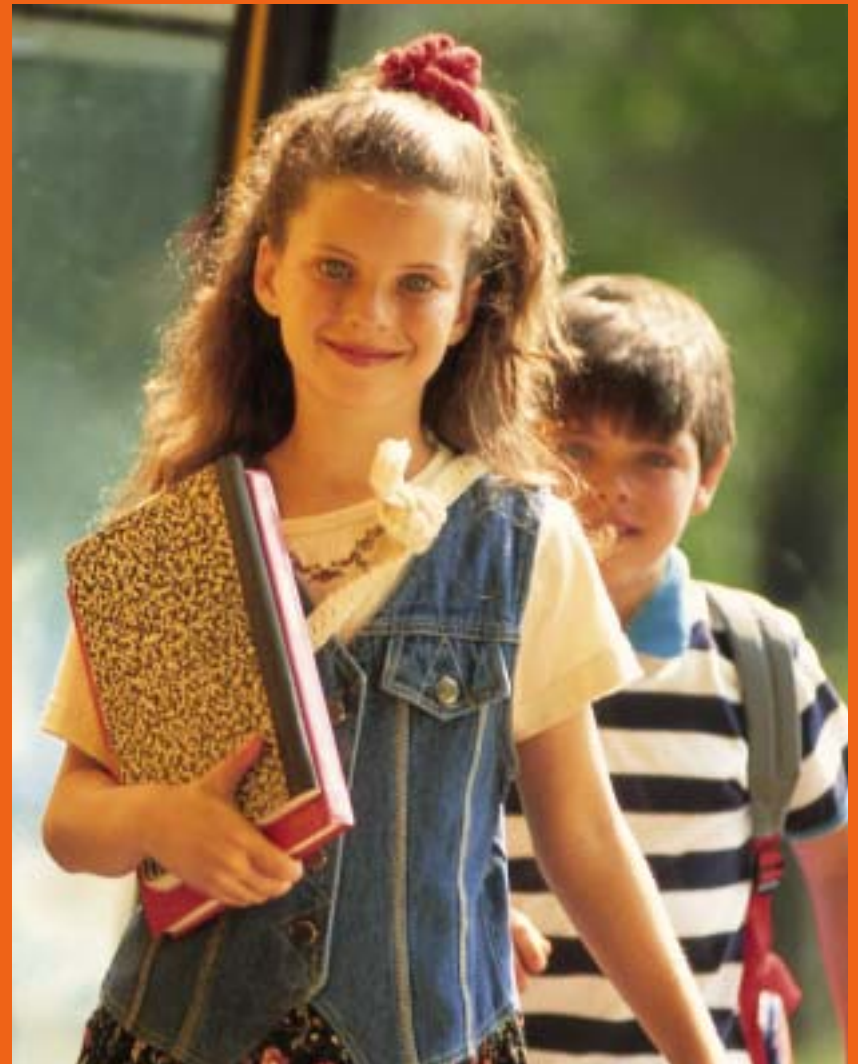
***National Leadership
Area: Re-engineering
Schools***

Through its national leadership area, re-engineering schools, NWREL supports the role of the district in building capacity for long-term school improvement.

According to Deputy Executive Director Bob Blum, this means, “developing tools and strategies for systemic change and assisting districts as they reshape rules, roles, structures, and relationships.”

Working with a broad array of partners—including regional labs, professional associations, and research and development centers—NWREL annually conducts a national forum on comprehensive school reform, with the proceedings posted on NWREL’s website, and provides ongoing technical assistance to partner sites.

In addition, NWREL continues to update the web-based products *Research You Can Use to Improve Results* and the *Catalog of School Reform Models*.



Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)

Converging Pacific and Western Understandings of Reading



One of the greatest challenges faced by educators throughout the region served by Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) is that significant numbers of students are not reading independently in either English or their home language by the end of third grade.

To address this challenge, the Pacific Communities with High achievement In Literacy Development (Pacific CHILD) project was designed to identify the components of an effective professional development model for early reading improvement.

“PREL’s work is on the cutting edge of research in early reading as it intersects with the uniqueness of language and culture. Its findings have the potential to inform both national and international knowledge bases.”

— Thomas W. Barlow,
President and CEO

PREL is investigating which of the findings from English language early reading research are transferable to the Pacific context and identifying features that are unique to this region and need further research. The region served by PREL is vast and diverse and includes 10 U.S.-affiliated entities in the Pacific whose political status ranges from statehood to free association. In addition to economic and political diversity, the Pacific entities are characterized by a multiplicity of cultures and languages. At least nine Pacific cultures are prominent in the region. The languages of instruction in the region’s schools include English as well as a dozen or more Pacific languages, such as Samoan, Kosraen, Palauan, Marshallese, and Pohnpeian.

