

# R&D

A L E R T

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## Reading for understanding: A modern urban success story

### *Reading Is a Voice in Your Head*

It is early December and a group of 10 San Francisco ninth graders are gathered in the back room of their school library. They are talking enthusiastically about a new reading course they've been taking since September.

"There should be a little voice in your head like the storyteller is saying it," says freshman LaKeisha. "And if there's not, then you're just lookin' at the words."

Like the others in this group, LaKeisha is eager to share her new vision of reading. Since participating in her school's new "Academic Literacy" course, she has learned what she likes to read and is more able to understand what she is reading.

The Academic Literacy course that LaKeisha took part in was developed in 1996 by Ruth Schoenbach and Cynthia



Greenleaf, Director and Associate Director of WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI), and Christine Cziko, then-Department Head of English at San Francisco's Thurgood Marshall Academic High School.

The course has shown dramatic signs of success. When LaKeisha and the other

300 ninth graders at Thurgood Marshall started the school year in the Fall of

1996, they were reading, on average, at a low seventh-grade level.

By the end of the academic year, this diverse group of students had improved their reading comprehension to an average score of late ninth grade on the Degrees of Reading

Power (DRP), a nationally normed standardized test. This gain was consistent across all ethnic groups and across the four classrooms where the course was taught. In addition, at the end of the following school year, the students in this group gained, on average, another two years as measured by the DRP. Perhaps most hearteningly, students gained positive reading attitudes and habits.

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## From the CEO: When kids can't read

It's not acceptable when children have been in school for years and still can't read. It's not okay to say, "We tried." Whether they're in third grade or high school, there are no students we can afford to write off. Being able to read is just too important to the future of every one of them.

In response, teachers are being asked to learn more than ever about the reading

process — and to use that information to sharpen their teaching. They are also being asked to become expert in motivating students, especially students who must give reading a lot of extra effort.

Even after-school programs are being asked to step in and help. A huge effort has been put into

making reading an appealing choice in after-school programs — especially for children who might otherwise choose anything *but* reading.

This issue of *R&D Alert* highlights a number of reading initiatives — both school-based and after school — that are underway at WestEd.

Our feature article looks at a secondary-school program

that is, at heart, about refusing to give up on kids. The Strategic Literacy Initiative (formerly the HERALD Project) proves that even as late as high school, if students can't read, there are ways to make a difference. A key program strategy is to help teachers turn metacognition into a fascinating way for adolescents to become engaged in their own reading development. The result, according to a recent program evaluation, is a significant boost in students' reading comprehension.

I hope that as you read about these approaches, you find them useful. Perhaps they will stimulate your own thinking about how to help children thrive as readers.

**Glen Harvey**  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
WestEd

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“I feel proud of myself as a reader,” one ninth grader said after completing the course. “I really did grow.”

## Reading Apprenticeships

Thurgood Marshall’s course is nested in the SLI’s larger-scale initiative to improve secondary-level reading.

Using what SLI staff call a “reading apprenticeship” approach, teachers of subject-area classes — including English, science, social studies, and even math — have seen a substantial positive impact on students’ reading comprehension.

In 20 classrooms in other Bay Area middle and high school classrooms where the approach was incorporated, the average

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**Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Improving Reading in Middle and High School Classrooms** lays out the ideas behind the Strategic Literacy Initiative’s apprenticeship approach, and provides classroom examples and ideas to help teachers apply the approach. The book, authored by Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, Christine Cziko, and Lori Hurwitz, will be published this Fall by Jossey-Bass.

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WestEd’s  
Web site!

The WestEd Web site <WestEd.org> is a great source of information for education leaders everywhere. Visit the “What’s New” section for the latest publications and links: [WestEd.org/wested/news.html](http://WestEd.org/wested/news.html)

**T**he Roving Institute for Reading Tutors of Indian Students. A curious name, but it comes by it honestly: This institute really does rove. The project, known as RIRTIS, has conducted trainings throughout California, Arizona, and New Mexico, in places as diverse as public libraries, community halls, health centers, and even a Moose Lodge.

RIRTIS, led by WestEd’s Northern California Comprehensive Assistance Center, pulls together the literacy and cross-cultural expertise of staff from the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center and WestEd — including its Southwest Comprehensive Assistance Center in Phoenix, AZ.

Modeled loosely on the federally funded America Reads Challenge, RIRTIS provides professional development to an often-overlooked segment of the school population — tutors and paraeducators — who work with students in high-poverty, low-performing schools. Tutors and paraeducators typically include parents, high school and college students, community members, and elders.

RIRTIS’ original focus was on providing support for those who work with Indian students in the

primary grade levels. The project since has been expanded to include both migrant education students and the development of materials for the upper-grade levels. RIRTIS also will continue to adapt to the needs of tutors working with other diverse student populations.

