



**Comprehensive
Centers
Network**

**Making a
Difference
for Children
in Schools**

The comprehensive regional assistance centers were created by the U.S. Department of Education to provide technical assistance services to state education agencies and local school districts who are implementing education reform efforts under the *Improving America's Schools Act*. The comprehensive centers support and assist states, districts and schools in serving children served under the IASA in their efforts to:

- Implement school reform programs in a manner that improves teaching and learning for all students.
- Adopt, adapt and implement promising and proven practices for improving teaching and learning.
- Coordinate school reform programs with other federal, state and local education plans and activities so all students – particularly those considered at risk of educational failure – are provided opportunities to meet challenging state content standards and student performance standards.
- Administer and implement IASA programs.

The comprehensive centers work primarily with states, local education agencies (LEAs), tribes, schools and other recipients of funds under the IASA. Priority for services is given to high poverty schools and districts, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and IASA recipients implementing schoolwide programs.

For more information on the comprehensive centers network, visit
www.ccnetwork.org
or contact the center nearest you (see Page 34).

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Making a Difference



As education takes center stage as a national priority, parents and the broader public are demanding effective educational programs and clear evidence of increased student performance and achievement. Policy-makers and communities are insisting that rigorous accountability systems be instituted and that student achievement be the primary goal of *all* schools for *all* children. As the U.S. population becomes increasingly more diverse, the challenge of helping all students meet high standards takes on a new dimension. To meet this challenge, schools are attempting to make dramatic changes in how they function, how staff teach, and how students learn. But, research and experience have shown that schools cannot do this alone.

Educational change is a complex process. It requires time, hard work, and ongoing support. Schools need help in developing the “how to” capability, obtaining information, and acquiring the resources necessary to make sound decisions. They need ongoing guidance and reassurance in their reform efforts and strategies. Outside help is critical to this process and to its success.

In response to this growing demand, the *1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act* established the comprehensive regional assistance center network. This 15-center national network is charged with helping the nation’s most disadvantaged schools restructure and improve instructional programs. Comprehensive centers prioritize services to schools that have a significant number of children who are poor and who are at risk of failure.

Because these schools reflect national demographic trends, student diversity is often a critical issue that must be considered as schools undertake reform initiatives. Comprehensive centers provide expertise relative to the unique needs of: English language learners, migrant students, immigrant children, neglected or delinquent children, homeless students, Native American students, children with disabilities, and Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children.

Originally designed as a “one stop shopping” concept, these centers provide services that are comprehensive in nature and span a variety of programs under the *Improving America’s Schools Act*.

As service providers, the centers tailor their services to client needs, are responsive to regional issues and priorities, and are knowledgeable of national and regional resources. In order to optimize resources, they rely heavily on strong collaborative relationships with comprehensive center network partners and other service providers.

The Critical Role of the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers

It is within this context that the comprehensive regional assistance centers exist to provide:

- ❖ direct assistance in designing and improving instructional programs in high-poverty schools;
- ❖ training and other staff development activities for teachers and administrators;
- ❖ information on current research and best practices in forms that are useful to school staff; and
- ❖ direct assistance in linking schools with each other and the community, forging strategic partnerships, helping educators build networks for support and continuous learning, and providing strategies to optimize the use of resources.

Unique in their approach, comprehensive centers target their services to those schools and populations that have traditionally been underserved and have limited access to resources. You will find comprehensive center staff working in the most remote isolated rural areas, inner-city schools, Indian reservations, and schools that do not have the resources to access any other form of assistance.

Without the comprehensive regional assistance center network, the high-poverty, hard-to-reach schools serving the greatest number of diverse students would not have access to adequate resources or assistance. Although relatively new, the comprehensive centers have demonstrated their value. The following is a sampling of success stories from the centers that illustrate the comprehensive nature of their services and confirm their contributions to “making a difference.”



Improving Mathematics Achievement



The ability of U.S. students to compete with students from other nations has become a national priority. Many new initiatives are examining how mathematics is taught in U.S. schools and how students learn best. These initiatives are fueling the development of innovative models and programs.

The Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) model is one of those programs. Developed by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, CGI combines high standards for student achievement in mathematics with professional development for teachers. It focuses on how primary-grade students solve mathematics problems and use reasoning for learning.

CGI is recognized for its strong research base and its applicability for disadvantaged students. **The Comprehensive Assistance Center, Region VI adopted this program as its primary effort for improving mathematics student achievement and increasing teacher capacity to teach mathematics at the primary grade levels.**

Committed School Teams

In August 1998, the comprehensive center conducted the first national CGI institute. Organized by school teams, 40 elementary teachers and 20 staff development support specialists formed the first cadre of CGI teachers.

All potential institute applicants were required to demonstrate their school's or district's support to ensure the success of the program and to select the most committed and serious candidates. Teams had to obtain a signed letter from their school principal confirming support of the following program requirements:

- ❖ Teachers would be encouraged to use CGI instructional methods.
- ❖ Teams would be permitted time to meet and work together.
- ❖ Teachers would be encouraged to train other teachers on the CGI method after one year's experience in the program.

The institute focused on the mechanics of mathematics. Participants learned how to structure addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division word problems in ways that engage students and develop their understanding. Once teachers understood the structure of different problem types, they learned how students typically solve these problems and what the different strategies reveal about their student's reasoning.

Teachers were then able to increase or decrease the level of difficulty of a problem to enable a student to solve it, to monitor a student's application of formal and informal strategies, or to encourage different or more advanced strategy use.

Comprehensive Center at The University of Wisconsin-Madison

Region VI

**Research-based program
combines high standards
in math for students
and greatly-needed
professional development
for teachers.**

**Students outscored
comparison students
on a battery of
arithmetic problems.**

Changes in Students and Teachers

Many teachers volunteered to participate in the evaluation of the institute's impact on their teaching practice and their student's mathematics achievement. They also recruited colleagues to participate in the process and contribute comparison information. The evaluation results revealed some remarkable changes.

Teachers reported changes in their practices, their attitudes toward mathematics, and their perceptions of how children learn. Prior to participation in the CGI program, teachers reported using the textbook to make instructional decisions. After CGI involvement, teachers were relying on the CGI framework and students' thinking to make those judgements.

Teachers' beliefs about how children learn mathematics were greatly changed. Previously, teachers believed that students had to learn algorithms to solve mathematics problems. After implementing the CGI program for a year, teachers believed that students could not only solve problems by using their own methods but could also learn to use more advanced methods by observing and listening to other students. This increases the student's basic skills knowledge, problem solving and reasoning skills, and self confidence. **Teachers reported a new excitement about mathematics and their teaching and that their students shared in this excitement.**

CGI Students Outperform Peers

Pre- and post-test results revealed that first-year CGI students outscored comparison students on a battery of arithmetic problems. For first graders, the difference in favor of the CGI students was 0.33 standard deviation; for second graders, it was 0.47 standard deviation. For third graders, the difference reached an astounding 0.66 standard deviation (by way of comparison, a standard deviation on the SAT is equivalent to 100 points).

Title I, bilingual, and American Indian students in CGI classrooms outperformed their peers. Also, CGI teachers reported teaching much more difficult mathematics content and felt a greater sense of effectiveness than did their non-CGI colleagues.

Expanding the CGI Program

In 1999, the comprehensive center in Region VI conducted the second CGI national institute. Again, the event proved to be a success. There were 80 new participants from the region as well as from other states and countries such as California, Alaska, Texas, and New Zealand. As this program gains popularity, teachers are demanding CGI training.

In response to the many requests, the center has developed an advanced CGI institute for training of trainers so that experienced CGI teachers can conduct CGI workshops at local sites – thus impacting more students. Experienced CGI teachers are exemplary models of the comprehensive center's efforts and its contribution to making a difference.

Planning for Change on the Reservation



Located in west central Wyoming and nestled beneath the Wind River Mountains, the Wind River Reservation is home to approximately 6,000 Arapahoe and 3,000 Shoshone Native Americans. Historically plagued by economic and social stress, reservation children's performance in school have reflected the ills of their surroundings. With a high concentration of economically disadvantaged and limited-English-proficient students, **Arapahoe children were in the ranks of the lowest achieving children in the state.** Being identified as such, the Arapahoe community decided to take action. Improving student achievement became a priority.

School Seeks Technical Assistance

In 1996, the Arapahoe school staff took the first step toward improving their school and offering better learning opportunities for their students. Their strategy to obtain ongoing support and assistance was to become a partner site with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) comprehensive assistance center. For the partner site, the center provided intensive, tailored and ongoing technical assistance; bimonthly site visits; ongoing communication via telephone, fax and e-mail; and sponsorship to the summer School Improvement Conference.

