

Each edition of *REL Midwest Research Update* offers information on resources available from the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program and from REL Midwest at Learning Point Associates. REL Midwest is one of 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 provides expert advice to help educators and policymakers apply scientifically valid research to their decision making. Learning Point Associates has operated the region's educational laboratory since 1984.

Our Work

REL Midwest Gears Up for Additional Year

The U.S. Department of Education's proposed budget for 2011 includes a one-year extension for all regional educational laboratory contracts. Without the extension, REL Midwest's current contract would end January 31, 2011. "We're excited about the opportunity to continue and expand our service to the region," said REL Midwest Director Matt Dawson. "Instead of just wrapping up current projects, we are planning studies, technical assistance, and events for all of 2011. The additional year also will allow for broader dissemination of the findings from our long-term studies (one on adolescent literacy, the other on formative assessment) that will conclude this year." REL Midwest extends a special thanks to current members of its Board of Directors for agreeing to serve until the end of the contract.

New Commissioner Oversees REL Program

Rebecca Maynard, Ph.D., of the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education (Penn GSE) is the new commissioner of the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), the IES center with responsibility for the Regional Educational Laboratory Program. Currently on leave from her previous position, Dr. Maynard most recently was University Trustee Chair Professor of Education and Social Policy at Penn and director of the university's Predoctoral Training Program in Education Sciences. Until her appointment, Dr. Maynard served on REL Midwest's external technical working group (TWG). The TWG provides REL Midwest with expertise on the design and conduct of long-term rigorous studies.

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REL Board Member Named to IES Advisory Board

Congratulations to REL Midwest board member Adam Gamoran, Ph.D., on his recent U.S. Senate confirmation as a member of the National Board for Education Sciences, which advises IES. A professor of sociology and educational policy studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and director of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, Dr. Gamoran was among four of President Obama's nominees to receive Senate confirmation.

Do You Have Enough Teachers for Core Subjects?

A simple formula can help principals and superintendents calculate a potential undersupply of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in core content areas, an analysis that may be of particular use when implementing new graduation or course requirements.

This spring, REL Midwest hosted a webinar focusing on this method to help Michigan administrators look for potential FTE staffing shortfalls. (Schools anywhere can adjust the variables in the formula to fit their own needs.) The webinar featured Barbara Schneider, Ph.D., of Michigan State University. View the 45-minute webinar archive from the convenience of your computer.

Events Connect Research to Practice

From sessions held in conjunction with larger conferences to stand-alone seminars and webcasts, REL Midwest will continue its series of Connecting Research to Practice events through 2011. The events are designed to provide opportunities for practitioners and policymakers to hear about the most recent research evidence and for educators to engage with researchers and each other on how to improve practice and close the achievement gaps.

Kicking off the summer lineup was *Effective Leadership to Transform Struggling Schools* on June 25. Approximately 100 participants convened at the Bloomington Monroe County Convention Center in Bloomington, Indiana, to review emerging research and discuss recommendations in the IES Practice Guide *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*. REL Midwest and the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at Indiana University cohosted this event that featured keynote presenters Sam Redding, Ed.D., and Eric Camburn, Ph.D.

Dr. Redding, coauthor of the IES Practice Guide, is executive director of the Academic Development Institute and director of the national Center on Innovation & Improvement. Dr. Camburn, a nationally recognized expert on distributed leadership and leadership practices for instructional improvement in struggling schools, is assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and senior researcher at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

Special thanks go to REL Midwest board member Martha McCarthy, Ph.D., chancellor's professor and chair, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Indiana University, for her efforts in the planning and presentation of this event.

In conjunction with the 26th Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning, REL Midwest offered *Online Learning Opportunities for Rural Schools*, a full-day session on August 4 where researchers and practitioners exchanged ideas, research findings, and best-practice information. Featured were experts in rural education and online learning, including Michael Barbour, Ph.D., assistant professor in instructional technology at Wayne State University; Peggy Clements, Ph.D., of REL Northeast and Islands at Education Development Center, Inc.; and Matthew Irvin, Ph.D., research scientist at the National Research Center on Rural Education Support.

On August 11 in Detroit, Michigan, REL Midwest, the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center, and the Michigan Department of Education hosted a one-day statewide summit to provide educators who are participating in the Michigan Superintendent's Dropout Challenge with an overview of research-based supports and interventions for struggling learners. *Increasing Graduation Rates by Creating a System of Supports* featured Nettie Legters, Ph.D., Academy for Educational Development, and Martha Abele Mac Iver, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University, and drew more than 300 participants.

