ISSUE FOCUS

Education in a research-based era
On the role of research in education today: Q&A with WestEd research and policy experts

Falling off track: Why 9th grade really matters, especially for minority students

The California Healthy Kids Survey produces data for local change

Do benchmark assessments make a difference? A first look

How do we know what English learners know? Research on English learner assessment

Evaluation fine-tuning to assess program effectiveness

What’s new & useful: WestEd products & services
Research has become more central than ever to how decisions are made about education policy and practice. To ask why research is important is akin to asking why knowledge matters. But there is no single kind and no one “best” approach to research. There are many types, each appropriate for different purposes and with its own particular benefits and drawbacks.

As an agency committed to evidence-based practices, WestEd engages in a wide range of research and seeks to translate research knowledge into effective policy and practice. We ground our work on a foundation of research to help clients find the best answers to emerging questions and to solve pressing problems.

The ensuing articles in this issue of R&D Alert describe five examples of WestEd-led research. As an introductory Q&A, R&D Alert solicited responses from six WestEd research and policy experts about a variety of issues related to the growing importance of education research.

**Have expectations changed for the role of research in education?**

**Filby** > To some extent, yes, there’s been an increased focus on high-quality research led by the federal government. The U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences aims to make education an evidence-based field. The No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] requires that program funds be directed toward practices that are scientifically based. At the state and local levels, administrators increasingly are asking about the research base behind claims — and wanting details, not just assertions. As a result, program developers are seeking and conducting more evaluations to be sure they have evidence to cite.
At the state and local levels, administrators increasingly are asking about the research base behind claims — and wanting details, not just assertions.

Koehler > The metrics of NCLB — putting schools and districts on lists of not performing — have raised the importance of finding evidence-based practices higher than ever before. The discussion at the state level — because that’s where a lot of this action is now — is about what will work. State policymakers and educators want solid evidence.

Lash > The change is less that people are more actively seeking evidence but that they’re seeking different types of evidence than before. We’re being asked to meet different standards of evidence, to show “causality” — that a change in students’ learning, for example, can be attributed to a new program or curriculum and not to other sources of influence. In the past, people were more willing to infer causation if the learning change simply followed program implementation. Now, we also would want to show there was no change over the same period in similar students who did not experience the program.

Can research live up to the expectations?

Filby > It can help policymakers and educators spend resources more wisely. Research cannot guarantee that a policy or program will work, but it can suggest which things are more likely to pay off and under what conditions. Then, once decisions are made, research can help policymakers and educators evaluate whether their choice is having the intended results.

But research doesn’t help unless we understand its limits. People tend to over-generalize. If a study finds that a program works, the tendency is to adopt it wholesale without first understanding the key implementation conditions and population and other factors that may be influencing the results.

Makkonen > One challenge is finding the right balance between the need for rigor and the need for research to be timely and useful to policymakers and practitioners. As you go up the rigor ladder, there are so many limitations...
to generalizing from the research that the findings can become practically irrelevant to policymakers. Sometimes we have to give up a little rigor for timeliness, and it’s not always easy to strike the right balance.

**A lot of emphasis seems to be on experimental research, specifically randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Why?**

**Orland** > For questions such as, “Does this program work?” RCTs are the gold standard. They are wonderful tools for establishing valid causal inferences about the relationship of a particular intervention to an objective or outcome. They’re most appropriate for studying instruction at the classroom level and the effectiveness of different kinds of models. But RCTs are most powerful when combined with other methods that look at how the intervention is being implemented, so you really understand not only whether something worked, but why or how, or if it didn’t work, what might be changed for it to work better.

**Makkonen** > A problem with a lot of RCTs is that they progress immediately to evaluating program impact before any field testing has determined the best way to implement the program. What kind of training needs to happen? In what classrooms or contexts is the program most effective? These are the kinds of questions that require qualitative, smaller-scale studies to help iron out the kinks before RCT findings can be most useful.

**Tushnet** > The current focus is diverting funds from important policy and practice questions to only those questions that can be handled through RCTs. It’s important for the methods to fit the questions. If you want to know why programs work and under what conditions, or if you want programs that actually meet the needs of kids, you need research on how kids experience those programs. RCTs don’t really touch on that. To explore such issues in a rigorous way, you need to use multiple methods, including talking to kids and doing observations.