## Institute provides training to overlooked school population: Tutors and paraeducators

“Tutor training for Indian paraeducators in reading is long overdue,” says Floyd Beller, a WestEd Research Associate with 25 years’ experience in Indian education. “In addition, we must support Indian parents who are taking an active role in helping their children with literacy skills in the home.”

The institutes address culturally relevant approaches to teaching and learning, common reading needs and how to address them, instructional strategies for literacy development, methods for analyzing reading strengths and needs, and references for accessing additional information resources.

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*Bert Tello, Lead Tutor Coordinator for the California Indian Education Center in Ventura, reads with children. The center is part of WestEd’s Northern California Comprehensive Assistance Center, which oversees RIRTIS.*

# Teaching children to read is everyone's responsibility

Five months ago, nine-year-old Dillon struggled with reading and was uninterested in doing his schoolwork. Today, with help from an America Reads volunteer tutor, Dillon's reading performance has jumped a full grade level. Equally important, Dillon *wants* to read.

The difficulties Dillon faced are, unfortunately, not unusual.

"Almost everyone has a child in their life for whom literacy is or will be an issue," says Cindy McCarthy, WestEd Regional Coordinator of America Reads.

In 1994, 40% of America's fourth graders failed to attain the basic reading level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Facing such an enormous challenge, responsibility for improving children's odds of success cannot lie solely with our nation's educators.

This is the premise upon which the America Reads Challenge is founded. A national initiative begun in 1997, the program creates partnerships based on a unique university-school-community model.

"It's not necessary to have a teaching credential to be part of this effort," says McCarthy. "We can support teachers by

volunteering time or books, participating in community awareness events, or helping parents get the information they need to help their children succeed."

As one of nine federal grantees for this program, WestEd has facilitated America Reads conferences in California and Arizona. Participants from universities, libraries, schools, and businesses attend sessions on literacy research and practice, tutoring, training and managing tutors, and designing and maintaining partnerships.

Six partnerships across WestEd's region received additional federal resources to develop or extend their tutoring programs and materials. Tips and lessons learned from these and 55 other partnerships nationwide are profiled in *So That Every Child Can Read*, recently published by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in collaboration with the other regional educational laboratories. A free copy is available through NWREL's Development and Communications unit at 503/275-9519; e-mail, [products@nwrel.org](mailto:products@nwrel.org); or fax, 503/275-0458. The report also is available online at [nwrel.org/cevsc/steccr/](http://nwrel.org/cevsc/steccr/)

For more information about the America Reads Challenge, contact McCarthy at 562/985-9139; or visit the America Reads Web site at [ed.gov/inits/americanreads/index.html](http://ed.gov/inits/americanreads/index.html) ■

## Reading for understanding

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student gained almost two years' reading comprehension from October to May, according to the DRP test.

### The Problem of Secondary Reading

"I'm doing back flips in the classroom to get the content across without expecting them to read the textbook," a history teacher says. "I've stopped assigning reading; the text is almost supplementary for my history curriculum."

Teachers nationwide report that many of their middle and high school students have difficulty reading and *understanding* the academic texts required in their history, English, social studies, math, and science classes. Taught to decode, or say, the words on a page, many students are unable to read critically for ideas and content.

Teachers like those at Thurgood Marshall Academic High School are looking for ways to teach reading for comprehension, a way to empower adolescents to create their own purposes and strategies for reading a variety of academic and recreational texts.



Cindy McCarthy, WestEd Regional Coordinator of America Reads, tutors six-year-old Taylor Gaia twice a week.

## Untapped Resources

The apprenticeship approach helps teachers mine their own skills as “master readers” to use in developing apprenticeships with their students. Students learn to be more aware of their own reading processes as they learn to read for understanding in the context of their subject-area curriculum.

Apprenticeship puts “thinking about thinking” — metacognition — at the center of professional development in reading for subject-area teachers.

The first step in this process is to get teachers to recognize what *they* do when they read.

“We have groups of social studies teachers sit together and read a history analysis and chemistry teachers read a *Scientific American* article,” says Greenleaf. “And we have them list their reading moves — what they pay attention to.”

## Making the Invisible Visible

Next, SLI staff help teachers create apprenticeships in which students learn to be self-reflective about *their* reading processes.

“We try to make the invisible processes of reading

*(continued on page 6)*

A tremendous number of our children struggle with basic literacy skills, and, not surprisingly, a disproportionate share of the burden is borne by students in high-poverty communities. The Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) was funded in 1994 in part to address this reality. As part of IASA, the Reading Success Network (RSN) was created to provide support and training for schools actively engaged in addressing the literacy needs of their students.

