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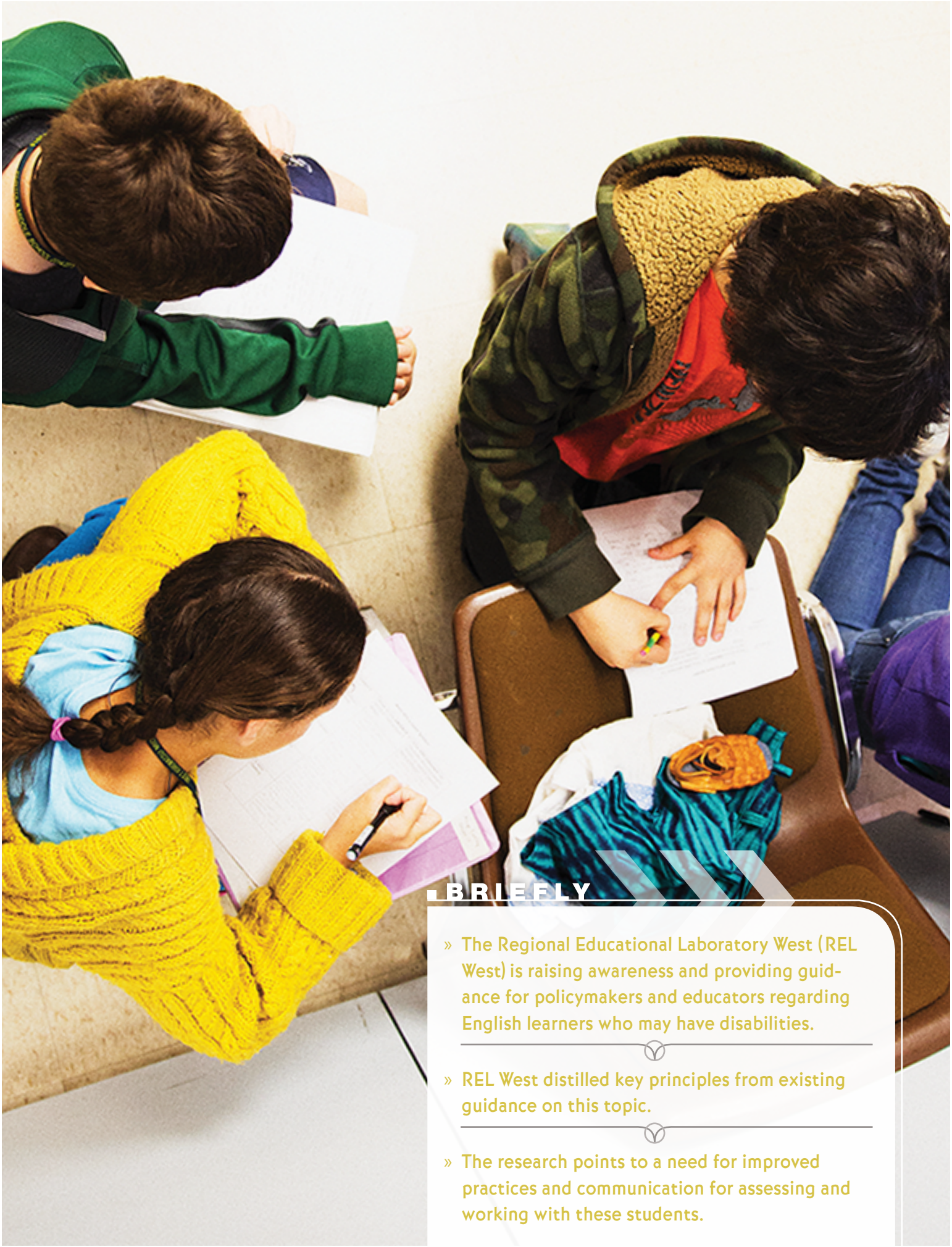


BRIEFLY

» The Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) is raising awareness and providing guidance for policymakers and educators regarding English learners who may have disabilities.

» REL West distilled key principles from existing guidance on this topic.

» The research points to a need for improved practices and communication for assessing and working with these students.

A Focus on English Learners Who May Have Learning Disabilities

Translating Research Into Policy

Students whose primary language is not English face an extra layer of challenges in school. They must simultaneously learn to communicate in English and learn the core content of their classes. So, when an English learner struggles academically, it can be tough for educators to discern the source of the difficulty. Is it due to the processes of second language acquisition and acculturation, or perhaps to a learning disability, or some combination of factors?

Accurately identifying the nature of learning challenges is vital to ensuring that students in the nation's growing English learner (EL) population receive the supports they need to succeed in school. Current systems do not always correctly identify learning disabilities among English learners, and even EL students who have been identified to receive special education services often continue to struggle academically.[1] Recently, the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd has produced much-needed guidance on this topic in a comprehensive report, *Identifying and Supporting English Learner Students with Learning Disabilities: Key Issues in the Literature and State Practice*, and an accompanying resource brief.

Lead author Elizabeth Burr, a WestEd Senior Research Associate, says recognition of the topic's importance has been increasing. The report and brief have been disseminated nationally by the Institute of Education Sciences, widely cited, eagerly used by educators, and gaining the attention of state policymakers.

AWARENESS, SUPPORT, AND COMMUNICATION

The REL West report identifies factors in policy and practice that can hinder the academic progress of English learners who may also have disabilities.