**What are some other valuable kinds of research?**

**Orland** > Quasi-experimental studies are the poor man’s RCTs. They have treatment and comparison groups, but group assignment is not randomized. They’re easier to implement than RCTs, but much is lost when you go to the quasi-experiment from the experiment, no matter how hard you try to get the right comparisons.

Survey research is very useful for descriptive data about current conditions, tendencies, and behaviors. Because surveys usually use a representative sample, they’re very good for generalizing results, but what’s tough is making causal inferences from survey results.

Case studies and qualitative research can be extremely powerful for answering the how and why questions, as well as describing the phenomenon. Case studies are not good for making causal inferences about effectiveness or
In a study with national implications for those seeking to boost the participation of minority students in higher education, researchers have found that many California high school graduates who fail to meet admission requirements for the state’s public universities have fallen off the university-bound track as early as ninth grade and never fully recovered.

“The unfortunate result is that some students may never get in the range of university eligibility while others may miss it by an inch,” WestEd’s Neal Finkelstein and Anthony Fong write in “Course-Taking Patterns Among Minority Youth and Preparation for Postsecondary Education,” a report prepared for the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West).

California is among a growing number of states that have established a set of rigorous courses that students must complete satisfactorily to become eligible for admission to the state’s public universities. For example, for entry to the California State University system, high school students must have earned at least a grade of C in designated courses covering seven content areas (in addition to electives that complete their class schedule). The sequence of courses is designed to bring more consistency to the high school
r & d alert 9.2

curriculum and offer greater assurance that students can succeed in college. The question is whether students are following and succeeding in this course sequence.

REL West researchers were able to identify California high school students’ academic patterns on a large scale because of the availability of new data systems that allow researchers to statistically track and compare students by evaluating their high school transcripts. This study analyzed the course-taking habits of thousands of high school seniors from across California for both the 2003–04 and 2004–05 school years.

The study found that students who complete key college-preparatory courses in ninth grade begin a clear trajectory that continues throughout high school. These students have a higher probability than their counterparts of meeting the complete set of course requirements for admission to California’s higher education systems.

Disaggregating the data on high school course-taking patterns by student ethnicity yields large differences in how various subgroups progress toward meeting course-related admissions requirements, with white and Asian American students more likely than their Hispanic and African American peers to meet the requirements. This is of particular concern given that minority students traditionally have been underrepresented on California’s college campuses, and that their numbers declined further after the 1996 passage of Proposition 209, which eliminated affirmative action policies in higher education.

The REL West study showed that many high school students do not meet the eligibility requirements because they have missed key courses. Among the findings:

- Sixty percent of high school seniors had not met requirements for admission to California’s four-year colleges solely because of their failure to fulfill the course sequence in English.
- The percentage of students who met the state’s college benchmarks declined for every ethnic group from the beginning of high school to the end. This suggests that poor performance and course selection early in a student’s education has a cascading and cumulative effect. For example, while only 40 percent of African American students were enrolled in the required college-preparatory courses in ninth grade, their numbers had declined to just 15 percent by the end of high school.

If a student falls off track, there needs to be intervention early in high school because students aren’t catching up later.

- High schools routinely offer courses unaccredited by California’s university system. Students who enroll in these courses may be unaware that they will not meet the requirements for college.
- Achievement gaps between white and African American students were statistically significant at every grade level, and the gaps between white and Hispanic students were pronounced in all but one.

Ninth grade proved to be a pivotal point for students, no matter their ethnicity. In math, for example, close to half of the students in the study had veered off course by the end of their freshman year because they had not completed two semesters of Algebra I or higher and thus were unable to take the advanced mathematics courses needed for college admission. More than a third of the students did not meet the requirements for college-preparatory English in ninth grade, and many students missed the benchmarks in both English and math.

