got data?

Learning Point Associates can show you how to get the most from your education data to make informed decisions about student learning.

Our Data Retreats have helped thousands of administrators and teacher leaders to:

**build knowledge**
Identify patterns and trends in student data.

**apply strategies**
Use research-based strategies for improved student learning.

**measure results**
Create clear, measurable goals for student achievement.

Build a foundation for school improvement through one of our Data Retreats.

Call 800-252-0283 or visit us at www.learningpt.org.
CONTENTS

Letter From the CEO
Gina Burkhardt reflects on sustaining the momentum of NCREL’s 20 years as a research and development leader. .......................................................... 5

High-Performing Learning Communities
By Michele Fitzpatrick
As a leader in technology integration, pioneer in data-driven decisions, and early developer of literacy interventions, NCREL continues its quality quest. .......................................................... 6

Features

QUALITY TEACHERS: THE REAL CLASSROOM ADVANTAGE .......................................................... 11

THE SUSTAINED IMPROVEMENT FACTOR: DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS
By Rebecca Phillips .......................................................... 14

JOINING HANDS TO REACH ALL LEARNERS .......................................................... 19

Sioux City, Iowa: Charting a Course to Eliminate Achievement Gaps
By Linda Schuch .......................................................... 22

Point of Impact: Developing Solutions That Meet Your Needs
By Sandy Moore .......................................................... 26

Strategic Alliances: Collaborative Efforts of the REL .......................................................... 29
By Linda Schuch

“Going from research to implementation—getting the right information at the right level to the right people...”

—Jeff Miller, NCREL Board President
Nothing marks the passage of time quite like the growth of a child. During the last five years, I have witnessed the metamorphosis of my daughter—from tentative prepubescent to confident adolescent (complete with iPod wiring). Those of you with teenagers know what an experience this can be.

So it has been with the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). These last five years have seen NCREL continue to mature as a trusted and respected research and development (R&D) leader. With the advent of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, we faced new challenges and shifting demands. Our responsiveness to regional and national priorities has demonstrated our strength and agility. Like our teenagers, these struggles have served to help us emerge with a clearer vision of who we are and who we want to become.

NCLB is a challenging priority for educators and policymakers, and NCREL is deeply committed to maintaining the regional infrastructure of support for states as they work to meet NCLB requirements. We understand that as schools strive to achieve adequate yearly progress, they address the very same challenges upon which our R&D work is designed: children who cannot read; adolescents and young adults who struggle to apply reading and writing skills across content areas; underqualified teachers who work in some of the neediest schools; and educators and administrators who lack the access and capacity to use well-organized, high-quality data to inform their decisions.

As part of the national R&D infrastructure, we take seriously the charge to show a credible return on the investment of federal funding, especially in view of diminishing research and development dollars available at the state level each year. Without exemplary R&D, states cannot continue to identify, develop, sustain, and replicate brilliant teaching and learning in our nation’s classrooms.

Our regional educational laboratory contract and scope of work hinges on building high-performing learning communities and closing the achievement gaps. With some 25,000 public and private schools in the region, NCREL has labored on behalf of nearly 20 percent of the country’s students and teachers for more than 20 years. But we have not been working alone.

The strategic alliances we have built and maintained have been integral to our efforts to offer educators the very best. Supported by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education, guided by a strong Board of Directors, and propelled by a talented staff, NCREL has a solid track record working with state education agencies; intermediate service providers; urban, rural, and suburban districts and schools; professional organizations; other regional educational laboratories; business leaders; and policymakers.

As I struggle to keep up with my daughter’s rapid strides toward adulthood, I am reminded that each small step of her childhood was an important one and each achievement she masters is cause for celebration. Learning Point Associates and NCREL are grateful to have earned your trust. We look forward to working with you in the years ahead, ensuring that no child is left behind and celebrating each forward stride together.

Gina Burkhardt

In this issue, we showcase some of the best work from our last five years. We address the complex issue of teacher quality; the dramatic potential of data to drive effective improvements; the powerful impact of authentic local, regional, and national partnerships; and the success story of one Iowa school district engaged in systemwide reform.

In December, we will have fulfilled the contractual obligation to serve as the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and supported your efforts in the Midwest to improve student achievement. Across the nation, the bottom line is that all states benefit from this type of targeted federal initiative. States can then invest their resources in building upon the core knowledge that emerges from such an initiative to help push the frontiers for improved public schooling.
QUALITY QUEST

High-Performing Learning Communities

By Michele Fitzpatrick

The Learning Point Associates quest to help educators establish high-performing learning communities and close achievement gaps builds both on its expertise in literacy, technology, and data-driven decision making and on a more than 20-year commitment to developing quality systems that work for all learners.

Welcoming the challenges of the 21st century, Learning Point Associates has rededicated itself to this quality quest, recognizing the pivotal role of each highly qualified teacher, the importance of using technology well to make decisions based on relevant data, and the power of authentic partnerships to realize sustained student achievement.
When the new millennium dawned five years ago, NCREL began its 16th year sharing the hope with educators nationwide that the time was now to prepare all students for learning success. In fact, it already had been on that quest and welcomed the challenge. Its reputation was established as a credible and valued resource that linked educational research, policy, and practice in circumstances both long-term and intensive, and short-term with a rapid response. School improvement in the 21st century requires both types of timelines be met.

In 2000, NCLB was neither law nor a household phrase, but NCREL already was deeply involved in relevant initiatives such as Project REAL (Rural Education Aligned for Learning). This intervention was designed for mathematics students in rural Ohio and ultimately resulted in moving six districts off emergency-watch status in that state. Within weeks of NCLB’s passage in 2001, NCREL debuted the online resource Ahead of the Curve: Emerging Policy Issues to help educators quickly learn more about the law and its impact on their school, district, and state.

Building on its determination to be the primary source for research-based services and information that responds to regional needs, NCREL focused and leveraged its core expertise in technology, data-driven decision making, and literacy during the past five years to do two things that regional needs assessments confirmed were critical: help educators transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities and narrow gaps in student achievement.

**Technology Integration Leader**

Even five years ago, technology integration in many schools hadn’t progressed far beyond the purchase of computers. NCREL, however, had been studying technology for more than a decade when it identified in 2000 the importance of preparing all students to achieve in a high-technology society as well as the need to ground all instruction in a research-based model.

In 1990, NCREL understood technology’s potential to reach a greater number and wider diversity of learners and worked with the Public Broadcasting System on staff-development videos delivered to state educators via satellite. It also delivered telecommunications support in a program to improve reading instruction in 17 rural Wisconsin districts. It established a reputation as “the technology lab” among the regional laboratory network.

Not only did NCREL use technology as a dissemination medium before many others in the field, it studied its educational applications extensively and in 1995, published its seminal work, Plugging In: Choosing and Using Educational Technology, with the Council for Educational Development and Research.

In 2001, the Center for Technology at NCREL launched an online newsletter to deliver news of educational technology developments that schools and districts could use immediately. Published twice each year, Educational Technology News provides readers a ringside seat at events hosted by NCREL: summaries, proceedings reports, syntheses, and webcast updates.
The need for technology integration guidance accelerated after the passage of NCLB, when educators began to face the challenge of ensuring students are technologically literate. What it means to be technologically literate was still being debated and refined by educators in 2003 when NCREL published *Literacy in the Digital Age*. In layman’s terms, the guide mapped the meaning of Digital-Age literacy within the context of 21st century skill development.