One factor is lack of awareness. Eric Haas, Senior Research Associate and co-author of the REL West report, says many teachers and other school and district decision-makers are unaware of best practices for identifying and addressing disabilities among English learners, leading to problems in how — or whether — students are referred to special education services. Accordingly, adequate training and ongoing support are needed to better inform special education referral policies and to improve educators' ability to distinguish between the process of second language acquisition and the presence of a learning disability.

Research on best practices suggests that different types of evidence from different contexts should be considered in determining what combination of EL and special education services a student may need. "Teachers and administrators tend to get a partial picture of a student's

academic, social, and behavioral capabilities," says Burr. "So research suggests the value of conducting evaluations in a variety of settings and including input from different teachers, family members, and both a bilingual and a learning disabilities specialist." Haas adds that parental input is particularly important for understanding challenges that may, for example, be related to the student's previous education experience, fluency in his or her first language, or the student's attitude toward school and learning English.

Given language and cultural barriers, overreliance on standardized testing, especially if conducted only in English, can undermine educators' ability to understand how well an English learner with a potential learning disability is doing. "The literature review yielded such recommendations as offering assessments and meetings with the family in the student's first language," says Burr. "Although taking this approach seems obvious, not a lot of districts have the resources or supports to do so."

Haas also emphasizes that acculturating to U.S. schools and developing English proficiency do not necessarily happen in even steps. "Educators and specialists must continue to gather information about students over time. Many students have long, quiet periods in which they are learning English but are not yet ready to speak at a fast pace or participate a lot in class."

Lastly, there is much room for improved communication among everyone involved in supporting English learners who have, or may have, disabilities. "Stakeholders increasingly recognize that EL and special education systems need to work together to provide the right services for students," says Haas. Unfortunately, he adds, EL and special education specialists traditionally work separately from each other as they assess and provide services for dual-identified students.

HELPFUL GUIDANCE ALREADY EXISTS

On topics such as the process for referring English learners to special education, including whom and what to include in the process, "information is out there, but not readily available in many places," says Burr. "Teachers are hungry for assistance and often don't know about guidance that already exists." She points to the federal *English Learner Toolkit* as one important source.[2] REL West's report describes guidelines and protocols used by 20 states with the largest populations of English learners. From this wealth of information, the report distilled five guiding principles:

- Provide accommodations for English learners taking standardized tests.
- Have a clear policy statement to ensure that a variety of considerations are used when determining whether to place English learners in special education programs.
- Ensure that assessments and criteria for exiting EL support programs appropriately accommodate English learners who receive special education services.
- Use a multitiered approach to help determine and address English learners' potential language and disability needs, an approach that starts with appropriate intervention responses in the classroom before moving to a formal special education process.

Stakeholders increasingly recognize that EL and special education systems need to work together to provide the right services for students.

» Provide comprehensive manuals to aid educators in identifying and supporting English learners who may have learning disabilities.

This last point is key. Five states — Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Virginia — already have such manuals for identifying and supporting English learners with disabilities. "These manuals provide practical tools and resources for working with students," says Haas. For example, they describe information on second language acquisition and progress, laws and regulations related to the rights of EL students, examples of pre-referral strategies and early interventions, and concrete tips for conducting assessments and interviews with families.

"The manuals also include handy checklists to help educators untangle behaviors that could be related to either a learning disability *or* English language acquisition," says Burr. "By laying out a typical process for second language acquisition, the manuals help educators avoid *over*-referring students to special education and also avoid waiting *too long* to refer students."

FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY

Under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), the federal government is promoting statewide English language proficiency standards to help address variations in current requirements across districts and states. The legislation requires that states establish ambitious long-term goals for student performance and measurements of interim progress for particular groups, including children with disabilities and EL students. States also must report on how many students with disabilities are also English learners. Haas says new policies should promote ways for students to demonstrate English proficiency that take into account any learning disabilities the students may have, without weakening the criteria used to determine when students are ready to exit EL support programs.

Partly in response to federal legislation and to research from REL West and others, more states are taking action on behalf of English learners who may have learning disabilities. California is one example. With about a third of the nation's English learners, California is working to improve the ability of schools and teachers to identify and support EL students with learning disabilities in order to reduce the current overrepresentation of EL students, as compared to non-EL students, who receive special education services in the state.

With bipartisan support, California passed new legislation in 2016 that requires the California Department of Education to develop or adapt a manual similar to those available in other states.[3] Authors of the REL West report are among those who provided input on California AB 2785, and the report provided some of the bill's text, according to Burr.

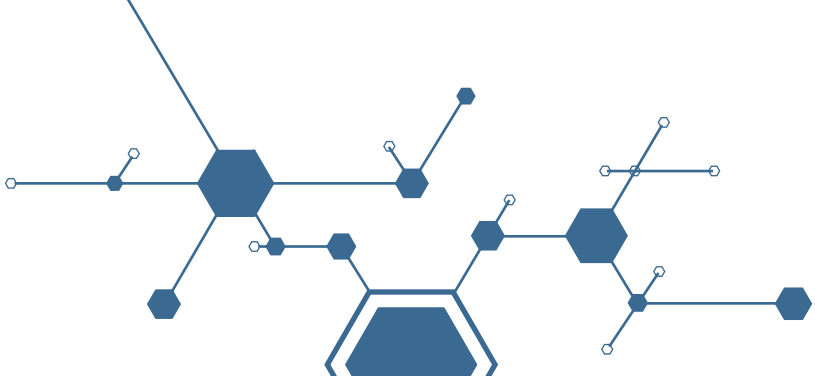
Arizona is another state taking notice of the EL resources highlighted in the REL West report. In May 2016, Burr presented findings from the REL West research at the semiannual statewide Practitioners of English Language Learners meeting. Following the event, Kelly Koenig, Deputy Associate Superintendent in the Arizona Department of Education's (ADE's) Office of English Language Acquisition Services, said, "This topic clearly resonates with our educators who struggle to meet the particular needs of dual-identified students. Our participants were appreciative

BRIEFLY

» Reading Apprenticeship is WestEd's signature approach to improving literacy in subject matter classes at the secondary school level.