Working collaboratively with the Wyoming State Department of Education, the center ensures that all assistance it provides is aligned with state standards and within the context of Wyoming state requirements. The center conducted an extensive needs assessment working collaboratively with Arapahoe school staff.

Then the center took a whole school reform approach. It provided comprehensive technical assistance, targeting a variety of areas relative to schoolwide reform, accountability, and strategies to improve student achievement. Comprehensive center staff introduced Arapahoe school staff to school reform models, provided strategies to initiate the restructuring processes, assisted in organizing a parent involvement initiative, and helped establish an accountability system. **Ongoing staff development was critical to the overall process.** The center also assisted Arapahoe school staff in disaggregating data to assess various subgroup's progress, profiled school programs, and set clear and specific goals for school improvement.

Learning the Latest Innovations

Each summer, teachers and administrators armed with school profile data travel to Portland, Oregon, to participate in the NWREL annual summer School Improvement Conference. This annual journey is now an integral part of school renewal. Arapahoe school staff learned from experts and gained information on the latest innovations in education reform. They also had

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Comprehensive Center

Region X

the unique opportunity to meet with colleagues from across the region and the country to share and learn from other's successes.

Participatory in nature, the conference offers many chances for exchanges of data, ideas, and strategies. All conference participants undergo a school profile development process to identify successes and challenges. Each team meets with the comprehensive center's staff to review their profiles, get feedback on their past year's efforts, and begin the incoming year's planning process.

At journey's end, Arapahoe school staff return home with new strategies, a sense of accomplishment for their past year's work, and a renewed vigor to continue the challenge of improving their school and increasing learning opportunities for their students.

Student Scores Increase

The staff members continue to be enthusiastic, especially as they see the results of their efforts. Training activities are well attended and received. There is a sense of appreciation for the comprehensive center staff who continue to travel to conduct these training sessions on the reservation.

"It has been a good reinforcement for me, especially being out in the boonies," commented a school staff member.

"It has been great to have someone from the comprehensive center come work with us, then to go to the summer institute and hear research from a nationally known speaker say the same thing," commented another.

Although staff is learning and enhancing their skills, the most important results are those of students. As Arapahoe students participate in the Wyoming statewide assessment process, an increase in their scores is evident. Over the past three years, fourth grade students'

Over the last three years, fourth graders have consistently shown an upward trend in both math and reading scores.

Math percentile scores increased from 36 to 55.

Reading percentile scores increased from 39 to 55 – above the national average.

Violence Prevention: A Community's Step Forward



After a serious shooting incident involving a community leader and a local teen, concerns about violence in school became a community reality and priority in Gary, Indiana. The community was aware of the national trends relative to school violence, but they were unaware that it was in their neighborhood schools. As a result of this violent altercation, the community leader, who almost lost his life, urged the Gary (Indiana) Community School Corporation superintendent, Dr. James Hawkins, to take a pro-active measure to tackle this situation. Assistance was requested from the Region VII Comprehensive Center.

In the winter of 1996, a team from the comprehensive center visited the community and met with educators and community members to assess the situation. To fully understand the nature and extent of the situation, the team members needed information from a variety of perspectives. They held conversations with school board members, teachers, administrators, students, parents, union representatives, and community members. At the conclusion of the fact-finding activities, the center compiled the information, developed a profile, and presented their findings to corporation decision-makers. Impressed with the analysis, the administration gave final approval to proceed with a violence prevention initiative and charged the comprehensive center with developing a plan of action.

Identifying the Need: A Strategy for Change

After careful analysis of the data, the center discovered some startling insights. One area that raised concern was the high rate of suspensions in many of the Gary schools. Suspensions were often the result of fights among students and, in some instances, fights between students and teachers. Students were also suspended for bringing weapons to school or for their involvement with alcohol and drugs.

Data also revealed that students did not have the skills to resolve personal conflicts in a non-violent manner. Instead, teachers or administrators intervened, solving problems for students as opposed to providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively deal with their own conflicts.

Teachers reported a sense of helplessness and fear. They had a strong desire to change the situation, but they did not know what to do. Conversations further revealed that teachers and students felt that minor disagreements often escalated to major conflicts. They attributed the rumor mill, gang activities, and minor misunderstandings among friends as the major sources of strife.

The comprehensive center proposed a corporation-wide violence prevention initiative. A key component of the proposal was the institution of a peer mediation program throughout the district and extensive training for teachers and administrators on

Comprehensive Center

Region VII

how to deal with violence in the school setting. The superintendent and his staff agreed that students needed to take more responsibility and that a peer mediation strategy would be most appropriate. To complement this district plan, the teachers' union also developed a corporation-wide safety plan.

The comprehensive center designed and conducted a week-long training institute for all staff of the Gary Community School Corporation. School teams comprised of site administrators, staff development specialists, teachers, school board members, community representatives, school nurses, and counselors participated in the training. The institute was designed to provide violence prevention information and skill-building opportunities. Participants were also introduced to the change process, research-based violence prevention strategies, program implementation issues, school-parent-community involvement, and data gathering and management systems. Participants included teams from the district's 25 elementary schools, eight middle schools, 10 high schools, and two alternative schools. Five days, or 40 hours of training, were provided to these teams over a three-month period.

Trust and Ongoing Support

The comprehensive center was an integral part of this initiative. Staff were instrumental in the original design of the project and provided ongoing technical assistance and support. The center conducted on-site visits, meetings with teachers, students, and community groups and monitored the program's progress. The center also offered staff opportunities to share their success, ideas, and strategies. They assisted school staff in establishing two networks: the cross-grade level network and the Indiana Violence Prevention Network. Having the opportunity to network with colleagues, team members report many successes. They were especially impressed with the coverage the project had received from the local media and community groups.

Notable Outcomes: Curbing the Tide of Violence

Since this initiative was introduced to the 43 original participating sites, all schools in the district have now incorporated the peer mediation program into their daily operation. One of the most notable outcomes observed after the first year of implementation was the significant reduction of school suspensions. During the 1997-98 school year, 5,432 suspensions were noted. But, in the 1998-99 school year, suspensions had dropped to 4,320. **This was a significant decrease of 1,112 suspensions, or 21 percent.**

Teachers have also reported notable improvement in student behavior. Interviews with students and teachers reveal that some high school students were quoted as making such

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Student attitudes were significantly changed. When surveyed, 100 percent of the students participating in the training responded that "physical fighting was not the appropriate way to resolve conflicts."

Schoolwide Reform and Improving Reading Skills



Three years ago, New York City Chancellor Rudy Crew adopted 12 of New York City's lowest performing schools (six elementary and six middle schools) in an effort to enhance student learning and improve their achievement. These schools were at a critical juncture: either student performance improved and students met New York state standards or they would be closed.

Education experts from throughout the state responded to this call, converging on the schools with an array of tools and advice. To ensure a deliberate and coordinated effort of service delivery, a technical support team was created. Selected service providers were asked to join this team.

The New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC) was one of those service providers. **As an original member of the team, the center played an integral role in developing the action plan that helped improve services at these schools.** This plan called for a comprehensive schoolwide restructuring, rigorous standards and curriculum alignment, a structured parent involvement program, and intensive leadership training for principals.

Contributing to the Overall Improvement Goal

The comprehensive center's major contribution to this improvement effort was its reading tutoring program, *Team Success*. Integrated into the daily activities of target schools, this program provided additional assistance by using university tutors to help individual students. As part of New York University's School of Education, the center identified and trained 25 graduate students. **The tutor training program focused on research-based literacy development strategies, tutoring techniques, and using assessment and evaluation tools to measure student progress.** In conjunction with hands-on field experience, this training content provided these future teachers with an excellent learning opportunity. Each tutor committed to a 20-hour schedule, meeting five days a week with eight to 10 students *on an individual basis*. All tutors worked very closely with the reading teachers to ensure that their efforts were in sync and to share what they had learned about how best to help individual students.

Experiencing Success

Team Success has proven to be rewarding for students, teachers and tutors. Individualized tutoring has helped students become better readers and has helped students gain a new confidence in their learning. It has also promoted more parent involvement in the learning process.

Michael Fulton, a reading tutor recalled: "I had Rodney for 16 weeks. He was far from confident and had a lot of trouble with nearly all of his sounds blends."

New York Technical Assistance Center

Region II

Test results show significant increases in reading achievement in all 12 target schools. As a matter of fact, these schools had a higher percentage of improvement compared to all other New York City districts.