PREL is collaborating with participating schools, referred to as “intensive school sites,” to conduct research and development for the Pacific CHILD project. Intensive school sites are provided ongoing support through lesson modeling and coaching, weekly workshops on



reading strategies, and the provision of instructional materials in Pacific languages developed by PREL. In addition, PREL developed early reading assessments in several Pacific languages, as well as English, and provided professional development to teachers in using formative assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, thereby linking assessment results to classroom instruction.

Classroom observation data, student early reading achievement data, and professional development data are collected throughout the year and analyzed to support the identification of particularly effective components of the Pacific CHILD project.

National Leadership Area: Reading and Language Mastery

PREL's national leadership area is Curriculum and Instruction Related to Reading and Language Mastery. In September 2004, PREL sponsored an annual forum on comprehension in New York. Similar to

predecessor forums on vocabulary and reading, state Reading First directors, state literacy leaders, reading researchers, and literacy leaders from Regional Educational Laboratories and Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers gathered for two days to examine the implications and applications of reading research and to identify next steps for increasing student reading achievement at the state level.

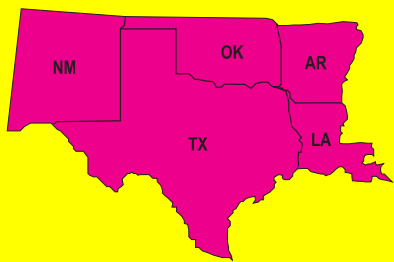
Each forum is followed by the development of a practitioner-oriented booklet that draws from the forum presentations and reviews the most current scientifically based research on the forum topic.

The booklets translate the research into terms practitioners are able to understand and apply and have been used successfully as a professional development tool in PREL's intensive school sites.



Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)

SEDL Works Systemically to Address Southwest Regional Challenges



The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's (SEDL) region of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas could be described as "the land of contrasts."

SEDL serves areas that are among the most urban in the country and areas that are among the most remote. It serves districts that are among the wealthiest in the country and among the poorest as well as districts that have the highest percentage enrollments of minority students and districts with the lowest.

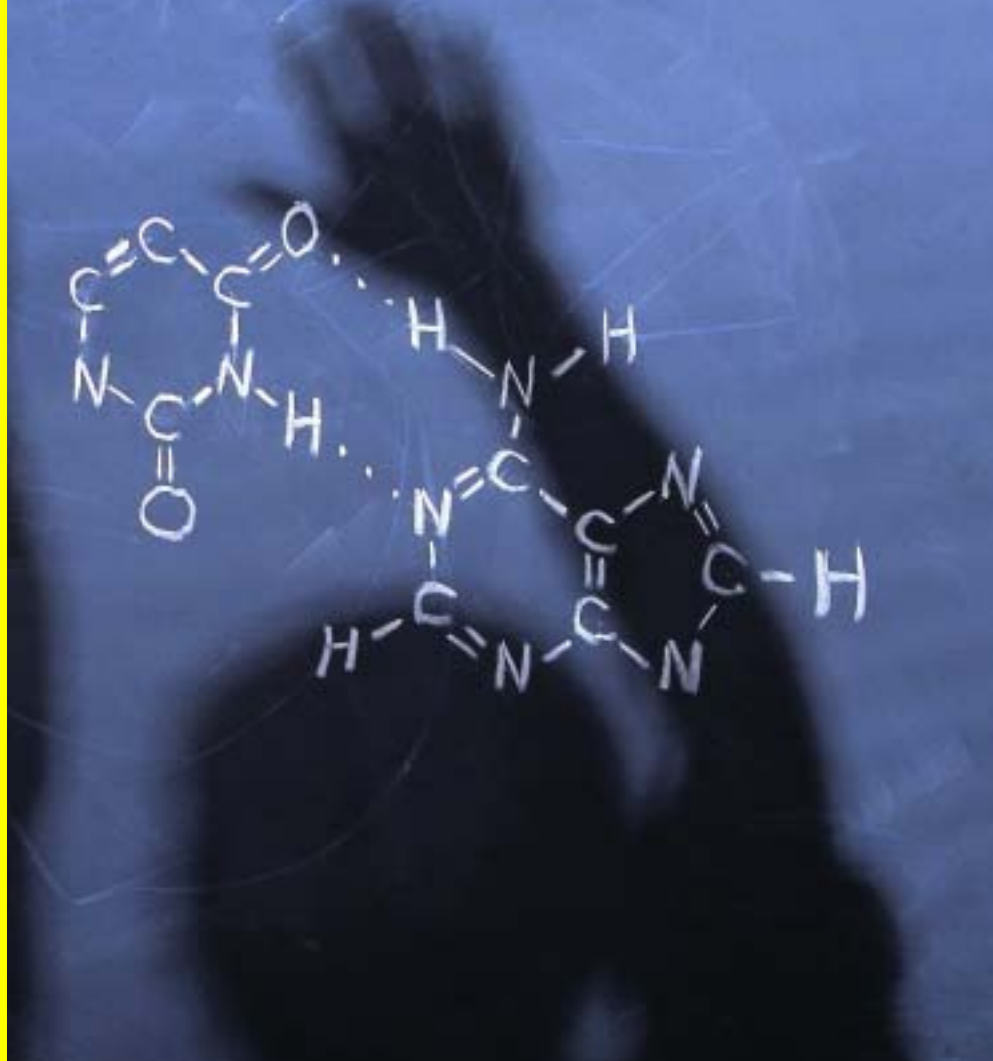
SEDL is helping states, districts, and schools face these challenges by developing and testing a model that helps improve student achievement, especially in mathematics and reading.