The information is “very alarming” and confirms that “what happens in ninth grade has serious consequences” for a student’s future, says Fong, a REL West Senior Policy Associate. “If a student falls off track, there needs to be
The California Healthy Kids Survey
PRODUCES DATA FOR LOCAL CHANGE
Efforts to improve student achievement often fall short because they fail to consider the school context and whether students are ready, able, and motivated to learn. Recognizing this shortcoming, WestEd’s Health and Human Development Program worked with the California Department of Education to create the nation’s most extensive and comprehensive system for gathering and using data on school climate, student engagement, and nonacademic barriers and supports for learning.

At the core of this unique system is the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), providing student self-report data on key risk and resilience indicators. In use since 1998, the CHKS has built a database of over three million student records from 8,512 schools in 956 California school districts. This large dataset has allowed for powerful research on the relationship of academic performance to health and risk behaviors.

“We've found that school climate factors are critical to student performance, even when we control for socioeconomic factors, race, and parental education,” says Greg Austin, Director of WestEd’s Health and Human Development Program. The CHKS data show that in schools with high levels of violence, harassment, and substance abuse and low school developmental supports, the students aren’t as connected to school and don’t perform as well academically as in comparable schools.

“Educators have acknowledged this reality for years,” notes Austin, “but now districts have their own data to back up this concern and to support their need to address nonacademic issues that impact academic success.”

The CHKS collects information from students through an anonymous and confidential survey, administered in grades 5, 7, 9, and 11. It provides districts and schools with valuable information to help them improve the school environment, keep students on track academically, and promote positive youth development and well-being — the fundamental goals of the CHKS effort.
Schools across the nation are using benchmark assessments to boost student learning, but does the practice work? “There hasn’t been a lot of research on the impact of benchmarks,” says WestEd Senior Research Associate Susan Henderson. In response to that need, Henderson and a team of researchers analyzed math achievement data from middle schools across Massachusetts over a five-year period, culminating in 2006, the end of the schools’ first year implementing benchmark assessments. Their report has just been released.
Regular use of benchmark assessments, particularly when aligned with state content standards, is widely seen as having potential to improve student performance. While annual state testing provides summative measures of achievement, the results are available only after students have moved to the next grade. In contrast, benchmarks are scored immediately, providing valuable information that can alert teachers and administrators to learning gaps before students move on. In a 2005 survey, approximately 70 percent of school superintendents reported their districts used benchmark assessments.*

The Massachusetts Department of Education backs that trend. The department is “committed to exploring strategies for supporting interim and benchmark assessment practices,” says Carrie Conaway, the department’s Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. “Benchmark assessments are an important part of our strategy to establish support systems that enable all students to reach proficiency.”

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education through the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory (NEIREL), Henderson and coauthors examined data from 66 middle schools, representing eight Massachusetts districts, to determine if they could measure impact of benchmark assessments on student achievement. Twenty-two of the schools had received grants to develop and use benchmark assessments. The recipients serve high-poverty populations and had been identified as needing significant improvement in math performance. The funding was to help the schools use a data management system to create their own grade-level assessments aligned with Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Before the state asked NEIREL to evaluate the initiative’s impact, Massachusetts had already selected which schools would participate, so researchers could not conduct a randomized trial. “We had to use other tools in the research toolbox,” notes Anthony Petrosino, WestEd Senior Research Associate and one of the study coauthors. “We ended up using a statistical matching procedure to equate the schools that didn’t get the intervention to those that did.”

Through covariate matching, the researchers identified 44 Massachusetts schools that did not receive grants to implement benchmark assessments but did share income, demographic, and social characteristics, and whose students’ math scores were nearly identical to those of the program schools prior to benchmark implementation. Thomas Hanson, a WestEd expert in research methodology, helped design “an interrupted time-series analysis” for the study. It involved examining scores on the math portion of the Massachusetts State Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) for multiple years prior to the benchmark assessment intervention to determine a trend in achievement, then analyzing whether the intervention “interrupted” or impacted that trend.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT ENGLISH LEARNERS KNOW

Research on English Learner Assessment
How well do large-scale assessments for accountability measure the achievement of students who are English learners? With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) tying accountability to the performance of all student subgroups, and with English learners one of the most rapidly growing subgroups in the nation, the stakes are high.

In this context, WestEd researchers have undertaken extensive research on the technical adequacy of large-scale assessments for this traditionally underserved population. They’ve found that methods for establishing the validity, reliability, and fairness of current tests are often insufficient, and the researchers are using their findings to guide improvements.