Like many other students, Rodney had already been retained once, and his parents feared it would happen again. Through Rodney's hard work and continuous support from his tutor, reading teacher and parents, this program had a significant influence on his life. Fulton said:

At home, he would talk about the stories and the words he learned. We would create a list of new words that he could read and he would hang them up on the fridge at home. He began asking his parents to listen to him read and help him with his homework. His confidence now established, his mother couldn't be happier.

Teachers and tutors also report a positive experience with this program. Tutor Colleen Coleman, commented on her experience with the children and the school:

In the neighborhood that 'our' school is in, it is questionable how many children have a lot of special, positive learning experiences. Providing such an experience for them has definitely been a highlight of the job over the past two years.

Reading Achievement Levels on the Rise

Comments such as Colleen's are common, but the most important impact of this program is that students are learning and achieving at greater rates. This is demonstrated by the increased reading levels in both the city-wide and New York state tests. In the past year, test results show significant increases in reading achievement in all 12 target schools. As a matter of fact, these schools had a higher percentage of improvement compared to all other New York City districts. For example, the percentage of third graders reading at grade level increased from 31 percent to 46 percent in one year. **Subsequently, six of the 12 targeted schools have now been removed from the list of schools risking closure, so far.**

The overall improvement of these schools resulted in the increasing number of schools in the chancellor's district from 12 to 47. Dr. LaMar Miller, executive director of the comprehensive center, is pleased with the success of the project. He acknowledges that Team Success added a new dimension to school improvement, but it was the combination of strategies and activities that produced the final results. He concludes, "This confirms our belief that school reform efforts must be broad-based, strategically executed and that resources must be maximized."

Isolated School in Transition



Nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and in the shadow of Yosemite National Park, Mariposa Elementary School is transforming itself into a vibrant, engaging learning community. Although considered a desirable location, the isolation of Mariposa, California, presents many challenges for local children attending school. **Some children travel as much as 35 miles each way to reach their classroom.** The isolation also limits the opportunities for children to interact with other children, visit other communities, or have access to libraries and books. Mariposa serves 418 students, half of whom qualify for free and reduced-price lunch program.

Student-Focused Schoolwide Project

In its quest to identify solutions to the growing needs of its students and to enhance student performance, the Mariposa Elementary School leadership team began its work with the Region XI Northern California Comprehensive Assistance Center. The center assisted the school staff in their decision to shift from a targeted assistance Title I school to an integrated, student-focused schoolwide project.

The Mariposa leadership team members committed to participate in the comprehensive center-sponsored seven-day, comprehensive schoolwide planning institute. The primary focus was to provide school staff with necessary information and skills to transform their Title I program from a targeted assistance approach to a comprehensive reform effort benefiting all students. Training sessions focused on planning strategies, research-based best practices for high poverty schools, data-based decision-making, resource allocation and budget development, and action planning based on student and school needs.

Positive Steps to Change: Identifying the Needs

After conducting an extensive needs assessment, the leadership team identified three major areas of concern: reading, articulation and communication, and attendance. Test results indicated that 57 percent of the students who took standardized tests during the previous two years scored at the bottom two quartiles on all reading subtests.

Attendance data revealed that the average daily attendance for kindergarten students was about 87 percent. In fact, many children were absent as much as 50 percent of the time! After careful scrutiny of the data, the team determined that the transportation system was contributing to the problem. Due to the vast geographic areas that are covered by daily bus runs and the great number of schools served, all the Mariposa elementary students, including the kindergartners, had to ride the same bus as the high school students. To further complicate the situation, kindergarten students attended morning sessions only and were not provided transportation for their return home. This was a hardship for

Comprehensive Assistance Center

Region XI

many people, thus many parents simply kept the children home.

Clearing a Path for Change

The comprehensive center helped the school leadership team members identify and strategically plan their first-year strategies. Mariposa Elementary School staff planned their approach and took it to the community. Gaining community support, the plan was enthusiastically accepted. It included an expansion of the kindergarten program from a half day to a full day, and bus transportation was provided to and from school.

Targeting reading as the instructional priority, the leadership team developed a comprehensive plan that called for modification of the school day. An uninterrupted reading instruction block of two and one-half hours has been integrated in the daily schedule. This additional time offers more reading opportunities for students and provides extra time and resources for teacher planning as well. To ensure that the reading block is honored at all times, assemblies and special events are conducted only on Friday afternoons.

The leadership team members are confident that they are well on their way to transforming their school. They have already successfully changed their daily operation, how they use resources, how they assign teachers, and how they communicate with each other.

Making a Difference

Data from the 1998-99 school year indicate that the strategies are working. **School staff document changes in kindergarten attendance, student performance, social skills development, behavioral improvements, and increased parent involvement.** Daily attendance has increased dramatically, 5.5 percent monthly for the first eight months of the school year.

Teachers also report significant improvements in student performance. Students are learning key concepts faster than before, their printing is improving, and students know numbers and shapes by the middle of the second semester. Teachers are very positive about their work and hold high expectations for all their students.

Upper grade teachers also report significant progress in their efforts to improve student literacy. **An initial review of report card grades shows that the number of students who failed reading has dropped by 10 percentage points from 40 percent to 30 percent.** An unexpected benefit of their efforts is a marked increase of parent involvement, especially in volunteer rates.

The school's staff decided to grow and, by doing so, they have transformed teaching and learning at their school. The changes that have occurred are truly making a difference for students, staff, and the entire community.

“There comes a time in the life of an organization when a myriad of events come together in such a way that systemic change is inevitable. At such times, organizations have a choice: fight by reacting in ways that have been used in the past or find connectedness in the events, build new relationships and grow.”

**– Principal,
in a letter to the school board**

Design for Literacy



During the past 30 years, students experiencing reading and writing problems have traditionally been pulled from their classroom for individualized instruction with special teachers hired as “fix-it mechanics.” The classroom teacher (generally prepared only by a single three-hour university course in teaching reading and writing) may not have the necessary skills to diagnose problems or identify the appropriate strategies to help students be successful.

To further complicate this situation, the coordination of instruction activities in the classroom and in the pull-out class is often nonexistent. As a result, students having difficulties must also face fragmented and unfocused instructional programs. **To address this situation, the Region IX Southwest Comprehensive Center (SWCC) developed a program to support classroom teachers in developing literacy skills in all children.**

Partnership for Success

Teacher-focused and based on a strong literacy foundation, the Design for Literacy program offers teachers the necessary information and opportunities for skill development to address the reading and writing needs of underperforming students.

The program is designed around a strong foundation of knowledge about literacy and five major components for ongoing teacher support and training: essential elements of balanced literacy, collaborative inquiry, peer coaching, conditions for learning, and zones of proximal development. The program also offers support materials for literacy development and prescribes specific time allotments for the instruction of literacy.

The center took its proposal to create an “infrastructure” to support the classroom teacher to the Albuquerque Public Schools. Together as equal partners, they designed the program and determined that a pilot would be field tested at Armijo Elementary School. This school proved to be an ideal pilot site. It is a high poverty school with a student body that had great needs, and it was also at risk of being taken over by the New Mexico State Department of Education due to poor student performance. To demonstrate its commitment, the district funded the majority of the project.

Making Systemic Changes to Support Teachers

The relationship that exists between the comprehensive center and school staff is centered on improving learning opportunities for all children and ongoing collaboration. Center staff have positioned themselves in a unique role, not only as a technical assistance provider, but also as an integral extension of the district’s staff. **Acting on the center’s guidance, the school has made significant changes that were documented through focus group discussions, surveys, and classroom observations by literacy leaders.**

Southwest Comprehensive Center

Region IX

- ❖ During the school year, classroom teachers attended five full-day in-service training sessions focusing on literacy instruction.
- ❖ An on-site literacy leader was identified and assigned on a full-time basis to assist in the implementation of the program at the school and classroom levels.
- ❖ A literacy core team was established to help guide the school staff in assessing, planning and implementing the program. The team consists of the principal, classroom teachers, support teachers and parent representatives.
- ❖ A large professional library was established at the school to help teachers learn more about effective literacy teaching techniques.
- ❖ The daily schedule was modified to enable teachers to meet and discuss how to use strategies acquired during the five-day training. Teacher collaboration and communication occurred within each grade level and across grade levels and programs.

Teachers Contribute to the Success

After only 18 months of implementation, signs of change are apparent at the school. For example, classroom observation and survey results show teachers routinely use diagnostic tools to guide instruction, apply program-specific instructional strategies, offer systematic phonics instruction in the first and second grades, and seek to match reading materials to the instructional level of each student.