Data-Driven Decision-Making Pioneer

As its current, five-year contract with the U.S. Department of Education began, NCREL was among the pioneers that recognized while good improvement choices should be based on relevant data, most educators had not been trained to gather, analyze, and implement actual “data-driven” decisions.

In its work to build the capacity of educators to use data effectively, NCREL worked on both small and large initiatives. In 2000, this meant working with a local university to help a struggling school in central Illinois rethink its mathematics instruction to see how data might effect a positive change. Here, the project’s goal aligned with the starting point of the school: simply introduce the task of gathering data, view it graphically to observe patterns, and continue to share the data integrated into instruction.

Applying the power of data to the multifaceted issue of achievement gaps remains a major undertaking.

which broadly includes a range of “literacies” as well as inventive thinking, effective communication, and high productivity— the hallmarks of this century’s successful students and teachers.

In 2004, work began on a series of assessments and professional development modules to determine the level of technology integration by both students and teachers. Launched in 2005 as TechPOINT™, these products can help educators meet the NCLB requirement that all students be technologically literate by the end of eighth grade.
Applying the power of data to the multifaceted issue of achievement gaps remains a major undertaking. In 2001, NCREL embarked on a long-term project collecting and organizing the types of data states use to test student performance in key content areas and across grade levels. Later that year, a report was released in direct response to a request from the chief state school officers in the Midwest. A Review of State-Mandated and Supplemental Testing in the Midwest paved the way for NCREL to build a profile of the types of assessment conducted in states to compare student performance by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Subsequent launch of the Closing the Achievement Gaps website in 2002 provided data-rich information when educators needed it most — on the heels of NCLB’s passage.

Additionally, four research studies on achievement gaps in schools that were completed in 2003 reflect both NCREL’s commitment to equity issues and its capacity for broadening research perspectives: a comparative study between schools in the San Francisco area; a study of gaps in rural Michigan; evaluation of a literacy program for high school students of color and low income in suburban Chicago; and a study of higher education programs that support minority and low-income students.

**Literacy Intervention Specialist**

Many of our country’s poorest readers and writers are members of minority groups and/or those living in high poverty, and NCREL’s literacy experts responded to the clear need to improve reading instruction in recent years by developing resources and working in schools.

In 2000, requests for information on improving reading programs in the region led to development of a Pathways to School Improvement Critical Issue, “Monitoring the School Literacy Program.” It examined the characteristics of literacy-rich classrooms. It included data analysis and identified significant external factors that affect student literacy achievement, presaging much of the direction that research on this subject has taken.

The next year, a follow-up Critical Issue, “Using Technology to Enhance Literacy Instruction,” took a look at the pros and cons of a burgeoning field of reading options made available by technology: audiobooks, electronic books (e-books), talking books, and software-programmed reading instruction.

NCREL’s overall work in literacy has been a natural progression, building on early contributions about effective processes to teach reading and writing; and now moving toward deeper issues that impact those processes. Such issues include data gathering and observation of the specific components of a literacy program as it unfolds in the classroom. In this way, appropriate interventions that can make a difference in the context of the struggling student can be implemented.

Recognizing that few resources address the needs of struggling adolescent readers, NCREL this year introduced the Adolescent Literacy website (www.ncrel.org/litweb/), which was recognized almost immediately by the International Reading Association in Washington, D.C., as a “comprehensive compilation of information, innovative approaches, and research.”

In addition to information on adolescent literacy legislation, successful reading practices and school leadership programs, visitors can access print and online resources, bibliographies, and immediately useful tools such as A Conceptual Model of Adolescent Literacy.
Working Together

It is the meeting of policy and research with reality that uniquely defines NC REL, whose work is conducted within Learning Point Associates. This includes seeking counsel of those who are policy-makers, those who research, and those who teach. NC REL’s Teacher Advisory Council, for instance, lends the voice of the classroom to project development.

Council member Alan D. Stauffacher, social studies chairman at Monroe High School in Monroe, Wisconsin, says Learning Point Associates is a respected organization because of the support and research it provides. “But, I have concluded that much of its fine reputation is based upon both pragmatism and a positive attitude,” he says, adding that Learning Point Associates offers messages and ideas “which can actually be used, not esoteric ideas of only marginal value.” Learning Point Associates takes every opportunity, Stauffacher says, “to illustrate how things can improve, how difficult situations can be managed and how educators who are in schools every day can help their students succeed.”

Learning Point Associates and NC REL will continue to be a resource for all education stakeholders and work directly with practitioners, policymakers, and funders. By continuing to listen to educators and find solutions for their needs, Learning Point Associates believes the quest to build high-performing learning communities is absolutely achievable—working together. ■
Quality Teachers: The REAL Classroom Advantage

NCLB mandates that every classroom be led by a highly qualified teacher. Such is not the case in many schools across the nation.

It used to be that a teaching certificate and appropriate professional development were all that was needed to demonstrate and vouch for a teacher’s qualifications. But this outdated and complacent way of thinking is not good enough in today’s classrooms as both educators and parents have come to expect—and even insist upon—no less than excellence when it comes to teaching quality.

Of all the challenges facing educators and administrators in the effort to improve student learning, the placement and sustained presence of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom could be the deciding factor in realizing the achievement of all students. Closing the teacher-quality gap means closing the achievement gaps. Teachers and principals recognize that it does make a difference, NCLB expects it, and Learning Point Associates has long worked to conduct research and develop resources that acknowledge this key to the success of all students: teacher quality.

To help the most struggling learners, teachers must first be helped to hone their craft and feel supported in schools where they are needed most and where they can make the greatest impact. NCREL’s foundation of teacher quality research, policy, and practice addresses the need for highly qualified teachers indicated by NCLB. The highly qualified teacher is the edge—indeed, the requisite that is necessary for all students to achieve.
“Given the widely accepted and conclusive research base confirming that the quality of the teacher has the greatest impact on an individual student’s learning,” says Sabrina Laine, policy expert at Learning Point Associates, “we developed and partnered to create resources to make that impact obvious to policymakers.”

Professional Development

Recognizing that the teacher is the real classroom advantage, NCREL began its teacher quality work prior to the passage of NCLB. That early work evolved from research in the Midwest and resulted in the Professional Development website (www.ncrel.org/info/pd/), which houses a full range of information to help districts and states make professional development a foundation for student learning. The site also explores sustained opportunities for development and growth for all teachers in an effort to not only foster lifelong learning in students but also within the profession.

Learning Point Associates also has worked extensively to provide Lesson Study workshops to educators who would better their teaching of lesson plans based on how their students learn. Lesson Study is a professional development process first utilized in Japan whereby educators collaborate to plan, observe, and refine a lesson. Educators in Michigan employed the technique to collectively improve their teaching practice and the achievement of their students in mathematics.

“It was a very affirming process,” says Vicki Vorus, a seventh-grade mathematics teacher in the Detroit Public Schools, and an Outstanding Educator of the Year in 2003 and 2004 for southeastern Michigan. “When I first heard about Lesson Study ... I wondered if it was just another great idea that wouldn’t translate into my world in Detroit Public Schools. But it did.... The lesson represented the team’s collective work. The team’s voice became the lesson and the lesson became the team’s voice.”