"Working systemically ensures that all levels of an education system are focused on improving student achievement and developing the competencies needed to ensure high levels of success—no matter where the school is located or what challenges the students face."

— Joan Buttram, Director

SEDL's Working Systemically model is based on a rational planning process and relies on identification of problems and the development, implementation, and monitoring of a plan to address the problem.

SEDL's model has three distinct features: (a) it addresses multiple levels of the educational system; (b) it specifically addresses student achievement; and (c) it provides a framework to direct the activities to be conducted at the district and school levels.



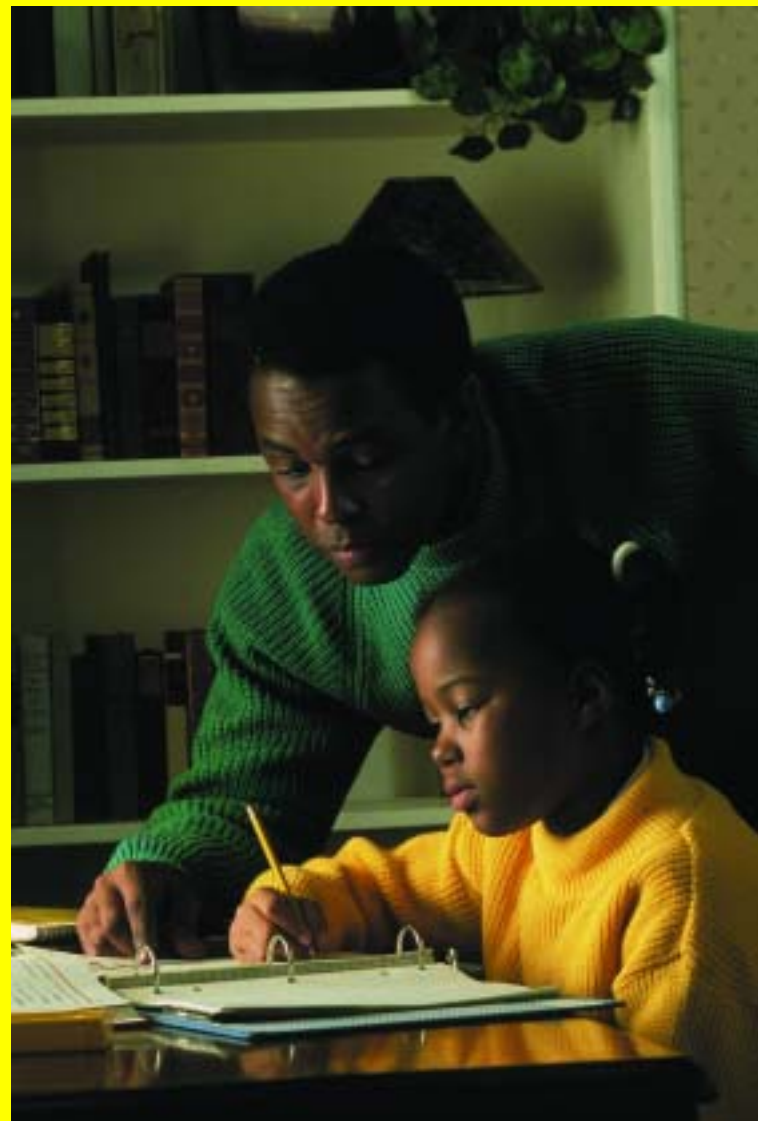
SEDL staff works with schools and districts to develop and test the model, primarily focusing on building leadership capacity and improving the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state standards.