As a result of the Design for Literacy experiment, Armijo Elementary School has shown remarkable gains in student achievement. **The school has gone from being cited for low performance (performing below the 20th percentile on standardized tests during the previous five years) to one that, in 1999, reported test results in the 40th percentile for reading.** This initial success has gained the attention and support of district administrators and other educators in the region. With the assistance of the comprehensive center, four other schools in New Mexico and one in Utah are now implementing this program.

To ensure that the Design for Literacy model is more comprehensive in nature, three additional strands will be added. The center is currently developing additional components, including a family, school and community partnership strand; an administrator support network; a partnership with After-School Community Learning Centers (as a pilot test); and training modules and in-service training sessions are being revised to reflect the needs of second language learners and provide teachers with appropriate instructional strategies for these students.

Classroom observation and survey results show teachers routinely use diagnostic tools to guide instruction, apply program-specific instructional strategies, offer systematic phonics instruction in the first and second grades, and seek to match reading materials to the instructional level of each student.

Improving Instruction Through Technology



As we enter this next century, one of the great challenges for educators is helping students cross the digital divide, especially those students that IASA targets: high poverty, homeless and neglected, limited-English-proficient and others who are usually left behind. Crossing and eliminating this divide can only be done if educators are ready for the journey. The STAR Center created the Excellence and Equity through Technology Network (EETNet) to help teachers and administrators begin this journey by increasing their technology planning capability, establishing a network of project schools and increasing the knowledge base of these educators to prepare all children for an Internet civilization.

A Step Toward Innovation

The STAR Center targeted 28 high poverty and high minority schools in Texas. Through EETNet, teachers and technology coordinators from more than 23 school districts implementing Title I schoolwide projects have received ongoing technical assistance and training in increasing achievement for their students through innovative instruction enhanced by effective use of technology.

The center supports this goal in a number of ways:

- ❖ STAR Center technology experts developed the web-based *Teacher's Internet Use Guide*. This guide is designed to help educators customize existing lessons and use web-based resources. It also assists teachers in designing instructional activities and assessment procedures to measure student performance.
- ❖ To ensure proper use of the guide, STAR Center staff created a training program that targets the needs of teachers and technology coordinators.
- ❖ A 28-school network was established, and the STAR Center hosts an online discussion group that focuses on technology applications.
- ❖ The STAR Center offers an online needs assessment tool to help school technology teams identify program and technology needs.
- ❖ Teams from participating schools attend an annual technology planning institute to help them develop their school's technology plans.
- ❖ As schools implement their plans, STAR Center staff provide ongoing support via e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face meetings. Their comprehensive approach to providing technical assistance targets a variety of areas, some of which are: budget development, grant writing, information on and examples of successful proposals, strategies in dealing with technology vendors, overcoming techno-phobia among teachers, and providing information on exemplary technology models implemented at the school level.

STAR Center (Support for Texas Academic Renewal)

Region VIII

This network is developing capacity in campus teams to integrate technology into their schoolwide reform efforts to enhance student achievement.

An Institute for School Teams

The technology planning institute is the starting point for school or district teams seeking to make better use of technology in the classroom. To ensure a range of input in technology planning, as well as support for implementation, teams typically include an administrator, a technology planner or staff development coordinator, a teacher, and a community member.

At the institute, teams engage in hands-on activities to determine how technology can best be used in their particular situations. STAR Center staff guide teams through a variety of strategies that help them identify site specific needs that may be addressed by sound application of technology in such areas as teaching and learning, teacher preparation, administrative support, and building infrastructure. A particular area of focus has been on applying technology to support successful teaching and learning strategies in language arts and mathematics.

Teams are also introduced to *the Teacher's Internet Use Guide* to create classroom lessons, and teams collaborate to create an action plan to support the team's visions of what they want to see happen at their schools. As participants of the institute, teams receive a binder containing resources on technology planning, needs assessment tools, research-based strategies and resources, web site information, and a copy of the *Texas Long-Range Plan for Technology*.

School team members have been positive about the benefits of participating in the EETNet institutes, clearly expressing their intention of taking what they have learned back to their schools.

School teams that participated in the network – both the institute and ongoing technical assistance – are in various stages of implementing their innovative, strategic technology plans. Their common primary focus is to build staff capacity in integrating technology to enhance student achievement. Staff development or teacher training is a key component of all their efforts. Each participating school offers its teachers training opportunities on the use of computers as an educational tool and strategies to integrate technology into the curriculum and daily practice. **Of the participating school teams that completed and submitted grant proposals based on their technology plans, all were successfully funded.**

In order to further the impact of EETNet, STAR Center staff have led numerous sessions to thousands of individuals at state and national conferences on the EETNet technology planning process and available resources. Staff are also developing a guide for schools to use in planning and integrating meaningful technology into the classroom.

This network is developing capacity in campus teams to integrate technology into their schoolwide reform efforts to enhance student achievement.

Successful Summer School Partnerships:

Building Reading and Leadership Skills of Migrant Students



Having positive role models is necessary for all children but critical for children of migrant farm workers. The shortage of teachers of color or teachers who reflect the diversity of our student population is a challenge that is faced by most schools. Dover Elementary School in Hillsborough County, Florida, is one of those schools. Situated in a highly agricultural area, Dover Elementary School serves the children of migrant farm workers who come to the area to gather the crops. It is a high poverty Title I schoolwide project with a significant number of migrant and limited-English-proficient (LEP) students.

The school motto proudly proclaims Dover as the best school in America. The school staff strives to bring this motto to life throughout the year. But, as they planned for their summer school, they recognized the need for positive role models for the children. They knew they could provide learning opportunities in reading and math but what could they do to help the children see themselves with a successful future? In their determination to provide the best summer school programs, they turned to local resources for their solution.

Harvesting Resources

The Region XIV Comprehensive Center at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) was the catalyst for resource development. Relying on its extensive network, comprehensive center staff initiated discussions and brought other resources to the table. The partnership grew to include the center, Dover Elementary School, high school sophomores and juniors from across Florida participating in the Migrant Leadership Institute at the University of South Florida, the Hillsborough County Public Schools Migrant Education Program, and members of the business community.

Preparing Role Models

Forty high school students participating in the Summer Migrant Leadership Institute were the ideal candidates for this challenge. **Selected for their academic achievement, involvement in extracurricular activities and contributions to their community, these students gladly accepted the task of serving as mentors and tutors for 88 elementary migrant school children.** To prepare these students for their critical roles, the comprehensive center staff developed and provided workshops in areas such as: reading strategies, student study skills, and tutoring strategies to prepare the young tutors. They also provided necessary materials and resources for classroom activities. In addition to preparing the tutors, the comprehensive center assisted in designing and organizing the tutorial program, provided technical assistance throughout the summer program, and sponsored a celebration to culminate the program.

Comprehensive Center

Region XIV

Summer School Success

Using the summer reading program, *Read* Write* Now*, Dover Elementary School students were involved in reading experiences that enhanced their reading skills and provided them with daily interaction with older students who shared their life experience. For 30 minutes a day, students read, shared experiences and developed relationships that built pride and confidence. **Teachers reported that each of the students who received additional assistance showed increases in reading skills and displayed a greater enjoyment of reading. School staff also reported improvements in student behavior.**

These tutor-student relationships were beneficial for the youngsters as well as for the young tutors. They often commented on the value of the experience and their growth as individuals. Many expressed that they found the experience so meaningful and rewarding that they were now considering becoming teachers. Many others expressed an interest in starting similar reading support programs back in their own communities.

A Winning Combination

Partnerships do not just happen, they are strategically planned and executed. The positive results of this initiative is proof that various organizations can work together, provided there is a clear vision and consistent leadership. The comprehensive center in its key role, with its resources, network capabilities and staff contributed to making this project a reality for Dover Elementary School staff and its students.

At a closing ceremony, attended by state and local departments of education staff and business representatives, Dr. Earl Lennard, superintendent of the Hillsborough County Schools, remarked, “What distinguishes this [program] as unique is that youngsters are giving back and teaching others who are in the same positions they were once in.” He went on to praise the program and supported its continuation in the fall.

As the result of the efforts of 40 student-tutors, school staff who believed in their students, a community willing to invest in its future and a comprehensive center committed to providing quality technical assistance, a summer tutorial initiative was the beginning of a dynamic relationship and successful reading experiences for migrant students.

“What distinguishes this [program] as unique is that youngsters are giving back and teaching others who are in the same positions they were once in.”