Through focused development for sustained improvement of new and veteran teachers, all teachers can have the opportunity to become highly qualified and each classroom will have the advantage it needs to bring student achievement to new levels.

Online Resources

In response to NCLB mandates on highly qualified teaching, the Learning Point Associates teacher research available at no cost). That meant not only exploring professional development but also examining teacher certification and preparation, retention and recruitment, and teacher mobility.

In 2004, Learning Point Associates launched the Teaching Quality (TQ) Source website (www.tqsource.org) in collaboration with the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and ETS as part of its National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools. Spawned from its Midwestern research on teaching quality, TQ Source looks to assist policymakers and educators with teaching quality policy, data, and resources in all 50 states. This culmination of research, partnership, and field work offers comprehensive assistance and data on making a difference in the learning of every student through the application, development, and support of the highly qualified teacher.

“NCREL’s early work in supply and demand led to the development of the TQ Source,” says Dr. Laine. “(It) was intended to provide a one-stop shop for decision-makers on information and resources related to teacher quality issues ranging from teacher preparation to recruitment to retention to certification and licensure.”

Learning Point Associates has fashioned a foundation of research and supportive services for educators and administrators and has erected a framework for policymakers to shape and guide legislation. More than any other factor, the highly qualified teacher can be the key to all learners succeeding. With this key in hand, schools and districts can now open the doorway through which all learners may pass toward achieving their full potential.
The following resources reflect the Learning Point Associates commitment to teacher quality, with a range of topics that include teacher certification, retention and recruitment, professional development, mobility, and teaching quality:

**Teacher Professional Development**

**Professional Development Website**

[www.ncrel.org/info/pd/](http://www.ncrel.org/info/pd/)

NCREL's comprehensive Web resource on teacher professional development includes a full range of information to help schools and districts use professional development as a foundation for student learning as well as links to NCREL's Professional Development: Learning From the Best toolkit and NCREL's Technology Professional Development website.

**Teacher Certification**

“The Impact of Alternative Certification in the Midwest”

Policy Issues No. 12

[www.ncrel.org/quality/cert.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/quality/cert.htm)

Focusing on alternative teacher certification in the Midwest, this edition of Policy Issues provides a brief literature review and the results of an analysis of a Schools and Staffing Survey. Midwestern alternative certification programs are reviewed and include the results of more than 1,000 principals in regards to their experiences with alternatively certified teachers.

**Teacher Mobility**

**Teacher Turnover in the Midwest: Who Stays, Leaves, and Moves? and Interactive Data Tool**

[www.ncrel.org/quality/mobility/mobile.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/quality/mobility/mobile.htm)

This study explored the number of teachers who left public school districts in four Midwestern states during their first five years of teaching. The study also surveyed five-year veteran teachers to investigate the factors that contribute to retaining teachers in the profession.

**Teacher Quality**

“Understanding the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Teacher Quality”


Quick Key No. 6 offers assistance with understanding the NCLB mandates for teacher quality, paraprofessional quality, options for meeting requirements, and answers to other questions about NCLB.

“Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act: Teacher Quality Improves Student Achievement”


Quick Key 8 Action Guide offers assistance in implementing NCLB’s mandates for teacher quality and includes action steps and guidelines.

**Teacher Retention and Recruitment**

**Effective Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies in the Midwest: Who is Making Use of Them?**

[www.ncrel.org/quality/randr.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/quality/randr.htm)

Policymakers face tough decisions about how best to attract and keep good teachers. This resource includes information on which strategies Midwestern states adopted and how effective those strategies have been at recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers.

**National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools**

**Qualified Teachers for At-Risk Schools: A National Imperative (2005)**

[www.ncrel.org/quality/partnership.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/quality/partnership.htm)

The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (a collaboration between ECS, ETS, and Learning Point Associates, with additional funding from the Joyce Foundation) has developed this inaugural report in response to the urgent need to recruit and retain quality teachers in at-risk, hard-to-staff schools.
The SUSTAINED IMPROVEMENT FACTOR: Data-Driven Decisions

By Rebecca Phillips

Constructing a high-performing learning community requires effective and informed decisions made by those educators who are its master builders. In their hands, data can be a powerful tool, particularly in an era characterized by the explosion of information, the expansion of accountability, and the persistence of gaps in student achievement.

Yet, educators are challenged to acquire the right analytic skills so they can fully utilize the potential of data. Understanding the challenge, NCREL has responded not only by developing tools that are useful but also with training to make them effective in educators’ hands.

In just the past five years, NCREL has enabled educators to be effective users of technology; meet the NCLB reporting requirements for technology literacy and integration; develop evidence-based, ongoing school improvement plans; collect feedback from stakeholders about the educational environment; and implement curriculum that compares to top-achieving nations and aligns with state standards.

Through it all, educators armed with these important data have been the drivers to effective school improvement.

The 1999 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provides overwhelming evidence that the topics in U.S. mathematics and science curricula are too numerous and often reflected outdated thinking.

NCREL releases the Curriculum Mapping website in response to the 1999 TIMSS to provide educators the ability to analyze and compare their mathematics and science curriculum to that of top-achieving nations.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) releases the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) to enable the development of national standards for educational uses of technology that facilitate school improvement.
Data Drive Effective Technology Use

Policymakers, educators, and administrators are increasingly being asked about the impact that educational technology has on student achievement and whether technology investments are realizing a return. In 2000, Learning Point Associates launched enGauge to help answer those questions and provide schools and districts with the ability to gauge their progress toward technology goals and develop a plan to prepare students to thrive in the 21st century.

enGauge, a Web-based set of surveys that provide a comprehensive view of factors that strongly influence the effectiveness of educational technology, has been completed by nearly 300,000 people representing more than 6,400 schools.

When Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District in Wisconsin analyzed survey data from 1,200 individuals, several things became apparent. Even though technology was readily available in the school district, the students were not likely to benefit from the district’s investment without meaningful professional development opportunities for teachers. As a result, the district sharpened its focus on training for teachers, which allowed it to expand its capacity to teach with technology.

The enGauge framework has been under continual development to increase its usability and effectiveness, as determined by field testing and feedback. Content has been customized for specific states; a policy framework has been developed that aligns enGauge with NCLB; stakeholder surveys have been changed to reflect recent research; and dozens of resources and success stories have been added.

TechPOINT™ Proficiency Assessments, Surveys, and Professional Development evolved out of the successful history of the enGauge framework in 2005. Created specifically to help schools meet the reporting requirements for technology literacy and integration set forth in NCLB—for all students to be technologically literate by the eighth grade—TechPOINT combines student knowledge with teacher knowledge and attitudes to better understand the technology environment in which they work.

TechPOINT is based on the latest research about factors that impact student technology literacy and teacher technology integration, and measures a school or district’s progress on technology goals. TechPOINT consists of a series of assessments and surveys aligned with the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) from the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). The assessments, designed for students in Grades 5 and 8, can help determine the technology-literacy levels of those students.

“We are in the age of standards,” says Sue Cooper of Park View Elementary School in Morton Grove, Illinois. “Our school is in the process of aligning everything to standards and that includes technology. The TechPOINT Proficiency Assessments helped us to see where our students are meeting the mark and where they need improvement.”