A key part of SEDL's model is the Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle, a process of collaboration and ongoing professional development that is designed to help improve teacher effectiveness and create coherence among standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment across subjects at all grade levels.

***National Leadership
Area: Family
and Community
Connections
With Schools***

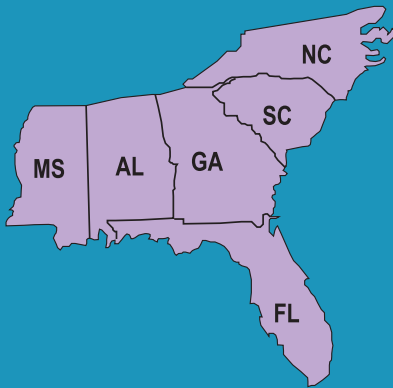
SEDL has long recognized the importance of family and community connections with schools. Through publication of an annual research synthesis, presentations at conferences and workshops nationwide, and articles in our practitioner

magazine, SEDL has promoted research-based and best practice strategies to help schools and districts focus their energy on establishing family and community connections that will improve student achievement.



Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE

SERVE Networks Support District Leaders



“SERVE instills hope in education leaders at regional, state, district, school, and classroom levels. We give them time to reflect on their successes and challenges; to communicate with their peers about solutions to problems in high-poverty, rural settings; to expand their knowledge of research and its practical applications; and to gain clarity about their strategic goals and improvement strategies. By becoming part of an active learning community, they tap into a broader knowledge base that informs their decision making.”

— Ludwig David van Broekhuizen,
Executive Director

The Southeast has many districts that must deal with the challenges of rural poverty. Such districts find it extremely difficult to compete with larger, affluent communities for highly skilled teachers and principals.

In the Southeast, nearly 76% of low-performing schools are located in non-metro areas. These small, rural, high-poverty districts have limited central office staff, stretched just to comply with state and federal requirements, so tapping into external networks is a powerful way for a district to gain new knowledge about improvement efforts. The findings from research

and practice shared in such settings can provide critical information to support improved decision making. SERVE has established networks that support school improvement efforts.

In 2003, SERVE initiated the Rural School District Superintendents’ Network. This network convenes 18 exemplary rural district superintendents (three from each of the region’s six states) twice a year to examine research-based solutions to identified problems. The problem identified by the group in 2003 was teacher recruitment and retention. SERVE worked with the superintendents to identify tools to help them address this problem. The tools shared with them included a community survey, a recruitment brochure, a screening process for hiring teachers, and exit interview protocols to examine why teachers leave.



Since 2000, the SERVE-Leads network has engaged district leadership teams with the problem of improving the quality of teaching through high-quality professional development. Ten district teams have piloted approaches to engaging small groups of teachers in improving the rigor and purposefulness of the assignments they give students. Districts report positive responses from teachers and ongoing challenges (such as finding time and incentives for teachers to participate). District leaders value regular opportunities to think critically about their long-term efforts to improve teaching quality.

***National Leadership
Area: Expanded
Learning
Opportunities***

throughout the Southeast to develop effective programs and services that extend learning beyond the traditional school day.

For example, SERVE has focused on improving the effectiveness of homework centers and after-school and tutoring programs through research dissemination and regional training events.

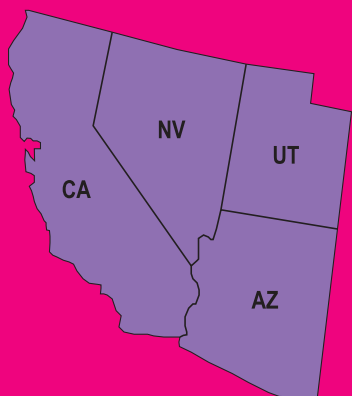
SERVE has also been at the forefront of school readiness work, helping policymakers and educators improve services for children before they enter school and with transitions to school.

