



**REL** / research digest  
WEST

October 2011

## College Readiness: Searching for Reliable Indicators

For more than a quarter of college-bound high school graduates in this country, embarking on higher education doesn't necessarily equate with earning college credit. Before they can take key credit-bearing college-level courses, they must first take remedial classes. These are students who have completed all courses required for college eligibility, taken requisite admission tests, and earned grades and test scores good enough to merit an acceptance letter. Yet their college or university informs them that, based on the institution's readiness criteria, they are, in fact, *not* ready for college-level coursework in mathematics, English, or both.<sup>1</sup>

In Nevada's Washoe County School District, close to 60 percent of college-bound high school graduates attend school locally, at University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) or Truckee Meadows Community College. Of the students who graduated in the high school classes of 2005 to 2009, 46 percent of those at UNR and 89 percent of those at Truckee Meadows Community College were determined to be in need of remediation in math, English, or both prior to taking college-level courses.<sup>2</sup>

When the district's senior leadership discovered the extent of the problem, they wanted to explore the possibility of assessing, at different points from kindergarten onward, whether a student is on track to graduate from high school prepared for college. To that end, the district collaborated with REL West on a project designed to understand how, based on college readiness criteria at the UNR, a student's probability of qualifying for college-

level courses in math and in English relates to the student's scores on 1) Nevada's grade-8 assessment in these two subjects and 2) the student's first attempt, usually in grade 10, on the state's high school proficiency exam in these same subjects.

The project examined data for students in the 2008 and 2009 graduation cohorts for whom scores were available from the two statewide assessments (grade 8 and high school proficiency) and from one or both of the two admission tests (ACT and SAT) on which UNR bases its readiness decisions. Students were considered "ready" if their admission test(s) scores met UNR criteria for enrolling in credit-bearing courses for freshmen entering in fall 2009.

A key finding in all four data analyses (one for each subject matter test in each statewide assessment) was that the range of student achievement scores that "meet the grade-level"

*REL West Research Digest keeps educators and others abreast of the research carried out by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West at WestEd. In addition to providing abstracts of selected REL West research reports, this twice-yearly digest may include descriptions of upcoming REL West work, services, and events, and, as relevant to the Western region, of publications developed by other researchers.*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Trends in Arizona Title I schools**

**Data for decision making in Nevada**

*continued >>*

standard on the assessments was “associated with a wide range of probabilities of being judged eligible for college courses. With one exception, the likelihood of being judged eligible was less than .20 for students who scored at the lower end of the ‘meets standard’ range and above .70 for students who scored at the top of the range” (p. 9). The exception was that students scoring at the lower end of the “meets standard” range on the grade-8 reading test had an associated readiness probability of .41.

Project partners caution that data analyses represent only students who were knowledgeable about and motivated to complete a college admission test and for whom all relevant test scores were available. Representing about one-third of the approximately 10,000 students in the two graduation cohorts, this subgroup also had a lower percentage of English learners, students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and those eligible for special

education services than the cohorts as a whole. In addition, the results apply only to the UNR criteria derived from the admissions tests. Nevertheless, the analyses may be useful to students actively pursuing college goals, as well as to districts setting student performance targets and planning related instructional programs.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wirt, J., Choy, S., Rooney, P., Provasnik, S., Sen, A., and Tobin, R. (2004). *The condition of education 2004* (NCES 2004-077). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved October 14, 2011, from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe\\_ofc.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_ofc.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Education Alliance of Washoe County. (2009). *Washoe K–12 data profile: WCSD graduates attending UNR and TMCC*. Reno, NV: Author. Retrieved December 20, 2010, from <http://www.washoecountyschools.org/community/annual-reports-publications/data-profiles>

## Nevada Focuses on Data for Decision Making

Generating high-quality data to inform instructional decision making was the focus of an October 5th conference in Las Vegas cosponsored by the Nevada Governor’s Office, REL West at WestEd, and the Nevada Department of Education. In his greeting to the conference, Nevada governor Brian Sandoval referred to data use in school, district, and state-level decision making as a “foundational element in meaningful school reform.” Expert presenters included Ellen Mandinach, Senior Research Scientist at WestEd and panel member for the featured Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guide, *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making*, who reviewed major findings of that research; and Diana Nunnaley, the Using Data Implementation Director at TERC, who demonstrated effective use of data for making evidence-based instructional decisions. Participants attended interactive breakout sessions on applying research to developing Nevada’s data system and its growth model. **Get more details.**

Other recent bridge events include:

**Supporting English Language Learners in the Southwest Region.** Successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the Southwest region demands attention to English language learners. State education agency teams from Arizona, Colorado,

Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah gathered September 8 and 9 in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico, for an update on CCSS national work, critical components for an implementation plan, and the implications of CCSS for English language learners. **Learn more.**

**Southwest Collaborative on Educator Effectiveness.** REL West facilitated two breakout sessions at this two-day August conference in South Lake Tahoe, Nevada, focused on emergent research, promising practices, and strategies for designing and implementing teacher and principal evaluation systems. Topics were: 1) effective data management at the state and local levels; and 2) considerations for evaluating southwest state educator evaluation systems. **Learn more.**

**Sorting Through the Research and Being Practical: Navigating from 9th Grade to College.** Stakeholders in Chula Vista, California, including the mayor and city government staff, school district administrators, faculty from institutions of higher education, and business leaders met on May 20th to discuss research on postsecondary access and success presented in the IES Practice Guide, *Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do*, and its use in their district. **Learn more.**

## 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, Spring 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>*

### **Achievement Trends of Schools and Students in Arizona's Title I School Improvement Program**

In many states, including Arizona, increasing numbers of Title I schools are consistently failing to reach adequate yearly progress (Center on Education Policy 2010). Although the state's reading and math proficiency grew steadily over the study period, its number of Schools in Improvement doubled, as adequate yearly progress targets outpaced performance improvements.

### **UPCOMING FAST-RESPONSE REPORTS (WORKING TITLES)**

#### **How California's Local Education Agencies Evaluate Teachers and Principals**

As mandated by the 2009 State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) program, this report analyzes and summarizes 2010 survey data from all California local education agencies on current teacher and principal evaluation practices.

#### **Patterns of Progress of English Language Learner Students in English Proficiency and English Language Arts: A Longitudinal Analysis**

To maximize the number of ELL students who make expected gains in English language proficiency and expected academic content achievement in English language arts, the K–8 Lennox School District in metropolitan Los Angeles is using longitudinal data to identify points where content and language achievement commonly slip, and to develop programmatic interventions.

### **New in Our Webinar Archive**

#### **Achievement Data and Instructional Decision Making in Rural Schools and Districts**

Ellen Mandinach, co-author of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making*, provides an overview of critical issues related to data-driven decision making, and discusses the Practice Guide's five evidence-based, practical recommendations for data-supported decision making. Panelists representing rural stakeholders engage in a moderated discussion with Mandinach about implications of the recommendations for rural schools and districts. (September 2011)

**Play the archived webinar** (1 hour, 7 minutes)

REL West's free archived webinars are a quick, convenient way to sharpen your knowledge about important education issues, by listening to presentations by top researchers and seasoned practitioners. Topics range from classroom practices, to district reform, to state-level policies and initiatives. Links to free related materials are also included.

View all archived webinars at:

<http://relwest.WestEd.org>

# ASK • A • REL

**Ask A REL** is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories. Functioning much like a technical reference library, it answers education-related questions by providing referrals to IES research projects, publications, and reports; references for and bibliographies of existing education research; referrals to federally funded education organizations and websites; and regionally specific educational information. To **Ask A REL**, go to <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/askarel> and click on your state.

## Publications from Other Organizations

### Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center

#### *Key Considerations When Measuring Teacher Effectiveness: A Framework for Validating Teachers' Professional Practices*

The report describes three levels of data collection to measure teacher effectiveness both with and without standardized test scores.

### National Professional Development Center on Inclusion

#### *Research Synthesis Points on Early Childhood Inclusion*

This document summarizes nine key conclusions drawn from a synthesis on early childhood inclusion and provides research references that support each of the key statements. (July 2011)

### Center for Improvement and Innovation

#### *Online Tool for Monitoring and Evaluating SIG Transformation*

This tool facilitates development, monitoring, and evaluation of the Transformation model for School Improvement Grants.

### REL Southwest

#### *The Impact of Collaborative Strategic Reading on the Reading Comprehension of Grade 5 Students in Linguistically Diverse Schools*

This report describes methods for explicitly teaching reading comprehension in the upper elementary grades so that students can discern which information is critical, integrate such information with what is already known, and draw valid inferences. (March 2011)

### Visit the REL West website featuring:

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

<http://relwest.WestEd.org>

### CONTACT INFORMATION

REL West at WestEd  
730 Harrison Street  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
866.853.1831  
[relwest@WestEd.org](mailto:relwest@WestEd.org)  
[relwest.WestEd.org](http://relwest.WestEd.org)

*This digest was prepared under Contract ED-06-CO-0014, from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, by the Regional Educational Laboratory West, administered by WestEd. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.*