Through the Assessment and Standards Development Services program (ASDS) and the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center (AACC), WestEd is conducting research on many fronts related to English learner (EL) assessment and accountability. “Our work in this area is comprehensive and purposeful to attend to EL students’ particular needs and the challenges faced by states,” says Edynn Sato, Director of Research and English Language Learner Assessment for ASDS and Director of Special Populations for AACC. “The research includes formal experimental studies; alignment studies looking at how assessments align with standards and how different sets of standards align with each other; reviews and syntheses of existing research and theory relevant to EL assessment and accountability; and white papers based on established theory and research intended to push thinking and practice in the field.”
The results from a WestEd evaluation of a program to assist struggling learners are helping the program’s creators improve its effectiveness.

“We feel great about that,” says Treseen McCormick, WestEd Senior Project Director. “As researchers and evaluators, we want people to benefit from our findings. That’s an evaluator’s dream.”

McCormick, along with Sharon Herpin, WestEd Senior Research Associate, directed the study for the All Kinds of Minds Institute (AKOM), a nonprofit that develops research-based programs, products, and services for struggling students.
WestEd’s three-year, quasi-experimental study documented how 34 California schools were using Schools Attuned and analyzed its impact on participating schools, teachers, and students.

WestEd’s Evaluation Research program was asked to study the effectiveness of AKOM’s Schools Attuned professional development program, which aims to help educators better understand how individual students learn as well as to develop strategies to better meet student needs.

Schools Attuned is based on brain research by Mel Levine, a pediatrician and AKOM co-founder. Educators participating in Schools Attuned professional development gather information from various sources about the way their students’ brains function when learning and develop a profile for each student, detailing individuals’ strengths and weaknesses.

WestEd’s three-year, quasi-experimental study documented how 34 California schools were using Schools Attuned and analyzed its impact on participating schools, teachers, and students. The study also examined potential added benefits of a mentoring program to reinforce Schools Attuned concepts.

WestEd researchers conducted two major rounds of data collection, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and classroom observations, then subjected the data to quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Carrying out the study presented a number of challenges. Originally, it was to compare a group of schools where teachers were using Schools Attuned with similar schools where teachers were not. But researchers discovered that an appropriate comparison group did not exist.

“That was a huge setback,” recalls McCormick, “but we were willing to do what was needed to rework the design.”

The team opted instead for comparing the work of trained and untrained teachers within the same school. Herpin says this model required extra steps to ensure that the study’s results wouldn’t be “contaminated.”

They knew, for example, that teachers who had not received Schools Attuned training might have been exposed to — and even used — some of the program’s components as a result of working in close proximity to colleagues who had received the training. “There were teachers using elements of Schools Attuned who didn’t realize it,” says Herpin.

Researchers asked teachers numerous questions and used the results to do “a cluster analysis to determine who was truly implementing the program and who was not,” Herpin explains.

The study determined that Schools Attuned training had heightened teachers’ awareness of and increased their empathy for students with
“All Kinds of Minds leaders were really open to learning about their program,” says McCormick. “They trusted us. That was key. And they were willing to modify their thinking based on what we found.”

AKOM officials, in turn, have praised the WestEd team’s ability to meet the logistical and methodological challenges encountered. WestEd’s evaluation has been informative and “enormously helpful,” according to Tamara Nimkoff, manager of research and evaluation for AKOM. “The findings validated some of the program improvements we’d begun putting in place.”

Beyond that, the WestEd researchers found the study professionally stimulating. “It was challenging and made us think,” says Herpin, “but it was also fun finding ways to overcome what was thrown at us.”

The findings validated some of the program improvements we’d begun putting in place.

For more information about WestEd’s study of All Kinds of Minds’ Schools Attuned program, contact Treseeen McCormick at 562.799.5169 or tmccorm@WestEd.org, or Sharon Herpin at 562.799.5101 or sherpin@WestEd.org.

learning challenges. Teachers also reported that the training had given them additional tools to use with struggling students, as well as a common vocabulary for discussing student learning. They identified inadequate time available for the Schools Attuned process as the biggest challenge to implementing the program.