Scores from these instruments can be used to determine the level of technology integration in the school (see TechPOINT Results) and are the basis for the final step in the process: the delivery of TechPOINT Professional Development to teachers to arm them with the information they need to use technology effectively in their classrooms.

TechPOINT Results

TechPOINT provides the information that districts and schools need to determine if their technology investments are paying off. Using TechPOINT Proficiency Assessments and Surveys, administrators will be able to do the following:

Create customizable reports that allow for aggregation across a school, a district, a region, or a state.

Compare results of districts with multiple buildings.

Create customizable reports that allow for disaggregating by various demographic categories, including gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Develop a baseline for judging the return on investment of technology-related expenditures.

Match teachers to appropriate professional development so they obtain the most out of their professional development experience, and the school realizes the most out of its professional development budget.
Data Drive Improvement Planning

Ralph Grimm, former superintendent in Canton, Illinois, was challenged to pinpoint specific causes for low achievement that made determining how to raise student achievement a daunting, if not impossible, task. It wasn’t that he didn’t have the data he needed—he had mounds of data. Unfortunately, they were not organized to be used in connection with their school or district improvement plans.

In 2001, the district held an NCREL Data Retreat to learn how to collect, examine, and utilize the data to make informed decisions. Since then, two elementary schools in the district received a blue ribbon award from a national NCLB recognition program and a middle school was nominated for the Horizon Schools: School to Watch award. Grimm says he believes the Data Retreat helped lead the district toward these awards because it can now connect school and district improvement goals directly to data and trend information.

A Data Retreat is a 2½-day workshop that begins with a half-day planning meeting to help leadership teams determine which data to collect and bring to the workshop. The remaining two days are dedicated to analyzing school and district data and establishing focused improvement goals based on evidence uncovered by the data. Following a successful Data Retreat, schools and districts are equipped with a meaningful school improvement plan based upon information already gathered from their students.

Four types of school and district data are used during a Data Retreat workshop—student achievement data, demographic data, program data, and perception data. As patterns are studied and the hypotheses are discussed, goals for improvement emerge (see Figure 1). The school leadership team creates clear, measurable, attainable goals for improvement based on concrete findings from these data.

The first Data Retreat was held in 1999 in northeast Wisconsin.

Within one year, Data Retreats were being held throughout the state. In addition to empowering educators around their school’s data, it became obvious that Data Retreats provide the very best professional development for the district and school administrators, program directors, teachers, and others who are involved.

The Data Retreat process also can provide valuable training toward the following three of the five core propositions of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards:

- **Proposition 3:** “Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.”
- **Proposition 4:** “Teachers think systemically about their practice and learn from experience.”
- **Proposition 5:** “Teachers are members of learning communities.”

NCREL staff had recommended that a Data Retreat should not be a single event but rather an annual process that takes unique direction each year based on the data analyzed.

![Figure 1. Data Uses](image-url)

**Figure 1. Data Uses**

1. Evaluate attainment of goals
2. Define problems and goals
3. Select and implement strategies
4. Develop hypotheses
5. Schools and communities use data to...
and the dynamics of the team. To further empower education leaders to engage in ongoing data study and team collaboration, Learning Point Associates began offering Data Retreat Facilitator Training in 2002. The Facilitator Training program provides detailed instructions for leading teams through a Data Retreat. Prospective facilitators can become trained and licensed to deliver Data Retreats to educators in their region and/or to deliver the Data Retreats to several school teams within the region.

Also driving school improvement planning is the Characteristics of Successful Schools (CSS) survey website that allows for the easy collection and analysis of perception data. Launched in 2004 by Learning Point Associates in collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, CSS uses online surveys to gather responses from educators, parents, students, and community members about their perception of the school’s strengths and areas needing improvement.

The CSS site is made up of eight individual surveys: one overview survey and one survey for each of seven characteristics that can be attributed to successful schools—vision; leadership; high academic standards; standards of the heart; family, school, and community partnerships; professional development; and evidence of success. Schools may choose to ask respondents to complete an overview survey and any one or more of the complete characteristics surveys, depending on specific needs.

Figure 2 shows the first five questions that comprise the “High Academic Standards” survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Academic standards align with state and national standards.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Standards are the foundation for curriculum and instruction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Modifications are made to help special-needs students reach the standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Staff demonstrate high expectations for all students in instruction, course content, and advising.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Teachers are competent in and use a variety of teaching strategies that meet the needs of all students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developed in collaboration with Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) National Research Center at Michigan State University, it allows educators to compare the breadth of their curriculum to that of top-achieving nations.

In addition to the online mapping capability, the Mathematics and Science Curriculum Mapping workbooks (a paper-and-pencil tool modeled after the website) were disseminated in early 2001, and to date, an estimated 3,900 districts have used either the online tool or workbook to make meaningful choices about the value of their curriculum.

Using the curriculum mapping approach, many educators have found that their district’s breadth of curriculum (number of topics

### Data Drive Instructional Improvement

NCREL’s Curriculum Mapping website, originally launched in November 2000, was designed to help school districts map out new mathematics and science curriculum.

NCREL's Surveys of Enacted Curriculum provide schools and districts the ability to visually compare their enacted curriculum to state standards to ensure consistency with state standards and NCLB targets.

The U.S. Department of Education created the Evaluating State Educational Technology Programs.
covered in a given school year) is too expansive in comparison to top-achieving nations. With only so many instruction hours available, they find the duration given for each topic is limited and does not allow for the depth of coverage needed for students to fully understand the topic.

When NCREL administered a survey about the functionality, usefulness, and value of Curriculum Mapping within months of its 2000 launch, the most resounding recommendation was to expand it from K–8 to include Grades 9–12. NCREL launched curriculum-mapping capability for Grades 9–12 in 2003 and published updated versions of the workbooks.

The next step in NCREL’s work to help educators compare their curriculum to that of top-achieving nations provided a solid foundation for the development of its complementary resource, the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum.

NCREL launched SEC in 2003 in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Unlike basic curriculum-mapping tools, SEC provides a process for measuring what is being taught to students, how it is being taught, and what students are expected to know and be able to do. SEC is available for K–12 English language arts and reading, mathematics, and science.

Once survey data are collected, a comparison of current learning practices to state standards are presented visually (see Figure 3) so modifications can be made to ensure consistency with state standards and NCLB targets. For example, Figure 3 shows that the curriculum for eighth-grade mathematics utilized at this school allows for the same amount of instruction time for all seven subject areas. However, state standards require eighth-grade students to be able to perform a much stronger understanding of algebraic concepts than measurement or instructional technology.

Recently, Learning Point Associates added an SEC professional development component to help educators analyze and interpret data as well as identify solutions to address misalignment. This tailored professional development helps explain the details on the graphs and charts and lead to the discussions that need to occur at the teacher, grade, building, and district levels as a result of these findings.

Education and time have at least one thing in common—neither will stand still. Curriculum and standards will be enhanced; technology will continue to evolve; the way teachers teach and student learn will change; and schools will need to take a comprehensive approach with school improvement efforts. Types of data and the way they are collected and analyzed will change as well. But the concept of using data as a way for educators to make good choices about school improvement and student achievement will remain constant. As educators look to the future, they will find that Learning Point Associates is already there.