**– Dr. Earl Lennard,
superintendent of the
Hillsborough County Schools**

Alaska's Native Communities, Building Stronger Ties:

Taking an Active Role in Children's Education



Research shows that meaningful parent and community involvement in the education of a child is critical to academic success. There also must be some connection between the home and school experience for education to be truly effective and relevant for the child. This is especially critical for culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

The Alaska Department of Education and early development staff knew that past practices had not always been successful with this population and that if this initiative was to be different, a new approach had to be taken. **They recognized that the cultural and linguistic diversity of these communities was a key element that needed to be addressed and integrated into the proposed work.** They began by questioning current practices and targeting specific areas such as:

- ❖ the capability of the native ways of knowing and the skills and knowledge required by a typical curriculum,
- ❖ how the Native communities could become an integral part of their children's experience, and
- ❖ how the school and community expectations could be changed or modified to support children in their learning.

Staff also knew that if their proposed vision was to become a reality, it was imperative for native parents to be part of the discussion and the design of the initiative. The approach had to be comprehensive and inclusive.

Secondly, school staff would need preparation for the proposed changes. Expectation and perceptions had to be examined and changed to align with the new vision. Curriculum would be built on the students' native language and culture and would incorporate new instructional strategies congruent with Native ways. This curriculum makes the educational experience more relevant for the child and building stronger ties between the school and community.

From Vision to Reality

Recognized as a strong educational resource and advocate for Native Alaskan populations, the Alaska Department of Education staff turned to the Region XIII, Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (AKRAC) for assistance. The center's staff eagerly responded to the request. They began by designing a process to enable school staff and community members to openly discuss critical issues pertinent to their beliefs, expectations and the role of the school.

An Inclusive Process: Everyone Plays a Key Role

The first step of the process was to form a leadership team that is representative of the community. Parents, teachers, administrators, and other community members were all included. Community elders, having the honor and respect of their communities,

Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Region XIII

played a key role in this leadership team.

Another reality of the Alaskan Native community was the high turnover rate of school staff. Changes in personnel could be detrimental to the process, however, identifying key community members ensured consistency and continuity. The center developed a district-level team made up of key central office staff, and school and community representatives to provide ongoing support.

The second step of the process was to involve the community in a series of meetings led by the leadership team. The information from the meetings was then incorporated into the school and community improvement plan at the local level. It also became part of the district-wide plan.

To ensure that all team members had the necessary knowledge and skills, the Alaska comprehensive center provided training on the Alaska Onward to Excellence process. They also provided advice and technical assistance to help the community group in reaching its goals.

Results and Differences: Observing the Impact

A prime example of community influence resulting in richer learning experiences for children occurred in a Yupik community. Activities associated with berry picking became the focus of instructional activities that helped students master language arts and engaged them in more creative ways of learning. Children heard native stories associated with berry picking, performed the dances of the season, and created artwork that demonstrated the various aspects of berry picking as it relates to the Native ways.

Yupik elders and storytellers visited the school and interacted with the children. Through their stories, they provided culture-rich information that students then incorporated into their articles, stories and personal writings. Students were similarly exposed to other cultures. This approach fosters a better understanding of the child's own culture and allows for a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences that exist between all cultures.

An Involved Community

This program has succeeded in involving communities in their children's education. **Preliminary data suggests that the effort has had positive impact on student achievement.** Reviews of student portfolios reveal changes in student writing. Teacher and community interviews show that "there is an increase of trust and cooperation between community members and school staff." In addition, community members are taking much more ownership of their schools, realizing that their voice is heard and their contributions are valued.

"Once, I passed community members on the street with only an exchange of greeting. But now they stop me and ask me what is happening in the school."

**– A teacher in a
Native Alaskan school**

Reading Success Network:

Making a Difference for At-Risk Readers



In the Southeast, as in other regions of the country, the need for improved literacy instruction is compelling. Too many students are underperforming, lagging behind their peers and lack the necessary skills to fully benefit from classroom literacy instruction. The failure to read well affects student achievement in all content areas, prohibits students from reaching their full potential, and ultimately erodes self-esteem and fosters discouragement in the learning process.

Based on the results of a regional needs assessment, the Region V Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC) identified the need to improve literacy development in young children as a priority. Targeting its efforts and resources, the center proposed to implement a prevention strategy, the Reading Success Network. The Reading Success Network is a collaborative effort of the national network of 15 comprehensive centers. Targeting the need to reach children at an early age, the network is designed to provide teachers of kindergartners through third graders strategies to better serve struggling readers.

Since the initial national Reading Success Network in May 1998, the Region V Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center has been providing training and support to more than 75 teachers in 15 elementary schools in a five-state region: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In one year, the region's Reading Success Network has impacted the identification of reading difficulties in kindergarten through third grade students and it has impacted the assessment and instructional practices of teachers.

A prime example of this success is visible in Phoenix City, Alabama, where the Reading Success Network is currently being implemented on a district-wide basis. When the Phoenix City school district administrators and staff heard about the Reading Success Network, they made a commitment to have early childhood reading teachers receive the training. District staff believed that by implementing the Reading Success Network at the elementary school level, students who generally "fall between the cracks" would be identified and helped.

Strategies for Making a Difference

Early results show that the Phoenix City School District made a wise decision. Through comprehensive center's quarterly training session and follow-up support, reading teachers are using a study team approach to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their lowest-performing students. Teachers have also learned how to use assessment tools and other data to select the most appropriate instructional approach to help students master reading skills. As teachers continued to meet in their study teams and use informal assessment measures, their focus shifted from talking about what the children do not know and cannot do, to what these same children know and can do.

Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center

Region V

“Collaborating with our peers about successes and failures was an important strategy for us,” says teacher Mary Mummah. “We had partners in this endeavor; we were not alone. We learned from each other and taught others as well.”

Dimensions of Change

Two major changes in the region occurred as a result of the Reading Success Network. First, teachers’ expectations of what low-achieving students can do changed dramatically. In the past, teachers’ experiences with low-progressing students demonstrated that the low achievers generally did not catch up to their peers. Students who fell behind in the first grade continued to decline as they progressed through the grades. However, after only one year of Reading Success Network implementation, elementary teachers are now convinced that the lowest-achieving first graders can make progress in their reading and writing. Through appropriate intervention strategies, these children learn how to guide their own learning and get the most from classroom instruction.

The second notable change is in teaching practices. As grade-level teachers regularly planned instruction together, they began to deliberately apply concepts and principles learned throughout the Reading Success Network training. Via the cross-grade level study teams and the use of assessment tools, teachers are now better able to evaluate student progress and express a deeper understanding of how students learn to read and write.

School administrators and teachers agree that primary students’ growth in literacy is directly related to teachers’ increased understanding and ability to provide appropriate literacy instruction in the classroom setting.

Cordelia Moffet, Phoenix City Schools assistant superintendent, stated:

The Reading Success Network has added an important dimension to our district’s early educational opportunities for children as well as enhanced the classroom practices. RSN provides a safety net for students having difficulty with reading in the early years and it is well worth the investment toward each child’s success in the future.

The Comprehensive Centers Network is sponsoring the Reading Success Network to improve student reading achievement by developing a national network of trainers and teacher-coaches. These teacher-coaches are supporting classroom teachers’ efforts to provide powerful instruction in reading.

The Reading Success Network is a collective response to President Clinton’s Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century and to Secretary Riley’s Seven Initiatives that include the goal to have every student read independently and well by the end of the third grade.

Using Data for Program Improvement:

New Directions for the Maryland's Migrant Summer Program



Every summer, large numbers of migrant farmworker families come to Maryland's six major agricultural counties. Traveling from other states, such as Texas and Florida, these families face a variety of challenges, the main one being poverty. The children in these families also face daunting academic challenges. Many have limited English skills, gaps in their educational experience, sporadic school attendance, and may attend several schools in one year because of their mobile lifestyle. For many of these children and their teachers, academic success can be an elusive goal.

Recognizing these needs and the limited time available to work with these children, Maryland educators strive to provide the best summer school experience possible. Cvieta Sheridan, a veteran educator and state Migrant Education Program director, describes the challenge of educating 550 migrant students enrolled in its yearly summer program as no simple task:

Our greatest challenge is to develop a relatively short six-weeks program that is academically challenging with creative instruction. We also challenge our teachers by requiring them to be imaginative while implementing the program; yet expect them to provide a strong instructional program in the classroom.

In spite of all their efforts and creative thinking, they were not always certain if they were really making a difference in the students' learning.

While examining their practices and program, the Maryland Department of Education requested assistance from the Region III Comprehensive Center. **The comprehensive center staff developed a self-assessment tool that gave school staff a means of gathering data and a process by which this data could be used to make program changes.**

A Team Approach to Program Improvement

The state Migrant Education Program director, in consultation with comprehensive center staff, adopted a planning model that was inclusive and participatory. Together, the Migrant Education Program and the center generated ideas on how to best strengthen the academic focus of the summer program.