WestEd administers two branches of the RSN, one in Northern California and one in Arizona, through its federally funded Comprehensive Assistance Centers (CACs). Teaching partners from RSN schools learn peer coaching/leadership skills and strategies for improving the teaching and learning of reading. Participants also learn how to interpret and act upon information yielded by student assessment data.

Perhaps most important, according to Noraini Abdullah-Welsh, a WestEd Research Associate with the Northern California RSN, the foundation is laid for forming a tight network of trained literacy experts committed to achievement for all students, regardless of their language or cultural backgrounds.

“Our role is to train cadres of teacher coaches and help all children become literate,” says

Huck Fitterer, Senior Research Associate with the Arizona RSN.

Sessions are thus tailored to meet the needs of individual sites (e.g., schools that have a large English language learner population). During the school year, WestEd staff will work with districts and counties to follow up on progress made.

## Network trains teachers to help all children become literate

The network is small but growing. Little more than one year old, the two programs have hosted training for approximately 100 participants at six sites. They continue to expand their recruiting efforts.

For more information about RSN in Northern California, contact Abdullah-Welsh at 562/985-9036. In Arizona, contact Fitterer at 602/252-0005. Information about RSN also can be accessed at the Northern California CAC Web site at [wested.org/cc/index.htm](http://wested.org/cc/index.htm); or the Southern California CAC Web site at [sccac.lacoe.edu/priorities/reading.html](http://sccac.lacoe.edu/priorities/reading.html) ■

*“Our role is to train... teacher coaches and help all children become literate.”*

*— Huck Fitterer,  
WestEd Senior Research Associate*

## Reading for understanding

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visible for students,” says Schoenbach. “Teachers who use this approach help their students become more active and more strategic as they read. Students begin to see that you read different kinds of texts in different ways, and that you might read the same text differently depending on your purpose for reading.

“The bottom line is we are trying to work with adolescents’ strengths,” says Schoenbach. “We’re trying to put them in the driver’s seat in relation to their own reading.”

## Expanding the Work

Building on its success in the Bay Area, SLI is both doubling staff and developing a cadre of teacher consultants to help further extend their work. Working with networks of teachers in teams from different schools, SLI is sharing its work with educators across the country through publications, conference presentations, and professional development series.

For more information about SLI and Academic Literacy, visit the SLI Web site at [wested.org/stratlit](http://wested.org/stratlit) or contact Schoenbach at 415/565-3026. ■

# What’s new, hot, useful

## Coming Soon

### *Bridging Cultures in Our Schools: New Approaches That Work*

Elise Trumbull, Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, & Patricia M. Greenfield

16 pages \$5 LCD-99-01

This brief provides a framework for understanding how teachers’ culturally driven — and often unconsciously held — values influence classroom practice and expectations, and, when in conflict with the values of immigrant and other parents from more collectivistic societies, can interfere with parent-teacher communication. The brief looks at some specific cross-culture conflicts and illustrates some strategies for resolving them.



### *Class Size Reduction: Lessons Learned from Experience*

Joan McRobbie, Jeremy D. Finn, & Patrick Harman

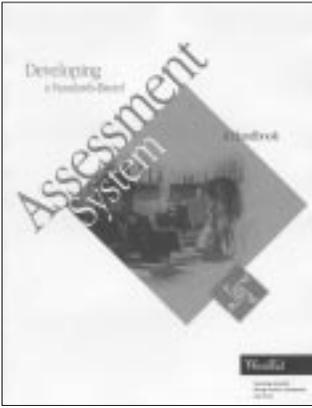
Copublishers: WestEd, The Laboratory for Student Success, & SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, 1998

12 pages \$3 PO-98-01

This policy brief starts from the position that class size reduction is not a silver bullet, but rather one approach that has been shown to improve learning, especially in the early grades. Also available online at [WestEd.org/policy/pubs/full\\_text/pb\\_ft\\_csr23.htm](http://WestEd.org/policy/pubs/full_text/pb_ft_csr23.htm)



*For ordering information, please refer to the product order insert.*



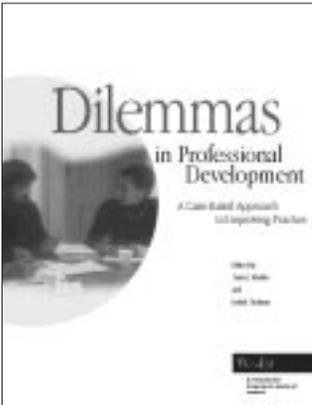
**Coming Soon**

*Developing a Standards-Based Assessment System: A Handbook*

Assessment and Standards Development Services  
200 pages (approximately)  
Price to be determined

**ASDS-99-01**

A resource for schools and districts interested in developing and implementing a standards-based assessment system, this handbook introduces key steps in the process. It also discusses several issues to consider when developing and implementing a new assessment system. Examples from existing systems are provided.