But the study’s results also pointed out that Schools Attuned was being implemented in multiple ways. “And in some cases, it was not the approach All Kinds of Minds intended,” Herpin says. “Schools were taking shortcuts. At the middle school level, for example, they were using it with a whole classroom rather than with individual students.”

That discovery, recalls McCormick, provided researchers with another challenge. “It kept us going back to the drawing board with our study design. We needed to make adjustments and expand the study to match the way schools actually were implementing the program.” McCormick says the results impacted program revisions and helped AKOM “realize one size did not fit all.” One example: Schools Attuned now offers two separate training options to address the different needs of elementary and secondary teachers.
Results were inconclusive at the end of the first year of benchmark implementation, with no statistical difference in math scores between schools that administered the benchmarks and the comparison schools. Average scores in both groups fell within the “needs improvement” designation.

Education is eager for a deeper understanding of how benchmark assessment improves student learning.

But the data indicate the possibility that a second year of benchmarks may bring more tangible gains, Henderson says, a result the WestEd group is preparing to study further. One interesting factor the researchers note: As schools increasingly respond to a push for more frequent testing, even the comparison schools may have been using benchmark assessments during the study.

The Massachusetts Department of Education has found the research compelling enough to warrant another round. “The NEIREL study provides a valuable perspective on the impact of benchmark assessments in the pilot schools,” Conaway says. “We would’ve been surprised to see conclusive results after just one year of implementation, so we intend to continue to review results as the program progresses.”

Henderson also sees this initial year as a starting point. “We’d love to look at how schools are using data to inform instructional practice,” she says, including changes to instructional calendars, curriculum mapping, re-teaching, and other classroom strategies based on what benchmark assessments reveal. Henderson and colleagues also hope to study how teachers are “unpacking” state standards to identify the “essential” standards for testing. Then, she says, they can track changes in skill sets — measuring performance in specific operations, for example, as opposed to global math scores.

In Massachusetts and across the country, educators are eager for a deeper understanding of how benchmark assessment improves student learning. “These initial results, along with other evaluation and research findings,” says Conaway, “will guide future policy decisions and targeted assistance activities.”

For more information, contact Susan Henderson at 781.481.1118 or shender@WestEd.org or Stephen Hamilton at 781.481.1104 or shamilt@WestEd.org. For a copy of the study report, please visit http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/projects.asp
A core element of this work began several years ago when Sato and Stanley Rabinowitz, Director of ASDS and AACC, led a team of experts in reviewing the technical quality of large-scale EL assessments. Their efforts led to a comprehensive set of technical criteria. While there has been extensive research and development for general student populations, Rabinowitz and Sato began to tease out how different criteria may need to be used for evaluating assessments specifically for EL students.

For any assessment to do its job, it must be valid, reliable, and free from bias — these are the cornerstones of a test’s technical merits. For EL assessments, gauging these qualities requires taking into account the students’ varying characteristics (e.g., language, culture) because these factors play a major role in how EL students access the test content and demonstrate their understanding.

To review assessments for English learners, the WestEd researchers systematically compiled a state-by-state listing of English language proficiency (ELP) assessments and collected documentation related to these assessments. They also convened a group of reviewers with expertise in large-scale test development, psychometrics, English language development, English learner populations, and technical assistance to state departments of education.

Using criteria that Rabinowitz and Sato validated, the reviewers found the assessments only partially accounted for the linguistic and cultural characteristics of EL students that could impact assessment validity. These results are not surprising, Sato says, given that the large-scale assessment of English learners for accountability is an evolving area of the field. But the urgency of improving practice is clear, so their research and related development efforts continue apace.

Through the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West), funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, Sato and Rabinowitz lead a multi-year experimental study on the efficacy of “linguistic modification,” a promising approach to improving access on assessments for English learners.

Linguistic modification involves clarifying the language used in an assessment without simplifying or significantly altering the content being tested. Modifications may include reducing sentence length and complexity, using more linguistically sensitive or familiar words, and providing appropriate and culturally sensitive context through language. REL West’s five-year study is examining how linguistic modification impacts assessments’ validity and will compare this approach to other methods for increasing EL students’ access to tested content.

