



research digest

December 2011

Seminar Looks at Principal Evaluation Practices

Effective principal evaluation – and related research, policy, and practice – was the focus when REL West and the California Comprehensive Center hosted *Enhancing Principal Effectiveness through Comprehensive Principal Evaluation Systems*, November 17 and 18. Karen Kearney, Director of the Leadership Initiative at WestEd, facilitated the day-and-a-half event. Over fifty California state and district leaders gathered at the WestEd San Francisco office for the interactive seminar, which combined researcher and expert practitioner presentations with policy panels, opportunities for Q&A and discussion, and action-step planning activities.

The event's keynote speaker was Richard Halverson, assistant professor and researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, who is engaged in an IES study through 2013 on developing and validating leadership evaluation tools, and who was on the panel for the IES Practice Guide, *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making*. Halverson focused his remarks on how school principals and district administrators can use data technologies to enhance instructional leadership and help transform schools. Peter McNally, Executive Vice President of the New York Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, along with Laura Feijoo, Senior Superintendent, New York City Department of Education, shared details of the union-management collaboration involved in the New York City system, as well as several examples of successes and challenges in putting

a comprehensive principal evaluation system into everyday practice.

Other presentations included a review of the literature on principal evaluation policies and practices, key features of a comprehensive evaluation system, using multiple measures in principal evaluation systems, and data options for evidence-based evaluation. A lively panel discussion focused on ways that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners might work together to improve principal evaluation practices in California. One popular feature of the seminar was a “consulting colleagues” activity, during which participants shared specific challenges they are facing in designing and implementing comprehensive principal evaluation systems, and worked with colleagues and presenters to brainstorm solutions and strategies.

Get details on the seminar and related resources.

Coming in 2012.

With the New Year come some new directions for the work at Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West). The current REL West contract ends December 31, and on January 3, WestEd will begin a new five-year contract to operate REL West. We will continue to send out research digests, drawing from our new scope of work — assisting multiple-stakeholder, cross-site alliances to use data in continuous improvement. (See article on page 2.)

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REL West Research Alliances: Using Data to Make Decisions

While it takes a concerted start-up effort, bringing together a broad group of education stakeholders to problem-solve common issues can be more efficient and effective than leaving each group to tackle the issues on its own. REL West is launching a five-year effort to implement several such collaborative projects at the regional, state, and district levels.

For example, REL West plans to develop and support groups like the English Language Learner (ELL) Collaborative, a cross-state initiative convened through the Southwest Comprehensive Center at WestEd. Exemplifying many of the collective problem-solving approaches that REL West aims to help implement, ELL Collaborative members develop and share best practices through face-to-face meetings, an online community, and web-based communication.

By providing a range of technical assistance to support data-based decision making, REL West aims to maximize the impact and sustainability of these sorts of collaborative groups, which will be known as “research alliances.” In fact, one of the main goals of the research alliances is to help educators learn to consistently use data and research evidence to inform their decision making, a fundamental shift in the way most schools and districts approach their work.

“Most states and districts already have some sort of data system in use — the key is to tap into that data as a way to inform continuous improvement of education strategies and practices,” explains Nikola Filby, REL West Co-Director. “For instance, Utah’s data system has a lot of useful information on the characteristics of English language learner students. This type of data can be analyzed in different ways to help develop targeted interventions to support these students.”

Until now, REL West has generally worked intensively with states or single districts to support their unique needs on a case-by-case basis. Expanding beyond this single-organization model, the new research alliances will bring together multiple stakeholders, including districts, states, or other education-related organizations.

Each alliance will address a pressing education need of the states served by REL West (Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah), and all of the work will fall under four areas of particular importance to the West Region: (1) increasing college and career readiness and

persistence, (2) strengthening educator effectiveness, (3) accelerating achievement among English language learner students, and (4) improving school climate and student achievement in low-performing schools.

REL West will serve as the center of support for the research alliances, providing technical assistance, targeted research, and a range of dissemination activities to ensure that valuable information gets shared with educators, not only within an alliance but throughout the region. For example, in support of the ELL Collaborative, REL West plans to leverage existing state and district data systems to conduct and disseminate research studies on the achievement of English language learner students, similar to the recently published study, *The Relationship Between English Proficiency and Content Knowledge for English Language Learner Students in Grades 10 and 11 in Utah*.

The work of the alliances will be implemented as iterative, continuous improvement processes — specifically, in repeated Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycles. Based on the priorities identified in the Plan stage, REL West will collaborate with the alliances to develop specific theories of action. For example, the proposed Silicon Valley Research Alliance (which aims to prepare students for college eligibility by ensuring adequate preparation in math) will likely begin by developing consistent course placement metrics across schools and districts, which will be validated over time. For maximum effect, REL West will help the alliances to repeatedly use the cycle as they move from small-scale tests to implementation at scale. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching will be a partner in the design of this continuous improvement approach.