» Evaluations indicate positive impact and have generated lessons on how to reach large numbers of schools, teachers, and students.

» Among key elements of scale-up were teacher leaders supporting Reading Apprenticeship from within schools; well-structured professional learning; and integrated support.



Toward Widespread Improvement of Literacy in Secondary Schools

Taking Reading Apprenticeship to Scale

Thirty years into her high school English teaching career, Lori Wojtowicz first made the acquaintance of Reading Apprenticeship, a WestEd-developed approach for improving secondary students' literacy. She was intrigued enough to make the leap and embrace this approach in her practice. "It had a huge impact on my teaching, but also humbled me to my core," she says, explaining that external feedback had led her to believe that she was already a strong teacher.

In 2010, a decade after developing the Reading Apprenticeship framework, its creators also took a big leap to scale up the approach with an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Their initiative, Reading Apprenticeship Improving Secondary Education (RAISE), spanned five years and five states, bringing Reading Apprenticeship to 274 high schools, more than 1,900 high school teachers, and more than 600,000 students.

THE FOUNDATION OF RAISE

Reading Apprenticeship professional learning experiences seek to transform the teacher's role from being a provider of information to being someone who apprentices students into ways of reading, writing, speaking, and thinking in a particular subject, says WestEd's Ruth Schoenbach, Co-Director of RAISE.

Through Reading Apprenticeship professional learning, teachers learn to make visible their own "invisible" expertise — they begin to recognize, and make accessible to students, the internal thought processes that teachers use to read and understand challenging texts in their subject areas. As they practice doing so, teachers also learn to apprentice students into the literacy skills of their fields. They model discipline-specific skills and guide students to build high-level strategies for comprehension and communication. One distinctive attribute of the approach is that teachers purposefully focus on the Social and Personal dimensions of the Reading Apprenticeship framework, creating classrooms in which active group problem solving is the norm.

To learn the Reading Apprenticeship framework, teams of RAISE teachers (representing grade 9 English, grade 10 biology, and grade 11 U.S. history) from five states attended 10 days of professional learning over 12 months. RAISE also supported these teachers through monthly onsite meetings facilitated by a teacher leader at each school.

In addition, RAISE funded a state coordinator in each involved state to organize the state's professional learning and serve as the main point of contact between a state's participants, its school teams, and the national project staff. These state coordinators were an important force for innovation in the project, says Schoenbach, and "they brought a special understanding of the local culture and sensibilities, which was essential to being able to scale up in the different contexts of each state."

> [State coordinators] brought a special understanding of the local culture and sensibilities, which was essential to being able to scale up.

Schoenbach adds that one of the coordinators' most important suggestions was to initiate three face-to-face meetings each year for teacher leaders across a region or state. In these meetings, state coordinators modeled inquiry-based protocols and facilitated discussions and problem-solving exchanges, building leaders' capacity to deepen Reading Apprenticeship practice in their schools.

Wojtowicz, a teacher leader from Michigan, describes these meetings with other schools' teacher leaders as "powerful" — among the first truly professional encounters that she'd experienced in three decades as a teacher. "Encouraged by peers, we found we were motivated to do more," she says.

Another way RAISE increased local capacity was by creating a Consultant-in-Training program for approximately 100 teachers and professional development providers, preparing them to facilitate Reading Apprenticeship professional learning. Tools and online supports were developed to train facilitators and provide feedback. "Although our facilitator certification process is still a work in progress, assuring quality and having facilitation standards were central to the success of the scale-up," says Schoenbach.

POSITIVE IMPACT

Two independent evaluation studies were integral to the i3 grant. The findings of both studies indicate that this high-quality professional learning can be scaled, positively impacting instructional practice and students' literacy skills. One of the studies was a comprehensive impact study, which randomly assigned each of 42 schools to be in either the intervention or control group. The other was a scale-up study that used surveys, focus groups, and case studies in all other participating schools besides those in the impact study. The scale-up study provided formative data to project leaders during RAISE implementation and helped elucidate challenges as well as factors that made the initiative successful.

The impact study found that teachers and students in schools using Reading Apprenticeship reported significantly more opportunities to share reading processes and engage in problem solving, and indicated that reading instruction was more integrated into content-area learning, in comparison to what the control group reported. Intervention teachers also reported gaining greater confidence delivering literacy instruction, and that students became more engaged, independent readers.

According to the independent evaluation's final report on the impact study, "Findings from this study demonstrate the success of the RAISE project in providing teachers with training and support at scale to help them change their instructional practices in order to foster metacognitive inquiry and support comprehension, particularly in science. These findings are consistent with positive findings from other studies of Reading Apprenticeship."

COLLABORATION AND LEADERSHIP

Cathleen C. Kral, Multi-State Coordinator for RAISE, who supported all five state coordinators, identified key ingredients of the initiative's success: collaboration, a consistent structure, and support from administrators. Collaboration was critical throughout all levels of RAISE, she says. "There were facilitator teams, site coordinator teams, teacher leader teams, and teams at each of the schools, all helping people to be connected and supported."