In the meantime, ASDS and AACC continue to build on and extend their body of research, with an emphasis on synthesizing and translating findings into usable guidelines for policymakers and assessment developers. For example, AACC staff have released a set of “Guidelines for Consumers and Developers” on “The Technical Adequacy of Assessments for Alternate Student Populations”; a draft guide to
linguistic modification and bridging Title I and Title III assessments; and, in response to requests from the U.S. Department of Education, a “Draft Framework for Developing High-Quality English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards and Assessments.”

This research and development portfolio also infuses the technical assistance that Rabinowitz and Sato provide to states and other education agencies and informs ASDS’s test development services. Recently, ASDS began developing a new Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment. These efforts of ASDS, the AACC, and REL West are consistent with WestEd’s commitment to address the needs of English learners, students with disabilities, and other underserved populations.

For more information about this body of research on English learner assessment, visit www.aacompcenter.org or contact Edynn Sato at 415.615.3226 or esato@WestEd.org.
impacts. But when used correctly, just like any of these tools, for the right questions — such as “How is this program actually being implemented in the field?” — case studies can be extremely valuable.

**What research misperceptions do you encounter?**

**Lash** > That there are easy, quick answers. That for evaluation data to be useful, you must have experimental studies. That research doesn’t cost much.

**Tushnet** > That experimental research is the most rigorous form of research. One can have rigor in many methods. There are sloppy RCTs and rigorous RCTs, just as there are sloppy qualitative studies and rigorous qualitative studies.

**Orland** > People often seem to be looking for a magic bullet that’s going to tell them what to do, and that’s not the nature of education research. You have to understand that education is very complex and interactive, then use research as a tool, as something that can be part of the calculus in arriving at decisions.

I subscribe to the “just right” thesis. You don’t want to make either too much or too little of education research. You want it just right. Research doesn’t give you an exact formula for what to do, but can guide you in directions you might not know about otherwise.

**Filby** > One misperception many people have is that you can start an evaluation at the end of a project. Interest in knowing about the effectiveness of a program often peaks as the funding is running out, and people want to know whether to refund it; but the design of a good evaluation — including appropriate comparison groups — has to be set at the beginning.

**Koehler** > One issue is the length of time it takes to complete the research, particularly for some of the issues being studied with RCTs. It’s just the nature of that kind of research that it will take some years before we get results. So the policy leaders who are trying to improve schools and districts now often ask: “What do I do in the meantime?” Theirs is a real serious question, and one that places like WestEd are helping address.

**Orland** > Time is definitely an issue. For a solid and useful knowledge base to be built in education research, it’s going to take a generation — at least — of really sound studies.

For a solid and **useful knowledge base** to be built in education research, it’s going to take a generation — at least — of really sound studies.
The CHKS is funded by the Safe and Healthy Kids Program Office of the California Department of Education (CDE). Since 2003, CDE has required public schools to administer it at least once every two years so as to be in compliance with Title IV provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

According to state education officials, the survey’s impact is primarily in the usefulness of its data locally throughout the WestEd associates have held structured discussions among students and staff about CHKS findings at over 60 high schools in California. These “listening circles” add the important voice of students to understanding the results and how to address the problems identified.

“We use a data-driven, action-oriented approach,” says Bonnie Benard, a WestEd Senior Program Associate who has worked on questions of resilience and performance for over a decade and developed this listening-to-youth process.

The CHKS provides powerful data and moves the information to the local level, where we can use it school by school, neighborhood by neighborhood.

The CHKS has exceeded our expectations to influence policy locally,” says Greg Wolfe, a CDE school health education consultant. “It provides powerful data and moves the information to the local level, where we can use it school by school, neighborhood by neighborhood.”

Austin and colleagues encourage schools to collaborate with community and local youth organizations to better meet student needs. “What we’ve worked on just as hard as collecting the data is developing a constituency for the data — helping educators understand how to use the information,” says Austin.

WestEd analysts disaggregate the survey data and deliver findings in formats geared to local decision makers, such as factsheets and reports that examine critical issues. By documenting issues such as binge drinking and drug use, the survey has helped schools and communities obtain additional state and federal program and service funding.

“Adults can’t know what matters to students unless they ask,” says Benard. “The kids aren’t really surprised by the data, and they have creative ways of responding — ideas we adults might never think of.”

