

Each edition of *REL Midwest Research Update* offers information on resources available from the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program and from REL Midwest. REL Midwest is one of the 10 RELs funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Under the direction of Matt Dawson, Ph.D., REL Midwest serves the educational needs of Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. A nonpartisan resource, REL Midwest helps educators and policymakers apply scientifically valid research to their decision making.

Our Work

Upcoming Events Focus on School Improvement, Adolescent Literacy, Assessment, and Charter Schools

REL Midwest’s Connecting Research to Practice events provide opportunities for educators to engage with researchers and each other on improving practice and closing achievement gaps. There are no registration fees, and participants must make their own travel arrangements. Event announcements, updates, and registration details are posted on the [REL Midwest website](#). Plan now to attend.

November 30, 2011—Des Plaines, Illinois

Transforming High-Need Schools. In partnership with the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (Chicago Consortium), REL Midwest will host a full-day session for Chicago district and school leaders and other Midwestern urban district leaders on connecting research about transforming high-need schools to practice. This event will engage participants in a conversation about the current climate of school reform in Chicago and the challenges and supports needed when transforming high-need schools; participants will discuss the recommendations provided in the IES Practice Guide *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*. Featured presenters are Marisa de la Torre, associate director of professional development, Chicago Consortium; Elaine Allensworth, Ph.D., senior director and chief research officer, Chicago Consortium; Joan Stamler, Ph.D., vice president for metrics and research, Turnaround for Children; and Scott Dolquist, senior academic advisor, Turnaround for Children.

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December 2, 2011, and December 9, 2011— Webinars, 2:00–3:15 p.m. CT

Findings From Recent Rigorous Adolescent Literacy Studies. REL Midwest, in collaboration with REL Northwest, will offer a two-part webinar series for practitioners involved in the field of adolescent literacy. The goal of the series is to promote awareness of the key findings from recent IES-sponsored randomized controlled trial studies of adolescent literacy programs and to discuss the implications of these studies with practitioners who are responsible for the planning, implementation, or support of adolescent literacy initiatives. Featured are William Corrin, Ph.D., deputy director, K–12 Education Policy Area at MDRC; Vicki Nishioka, Ph.D., senior research associate, Education Northwest; Kathryn Drummond, Ph.D., director, Education Policy Improvement Center; Jim Lindsay, Ph.D., senior researcher, REL Midwest; and Richard Smiley, Ph.D., senior research advisor, Education Northwest.

December 6, 2011—Rosemont, Illinois

Supporting Research-Based Formative Assessment in Schools and Classrooms. This event will provide district teams from the across the region with the opportunity to examine the practice of research-based formative assessment. Featured are Margaret Heritage, assistant director, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, and W. James Popham, Ed.D., professor emeritus, UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

December 8, 2011—Des Moines, Iowa

Competency-Based Education. REL Midwest and the Iowa Department of Education are cohosting this full-day conference designed for Iowa districts committed to developing and implementing competency-based reforms. Participants will examine research on competency-based education, connect with other practitioners implementing competency-based education reforms, and consider how best to evaluate the impact of these practices. Featured is Elizabeth A. Jones, Ph.D., professor of education, Holy Family University, and coauthor of the National Center for Education Statistics report *Defining and Assessing Learning: Exploring Competency-Based Initiatives*.

December 12, 2011—Racine, Wisconsin

Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices. REL Midwest, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and the Great Lakes West Comprehensive Center are cohosting this full-day event designed for Wisconsin principals, literacy specialists, and teachers. Presenters will introduce participants to the IES Practice Guide that focuses on improving adolescent

literacy and provide an overview of recent IES-sponsored randomized controlled trial studies of adolescent literacy programs. Featured are Terry Salinger, Ph.D., managing director and chief scientist for literacy research at American Institutes for Research; Donald Deshler, Ph.D., director of the Kansas University Center for Research on Learning; Jim Lindsay, Ph.D., senior researcher, REL Midwest; and Susan Sepanik, research associate in K–12 education, MDRC.

December 12, 2011—Webinar, 1:00–2:15 p.m. CT

Findings From Recent Rigorous Benchmark Assessment Studies. The overall goal of this event is to promote awareness of the key findings from recent studies sponsored by IES on the use of standardized benchmark assessments and to discuss the implications of these studies with school and district leaders who are responsible for the planning, implementation, or support of benchmark assessments and the training of teachers. Featured are *A Multistate District-Level Cluster Randomized Trial of the Impact of Data-Driven Reform on Reading and Mathematics Achievement*, presented by Geoffrey Borman, Ph.D., professor of education and sociology, University of Wisconsin–Madison; *Measuring How Benchmark Assessments Affect Student Achievement*, presented by Susan Henderson, Ph.D., senior research associate, WestEd; and, pending approval from IES, *Impact of the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)*, a REL Midwest study presented by David Cordray, Ph.D., professor of psychology and human development, Vanderbilt University, and Ayryn Molefe, Ph.D., senior statistician and Chris Brandt, Ph.D., senior researcher, REL Midwest.

December 14, 2011—Webinar, 1:30–3:30 p.m. CT

A Forum on Charter School Research, Practice, and Accountability. Mark Berends, Ph.D., director, National Center on School Choice, will discuss his research on the impact of charter schools on student achievement outcomes and provide an overview of the literature on the same topic nationally. In addition, Dr. Berends will discuss practices and strategies that are associated with high-performing charter schools. Julie Kowal, senior consultant, Public Impact, will present findings from the REL Midwest report *Examining Policy and Guidance in Midwestern States for Converting Low-Achieving Schools to Charter Schools*, which currently is in review. Her presentation will increase participants' awareness of the variety of authorizing policies in place across REL Midwest states.