SERVE's national leadership area is expanded learning opportunities (ELO). Through its ELO programs, SERVE is working with schools, districts, and state education agencies



Western Regional Educational Laboratory at WestEd (WREL)

***Amplify,
Don't Simplify!***



“A dominant need in the western region is to better educate English language learners. We see it in the demographics and hear it from teachers who want better methods to reach their students. The need is especially urgent at the secondary level, where achievement scores remain low and dropout rates are disproportionately high for English learners.”

— Glen Harvey, CEO

Facing classrooms of English learners, secondary teachers in the western region—home to 38% of the nation’s K–12 English learners—are looking for help. How do they provide strong academic instruction to secondary students who have limited mastery of English?

Schools typically respond with lowered expectations, simplified content, and a focus on isolated basic skills, ensuring that achievement gaps will persist.

WREL is giving teachers a better approach to the whole linguistic

process. Its motto is, “Amplify, don’t simplify.” Drawing on multidisciplinary research, WREL’s

Teacher Quality Initiative (TQI) is developing a set of nine content-based modules for training secondary teachers of English learners.

All modules include exemplars of good practice (video, vignettes, or cases), reflection activities that help teachers make sense of the material, elaboration activities and resources for more in-depth study, and road maps that enable trainers to shape the materials to meet specific teacher needs.

Chula Vista High School, a low-performing school near San Diego, served as one of several TQI pilot sites in 2002–2003. Between 80–100% of the teachers who received intensive training and coaching implemented various strategies for scaffolding instruction and developing academic literacy more effectively and frequently.



Moreover, teachers themselves reported becoming more energized. “I got re-inspired,” as one put it, “to be the best teacher I can be.” Together with other initiatives, TQI helped the school meet the state’s academic performance goals.

The activities were “so helpful, hands-on, great, and engaging,” said one Utah teacher after an intensive TQI institute. Others simply called it the best professional development they’d had. Inviting WREL back to provide more training, a state administrator said, “This helped expand and clarify the direction of professional development in Utah.”

A randomized control trial is now underway to provide more rigorous evidence of the effect of the training on teacher knowledge and practice and student achievement.