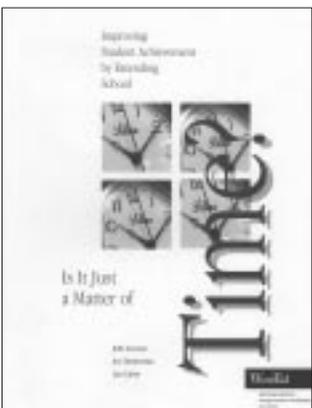
**Coming Soon**

*Dilemmas in Professional Development: A Case-Based Approach to Improving Practice*

Tania J. Madfes & Judith H. Shulman (Editors)

196 pages **\$24 DPD-99-01**

Who provides professional development for those who work in the arena of teacher professional development? This collection of eight cases with facilitator notes presents real-life dilemmas for those who manage and lead teacher development programs. The cases are useful for group discussion or individual reflection.



*Improving Student Achievement by Extending School: Is It Just a Matter of Time?*

Julie Aronson, Joy Zimmerman, & Lisa Carlos, 1999

20 pages **\$10 PO-98-02**

This report distills the research on the complex relationship between time, learning, and student achievement. Also available online at [WestEd.org/wested/papers/timeandlearning](http://WestEd.org/wested/papers/timeandlearning)

*Learning from Assessment: Tools for Examining Assessment Through Standards*

Tania J. Madfes & Ann Muench, 1999  
Copublishers: WestEd & the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

196 pages **\$31** (\$25 plus \$6 shipping and handling [S&H]; omit \$2.50 S&H on order form)

**LFA-99-01**

This comprehensive training package for middle-school mathematics staff developers provides a collegial process for clarifying the meaning of standards, evaluating assessments in terms of their alignment to standards, and planning student learning experiences that reflect standards-based teaching practices.

For more information, visit [WestEd.org/lfa](http://WestEd.org/lfa)



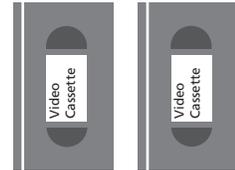
*Putting the Pieces Together*

Stephen Mills, Julie Duffield, & Harvey Barnett (Production Team), 1998

Two videotapes: 138 minutes (total)

**\$12 TIE-98-01**

This videotape series includes roundtable discussions with panelists analyzing successful technology planning, and the steps to develop, fund, and implement a plan. Additional information on the series and the videotapes, as well as online ordering information, can be found at [WestEd.org/tie/techplan/videos.shtml](http://WestEd.org/tie/techplan/videos.shtml)



*For ordering information, please refer to the product order insert.*

Institute provides  
**training** to overlooked  
school population

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The institutes also incorporate many hands-on activities, such as having participants create their own instructional materials for use in the classroom.

“We’re not just talking heads up there,” says WestEd Research Associate Noraini Abdullah-Welsh, who is coordinating the RIRTIS. “We want people to come out of these workshops with information and materials they can really use immediately.”

Based on participant feedback and requests for more services, the institutes are being expanded to two days.

Since January, RIRTIS has conducted 12 institutes and trained more than 400 tutors and paraeducators. Response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Says one participant: “It was good to learn more ideas, rethink old ideas, and get ‘psyched’ about reading, once again.”

For more information about RIRTIS, contact Abdullah-Welsh at (562) 985-9036. ■

## R&D Alert

R&D Alert covers issues affecting schools in WestEd’s four-state region (Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah) and nationwide.

Your letters are welcomed. Please send comments to: Colleen Montoya, WestEd, 4665 Lampson Avenue, Los Alamitos CA 90720-5139; fax, (562) 985-9038; or e-mail, [cmontoy@WestEd.org](mailto:cmontoy@WestEd.org)

**Chief Executive Officer**  
Glen Harvey

**Director, Office of Policy & Communications**  
Max McConkey

**R&D Alert Editor**  
Colleen Montoya

**R&D Alert Contributors**  
Glen Harvey  
Andrea Jachman  
Lynn Murphy  
Kate Rix

**Copy Editors**  
Tracy Landauer  
Nimfa Rueda

**Graphic Designer**  
Joe Vera, Vera Design

**Photographers**  
Hunter Freeman  
Gabriel Koneta  
Eric Larrayadieu  
Uniphoto

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or write:  
WestEd  
730 Harrison Street  
San Francisco, CA  
94107-1242

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730 Harrison Street  
San Francisco  
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