Materials and session presentations from events held since May 2009 are archived online and include such topics as interpreting test scores and gaps, increasing high school rigor, and improving student achievement through expanded learning opportunities. Visit the REL Midwest Events page to preview and register for upcoming events. There are no registration fees. Participants must make their own travel arrangements. For additional information, contact Lisa Shimmel by e-mail or by telephone (312-283-2301). Here is what's ahead:

September 28, 2010—Naperville, Illinois October 5—Columbus, Ohio

Connecting Research About Adolescent Literacy to Practice. This full-day conference is designed to help a regional audience of literacy educators understand the research-based recommendations in the IES Practice Guide *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* and apply those recommendations in their practice.

November 5, 2010—Rosemont, Illinois

Addressing Student Achievement Gaps. This event is part of the Midwest Regional Conference on Closing the Achievement Gap, a conference hosted by the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. Featured is Mark Berends, Ph.D., of the Center for Research on Educational Opportunity at the University of Notre Dame.

News, Events, and Activities

- Demonstrating its ongoing commitment to education research, evaluation, and technical assistance, the American Institutes for Research merged with Learning Point Associates, effective August 1, 2010.
- Building on our work last year with America's Promise Alliance in support of state and city dropout prevention summits, REL Midwest produced *Resources for Dropout and Teen Pregnancy Prevention*. This information brief with data maps that display geographic patterns of education and social data in Ohio was distributed at a Cincinnati youth summit in June.
- REL Midwest is providing support to a collaborative group of 32 Midwest districts called the Midwest Urban Research Network. In development is a project based on existing district data that will assist nine districts in identifying which students are on or off track for graduating from high school.
- In Iowa, REL staff provided technical assistance in connection with the Iowa Department of Education's (the Department) evaluation of its Assessment for Learning professional development program. The Department administered a survey to professional participants in the spring, and REL Midwest will provide assistance in examining the survey data.
- REL Midwest is participating in a Chicago Public Schools (CPS) working group on the development of early warning indicators. CPS has incorporated into their school performance management system the work of the Consortium on Chicago School Research to identify ninth-grade students who are on track for high school graduation. CPS would like to develop similar tracking for students in other grades and develop indicators of students on pace for college and career readiness. REL Midwest is advising the working group on the research base and technical aspects.
- Early college high schools are schools that allow students to take college courses while simultaneously earning a high school diploma. These schools differ from other college enrollment programs, such as dual enrollment programs, which allow high school students to earn college credit while attending high school. In response to a recent policy request regarding whether early college high schools are ever geared toward high-achieving students, REL Midwest prepared a brief that includes an overview of early college high schools and links to organizations that have compiled information on state policies for supporting them.

- REL Midwest assisted the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) in the development of a statewide literacy plan. REL Midwest reviewed state-level literacy plans and assisted with the development of a conceptual plan for MDE and stakeholders.
- For the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, REL Midwest assisted in updating the Wisconsin After-School Continuous Improvement Process (WASCIP). REL Midwest reviewed rubrics and offered suggestions for modifications that would better reflect research-based practices in the field of afterschool support.

For more information on any of these activities, contact Marianne Kroeger by e-mail or by telephone (630-649-6506).

Resources to Explore

- *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide* "seeks to provide educational practitioners with user-friendly tools to distinguish practices supported by rigorous evidence from those that are not." This publication of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (December 2003) includes a checklist to use in determining whether an intervention is backed by rigorous evidence.
- Reports that result from short-term projects of the RELs are published as *Issues & Answers* and *REL Technical Briefs*. To browse and download all REL publications, visit the regional educational laboratory website.
- Resources from the What Works Clearinghouse include Practice Guides on a variety of topics and quick reviews that provide objective assessments of the quality of the research evidence from recently released research papers and reports.
- To learn more about integrating evidence-based practices into classroom instruction, visit the What Works Clearinghouse partner site for Doing What Works.
- Check out the Research to Practice briefs available from Learning Point Associates, which operates REL Midwest. Topics include formative assessment, English language learners, and access to higher education.
- An updated edition of *School Restructuring: What Works When* for school leaders is available from Learning Point Associates. The guide translates research into practical tools designed to support decision making and help leaders of chronically struggling schools choose strategies that result in rapid improvement. Originally created in 2006

under the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement contract and updated in September 2009, this third edition aligns to the School Improvement Grant (SIG) guidelines recently provided by the U.S. Department of Education. All four school intervention models (turnaround, transformation, restart, and school closure) are included in this edition.

- REL Northeast and Islands (REL-NEI) publishes an online digest of popular questions received from their constituents together with responses from their reference desk research team. *What are the effects of standardized testing on instructional practice and student achievement?* Find the answer and browse other topics including data use by teachers, extended learning time, and the impact of homework on student achievement.
- Visit the video and podcast archive of REL Mid-Atlantic's Research to Practice Forums for topics that include encouraging girls in mathematics and science, turning around chronically low-performing schools, and using research to strengthen response to intervention (RTI) decision making and implementation.
- Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the REL Program and sponsored by IES. Ask A REL functions like a technical reference library and provides referrals, references, and region-specific education information. Submit your question today!

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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