This information was then shared with the larger planning team. During the early planning phases, it was determined that the summer program would contain clear instructional goals, creative instructional methods, and challenging content that would be aligned with Maryland state standards.

The first step toward improving the program was to collect baseline information and to critically assess the status of the program. It was also imperative to involve the teaching staff in this self assessment process. Since there is no "ideal" migrant program, this guided process would spur principals and teachers

to critically discuss their current offerings and to, together, determine what the “ideal program” would be. Motivating staff and gaining staff buy-in for program changes is often a barrier to program improvement. **Thus, by involving the staff in this initial planning step, the sense of ownership and staff buy-in for any proposed changes was established.**

The succeeding steps included developing a program review plan and examining a variety of evaluation tools provided by the comprehensive center. Presented with a series of evaluation instruments from across the country, the Maryland program director selected a tool developed for New York that was adapted to meet Maryland program requirements. To ensure its appropriateness, program principals and the center worked together to make the necessary revisions.

Customized Self-Assessment

As a result of this team effort, a highly focused and tailored self-assessment tool and process was developed. It was non-threatening and concentrated on obtaining the view of teachers and principals regarding key academic issues. Before the summer school program began, the center worked with program team members to design and conduct a training session on using the tool. The tool focuses on three areas: (1) curriculum and instruction, (2) professional development, and (3) assessment methods used in the program.

Teachers and principals completed the tool anonymously. This anonymity was guaranteed not only to secure honest and candid responses, but also to foster a sense of a team effort in improving the program. Center staff were responsible for gathering, analyzing, and summarizing this information. Each site was provided a summary report on the findings, key issues needing further attention, and recommendations on next steps and further use of data.

When asked about his experience with the comprehensive center and the quality of their work, a state education official commented:

I had never seen such a fast turnaround. Having worked with a lot of people on projects over many years, I was really impressed with this level of support. Everything was ready when they said it would be.

A Road Map for Program Improvement

The results of the self-assessment were impressive. They provided the snapshot the state department of education wanted and needed. Immediately, two critical issues surfaced. First, there was staff buy-in. The teachers took the notion of a self-assessment seriously and were eager to participate in this process.

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**– state education official,
commenting on his experience
working with the
comprehensive center**

Taking the Mystery Out of Data:

Improving Programs for English Language Learners



A critical component of increasing student achievement in high poverty, low performing schools is to accurately diagnose student strengths and weaknesses and to target instruction to the specific characteristics of every student. In order for educators to gain this information and to make appropriate instructional decisions, they must be able to skillfully gather, use, and interpret data.

There are many uses of this information, but the primary purposes are (a) to monitor and measure student progress and (b) to determine program appropriateness and effectiveness. Data that are systematically collected and organized in a user-friendly format can motivate inquiry and dialogue about critical student achievement issues, provide a basis for developing sound action plans, and help determine if the plan is effective or if revisions are needed.

The ability to use data effectively is essential for all student learning and program implementation. However, it is critical for programs that serve English language learners.

School districts face increased public scrutiny, an ongoing debate over which methods are most effective in enhancing student achievement, and legislative mandates requiring educators to measure English language learners' progress and academic achievement. School districts must now collect data to demonstrate their efforts in providing instructional programs for English language learners. They must collect data such as: the nature of the educational program in which students are enrolled, the length of time students are in the program, the students' level of English proficiency, and the level of student achievement. Thus, there is a strong need for systematic data collection systems and training of educators to analyze and use data.

Responding to the Need

To help school districts collect and use these data, the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, developed a key resource: *Data Collection and Program Improvement for English Language Learners – Accountability, Acceleration and Excellence*.

This document provides a framework to guide schools in the systematic collection, analysis, reporting of disaggregated data, and the use of data to improve instruction for English language learners. It shows educators how to:

- ❖ develop critical questions about English language learner achievement and progress,
- ❖ decide what data to collect and include in a student information system,
- ❖ address technical and technological issues that arise in

Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center

Region XII

**Educators in the region
are making more informed
decisions and are providing
better programs for
English language learners.**

collecting and using data, and

- ❖ develop a strategic action plan to improve student achievement.

A case study conducted in the Santa Ana Unified School District in Orange County, California, provides a “real school” example. The resource guide details the district’s efforts in developing an extensive data collection and reporting system, its use of many kinds of information, and its use of these data for effective program monitoring and evaluation.

Staff Training: The Key to Success

To compliment this document and ensure proper use, the comprehensive center developed training workshops that specifically target the gathering and use of data and program improvement. During the 1998-99 school year, two trainer-of-trainer institutes were conducted in southern California. About 70 school and district personnel successfully completed the four-day training, which centered on an orientation to the design and use of the document, “how to” strategies for developing a data gathering system, strategies to create the conditions required for effective use of data, and a reflective process on available data to stimulate change.

The center’s development of this tool and complimentary training has been a valuable asset for southern California schools. “Bravo, a particularly important training with the context of [Proposition] 227; I believe I can now do a better job of making instructional decisions,” noted one institute participant. **As a result, educators in the region are making more informed decisions and are providing better programs for English language learners.**

Building Leadership in the Pacific Region



When you think of the Pacific region, thoughts of a tropical paradise with lush green forests, sea breezes and miles of sandy beaches probably come to mind. Ah, this is the life!

But, for the local educator, issues of declining student achievement, fragmented instructional programs, limited resources, and increasing demand for more rigorous accountability are real challenges.

The elements that provide this region with all its natural beauty, also present challenges not seen in any other part of the country. The vast Pacific region, excluding Hawaii, is considered a rural and isolated area. Because of remoteness of these islands, there is little or no access to colleges and universities, few training opportunities are offered for educators, and pursuing such opportunities is often a hardship.

The lack of professional development has a negative impact on the operation of schools and guidance of local staff. This is a major concern, especially for teachers who are often appointed as principals without the benefit of formal or even informal administrative and management training.

The Pacific Curriculum and Instructional Council is a group of curriculum leaders for the 10 jurisdictions in the Pacific region. The council identified the development of leadership skills as a key priority to enhancing the overall quality of education in the region. Acting on this urgency, council members requested assistance from the Pacific Comprehensive Assistance Center. They insisted that strategies target the development of skills that would facilitate school improvement initiatives, motivate staff for continuous learning, and provide guidance to staff in their efforts to improve student achievement. With a strong research background and extensive experience in staff development, the comprehensive center staff rose to the challenge.

Creating Leaders for Local Schools

The center's strategy took the form of a leadership academy. Designed as a four-day event and based on the realities of the Pacific region, the institute provided local principals and administrators with current research and best practices information, opportunities to examine the principles of change and strategies to affect change, program management and monitoring strategies, and a process for strategic planning. The academy was designed on the premise that school leaders need to know and understand the change process. When school leaders understand the change process, they are able to make changes in instructional programs, ultimately affecting teaching practices and student achievement. The leadership academy reflected three beliefs:

Pacific Comprehensive Assistance Center

Region XV

- ❖ Leaders must have the capacity to gain wisdom and expertise through the continuous process of learning.
- ❖ Leaders must be able to make sense of past actions, so that they can make better decisions.
- ❖ Leaders must become effective change agents who can overcome the challenges of an unpredictable and complex future.

During a two-year period, the center conducted four institutes with many school teams participating.

Building on Success

As word of the leadership academy has spread among the islands, there has been an increase in requests for technical assistance and replication of the training. In response to this demand and in an effort to reach more remote areas, the comprehensive center is in the process of developing a multimedia training module, *Principals as Instructional Leaders*. The program will include video clips from the original institute training sessions, examples of school improvement plans, and materials from the Pacific Region Effective and Successful Schools program. **Graduates of the leadership academy will use the training module to offer training opportunities at their local sites and throughout the region.**

The latest leadership academy was conducted in May 1999 in the Republic of Palau, with 24 school and central office administrators participating. A participant commented:

Sharing is our culture, and a leader must enable the sharing. This activity has enabled us to share among entities and schools, and we need more of these [activities]. Thank you.

A simple message, but for the Pacific Comprehensive Assistance Center, sharing the knowledge is its contribution to making a difference.

As word of the leadership academy has spread among the islands, there has been an increase in requests for technical assistance and replication of the training.

Overcoming Barriers to Educating Homeless Children



Homeless children face formidable barriers to obtaining an education. Because of their living situation, many may even be denied their basic right to public schooling. Without a permanent address, these children are hard to identify or count, thus they become invisible to school personnel and to the public in general. Few school districts are able to state with confidence the accurate number of homeless children that live within their district boundaries. The families' living situations coupled with the various jurisdictional boundaries add to the challenge of reaching a school.