The process creates more positive relationships between staff and students — shown by a growing body of research to be essential to improved academic outcomes. At Jefferson Union High School in Daly City, for example, a group of struggling students considered the data showing that only about a third of the students felt like they had relationships with caring adults at school.

Guided by Benard, the Jefferson Union students and staff developed an action plan together. Students felt their campus...
What’s New & Useful

Mentoring New Teachers Through Collaborative Coaching: Linking Student and Teacher Learning and Facilitation and Training Guide

Based on research and their extensive work across the country, the authors offer guidance on how mentors can understand the needs of new teachers, build strong relationships with them, and coach them through an ongoing process of improvement. This book and facilitation guide are geared to education leaders who oversee mentor programs and those who provide professional development for mentors.

Resiliency: What We Have Learned

This synthesis of more than a decade of resiliency research highlights the role that families, schools, and communities can play in supporting children’s and youth’s natural capacity to lead healthy, successful lives. Of special interest is the evidence that resiliency prevails in most cases by far — even in extreme situations, such as those caused by poverty, troubled families, and violent neighborhoods. Benard offers a practical analysis of how best to incorporate research findings to support young people.

The Distribution of Teaching and Learning Resources in California’s Middle and High Schools

This report presents findings from a study examining access to important educational resources in California’s middle and high schools. It found that access to these resources is not equal among schools that serve different student populations. Overall, the most disadvantaged populations of students are likely to have the least access to the resources necessary for learning.

Measuring Resilience and Youth Development: The Psychometric Properties of the Healthy Kids Survey

This report summarizes findings from a study of the psychometric properties of a key component of the Healthy Kids Survey. The study aims to improve resilience assessment and research so that educators can shape the school environment to promote academic resilience.
Improving Literacy Outcomes for English Language Learners in High School: Considerations for States and Districts in Developing a Coherent Policy Framework

This research brief outlines existing barriers regarding teacher expectations, tracking, and placement of English language learners. It makes the case for states and districts changing their approach for working with English learners from one of remediation to academic acceleration and enrichment. Koelsch offers key policies and useful strategies for building capacity and creating learning environments conducive for the academic success of all students.

Language, Culture, and Community in Teacher Education

The ideas and analyses in this unique volume help prepare all teachers who work with culturally and linguistically diverse students—not just teachers of English as a second language or bilingual teachers. WestEd’s Sharon Nelson-Barber co-authored a key chapter, “Rethinking the Case for Culture-Based Curriculum: Conditions That Support Improved Mathematics Performance in Diverse Classrooms.”

Author: Nanette Koelsch
Publisher: National High School Center, 2006
Price: Free download
Available from: WestEd.org/products

Language, culture, and community in teacher education

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For faster service, visit our website: WestEd.org/products
intervention early in high school because students aren’t catching up later.”

If this kind of information is communicated clearly and quickly, Finkelstein believes, it has the potential to change behaviors at all levels of education — from the home, to the school, to the statehouse.

“I think the central message is that ninth grade matters, and it matters for everyone,” says Finkelstein, co-director of research for REL West. Students need to be focused “the minute they walk into high school, if not sooner, and that’s a message that needs to be communicated in terms of course selection.”

As a policy matter, Finkelstein adds, the study also demonstrates the importance of aligning expectations between secondary schools and colleges. Improving access to higher education, particularly for minority youths, depends on a coordinated set of objectives that all parties know and pursue.

For more information about the study, contact Neal Finkelstein at 415.615.3171 or nfinkel@WestEd.org or Anthony Fong at 415.615.3289 or tfong@WestEd.org. For a copy of the study report, please visit http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/projects.asp.

For more information about the California Healthy Kids Survey and related research, visit WestEd.org/chks or contact Greg Austin at 562.799.5155 or gaustin@WestEd.org.

looked messy, for example, so they organized a cleanup and implemented a recycling program. They weren’t fans of the music administrators played with morning announcements and came up with a way to have a voice in the choice.

“Small changes like this can make a big difference,” says Benard. “Caring relationships and being a contributing member of a community are significant protective factors for kids, so teacher-student collaborations like those at Jefferson Union really matter.”