The scale-up evaluation found that establishment of team meetings early was a predictor of which schools would

continue and deepen Reading Apprenticeship implementation rather than letting the implementation atrophy. Teachers reported that collaboration with colleagues was the most effective way to build capacity for implementation.

Wojtowicz confirms that a consistent structure was also essential for success, noting that RAISE professional learning "was not a 'one-and-done' workshop." Instead, RAISE interspersed professional learning experiences and teacher meetings throughout the year to provide consistent support, giving teachers opportunities to receive guidance especially when they started to feel bogged down.

"Where teachers felt empowered to make a difference in their own classrooms — through collaborative work and a universal framework using the same practices in different academic subjects — teacher-led team meetings at schools sometimes continued to be held for four years and beyond, deepening the work and leading to incredible progress," says Kral. "Where organization and meetings were more haphazard, there wasn't that kind of progress."

The role of school leaders was key, she adds. "To implement a new program like RAISE and keep it going, you really need administrative support." She says that good relationships and communication between principals and teacher leaders are vital.

Pennsylvania's Reading High School is a case in point. "The principal really supported the teachers in learning new ways to teach," says Schoenbach. "This has made a noticeable difference in students' engagement, learning, and scores in a low-income high school that had not been doing very well." Now, having implemented Reading Apprenticeship, this school has made strides in closing achievement gaps, and received official recognition for improvements in reading, biology, literature, and math, and for being in the top 5 percent of all Title I schools in the state.

Wojtowicz notes that the administration at her school (in Michigan) was also supportive of RAISE, allowing teachers to meet monthly — a fairly big commitment, she adds. As the school's RAISE teacher leader, she encouraged classroom visits by the principal, and she shared samples of students' writing with the principal to illustrate progress made.

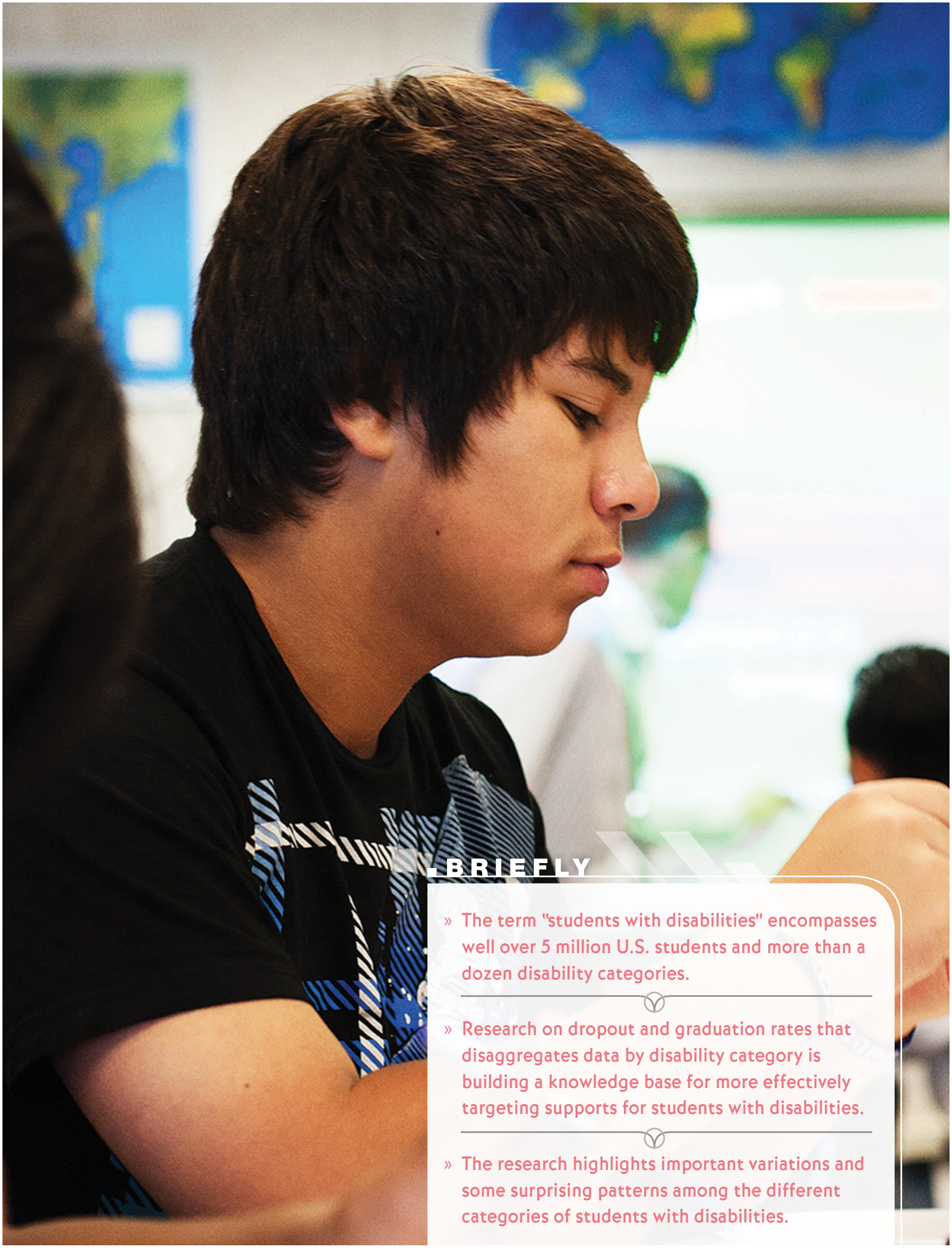
MODELS FOR WIDER REPLICATION

Reading Apprenticeship leaders continue to explore ways to expand replication. Grants from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement have enabled development and testing of an all-online professional learning model and two hybrid models using both face-to-face and online learning.