In many instances, even if a homeless child is successful in getting to a school, it does not necessarily mean the child is allowed access. Some children are turned away because office personnel lack the understanding and appropriate training regarding the rights and needs of homeless children. When homeless children are able to enroll in school their problems do not cease. Often they are unable to afford the needed school supplies, and their unstable living situation prohibits the development of successful study habits.

Recognized as a regional priority, the Region IV Comprehensive Center hosted an invitational forum on Homeless Education in collaboration with the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). Participants included state homeless coordinators, Title I directors, and local McKinney-funded program directors – all of whom had provided input on the content and format of the forum. The primary focus was to provide educators opportunities to identify and discuss critical issues relative to the education of homeless children, to identify promising practices and strategies to address these needs, and to create a support network and collaborating opportunities to address common needs.

Pinpointing the Needs

The forum provided many opportunities for in-depth discussions on a variety of key issues. Then participants identified three major areas that severely impact the education of homeless children: (1) the lack of awareness regarding homeless children's needs and rights, (2) transportation challenges, and (3) the need to heighten the importance of homeless education issues at the national level.

Throughout the discussions, raising awareness regarding the needs of these children continually surfaced as the most prominent challenge. Participants agreed that their efforts to increase awareness among educators and the public had to be a priority. They also acknowledged that key personnel, such as front office secretaries and bus drivers, have not been provided information or included in training opportunities regarding these children and their families. Front office staff, secretaries, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and teachers all interact with homeless children in many

Comprehensive Center at AEL

Region IV

important ways. However, due to their lack of knowledge, they often act in ways that were inconsistent with their district's policies. Too often, policies intended to aid homeless children are only known to district administrators and principals.

Attendees were eager to share ideas and creative approaches in addressing cross-jurisdictional busing. Some districts shared that creativity and a critical examination of available resources was the first step toward providing the needed transportation. They ingeniously thought of using magnet school and/or special education buses. Since these buses have the authority to cross school boundaries, including the homeless children in these bus runs did not require additional resources or challenges to local policies.

Finally, attendees addressed the need to raise homeless education issues at a national level. They acknowledged the need for a national agenda and voice to advocate the needs of these children and their families. They all agreed that homeless advocacy groups had to work together in developing a national strategy to bring the educational needs of homeless children to the forefront. Speaking with urgency, attendees stressed the need for a strategic plan to increase awareness regarding the plight of these children, additional funding, and ultimately a plan to aid homeless children across the country.

Sharing Ideas and Best Practices

Although much of the conversation centered on the needs of this population, attendees strived to identify solutions and strategies. For example, to assist in raising staff awareness, state and local officials from Kentucky collaborated to develop and conduct a series of training sessions for front office staff and secretaries on the laws, policies, enrolling procedures, and transporting homeless of children.

Another example was a strategy that was shared by the Homeless Education Program director from Virginia who described a process that is used on a statewide basis to gather information and count homeless children. The director provided recommendations on data gathering and management systems for statewide counts. Attendees from different states also provided information on other local and state counting efforts.

Keeping the Connections

A sentiment that was often expressed was that most Homeless Education Program staff often work in isolation. They requested the comprehensive center establish and maintain a listserv. This e-mail network would enable all attendees to continue the discussion and to share insights on new findings and critical needs.

As a result, state and local officials from Kentucky are collaborating to develop and conduct a series of training sessions on serving children in homeless situations. The sessions target front office staff and secretaries on the laws, policies, enrolling procedures, and transporting homeless children.

Improving Achievement Through a Schoolwide Programs Network



Two schools in the New England Comprehensive Center’s “Schoolwide Programs Network” have received national recognition as Title I Distinguished Schools. **As members of the center’s regional schoolwide network, these schools worked with the center for two years, participating in a variety of professional development activities and receiving on-site coaching.**

The Schoolwide Programs Network has created a New England regional community of practice that strives to develop and implement exemplary schoolwide programs in which all children achieve to high standards of learning. Network membership consists of schools that are using *Improving America’s Schools Act* funding to implement a schoolwide program.

The center’s strategies for providing support to the Schoolwide Programs Network include the following:

- ❖ providing ongoing professional development opportunities for member schools’ improvement teams and their district office team members according to expressed needs of the member schools;
- ❖ ensuring that each school has a coach who is provided with support and professional development;
- ❖ partnering with the state departments of education to leverage collective resources for network schools;
- ❖ identifying and developing tools and other resources to assist schools engaged in schoolwide planning and implementation;
- ❖ offering leadership training opportunities for principals; and
- ❖ developing electronic resources, such as the center’s web site, distance learning courses, and the national schoolwide network electronic discussion group.

Partnerships: A Means of Increasing the Reach

The regional network is a collaboration between the comprehensive center and participating state departments of education. The departments of education select the schools to be invited based on poverty level and need, and they provide mini-grants for the schools to cover some of the costs of participation in network activities. Department of education staff volunteer to be school facilitators. In this role they receive facilitator training and then serve as a school team facilitator at the annual schoolwide congress. Some facilitators continue to offer support to their schools throughout the year.

The Rhode Island Department of Education decided after two years of involvement in the regional network to ask the center for support in creating a state network. This network has been in operation since the 1998-99 school year and draws schools that

are implementing schoolwide programs and comprehensive school reform demonstration programs.

Evidence of Success

Participating schools are required to document their planning and progress toward meeting their improvement goals, particularly gains in student achievement. The comprehensive center's external evaluator, the Urban Institute, has collected other evidence of impact on participating schools, and is conducting case studies of two schools.

The data collected through this evaluation have shown that participating schools and districts highly value the professional development, coaching, networking with like-minded schools, and resources provided. **Principals of these schools reported that they attribute the progress they have made in their comprehensive school improvement process to their participation in the Schoolwide Programs Network.**

The center has been tracking gains in student achievement among member schools. Significant gains were found in schools that had participated in the network for at least two years. An example is the Armory, a kindergarten through sixth-grade school in Springfield, Massachusetts. The improvement goal for the past two years was focused on reading and writing skills. Grade-level assessments have shown a steady increase in student performance. **On the new state assessment, the school moved in one year from 26th place in the school district in English and science to 11th place in English and 10th place in science. The science gains were attributed to improved reading and writing skills.**

The network has also shown effects at the state level. Individuals in state departments of education who have received training by the comprehensive center to serve as facilitators for Schoolwide Programs Network schools reported that they value the skills they have developed through the professional development the center has provided and the opportunity to apply their skills by facilitating the network, evidence of the comprehensive center making a difference.

New England Comprehensive Assistance Center

Region I

Significant gains were found in schools that had participated in the network for at least two years...

On the new state assessment, one school moved in one year from 26th place in the school district in English and science to 11th place in English and 10th place in science. The science gains were attributed to improved reading and writing skills.

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Region II:

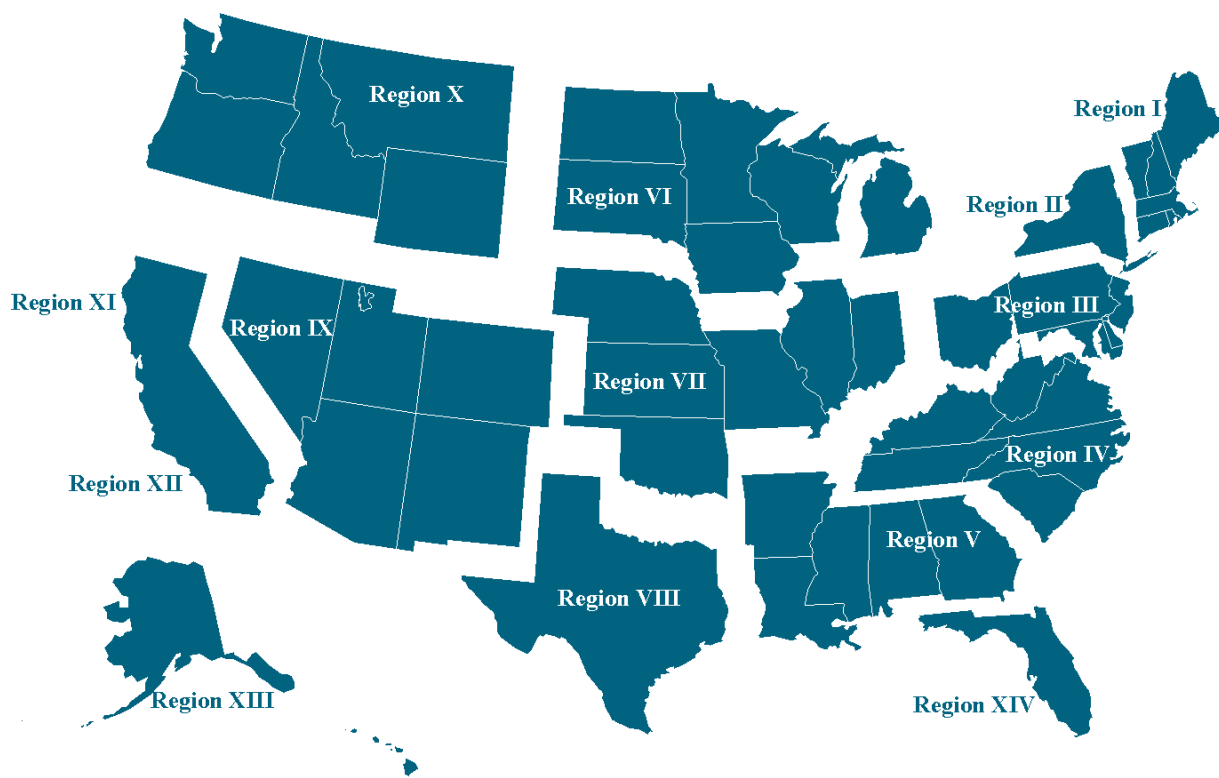
New York Technical Assistance Center
Dr. LaMar P. Miller,
executive director
The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education
New York University
82 Washington Square East, Suite 72
New York, NY 10003
800-469-8224 or 212-998-5100;
212-995-4199 fax
URL: www.nyu.edu/education/metro-center/nytac/nytac.html