Cross-REL Webinars Archived Online

On September 13, the Regional Educational Laboratory Rural Working Group presented a 90-minute webinar to more than 200 participants across the country. *Achievement Data and Instructional Decision Making in Rural Schools and Districts* featured Ellen Mandinach, Ph.D., coauthor of

the IES Practice Guide *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making*. Among the panelists who provided their personal experience with implementing the guide's recommendations was Gary DePatis, superintendent of Greenview Community Unit School District 200 in Illinois. REL Northeast & Islands hosted the webinar, which is archived on their [website](#). EdWeek contributor Diette Courrage covered the webinar in her [September 14 blog](#).

Developing Preschool Language and Literacy, an October 25 webinar cohosted by REL Midwest and REL Northeast & Islands, featured Timothy Shanahan, Ph.D., director of the University of Illinois at Chicago Center for Literacy. Dr. Shanahan provided an overview of the research findings from the National Early Literacy Panel's 2008 report [Developing Early Literacy](#) and shared practical recommendations for education leaders and early childhood education practitioners, including those presented on the [Preschool Language and Literacy](#) section of the Doing What Works website. More than 500 people registered for the 90-minute webinar, which is archived on the [REL Northeast & Islands website](#).

Study Focuses on Minnesota Student Science Performance

Policymakers in Minnesota have made assessing and improving student science performance a priority. Results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that although Minnesota's fourth- and eighth-grade students performed better in science than the average student in the same grade nationally, achievement varied across student demographic subgroups. In 2008, Minnesota introduced the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, Series II (MCA-II) science test to assess student progress toward the state's academic science standards. In response to a request from the Minnesota Department of Education, REL Midwest is conducting a study of trends and patterns in science performance by fifth- and eighth-grade Minnesota students. The study addresses the following three research questions:

1. How does student achievement on the 2009–10 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, Series II (MCA-II) science assessment in Grade 5 and Grade 8 differ by student demographic characteristics?
2. How does schoolwide achievement on the 2009–10 MCA-II science assessment in Grade 5 and Grade 8 relate to school characteristics?
3. To what extent do school characteristics explain differences in student achievement on the 2009–10 MCA-II science assessment in Grade 5 and Grade 8, after controlling for the influence of student characteristics?

The study will provide state-specific information to Minnesota on science achievement differences between student subgroups and how much of the variation in student achievement can be explained by differences among students in the same school versus differences between schools. Findings from the study can help inform decisions on efforts to measure and improve science achievement.

The report *Science Performance Trends on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, Series II (MCA-II) for Fifth- and Eighth-Grade Students* is currently in review.

News, Events, and Activities

- How do district-level assessment participation and academic performance for special education students and for all students in Illinois vary by district characteristics? REL Midwest is addressing this question in response to a request from the Illinois state director of special education. Using data from the 2009–10 school year, this technical assistance project examines the average, range, and distribution of district-level standardized state test performance and participation for the state and by region.
- In Ohio, REL Midwest received a request from the National High School Center and the Region 1 State Support Team in work related to on-track indicators and early warning systems for dropout prevention. REL Midwest will assist in applying an on-track indicator with historical data from a school district, using the publicly available early warning data tool from the National High School Center with current-year district data.
- REL Midwest received a request to provide research and analytical support to the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Workgroup and Design Team. REL Midwest support will include helping the Design Team synthesize recommendations into a state educator effectiveness framework. REL Midwest also has provided support to Wisconsin's Accountability Design Team and the Wisconsin Read to Lead Task Force.

Resources to Explore

- The National Research Center on Rural Education Support (NRCRES) has conducted programs of research to help address four important issues in rural education—early literacy, adolescent learning, distance education, and high school aspirations. NRCRES was established with IES funding in 2004 and is based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To learn more about their research, visit the [NRCRES website](#).

- Twitter users can submit questions on rural education to the U.S. Department of Education's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Rural Outreach John White. Use hash tag #EDRuralChat. The Department of Education uses several Twitter accounts in their communications efforts. Follow @usedgov for general news and information.
- New REL reports are available on the [REL website](#). From REL Appalachia, topics include school district superintendent turnover in Kentucky, how career and technical education aligns with the Tennessee job market, and voluntary prekindergarten programs in Tennessee. Academic performance in Title I schools is the focus of a REL West report.
- To find out what rigorous research says about widely used education interventions, visit the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) on [Facebook](#) or at their newly redesigned [website](#).
- Among the many resources available from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) is [A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems](#), a tool to help districts and states build better teacher evaluation systems. For detailed information about and expert panel reviews of real-life teacher evaluation systems, check out the TQ Center's [Teacher Evaluation Models in Practice](#) site.
- The [TQ Center](#) is one of five national content centers in the comprehensive centers program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The other centers are the [Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center](#), the [Center on Instruction](#), the [Center on Innovation & Improvement](#), and the [National High School Center](#). Each center disseminates research-based products in its specialty area.

Contact Us

For more information about any of the items in this newsletter or to discuss ideas for technical assistance with a member of our staff, please contact us by telephone (866-730-6735) or by [e-mail](#). We look forward to hearing from you.

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