With the ongoing educational focus on college and career readiness, continuing to ramp up Reading Apprenticeship may be one of the best ways to raise the bar for higher-level academic literacy in core subjects. As one teacher said early in the RAISE initiative: "The new standards tell us *what* to do; Reading Apprenticeship shows us *how*."

For more information about these studies, contact Ruth Schoenbach at 510.302.4255 or rschoen@WestEd.org.

In addition to receiving funding from the U.S. Department of Education, RAISE received matching funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, JP Morgan Foundation, National Philanthropic Trust, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



BRIEFLY

- The term "students with disabilities" encompasses well over 5 million U.S. students and more than a dozen disability categories.
- Research on dropout and graduation rates that disaggregates data by disability category is building a knowledge base for more effectively targeting supports for students with disabilities.
- The research highlights important variations and some surprising patterns among the different categories of students with disabilities.

Research Helps Target Support for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities tend to drop out of high school at higher rates than their classmates, so dropout prevention efforts might seem like one obvious step to provide the supports these students need in order to earn a diploma. However, a closer look at the data reveals that students with certain disabilities actually tend to stay in high school longer than four years — dropping out at relatively low rates but also not graduating on time. Efforts focused on keeping these students in school might not be the most effective way to help them complete school successfully.

"Looking at students with disabilities as a single group can be very misleading when trying to create dropout prevention supports and interventions," says BethAnn Berliner, Senior Researcher at WestEd, who focuses on school- and community-based interventions for school success. "There's such wide variation in dropout and graduation outcomes across the disability categories. The interventions must be more targeted to what's really going on."

To begin building the knowledge needed to target interventions more effectively, Vanessa X. Barrat, a WestEd Senior Researcher, and Berliner have been leading an effort by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) to disaggregate key outcome data on students with disabilities. Their research, summarized in reports such as *School Mobility, Dropout, and Graduation Rates Across Student Disability Categories in Utah*, highlights important variations and some surprising patterns.

DISAGGREGATING DATA BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

The term "students with disabilities" is a broad umbrella. It covers the approximately 5.7 million students who receive special education services in the United States. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines 13 different disability categories, such as learning disability, deafness, autism, emotional disability, and many others.

Rather than focusing on each of these distinct categories, most research on dropout and graduation rates has compared outcomes for students with disabilities, as a single group, against the outcomes of their general education peers. Very little research has been done to illuminate just how these education outcomes differ across the disability categories and, therefore, how policies and practices might best address students' particular needs.

The REL West research, led by Barrat's and Berliner's work to disaggregate data from public schools in Utah, has begun to fill in this knowledge gap. Looking at outcomes for each disability category, the researchers have analyzed data on mobility, dropout, and over-age enrollment in grades 6–12, and have analyzed dropout and graduation rates for a cohort of students in grades 9–12. Findings

> Looking at disaggregated data helps you begin to anticipate the kinds of support that particular youth are going to require.

compared the outcomes for students in each disability category and those for general education students.

FINDINGS REVEAL VARIED NEEDS

The REL West research showed that even though students with disabilities, as a group, are more academically vulnerable than their general education classmates, the education outcomes of students in some disability categories closely mirror those of the general education population, while education outcomes of students in other disability categories are far worse than those of the general education population. Some disability categories have unexpected results, such as low dropout rates *and* low graduation rates.

"One thing we show is that some students, depending on the disability category, drop out at half the rate of general education students, and some drop out at twice the rate," says Barrat. "They have very different needs, dropout rates, and graduation rates. It's not obvious that their needs can be addressed with a blanket approach."

More specifically, findings from the REL West report focused on Utah include the following:

» Dropout rates for high school students with disabilities ranged from 11 percent for students with autism to 44 percent for students with emotional disturbance, highlighting that — depending on the disability category — the dropout rate could be considerably below *or* far above the general education population's average dropout rate of 21 percent. For students with emotional disturbance, dropping out was the most prevalent outcome after four years of high school, even more prevalent than graduating (43 percent).

» As a group, students with disabilities had graduation rates nearly 20 points lower than the 78 percent graduation rate for general education students. A closer look, however, revealed that students with speech or language impairment graduated at rates nearly on par with the general population, whereas students with autism, emotional disturbance, or intellectual disability had graduation rates below 50 percent, and students with multiple disabilities had the lowest graduation rate of all, at just 16 percent.

» Students with autism, intellectual disability, or multiple disabilities had both low graduation rates and low dropout rates compared to the general education population's averages. A large percentage of students in these disability categories were continuing students — that is, students who stayed enrolled in high school beyond four years without dropping out *or* graduating.

» Students in all disability categories were more likely to be over-age in grade 12. Two subgroups — students with intellectual disability and students with multiple disabilities — were almost always older than expected in high school, yet also very unlikely to drop out.

» In grades 6–12, students with emotional disability had the highest annual mobility rate, changing schools at nearly four times the rate of general education students, on average.

USING DATA TO BETTER ADDRESS STUDENT NEEDS

The Utah report "emphasizes the injustice done when students with disabilities are aggregated as one large, homogeneous group," says WestEd's Katherine Bradley-Black,

who co-leads the Graduation and Post-School Outcomes Cross-State Learning Collaborative of the National Center for Systemic Improvement.