Region III:

Region III Comprehensive Center at The George Washington University
Dr. Charlene Rivera, director
Center for Equity and Excellence in Education
1730 North Lynn Street, Suite 401
Arlington, Virginia 22209
703-528-3588 or 800-925-3223;
703-528-5973 fax
URL: r3cc.ceee.gwu.edu

Region IV:

Comprehensive Center at AEL
Dr. Pamela K. Buckley, director
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
1700 N. Moore Street, Suite 1275
Arlington, Virginia 22209
800-624-9120 or 703-276-0200
E-mail: aelfinfo@ael.org
URL: www.ael.org/cac



Region XV

Also includes:
• American Samoa
• Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
• Federated States of Micronesia (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk and Yap)
• Republic of the Marshall Islands
• Republic of Palau

**Comprehensive
Centers
Network Online**
www.ccnetwork.org

Region V:

Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center

Mr. David Rainey, director
Southwest Educational
Development Laboratory
3330 N. Causeway Blvd, Ste 430
Metairie, Louisiana 70002-3573
504-838-6861 or 800-644-8671;
504-831-5242 fax
URL: www.seidl.org/secac

Region VI:

Comprehensive Center at The University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dr. Walter Secada, director
1025 West Johnson Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
608-263-4220; 608-263-3733 fax
E-mail: ccvi@soemadison.wisc.edu
URL: www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi

Region VII:

Region VII Comprehensive Center

Dr. Belinda Biscoe, director
University of Oklahoma
555 East Constitution
Norman, Oklahoma 73072-7820
405-325-1729 or 800-228-1766
405-325-1824 fax
E-mail: regionvii@ou.edu
URL: region7.ou.edu

Region VIII:

STAR Center

Dr. María Robledo Montecel,
principal investigator
Intercultural Development
Research Association
Dr. Uri Treisman,
co-principal investigator
The Charles A. Dana Center at
The Univ. of Texas at Austin
Dr. Shelley Billig,
co-principal investigator
RMC Research Corporation
Intercultural Development Research
Association
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350
San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190
210-444-1710 or 888-FYI-STAR
(394-7827)
210-444-1714 fax
URL: www.starcenter.org

Region IX:

Southwest Comprehensive Center

Dr. Paul E. Martinez, director
New Mexico Highlands University
500 Laser Road, NE, Suite B
Rio Rancho, New Mexico 87124
800-247-4269 or 505-891-6111
505-891-5744 fax
E-mail: swcc@cesdp.nmhu.edu
URL: www.cesdp.nmhu.edu

Region X:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Comprehensive Center

Dr. Kim Yap, director
Northwest Regional Educational
Laboratory
101 Southwest Main St., Suite 500
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503-275-9587 or 800-547-6339
503-275-9625 fax
URL: www.nwrac.org

Region XI:

Comprehensive Assistance Center

Dr. Fred Tempes, director
WestEd
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, Calif. 94107-1242
415-565-3009 or 800-645-3276
415-565-3012 fax
E-mail: ccrequest@wested.org
URL: www.wested.org/cc

Region XII:

Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center

Dr. Henry Mothner, director
Los Angeles County Office of
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9300 Imperial Highway
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310-922-6364; 310-940-1798 fax
URL: sccac.lacoe.edu

Region XIII:

Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Ms. JoAnn Henderson, director
South East Regional Resource
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210 Ferry Way, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801
907-586-6806; 907-463-3811 fax
URL: www.akrac.k12.ak.us

Region XIV:

Region XIV Comprehensive Center

Dr. Trudy Hensley, director
Educational Testing Service
1000 N. Ashley Drive, Suite 312
Tampa, Florida 33602
800-275-9003; 813-228-0632 fax
URL: www.ets.org/ccxiv

Region XV:

Pacific Comprehensive Assistance Center

Ms. Hilda Heine, director
Pacific Resources for Education
and Learning
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Honolulu, Hawaii 96813-4321
808-441-1300; 808-411-1385 fax
E-mail: askprel@prel.org
URL: www.prel.org

The comprehensive regional assistance centers were created by the U.S. Department of Education to provide technical assistance services to state education agencies and local school districts who are implementing education reform efforts under the Improving America's Schools Act.

comments as, “This is working so well, we would like to implement this program in our neighborhoods during the summer months.”

Teachers and students (especially those from schools that have the most active programs) are reporting fewer fights and “relative calm” in their schools. **An unexpected benefit is the significantly large number of students expressing interest in becoming peer mediators.** When surveyed, students reported that they were greatly satisfied with the mediation process and the associated training. They concluded by stating that the training was a key factor in the success of the project and the motivation behind student participation.

Evaluation results also demonstrate that student attitudes were significantly changed. When surveyed, 100 percent of the students participating in the training responded that “physical fighting was not the appropriate way to resolve conflicts.” Furthermore, and most importantly, students reported that they would use their newly acquired knowledge and skills such as listening, communication, and negotiation skills to resolve conflicts. To demonstrate their commitment to the process, students overwhelmingly made more student referrals than staff.

In light of the positive results, other community organizations are now actively involved. For instance, VISTA and the Youth and Family Community Renewal project are training housing development residents as peer mediators, and the Youth Services Bureau is assisting with evaluation services and supporting implementation of the program throughout the corporation.

Building on Success

The corporation and the community are taking steps to ensure that these measures remain an integral part of the community. **The district is now supporting the training of all school counselors who will provide ongoing technical assistance to school teams.** In addition, the district is continuing its financial support of all schools implementing this project. VISTA volunteers are carrying the message out to the community. There are also plans to expand the peer mediation program into the community housing developments. **What started out as an effort to curb violence in the schools has now spilled out into the community as a whole.** The Region VII Comprehensive Center has been a vital player in this community’s valiant effort to stem the tide of violence.

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Second, a snapshot of current practices emerged. Initial findings revealed that some teachers had extensive experience in the three areas of focus. They were using innovative assessment strategies and integrating technology in their daily practice while others were not. For example, some teachers were using student portfolios to measure student progress and other teachers were using technology to manage data.

The Maryland Department of Education staff is pleased with the results. One official commented:

Now, the state can make in-depth plans, by working with the principals and incorporating the self-assessment findings into teacher training and curricular changes. Through this self-assessment process and staff input, the state hopes to challenge both principals and teachers to use an ongoing data-driven process for continuous improvement of the summer migrant program. The goal is to encourage educators to scrutinize the effectiveness of their academic programs and demand more of their students and themselves.

This is only one example of how the Region III Comprehensive Center tailors its services to meet client needs. Recognizing the uniqueness of every state, the center tailors its approach to the local context. The center can help clients analyze what parts of the system work well, what might be done differently to enhance current practices, and how to take the next steps. However, the most important thing to keep in mind is that an effective program is highly dependent on an ongoing needs assessment process and continuous planning.

Comprehensive Centers Network: Making a Difference for Children in Schools was collaboratively developed by the national network of the 15 comprehensive centers. Special thanks to the Southwest Comprehensive Center, Region IX: Dr. Susan Hills; and the STAR Center, Region VIII. The STAR Center is a collaboration of the Intercultural Development Research Association, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation.

This work was supported by the United States Department of Education. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily shared by the United States Department of Education.