NCREL launches TechPOINT to help schools meet the reporting requirements of NCLB and measure their progress toward meeting technology goals that are aligned to the ISTE NETS.

U.S. Department of Education releases a national Education Technology Plan, which recommends action steps for states and includes the views of more than 200,000 students in 50 states.
Joining Hands to Reach All Learners

Today’s educational challenges are many. Closing achievement gaps. Fostering quality afterschool programming. Improving literacy levels for all adolescents. Assessing technology literacy proficiency. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers in at-risk schools. But these challenges are not for educators alone—

they are challenges to all who can empower students, teachers, administrators, and parents to make informed decisions that produce sustained student achievement and school improvement. They are challenges to a future that is supportive of all learners. And they are the basis for Learning Point Associates partnerships for success.

Learning Point Associates understands that working together offers the best hope of impacting that future and has actively joined forces with partners to realize and sustain improvement. Whether your school is down the block or a state away, Learning Point Associates and its partners envision the potential for your success and have been there with research-based solutions along the way.

Closing Achievement Gaps

Five years ago, Learning Point Associates and the national Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN at www.msanetwork.org) recognized something in common. Both wanted to narrow achievement gaps and wanted to learn how instructional decisions based on data might narrow gaps in student achievement. MSAN’s alliance of 24 multiracial, urban, and suburban school districts nationwide traditionally served high-performing students and schools with the resources, qualified teachers, and community involvement needed for success. However, achievement gaps still existed within its districts. The partnership with MSAN sought to implement programs and strategies targeted at confronting gaps based on race.
“We (MSAN) preceded the No Child Left Behind requirement for disaggregated data by a number of years,” says Allan Alson, Ed.D., founder and Governing Board president of MSAN and superintendent of Evanston (Illinois) Township High School District 202. “One of our greatest hopes at the time we formed was that we could help push the achievement gaps to the front of the national educational agenda.”

Understanding that gathering significant and diverse data was critical to their joint mission, NCREL collected large streams of data from MSAN as well as from rural districts in Wisconsin and a number of public schools in Detroit. This ongoing work now informs analyses of achievement gaps, particularly with respect to student race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Fostering Quality Afterschool Programming

A transition from federal to state administration funding opened an opportunity to assist educators at the state level. After the passage of NCLB, competitions and grants for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program began to be administered at the state level by state education agencies (SEAs). Prior to NCLB, those dollars had been administered at the federal level. With the transition to the state level, competitions were opened to more applicants, including local education agencies and community and faith-based organizations.

In 2003, Learning Point Associates began working with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) in the U.S. Department of Education (ED) as well as with SEAs to aid with this transition and assist in providing quality afterschool programming.

Learning Point Associates now works with OESE and 53 SEAs, serving as the liaison between SEAs, federal policymakers, and grantees. This work has resulted in the 21st CCLC Profile and Performance Information Collection System, an online data collection system and searchable website for grantees (www2.learningpt.org/ppics/public.asp).

“In an effort to provide a more comprehensive resource for grantees and applicants and to ensure quality afterschool programming, we anticipate providing an additional portal of tools and information on ED’s website (www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html) by the end of 2005,” says Carol McElvain, senior program associate for the Learning Point Associates afterschool initiative.

Improving Literacy Levels for All Adolescents

Literacy skills aren’t just about reading, writing, and spelling. Literacy skills can be applied across curricula for engaging learners in mathematics, science, and social studies. One of the newest partnerships at Learning Point Associates, the National Adolescent Literacy Coalition (NALC) is a collaboration among the International Reading Association, the National Council for Teachers of English, the National Middle School Association, the National Governor’s Association, and several others.

NALC was created in 2004 to support adolescents who struggle with literacy and to improve the literacy levels of all adolescents. The partnership will work in the coming years to provide information on best practices to support striving learners; recommend policy that addresses adolescent literacy programs, initiatives, and legislation; create a national clearinghouse of information on best practices; and propose a national research agenda.

NCREL’s work in the Midwest with teachers, districts, and states has shown a burgeoning need for a national strategy to provide teaching practices, research, policy, and awareness on adolescent literacy challenges and opportunities. For more information about NCREL’s adolescent literacy work, please visit www.ncrel.org/litweb/adolescent/.

Assessing Proficiency in Technology Literacy

How do schools ensure their students are technologically literate? Under the tenets of NCLB and the subsequent accountability it mandated, educators struggled to define and assess technology literacy proficiency. The widespread application of the International Society for Technology in Education’s (ISTE) National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for teachers, administrators, and students took a major step in helping schools meet the requirements of Title II, Part D of NCLB (requiring technology proficiency beginning in 2006 of all students by the end of eighth grade).
Learning Point Associates is taking the next step to provide assessments of these standards so that districts can implement and support core curriculum areas with educational technology. In 2004, Learning Point Associates began working in collaboration with the experts from the ISTE NETS project team and ISTE’s executive board to develop rubrics for the assessment of technology literacy for students in fifth and eighth grades and their teachers.

Known as TechPOINT™ (www.techpt.org), this suite of products includes proficiency assessments, surveys, and professional development modules to help teachers better integrate technology into their classrooms and help improve student learning.

Highly Qualified Teachers in At-Risk Schools

NCLB also mandates that every classroom be led by a highly qualified teacher. This is not the case in many schools across the nation. With classrooms led by teachers with temporary or emergency certification, little teaching experience, or a lack of content expertise in the field in which they teach, this dilemma is especially true in the nation’s most at-risk schools—those with a high proportion of minority and low-income students, poor student achievement, and, in the case of high schools, lower graduation rates.

To address this issue, the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools was formed in early 2005, a collaboration of Learning Point Associates, Education Commission of the States (ECS), and ETS, with additional funding from the Joyce Foundation. Its purpose is to raise awareness and knowledge of the issue and recommend strategies for pairing highly qualified teachers with the poorest, lowest performing student populations.

“Educators are very concerned about this [teacher quality] issue and are becoming more so day by day, but the public isn’t there yet,” says Sabrina Laine, Ph.D., senior advisor to the CEO and leader of the teacher quality team at Learning Point Associates. “If the public isn’t demanding the best teachers for their kids—especially in at-risk communities—the policymakers aren’t going to take up the cause either.”

As part of the National Partnership, Learning Point Associates conducted a study last spring asking teachers what it takes to get high-quality educators into schools with students who need them most. The results of this study and the inaugural report of the National Partnership are available at www.ncrel.org/quality/partnership.htm.

Partners for Success

Demonstrative of a tradition of research, policy, and practice, the work of these partnerships has evolved and grown alongside and in response to legislation, regional needs, and trends in education. As an organization, Learning Point Associates has been shaped by the multitude of teachers, researchers, policy analysts, administrators, technology coordinators, and other nonprofits that have worked hand-in-hand with its experts, sharing struggles and successes to make a difference in education for all learners.
SCHOOL ON THE RISE: SIOUX CITY, IOWA

Charting a Course to Eliminate Achievement Gaps

By Linda Schuch

Impressive results in this Iowa district provide just one example of NCREL’s service to urban, rural, and suburban schools over the years as they work to close achievement gaps and build high-performing school communities. In a district that holds high expectations for raising the achievement of its diverse student population, ongoing data analysis and exceptional professional development are critical steps in its plan to close the gaps.

