

# R&D ALERT

U.S. Lags in  
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*timely knowledge for education and human development*







## ■ BRIEFLY

- » Brain research shows that a healthy, nurturing, and engaging first three years of life are critical to babies' brain development, which supports success in school and life.

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- » Several adverse factors, such as poor nutrition, a mother's stress levels, and exposures to toxins can affect prenatal brain development.

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- » U.S. babies receive lower quality, more costly prenatal care and child care services than babies in other industrialized countries, and less time at home with their parents.



The facts are sobering. The U.S. is the only industrialized nation in the world without a paid-leave policy for parents at or around the birth of a child. Prenatal care in the U.S. remains expensive, while virtually all other industrialized countries provide free or affordable prenatal care. And, while families in the U.S. pay about 80 percent of the direct cost of child care services, parents in European countries pay about 30 percent.

WestEd's J. Ronald Lally says we can—and must—do better. With more than 45 years of experience developing programs and policies to improve the lives of infants, toddlers, and their families, Lally understands the urgency and necessity of supporting the healthy development of America's next generation. The latest research in brain science confirms what Lally and other child development experts and practitioners have known for decades: a healthy, nurturing, and engaging first three years are critical to babies' brain development, which supports their later success in school and life.

Problems that result from inadequate care of children ages zero to three are difficult, costly, and sometimes impossible to correct. Unfortunately, the United States has a long way to go to adequately nurture its young. It currently lags far behind virtually all other industrialized countries in the support it provides to infants, toddlers, and their families.

"American babies are getting inadequate prenatal care, less time at home with their parents during the first year of life, and fewer and lower-quality child care services, compared to babies in other industrialized countries," says

Lally, Co-Director of the Center for Child & Family Studies at WestEd. "The United States needs to become much more strategic and farsighted in the way it supports its children during their critical first few years of life."

This reality is why Lally and his colleagues launched For Our Babies, a national initiative to promote healthy development in U.S. children from conception to age three. During this period of life, a baby's brain undergoes an enormous transformation—growing from 25 to 85 percent of its adult size. The latest scientific research indicates that the actual physical structure of a baby's brain, as well as its functioning, is significantly shaped by experiences and environments in the baby's first three years.

#### PROVIDING A "SOCIAL WOMB" FOR EARLY DEVELOPMENT

"For the first few years of life, the brain needs a 'social womb,'" says Lally, "a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment in which babies can learn how to interact with others and use the tools of society to get their needs met: 'When I cry, somebody comes. When I communicate,



somebody listens.’ That shapes the way babies function and relate to people for the rest of their lives.”

In advocating for a system that can foster this sort of “social womb,” the For Our Babies campaign takes a multi-pronged approach. It includes a compelling overview of the issues in Lally’s recently published book, *For Our Babies: Ending the Invisible Neglect of America’s Infants*; a multimedia website; virtual and in-person public events; and strategic outreach to families, educators, the press, and policymakers. The initiative aims to spur local, grass-roots action as well as national awareness and policy implementation.

For Our Babies builds upon decades of work by Lally and his WestEd colleagues, who have consistently been leaders in national efforts to improve infant/toddler care. In particular, WestEd, in collaboration with the California Department of Education, developed the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC), a comprehensive training system that promotes responsive, relationship-based care. For more than two decades, PITC has been hugely influential in the field of early care: it is the most widely used training system for infant/toddler caregivers in the country, and its videos and print materials are distributed worldwide. PITC also worked with the U.S. Administration on Children, Youth, and Families to develop the Early Head Start program.

#### A CALL FOR COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT

For Our Babies builds upon PITC’s theoretical and practical foundation by outlining a comprehensive platform of services and supports, focused around four pillars that

track babies’ developmental trajectory from pre-conception to age three: prenatal care, paid leave; screening and follow-up services and well-baby care; and high-quality, affordable infant/toddler care.

#### PRENATAL CARE

A common misconception is that development occurs only after children are born. In reality, the initial development of the fetus is shaped by its mother’s health even before she becomes pregnant. In recognition of this, many countries have instituted proactive public information campaigns. For instance, Lally notes that many European countries routinely alert women of child-bearing age to key health issues that could affect a future pregnancy, such as the importance of getting adequate amounts of folic acid to prevent spine and brain abnormalities in a fetus.