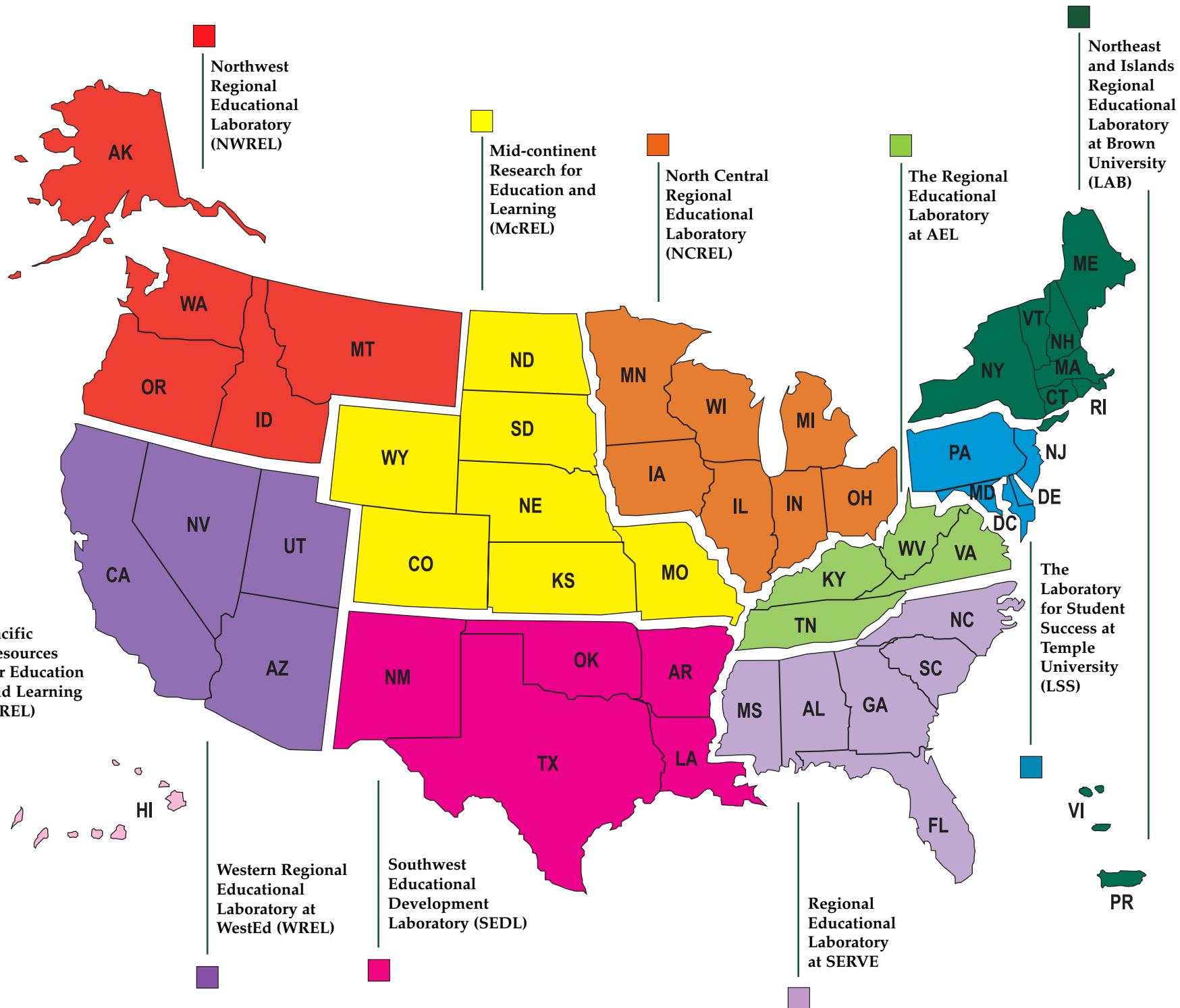
National Leadership Area: Assessment



Major assessment and accountability issues confront policymakers and educators nationwide as they review state policies in light of No Child Left Behind.

Issues include alignment, feasibility, pacing, and addressing the needs of special populations, along with technical adequacy. Complementing ongoing work in more than 20 states, WREL provides national leadership in this area by bringing together quarterly a national group of assessment and accountability specialists to identify the most relevant knowledge gaps, summarize the best knowledge on key topics in a series of Knowledge Briefs, and explore solutions to critical problems.

An annual Assessment Conference is co-hosted each fall with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment.





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"The rich cultural and geographic diversity of the Northwest provides both a resource and a challenge for schools to effectively educate each of their students. Teacher collaboration is an important strategy for adapting research-based approaches to local needs, and educators are increasingly turning to us for help in building this capacity."

— Steven R. Nelson, Director

"Rural schools make up much of McREL's region, and they often face crippling shortages of teachers and resources. By working with rural schools to overcome these hurdles, McREL is helping rural schools maintain their legacy of educational success."

— Louis F. Cicchinelli, Executive Director

"The north central region is a diverse mix of urban centers and rural countrysides with seas of suburbs in between. Using data to drive good decisions about education improvement is a challenge faced by educators and policymakers in our region every day. NCREL provides support by leveraging resources, delivering research-based solutions, and developing tools and strategies to promote better decision making for better student achievement."

— Cathy Gunn, Executive Director

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— Glen Harvey, CEO

"PREL's work is on the cutting edge of research in early reading as it intersects with the uniqueness of language and culture. Its findings have the potential to inform both national and international knowledge bases."

— Thomas W. Barlow, President and CEO

"Working systemically ensures that all levels of an education system are focused on improving student achievement and developing the competencies needed to ensure high levels of success—no matter where the school is located or what challenges the students face."

— Joan Buttram, Director



"AEL translates research findings into practice to help schools infuse this knowledge into their school culture through professional development experiences that are aimed at improving student achievement and supporting equitable education for all children, including those in areas with high poverty rates and low resources."
— Doris Redfield, President and CEO

"Educators at the elementary school level are making progress in closing the achievement gap among students and getting more students to meet standards. It is at the secondary level that educators are seeking support in figuring out what structures, strategies, and practices can make a difference in closing the achievement gap among students."
— Mary-Beth Fafard, Executive Director

"The MARTP brings clarity and definition to the nature and quality of teacher supply in the mid-Atlantic region. The new MNTC credential is an important by-product of its work and should pay a significant dividend in the region."
— C. Kent McGuire, Dean, Temple University College of Education

"SERVE instills hope in education leaders at regional, state, district, school, and classroom levels. We give them time to reflect on their successes and challenges; to communicate with their peers about solutions to problems in high-poverty, rural settings; to expand their knowledge of research and its practical applications; and to gain clarity about their strategic goals and improvement strategies. By becoming part of an active learning community, they tap into a broader knowledge base that informs their decision making."
— Ludwig David van Broekhuizen, Executive Director

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