“All the kids belong to everyone—that’s what pleases me,” Principal Linda Northcutt says proudly as she discusses how classroom teachers at Hunt Elementary School are viewing their students in new ways and doing things differently to raise student achievement. “We are developing a culture of collaboration and inquiry, and our teachers are learning to be very purposeful and efficient in their instruction.”

Located in Sioux City, Iowa, Hunt Elementary represents the systemic change under way throughout the district, where closing achievement gaps is a high priority. The Sioux City Community School District has established ambitious goals for everyone, low- and high-achieving students alike. And to reach those goals, the district is implementing new strategies developed by innovative education and community leaders, with guidance and support from Learning Point Associates.

The Backdrop

As the fourth largest school district in the state, Sioux City’s student population is very diverse, consisting of nearly 4 percent Asian American, 6 percent African American, almost 64 percent European American, 20 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent Native American. The K–12 district serves more than 14,000 students in 30 attendance centers.

With those demographics in mind, Iowa Governor Thomas Vilsack requested that Sioux City form a task force to study and offer advice for reducing, and ultimately eliminating, achievement gaps in its schools. He asked that task force members represent a cross-section of the community in order to hear from everyone who might be affected by its findings and recommendations.

With Superintendent Larry Williams and former board member and Area Education Agency Consultant Flora Lee as cochairs, the Sioux City Achievement Gap Task Force was formed. The 21-member group comprised diverse representatives from the district and community as well as six minority high school students.

At the first task force meeting, convened by Vilsack in May 2003, the student members were invited to speak about their experiences as minorities in Sioux City schools. Among their issues, the students discussed the pace of classwork, their hesitation about asking questions in class and taking risks in front of their peers, and not speaking English as well as they would like. Assistant
Superintendent Linda Madison, Ed.D., a member of the task force, indicated that the meeting was an important beginning and that “the students gave us a good realization about the situations they face.”

The following month, the task force met with Judy Stewart, Ph.D., of Learning Point Associates, to tap into her achievement gap expertise and learn about efforts to close the gaps. Dr. Madison marked this as another significant step in the work of the task force, noting that Dr. Stewart brought to the group an outside, unbiased perspective, which complemented and broadened the local perspectives. “You can’t think of ideas you haven’t heard of,” said Dr. Madison, who also acknowledged that any group can have certain blind spots.

Dr. Stewart recalled that during her first meeting with the task force, she presented a general summary of research on achievement gaps and an overview of effective practices for addressing gaps. “We looked at stories of success in communities similar to Sioux City,” said Dr. Stewart. The need for analysis of school data also was noted, and work began.

During the next nine months, the task force continued to work—with Dr. Stewart and independently—and much was accomplished. The work included:

- Data analysis to identify critical gaps in academic achievement.
- Knowledge building to identify relevant research and best practices.
- Goal setting to determine priority areas for investment, short- and long-term goals, and key indicators of success (see Comprehensive Strategies for Achieving a Comprehensive Goal).
- Consensus building to ensure broad input and support from the school community for a comprehensive plan to close achievement gaps.

Intensive data discovery and reflection helped refine the work. The task force examined student achievement data (in the key content areas of reading, mathematics, writing, and science) across multiple dimensions (race/ethnicity, income, gender, language, and special needs) using multiple data sources (statewide standardized test scores, program data, and survey data). Trend data for 1999–2004 were collected for all students in Grades 4, 8, and 11, and gaps were charted. An analysis of school-level data conducted by teachers and administrators the previous spring added value as well.

These exhaustive reviews—aided by consultants, district cabinet members, and others—produced results that helped identify strategies for a subsequent task: developing a comprehensive school improvement plan for each school in the district.

The Initiative

Building on the task force work, Sioux City has developed a detailed plan for closing achievement gaps. District leadership has focused every school on an overarching goal: to bring low-achieving students up to proficient levels while also boosting the number of high achievers.

Comprehensive Strategies for Achieving a Comprehensive Goal

To support the goal of a positive trend in students’ mathematics and reading scores on standardized tests in the next five years, with achievement gaps reduced and trending toward elimination, the Sioux City Achievement Gap Task Force recommended the following strategies:

- Raise expectations of all students; support minority students so they achieve at a rate meeting or exceeding the rate of all students.
- Expect all students and parents to feel connected to school and to sense they are welcome at school.
- Screen incoming kindergartners; provide summer programs for those needing a boost.
- Expect all students to be proficient in reading and mathematics by the end of Grade 3.
- Expect all middle school students to complete at least prealgebra; expect all high school students to complete algebra and geometry.
- Create opportunities for advancement of students previously identified as exhibiting average performance (e.g., challenging coursework, afterschool enrichment, summer workshops, and individual pacing via instructional technology).
- Expect increased enrollment in college-level and Advanced Placement courses.
- Use technology for rapid identification of students who need help and for addressing their skill gaps.
Commitment to this goal is evident in a 2004 task force report titled *A Matter of Expectations: Achievement Through Acceleration*, which includes the following statement: "Beginning in the fall of 2005, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) reading and mathematics scores will show a positive trend line over the next five years, with gaps reduced (trending toward elimination) and students reporting that they feel safe and welcome at school." In addition to establishing this long-term goal, the report recommends key strategies to support it. Also included in the report are specific strategies for elementary, middle, and high schools; instructional technology; and professional development.

Task force recommendations included a request for state support as well. Sioux City applied to the Iowa Department of Education and received an achievement gap grant, which is helping the district begin implementation of its strategies.

Understanding the importance of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom—and acknowledging that all achievement gap issues cannot be tackled simultaneously—district leaders established five priorities (see Priorities That Ground the Gap-Closing Plan). Within the framework of those priorities, the district carefully matched its goals to NCLB requirements and Iowa’s comprehensive school improvement planning process. To further align and strengthen the gap-closing plan, Sioux City is using state improvement initiatives in reading (K–12 Struggling Readers and Reading First) and in mathematics (Every Student Counts).

**Priorities That Ground the Gap-Closing Plan**

1. Build teacher capacity.
2. Support teachers and administrators in their roles as instructional leaders.
3. Effectively integrate technology into instruction.
4. Nurture a caring and connected school climate.
5. Design a seamless, gap-closing strategy across elementary, middle, and high schools so that students, staff, parents, and the community at large hear a consistent message.

"Teachers are asking themselves how they might need to change their instructional strategies in order to help the students. In other words, ‘If my students didn’t learn it, how do I need to teach it differently?’ This is a shift in thinking."

—Principal Linda Northcutt

**The Plan in Action**

The course is charted, and Sioux City’s comprehensive school improvement journey involves many “passages.” At the heart of the initiative is a commitment to enhance teacher quality—strengthening teachers through focused and sustained professional development. Among topics for which teacher leaders will be receiving professional development are early and adolescent literacy research and best practices, metacognition, use of technology to boost achievement, cultural competence, and peer coaching. Teachers Assisting Teachers teams work together during weekly sessions at several schools.