Much of the foundational wiring of a baby’s brain occurs prenatally, and several adverse factors—including a mother’s stress level, poor nutrition, or exposure to toxins—can affect the brain’s development at this stage. Thus, early and adequate prenatal care is vital to helping women assess and manage risk factors, in order to avoid stunting their children’s cognitive functioning. While virtually all other developed nations ensure free or affordable health care for pregnant women, care in the United States remains expensive, which limits the amount and quality of prenatal services that many women can access.

#### PAID LEAVE

The United States currently has the dubious distinction of being the only industrialized country without a national paid-leave policy for parents at or around the



A healthy, nurturing, and engaging first three years are critical to babies' brain development, which supports their later success in school and life.

birth of a child. This deficit is worrisome since paid leave enables an important period of bonding between parents and their newborns during a phase when babies' brains are highly receptive to the care and communication they experience. Studies have shown that paid parental leave gives mothers important time to recover from childbirth and adapt to motherhood, and that it improves the likelihood that mothers will remain in the workforce and achieve higher earning potential. Research also indicates that paid family leave significantly increases the length of time that mothers nurse, which can have important health benefits for infants.

Currently, the federal Family and Medical Leave Act grants 12 weeks of unpaid time off for parents to care for a newborn child. However, due to its eligibility criteria, only a small percentage of American mothers and fathers qualify, and very few states offer any form of paid family leave, making it inaccessible to many Americans. A 2011 survey by the U.S. Department of Labor revealed that only 11 percent of private-sector workers and 17 percent of public-sector workers reported having access to paid family leave through their employers.

### SCREENING AND FOLLOW-UP SERVICES

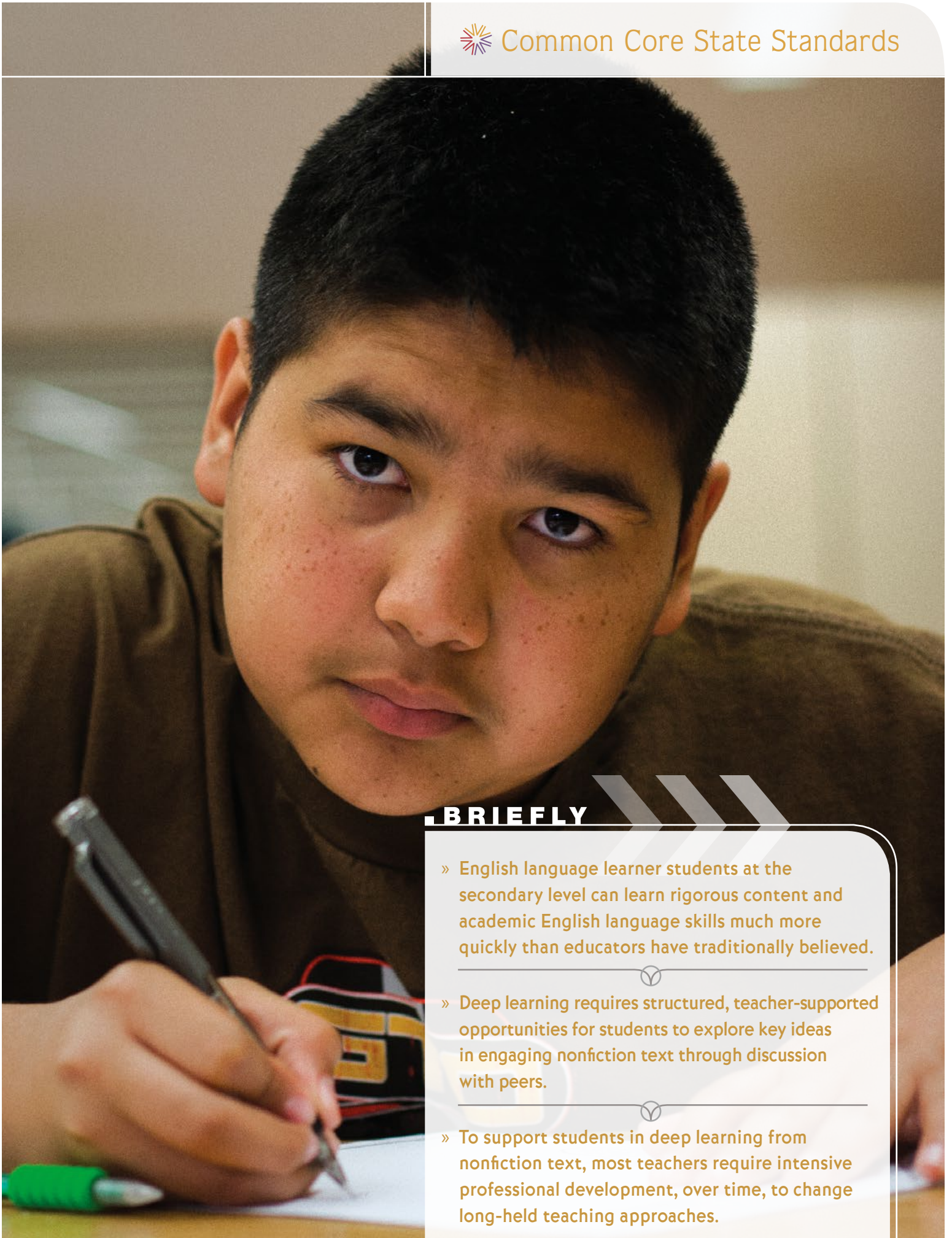
Early and regular health screening and well-baby care can help identify and mitigate effects of a variety of health issues, including cerebral palsy, sensory and motor disabilities, respiratory illnesses, and learning and behavioral disorders. Attending to these issues from the start of life is critical, says Lally, because later attempts to correct early developmental problems are often more costly and less effective.