Individualizing education to match students' needs is a fundamental concept in IDEA, notes Bradley-Black, and the REL West research highlights the value of understanding how the needs of students with disabilities vary across disability categories. "While we can sometimes make broad assumptions about the characteristics of certain disabilities, we need to be very careful resting on those assumptions," she says.

Loujeania Bost, co-author of a recent article on "Dropout Prevention in Middle and High Schools: From Research to Practice," has drawn on the REL West research in her work as Co-Director of the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, based at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. "Looking at disaggregated data helps you begin to anticipate the kinds of support that particular youth are going to require by virtue of the nature of their disabilities," she says.

In her work with state and local leaders, Bost says, "We've begun to look particularly at youth with behavioral or emotional disturbance, as they experience some of the poorest outcomes. There is some predictability in their graduation and dropout rates, so what kind of protective factors can we put into place in schools and at the state level to shift those outcomes?" She notes that supports might include hiring and training coaches to work with teachers and students, providing funds to local groups to develop initiatives focused on the needs identified by research, and enacting policies that encourage evidence-based practices.

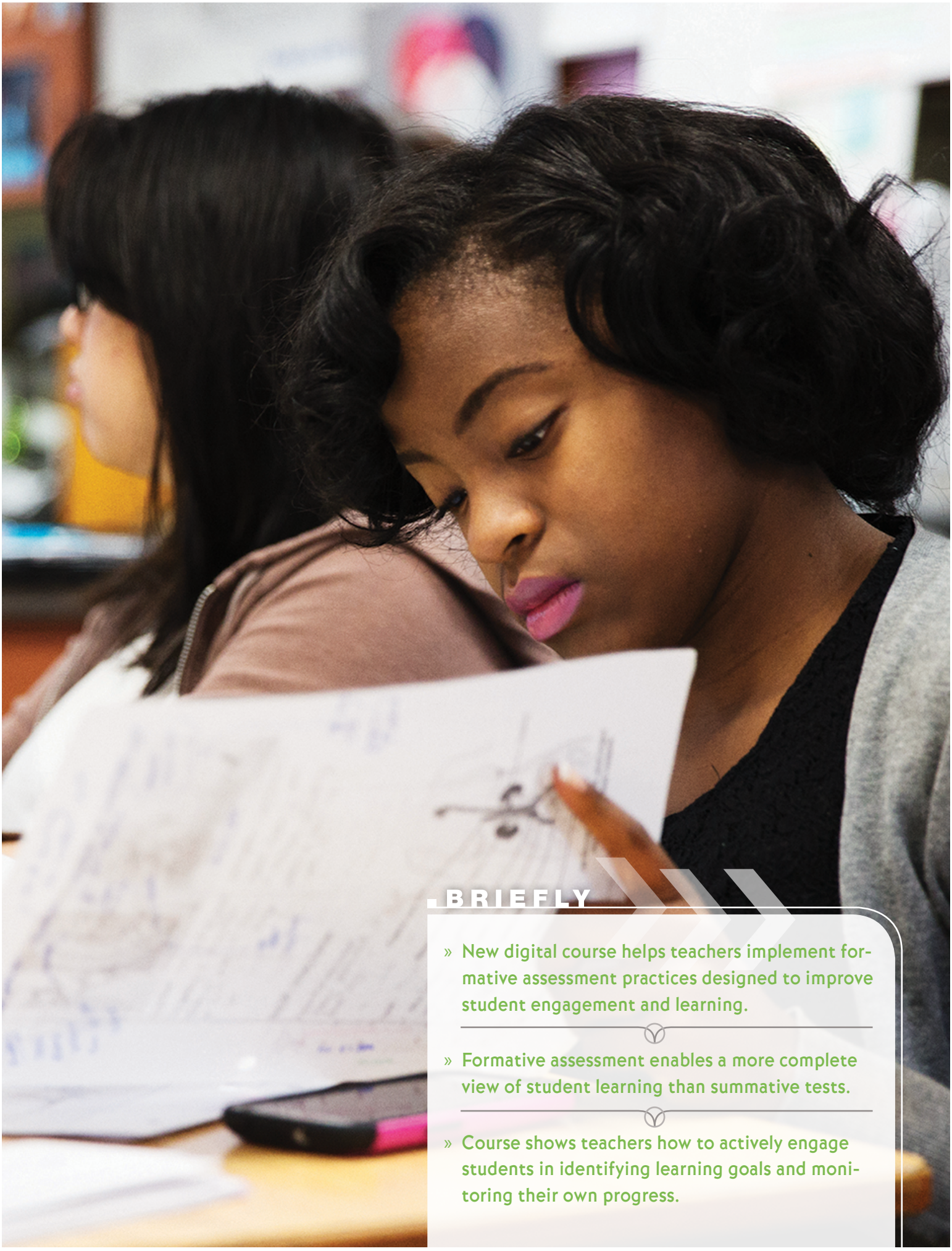
WHAT'S NEXT

Bost and Bradley-Black both point to the need for more research along the lines of REL West's disaggregating data on the education outcomes of students with disabilities. For example, Bost would like to see research that uses "core predictors" of which students are most likely to drop out or not graduate to match students with interventions targeted to those particular groups. She is especially interested in research that digs into how problems and solutions might differ "across settings, populations, and configurations of students" — comparing urban against rural settings, for example.