The gap-closing plan also promotes a shift in teachers’ mindsets. Dr. Madison explained that in the past, classroom teachers have sought to help struggling students by referring them to special programs. She notes that the changes under way “are focused on quality professional development for our classroom..."
After analyzing school data to identify the gaps, leadership teams at each building examine research to learn what works. Supported by weekly professional development at Hunt Elementary, reading proficiency is dramatically improving, largely as a result of teachers using many strategies, including the following:

• **Explicit instruction.** Teachers focus on a particular aspect of the reading process and call to conscious attention what is being taught, providing scaffolding to support students throughout their learning and practice with the strategy.

• **Think-alouds.** As teachers read aloud, they stop to verbalize their thoughts and questions, adjusting their tone of voice so that students can easily distinguish reading from thinking aloud. After teachers model the technique, students practice it with each other.

• **Picture Word Inductive Model.** Teachers use pictures and multiple read-alouds from nonfiction materials to draw out words from students’ listening and speaking vocabularies, help them add words to their reading vocabularies and discover phonetic and structural principles present in those words, develop improved writing skills, and build conceptual understanding of content knowledge in areas such as science and social studies.

teachers so they can address achievement gap issues before they become significant. What many low-achieving students need is encouragement. It doesn’t take extra time or more money to do that; it just takes a certain mindset. It’s a matter of expectations.”

At Hunt Elementary, Principal Northcutt agrees. “The mindset of our teachers is to establish a relationship with their students—understanding where they are and respecting them. Teachers are asking themselves how they might need to change their instructional strategies in order to help the students. In other words, ‘If my students didn’t learn it, how do I need to teach it differently?’ This is a shift in thinking.”

As a Reading First school, Hunt Elementary has been on the forefront of the change in Sioux City, having identified and implemented best practices in recent years. Ginny Ericson, third-grade teacher at Hunt, is encouraged by the enhanced professional development. “Now if our students are struggling, we don’t say, ‘What can somebody else do?’ We’re all in this together. We’re making a lot of changes, and we’re seeing results.” Substantial gains (30 percent in five years) in reading proficiency confirm that using proven strategies and encouragement is a winning combination.

Among the instructional strategies covered in the professional development sessions at Hunt—and throughout the district—are explicit instruction, think-alouds, and the Picture Word Inductive Model (see Instructional Strategies for Reading). “Kids need concrete models,” explains Northcutt. “If they can’t see it, they don’t understand how to do it. We’re revealing our reading processes to students so they can begin to do them.”

**The Promise**

The work in Sioux City began with the development of long-range district goals and comprehensive school improvement plans for all of the schools, moved forward with the findings and recommendations of the task force, and will continue as key strategies are being implemented. The goals are certainly ambitious—improving all students’ reading and mathematics proficiency, reducing and ultimately eliminating achievement gaps, and maintaining a school climate in which all students feel connected and welcome. Because the commitment is palpable, achieving the goals is probable.
DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS That Meet Your Needs

Compiled by Sandy Moore

Learning Point Associates continues the NCREL tradition by developing research-based solutions to school-, district-, and state-level educators.

Whether you need a synthesis of research to stay informed on critical issues in education, technology tools to implement your school improvement initiatives, a concise analysis of policy that impacts what you teach and how you teach it, or useful guides to assist efforts to implement NCLB, we offer practical assistance.

Your quest. Our best.

TECHNOLOGY

Integrating technology isn’t only about hardware. It’s about change.

“Technology Leadership: Enhancing Positive Educational Change,” a recent Pathways to School Improvement Critical Issue, examines research findings associated with leadership and change in general. It then relates those findings to the task of integrating technology into learning communities to enhance learning. View the Critical Issue at www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le700.htm.

Are national and state policies keeping pace with online learning?

As online learning assumes an increasingly important role, there is a growing need to implement policies that govern programs and recognize the differences in quality, funding, purpose, governance, and geographic reach. Policy Issues No. 17: “Education Evolution: The Need to Keep Pace With Development of K–12 Online Learning,” highlights concerns about lack of oversight and program administration. The authors suggest that by implementing appropriate policy, states can ensure success in equity, broad access, and high-quality curriculum options. Read Policy Issues No. 17 online at www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/pdfs/pivol17.pdf.

Another new Critical Issue, “Technology: A Catalyst for Teaching and Learning in the Classroom,” examines the value of effective technology use in classrooms and explores what conditions are necessary for its maximum effectiveness. It also discusses why technology is important to the teaching and learning of mathematics and science. The Critical Issue is available online at www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/technlgy/te600.htm.
What is the potential of technology to impact achievement in our school?

Hear what others know about making the most of technology in your classroom. NCREL’s latest Viewpoints CD, “Using Technology to Improve Student Learning,” offers perspectives from experts who examine the use of technology to improve student learning and teacher effectiveness. This product features two audio CDs and a concise booklet that highlights findings of recent research. The audio files are online at www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/html/vp12/cd.htm.

What is the potential of technology to impact achievement in our school?

Teacher quality leads off the new implementation guides. Quick Key 8 Action Guide, “Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act: Teacher Quality Improves Student Achievement,” provides action options, strategies, and examples from practitioners who have effectively implemented teaching-quality reform measures.

Quick Key 9 Action Guide, “Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act: Strategies to Improve High Schools,” assists educators in building capacity to improve the achievement of high school students and increase high school graduation rates. It outlines several high school reform strategies.

Quick Key 10 Action Guide, “Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act: Using Student Engagement to Improve Adolescent Literacy,” includes ideas to help educators and administrators implement current best practices for students in middle and high schools that have shown promise in the development of adolescent readers and writers.

The Quick Key Action Guides and the previous Quick Keys series are available online at www.ncrel.org/policy/curve/resources.

Integrating mathematics and science standards into practice is vital, and meets the accountability mandates of NCLB.

Two new Pathways to School Improvement Critical Issues address aspects of this challenge.

“Mathematics Education in the Era of NCLB—Principles and Standards” asks this key question: What approaches are necessary to further integrate Principles and Standards for School Mathematics into classroom practice to improve mathematics instruction and meet the accountability outlined by NCLB legislation? View the Critical Issue online at www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/math/ma500.htm.

“Science Education in the Era of NCLB: History, Benchmarks, and Standards” examines how science standards are making a difference in science instruction and achievement, how the professional field should be responding to the need for all students to reach academic excellence, and what action steps are required to boost progress in science education. The Critical Issue is available online at www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/science/sc600.htm.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Understanding the law is important. Implementing it is imperative.

NCREL’s Quick Key Action Guides spell out action steps to implement specific NCLB components. This new series expands on information provided in its predecessor, NCREL’s Quick Keys, which is a seven-part series that explains NCLB legislation in understandable and concise language.

2005 27
**Is our curriculum improving student performance?**

Collect, report, and analyze your curriculum data. Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) connect what you teach and how it is taught to student performance. SEC online tools simplify the task of collecting and reporting data on use of instructional content and teaching practice, giving schools the ability to monitor progress against curriculum reform goals. Its tools help evaluators and researchers compare particular initiatives with progress against state standards.

**Intended Curriculum**
- What students should learn (state content standards)

**Assessed Curriculum**
- What students actually learn (state and other assessments)

**Enacted Curriculum**
- What teachers teach

Professional developers at Learning Point Associates then use the information to engage educators in a curriculum-refinement process designed to identify gaps and duplication in instruction that may affect student performance. SEC tools have been developed collaboratively by NCREL, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, and the TERC Regional Alliance Data on Enacted Curriculum project. Learn how SEC works at [www.secsupport.org/index.html](http://www.secsupport.org/index.html).