REL West’s continual focus on fostering data-based decision making — which will include conducting online data-analysis workshops and developing templates for the collection of baseline data — is expected to ultimately lead to systemic change in the way alliance members approach their work. “By helping alliances become proficient and systematic in using data and research,” says Filby, “we hope to develop their capacity to take a strategic, informed approach to implementing and continually refining their education improvement strategies, and to sustain their work independently over time.”

For further information about the research alliances, contact Nikola Filby at 415.615.3124 or nfilby@wested.org.

Utah Advances Dropout Prevention

Researchers, educators, and students were among more than 80 invited participants who exchanged knowledge and experiences related to high school dropout prevention, at a November 14 event in Salt Lake City, co-hosted by WestEd, the Utah State Office of Education, and the National Dropout Prevention Center.

Russell Rumberger's keynote presentation included an overview of the *Dropout Prevention Practice Guide* from the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, which he co-authored, and a discussion of the Guide's six recommended, research-based practices. Rumberger is Vice Provost for Education Partnerships, University of California Office of the President; and Professor, Gevirtz Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

A panel of education and community leaders focused on the national and state costs and consequences of dropping out of high school. A panel of youth discussed their experiences, including reasons for considering dropping out, what supports both in and out of school

might have been helpful in preventing dropping out, and the impact that returning to or staying in school is having on their lives. Panel discussions were moderated by Dr. Loujeania Williams Bost, Executive Director, National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities; and Carol Anderson,

Education Specialist for Emotional Disabilities and Mental Health, Utah State Office of Education, respectively.

Participants had opportunities throughout the day to interact with experts, panelists, and each other to plan next steps to increase academic success for all of Utah's students. **Get more details.**

Visit the
REL West website!
<http://relwest.WestEd.org>

Featuring:

- Research on improving student outcomes
- Free reports on state issues
- Events that connect research, policy, and practice

Selected Fast-Response and Technical Assistance Project Reports

In carrying out fast-response projects intended to inform quick action and policy decisions, and in providing technical assistance on regional evaluation and research activities, REL West researchers analyze or otherwise utilize existing data, studies, and research reviews. Results undergo external peer review to ensure that they meet the Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research. The reports described below have been published since the previous issue of the Research Digest, October 2011. Published REL West reports are available at <http://relwest.WestEd.org>. Reports from all 10 RELs are available at the national REL website at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/index.asp>

How California Evaluates Educators

The 2009 State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) program required that states collect data from all local education agencies (LEAs) on their current teacher and principal evaluation practices. To meet this requirement, California's Department of Education created and sent a survey to all LEAs during summer 2010, and more than 99 percent responded. REL West developed a free, downloadable analysis and summary report of survey results, ***How California's Local Education Agencies Evaluate Teachers and Principals***. (Coming in December)

Teacher Retirement Trends Examined

Given the magnitude of the recent economic recession in California, along with the baby boomer population currently reaching peak retirement ages, state education leaders have expressed interest in investigating recent variations in California educators' age distribution and retirement rates over time.

Download a free copy of the complete report, ***An Examination of Retirement Rate Patterns Among California Educators Since 1995/96 School Year***. (Coming in December)

Publications from Other Organizations

Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center

Guidance for Developing and Selecting Assessments of Student Growth for Use in Teacher Evaluation Systems (Extended Version)

The authors provide comprehensive guidance on evaluating the quality of assessments used to measure student learning as part of “value-added” teacher evaluation systems.

A policy brief on the topic is also available.

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Online Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems

Teacher Evaluation Models in Practice

Center on Instruction

Progressions Documents for the Common Core Math Standards

Developed by the Institute for Mathematics and Education at the University of Arizona. (November 2011)

These narrative documents describe the progression of a math topic across a number of grade levels, informed both by research on children’s cognitive development and by the logical structure of mathematics.

Center on Innovation and Improvement

Handbook on Family and Community Engagement

The Handbook is designed to guide state, district, and school Title I personnel in providing high-quality, research-based family and community engagement programs and experiences.

OTHER RELS

REL Mid-Atlantic

What Four States are Doing to Support Local Data-Driven Decision-Making: Policies, Practices, and Programs

This report documents how four state education agencies are supporting local data-driven decisionmaking through their policies, practices, and programs for creating data systems, improving data access and use, and building district and school capacity to use data. (November 2011)

REL Appalachia

Superintendent Turnover in Kentucky

This report is the state’s first detailed description of superintendent turnover. It intends to help policymakers and other leaders better understand turnover so that they can develop new programs to prepare, recruit, and retain superintendents. The report describes superintendent turnover statewide, by rural status, and by Appalachian and non-Appalachian region over 1998/99–2007/08 and also looks at how turnover varies by 2007/08 school district characteristics. (August 2011)

REL Northeast & Islands

A Descriptive Analysis of State-Supported Formative Assessment Initiatives in New York and Vermont

This study examines two state-supported formative assessment initiatives that promote a consensus definition of formative assessment endorsed by the Council of Chief State School Officers. It describes the primary components of the two initiatives and the strategies that state, district, and school leaders report using to support implementation of each initiative. (November 2011)

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