Barrat notes that others in the field have also expressed interest in knowing what happens to the students with disabilities who tend not to drop out but also do not graduate after the standard four years of high school. She is leading a study to look into this issue, examining data on six-year dropout and graduation outcomes, disaggregated by disability category, as well as updating some of the findings from the earlier REL West report.

Bradley-Black says she values the REL West research for helping educators "better understand what is truly happening for students with disabilities. It serves as a model to remind people of the need to take a deep dive into data in order to specifically identify root causes, a necessary step toward determining the interventions and resources that will be most effective for supporting those students most in need."

For more information about these studies, contact Vanessa Barrat at 415.269.3519 or vbarrat@WestEd.org or BethAnn Berliner at 510.302.4209 or bberlin@WestEd.org.



BRIEFLY

» New digital course helps teachers implement formative assessment practices designed to improve student engagement and learning.

» Formative assessment enables a more complete view of student learning than summative tests.

» Course shows teachers how to actively engage students in identifying learning goals and monitoring their own progress.

Formative Assessment Course

Helps Transform Teaching and Learning

For many teachers, assessment means giving a test at the end of a unit to measure students' retention and learning. But such tests represent only a snapshot of learning and do not always help teachers and students see the complete picture. The results typically come too late to change students' academic outcomes and can leave a handful of critical questions unanswered: How did the learning occur? When and why did some students fail to grasp the key concepts and skills? What could teachers and students have done to identify learning challenges and take responsive action to overcome them?

"You can't teach effectively if you don't know where students are in their thinking and skill development," says Margaret Heritage, Senior Scientist at WestEd.

To get a more complete view of student learning, educators are increasingly focusing on formative assessment, a set of practices that enable students and teachers to examine how learning is developing throughout a lesson so they can make adjustments to teaching and learning activities.

"Teachers need to understand how their students' learning is progressing, so they can consistently align instruction to meet students' needs," says Heritage, an expert in the field who has authored books such as *Formative Assessment in Practice: A Process of Inquiry and Action*. "In formative assessment, the focus is on informing learning, rather than measuring it. When implemented effectively, it provides teachers with the substantive insights to help keep students on track to achieving learning goals."

This sort of responsive approach to instruction is particularly useful in the current education landscape, says Heritage, as it enables the kind of deep learning required by rigorous college- and career-ready standards, which reflect heightened expectations for all students. However, while formative assessment is gaining ground in the United States, its effective implementation is far from widespread. One reason, says Heritage, is the absence of high-quality, sustainable, affordable professional learning designed to support teachers in successfully implementing formative assessment practices in their classrooms.

To address that gap, Heritage and other WestEd specialists developed an interactive online course focused on formative assessment as a pedagogical practice to engage and support all students. Funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the intensive six-month course, Formative Assessment Insights (FAI), was offered to K–12 educators in six western states beginning in fall 2015. The goal? Simple: provide a scalable form of professional development that transforms how participating teachers and their students engage in teaching and learning.

HELPING EDUCATORS TRANSFORM THEIR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

About 750 educators, working in teams that enabled ongoing collaboration and peer feedback, completed the digital learning course. In post-course surveys, teachers reported that the course — the largest scale-up of formative assessment professional learning ever attempted in the United States — influenced their classroom practice. The majority also found that it substantially changed

> The formative assessment process works well for any curriculum — it has the power to transform education.

their understanding of formative assessment practices and how to use them more frequently in their classrooms.

Through surveys and focus groups, participants described how they achieved greater awareness of the role of formative assessment and why it must be integrated throughout the learning process. One participant noted, "I used to think that giving feedback to students at the end of a project or test was sufficient. Now I realize that feedback during the learning — focused on the task and what a student needs to do to improve — is what really matters. I've also learned the importance of peer feedback and student self-reflection to promote active learning."

In post-course surveys, 9 percent of participants reported having collected evidence of student learning during each lesson before they started FAI, whereas 75 percent reported doing so by the time they had completed FAI. Educators who completed the course also reported making other changes to their teaching, including planning for instruction based on learning goals and success criteria (88 percent), providing more descriptive feedback to students (85 percent), and placing more responsibility on students for their own learning (83 percent).

"The formative assessment process works so well for any curriculum. It has the power to transform education," says Beth Gaffney, academic coach for Chandler Unified, in Arizona. Educators at 30 of the district's 42 schools participated in FAI. "I would challenge any teacher to look for a reason not to use this in the classroom. It works, and it works at every grade level with every student."

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THEIR LEARNING

The FAI course is based on extensive research and practice that show the value of formative assessment to improve academic achievement. When used effectively, formative assessment involves teachers setting clear lesson goals and success criteria, helping students monitor their learning through peer and self-assessment, and using evidence of comprehension to make pedagogical responses to students' learning needs. A crucial component of the course's approach to formative assessment is the flow of feedback, which research has found to be one of the most influential factors in student learning. FAI refers to this flow as a "feedback loop," and it involves three key questions: Where am I going? Where am I now? Where to next?

"This ongoing feedback loop helps teachers be nimble in meeting their students' learning needs," Heritage says. For instance, teachers might obtain information about students' conceptual understanding by observing them working in small groups, engaging individual students in one-on-one conferences, or facilitating a whole-class discussion to surface misconceptions. From there, the teacher could determine the need for a quick mini-lesson, hands-on activity, or deeper dive into a specific topic.

The course also stresses giving students strategies and tools to become engaged, independent learners. Gaffney says that showing teachers in Chandler how to involve students in understanding learning goals and monitoring their own progress — through self-reflection sheets, personal reading logs, and peer-assessment activities, for example — was one of the most positive aspects of the FAI experience. She believes promoting that sort of student engagement and self-direction is particularly important to help the district's students thrive in life.