Accordingly, many countries provide a variety of preventative maternal and health care and guidance. For instance, among other well-baby services, the Australian state of Victoria provides a series of home visits to all mothers, regardless of income, until a baby is two years old. "Victoria's system is quite forward looking," says Lally. "Like many other localities and countries around the world, they have created a system to provide these vital well-baby care services without differentiating between rich and poor—because *all* children and families need these supports."

### HIGH-QUALITY, AFFORDABLE INFANT/TODDLER CARE

High-quality early care has been shown to increase school readiness, improve math and language ability, help reduce the incidence of cognitive and social difficulties, and decrease the likelihood of a child repeating a grade or being placed in special education. Because a large portion of American infants and toddlers spend at least part of each week in out-of-home care settings, access to affordable and effective infant/toddler care is particularly critical.

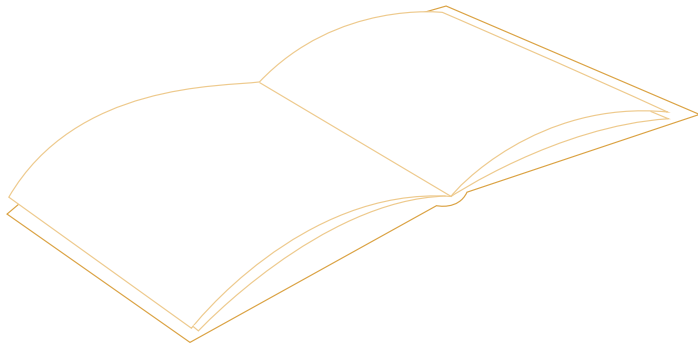
Unfortunately, the average cost of day care in the United States is beyond the means of many families. European families typically pay about 30 percent of the direct cost of child care services (with the rest subsidized through various sources), while American families typically pay a staggering 80 percent of direct child care costs. Despite the exorbitant costs, however, many day care settings in the United States fall below universally accepted health and safety standards, and much of the care provided in these settings does not adequately nurture babies' brain development.



## BRIEFLY

- » English language learner students at the secondary level can learn rigorous content and academic English language skills much more quickly than educators have traditionally believed.
- » Deep learning requires structured, teacher-supported opportunities for students to explore key ideas in engaging nonfiction text through discussion with peers.
- » To support students in deep learning from nonfiction text, most teachers require intensive professional development, over time, to change long-held teaching approaches.

# Helping English learners



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to the challenge  
of complex texts

The idea that secondary English language learner (ELL) students can master rigorous academic content quickly and deeply goes against much accepted wisdom in the field. But Aída Walqui and her colleagues have spent the past 14 years developing and helping educators implement an instructional approach with exactly that goal.