**Achievement Gaps**

**What can we do to ensure equity and excellence in mathematics and science?**

“Remembering the Child: On Equity and Inclusion in Mathematics and Science Classrooms” takes a focused look at equity issues as they apply to subgroups identified in NCLB. This Critical Issue examines education equity and its potential to increase excellence in mathematics and science for a diverse population of students. The authors emphasize the need to understand and appreciate various cultures as well as individual needs, strengths, and interests. Raising expectations for student learning is first on the list of key practical recommendations to help equitable instruction meet a wide range of student needs. Read the Critical Issue online at [www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/math/ma800.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/math/ma800.htm).

**Can educational technology help close achievement gaps?**

NCREL’s case studies of 19 high-performing, high-technology schools with significant low-income, African-American, or Latino student populations revealed policies, resources, and strategies schools can use to create and sustain high-technology, high-performing learning environments. The final report advances knowledge about characteristics that may contribute to the academic achievement of these target student populations. The case studies and final report are available online at [www.ncrel.org/tech/hpht/](http://www.ncrel.org/tech/hpht/).

**Will easing the transition from high school to higher education narrow the achievement gaps?**

In order to close the achievement gap and increase the rigor and relevance of high school education for all students, many states, districts, and schools are implementing programs that help students ease the transition from high school to a variety of postsecondary educational options. NCREL’s Policy Issues No. 18, “Beyond High School: Improving Transition Programs for Postsecondary Education,” provides an overview of some of the policy barriers that exist in the areas of student preparation, funding, and governance. It also highlights policy options for eliminating the secondary-postsecondary achievement gap. Read Policy Issues No. 18 online at [www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/html/p18vol18/](http://www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/html/p18vol18/)
By Linda Schuch

NCREL has had a long and productive relationship with its Board of Directors, whose 30 members shepherd the organization’s efforts and generously share their wealth of knowledge. This governing body meets three times each year, and its members represent the chief state school officers, teachers and administrators, parents and community, work and training segments, and higher education. The directors serve three-year terms and do so without compensation for their time.

As it oversees the business and professional affairs of NCREL, the Board of Directors provides input and advice on programmatic activities—all within the dual context of regional needs and the contracted scope of work from the U.S. Department of Education. According to Learning Point Associates CEO Gina Burkhardt, “NCREL’s success is due in no small part to the dedicated service of its board.”

Historically, board members have willingly shared their experience and expertise in a variety of ways, including service as active members on the Program and Planning Committee, the External Relations Committee, and other committees of the board as assigned. They also review NCREL products upon request and serve as advocates and ambassadors by promoting the value that NCREL and the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) system bring to public education.

Moreover, these trusted advisors also share NCREL's vision of learning for all students and the creation of authentic learning communities. Two board members, President Jeff Miller and Vice President Susan Zelman, Ed.D., recently weighed in on NCREL’s work, noting that it isn’t easy, and results don’t happen overnight.

As president and CEO of Junior Achievement of Central Indiana, Miller understands well the challenge of serving a diverse client base. “The board helps the REL stay focused on its goals—the directives of the U.S. Department of Education—with input from a variety of perspectives, those of teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers, both urban and rural,” he says. “The NCREL board itself comprises at least four representatives from each of the seven states in the region, and in terms of gender, ethnicity, and roles and responsibilities, the board’s composition is quite diverse. These features help ensure that NCREL’s work is meeting the needs of all the constituents.”
Dr. Zelman, superintendent of Public Instruction for the state of Ohio, agrees that NCREL serves the region admirably. “I was particularly pleased at how helpful NCREL was with me and West Wind Education Policy, helping us develop and pilot a leadership forum for superintendents in our state,” she says. “Forming such partnerships is the greatest strength of NCREL because it results in better resources and technical assistance support for the states.

“NCREL has been very aggressive, and I’m very impressed,” Dr. Zelman says. She relates how Ohio and NCREL worked together on her state’s critical education issues, including closing achievement gaps, professional development for teachers, development of a coaching model to help build capacity in low-performing schools and districts, and development of a regional teacher certification program, still in its infancy. “We’ve been able to inform the NCREL board about our future plans and create reciprocal relationships. It’s a good partnership,” she says.

Dr. Zelman and Miller both stress NCREL’s strength in forming strategic alliances throughout the region and at the national level. Miller notes that the alliances are with diverse groups, including intermediate service providers, institutions of higher education, state-based administrator and teacher organizations, and national groups such as the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Education Commission of the States. “These organizations support the dissemination of and access to the resources and tools that the REL develops, putting them into the hands of those closest to the need for their use,” he says.

Miller judges all of NCREL’s work to “fit under the charges of the U.S. Department of Education; that is, closing achievement gaps and supporting development in low-performing schools or districts.” He cites the Center for Literacy “because it addresses the needs of struggling adolescent readers and writers, helping to close significant causes of the gaps in achievement between minority and majority students.”

How to develop high-performing learning communities continues to be a hot topic, says Dr. Zelman. “There is a host of research questions on that, particularly the effectiveness of the role of the state working with districts to build capacity in low-performing districts and schools,” she says. “I think there are many unknowns about how best to do this. I hope that NCREL keeps this as a focus—and that we all do nationally too.”

The REL Advantage

These thoughtful leaders underscored the relevance of NCREL research and the rationale behind federally funded regional educational laboratories. “States have limited resources for R&D [research and development],” says Dr. Zelman, “so it’s more efficient to have federal units working in partnership with states. Resources then can be shared across the states. Also, states have similar concerns, so why have 50 states working independently on the same issues? The REL structure brings states together to discuss concerns and best practices.”

What Dr. Zelman likes about having a regional educational laboratory “is how it helps our department’s policy and program development, particularly with regard to R&D. And, in the area of technical assistance, NCREL has been very customer focused. The work of our state’s task force on closing achievement gaps has been boosted by NCREL’s experts attending our meetings with policymakers to really talk about presenting national data on achievement gap issues.”

Miller calls NCREL “a bipartisan source of information,” saying that it is “collaborative not prescriptive in its approach.” He mentions assessment and accountability systems, special education, teacher certification, and NCLB requirements as examples of such issues that NCREL has addressed. “The Quick Key brochures, geared to supporting NCLB implementation, exemplify the just-in-time type of resources that meet the needs of the constituents we serve. Going from research to implementation—getting the right information at the right level to the right people. It’s critical in making things really happen,” he says.

Miller says alliance building also should be noted: “NCREL has been successful at convening individuals and groups who may not otherwise have come together.”
Assess Technology Proficiency.
Experience Technology Success.

TechPOINT™

TechPOINT Assessments, Surveys, and Professional Development are aligned with the National Educational Technology Standards and designed to help your staff and your students experience technology success.

Created in collaboration with International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) professionals, TechPOINT Assessments measure student technology literacy in Grades 5 and 8.

TechPOINT Surveys and Professional Development enable teachers to examine their current technology environment and determine what types of information are still needed to ensure success.

Use TechPOINT from Learning Point Associates and understand how to employ technology as a tool to enhance teaching and learning in ways that promote student achievement.

Call 800-252-0283 or visit us at www.learningpt.org.