"The world today doesn't allow students to be passive recipients of information — when they go on to jobs and college, they will have to constantly sift through mountains of information and figure out how to get where they need to go," says Gaffney. "Formative assessment

pushes students to play an active role in their education through learning to identify their targets, monitor their learning, and understand what it takes to be successful."

In Tucson about 280 teachers — representing all 22 schools in the Sunnyside School District — participated in the FAI course. Chief Academic Officer Pam Betten explains that, prior to completing WestEd's course, many educators believed that formative assessment was defined by end-of-week quizzes that determined which students had mastered targeted skills or standards. Now, says Betten, teachers see formative assessment as a powerful process that begins with lesson planning built around learning targets and success criteria, with a focus on putting students in control of their learning.

"Formative assessment has the potential to lead to exponential gains in our students' achievement because it's about developing student agency," Betten says. "We are working to get our students to be 'creators,' not just 'consumers.' We want them to figure out what they need to do next to move their learning forward. At its core, this process shifts the ownership to the student."

SPREADING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Betten says the school district plans to build on the lessons learned from WestEd's professional learning experience by setting up laboratory classrooms where teachers can demonstrate and observe best practices in formative assessment. And because teachers in WestEd's course were most successful when administrators supported their learning, the district also wants to involve more principals and instructional leaders in future formative assessment professional learning.

"Teachers need us, as leaders, to understand formative assessment," says Betten, "so it becomes a part of what we all do every day."

The crucial role of leadership support for formative assessment was one of the major lessons learned from the FAI course, according to Lenay Dunn, a WestEd Senior Research Associate who has been evaluating the course's impact. Because participation was voluntary, only about half of the 1,500 teachers who started the course completed it; among those who dropped out, 62 percent said they had not received supports such as release time, coaches, or incentives from their school and district leaders (compared to 24 percent of course completers who reported not receiving those supports).

"All the modules are about great ways to engage students in their own learning," says Dunn. "Ideally, then, school leaders should support teachers in those same practices — so when conducting classroom observations, they are thinking about how to help teachers integrate formative assessment practices."

To that end, notes Heritage, WestEd plans to expand upon previous formative assessment professional learning materials targeted to school leaders, as well as expanding the online FAI professional development series to include site-based support for schools.

All these efforts to improve and spread formative assessment practices, says Heritage, are intended to put educators in the best possible position to help students succeed: "Helping students develop the lifelong learning skills fostered by formative assessment is critical for their future."

For more information, contact Margaret Heritage at mherita@WestEd.org.

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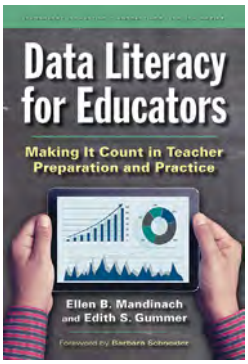

Data Literacy for Educators: Making It Count in Teacher Preparation and Practice

Ellen Mandinach, Edith Gummer

As data literacy has become an essential skill for educators, teachers need concrete strategies for building a bridge between data literacy and teaching practice. Using examples and case studies that tie theory to practice, this resource introduces the concept of data literacy for teaching and outlines the knowledge and skills it encompasses. The authors provide a road-map for incorporating data literacy into teacher preparation program curricula. They also cover emerging trends, such as virtual and hybrid courses and massive open online courses.

ISBN: 978-0-8077-5753-6 | $34.95 | 176 pages | Teachers College | 2016

- **https://www.WestEd.org/resources/data-literacy-for-educators/**

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Karen Kearney (Ed.)

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ISBN: 978-1-938287-33-6 | $12.95 | 52 pages | WestEd | 2015

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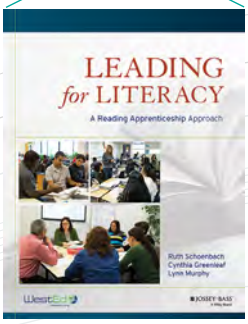

Leading for Literacy: A Reading Apprenticeship Approach

Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, Lynn Murphy

Leading for Literacy provides clear, on-the-ground guidance, tools, and examples for improving student reading across secondary schools and colleges. This companion to the landmark book, *Reading for Understanding*, guides teacher leaders, coaches, and administrators through the nuts and bolts of implementing the Reading Apprenticeship Framework. Nationwide classroom testing has shown Reading Apprenticeship promotes not only literacy and content knowledge, but also motivation and positive academic identity — leading to better student outcomes that reach beyond the classroom walls.

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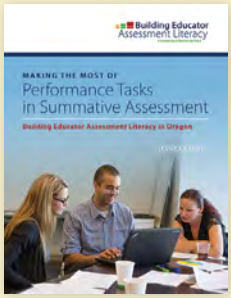

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of the study findings, especially the practical guidance from the comprehensive state manuals. They expressed interest in collaborating with ADE to adapt the manuals for use in our state."

Says Burr, "This work is meeting a real need of our state policymakers and educators. In doing so, it represents what the REL is all about: translating research into evidence-based policies and improved practice."

For more information about these studies, contact Elizabeth Burr at 510.302.4218 or eburr@WestEd.org.

NOTES

[1] See REL West research reports focused on EL students, available from https://relwest.wested.org/alliances/5.

[2] See chapter 6 of the English Learner Toolkit, on addressing English learner students with disabilities, available from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap6.pdf.

[3] See http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB2785