“Traditionally educators have believed that it takes seven years for ELL students to master the discourse, syntax, grammar, and other mechanics of English, and then, after that, they are ready to learn complex academic content,” says Walqui, Director of WestEd’s Teacher Professional Development program, which houses the Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) initiative. “But middle school and high school ELL students don’t have the luxury of seven years to accomplish that—and our experience shows that, with expert support from their teachers, that much time is not needed.”

QTEL’s approach, Walqui says, works on the premise that students will rise to the challenge of rigorous subject matter if it sparks their interest, if they receive appropriate support, and if academic content and academic English language skills are taught simultaneously, as a single, integrated process. However, she adds, to master this instructional approach, many teachers need to make dramatic shifts in their beliefs and practices.

Over the past year, a unit of study illustrating the approach has been piloted in five urban school districts nationwide through a partnership between the Understanding Language (UL) initiative at Stanford University and the Teacher Professional Development Program at WestEd. UL has as its goal promoting the examination

of why new understandings of language and instruction matter in an era of new, more rigorous standards. For field testing purposes, curriculum developers designed a five-week, Common Core State Standards–aligned English language arts unit on persuasive text and media messages, aimed at raising learning expectations and experiences for ELL students—and their non-ELL peers.

“Teachers were surprised and impressed with their students’ engagement with the content,” Walqui says, “and with the sophistication of their academic conversations. The experience changed teachers’ views of students’ capabilities.”

## BUILDING CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND LANGUAGE SKILLS IN TANDEM

The unit, “Persuasion across Time and Space: Analyzing and Producing Complex Texts,” targets middle school English learners who have reached an intermediate level of proficiency in English. It shows teachers how to help students build English language mastery in tandem with conceptual understanding of text. Instead of isolating discrete skills such as vocabulary development or grammar, the unit encourages teachers to invite students to engage in meaningful and purposeful exploration of





I liked the questions my students asked and the deep discussions they had, without me prompting them. They are learning that there is another way of learning.

historical and contemporary texts, and to integrate formal language skill building into the process.

Each lesson takes students gradually through similar types of texts, representing similar genres and conventions. The unit is designed thematically, so that, as students deepen and expand their understandings, each new lesson helps them build on prior concepts and skills. In the unit, Walqui points out, students develop their abilities to read, interpret, critically analyze, and create various kinds of persuasive texts, and, in the process, learn appropriate academic practices and the language required to express them.

The unit's designers looked to the three major types of text addressed by the reading and writing sections of the Common Core State Standards: narrative, argument, and informative/explanatory. They chose texts ranging from television commercials to Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" and pivotal speeches from the Civil Rights Movement, and provided tools—such as Aristotle's explanation of how argumentation can appeal to the ethical (*ethos*), emotional (*pathos*), and logical (*logos*) reasoning of readers and listeners—that can help students evaluate the texts' arguments and claims. The goal of the unit is to build students' knowledge of historical and current events while supporting their growing independence in listening to, speaking, reading, and writing English for academic purposes.

In using the unit, rather than simplifying text or assuming that students can't identify themes in text, teachers learn how to differentiate instruction for ELL students and how to help them draw on their background knowledge

and experiences to build new or deeper understandings of ideas in and beyond classroom texts. By progressing from analysis of more familiar ideas and formats to analyzing unfamiliar content and text structures, teachers gradually enable students to explore complex texts in a purposeful way.

Six school districts affiliated with the Council of the Great City Schools field tested the unit during the past year, and teachers in several other large districts have reviewed and critiqued the unit. Feedback from participating schools indicates that the unit changed teachers' beliefs about what ELL students were capable of achieving.

One teacher recalled that it was rewarding "watching one of my students struggling, but nevertheless having a tremendous discussion, very high level, about something that was meaningful to him." "I was surprised at the level of questioning and the conversations that students engaged in," another teacher shared with WestEd researchers. "Toward the second and third lessons, it was very simple for them to jump into conversation [on the theme assigned]—just to start talking." "It was impressive to hear them," a third teacher observed. "To be honest, I didn't think they would be able to talk about *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. But they did get it; they understood the complex ideas and processes."

"I liked the questions my students asked and the deep discussions they had, without me prompting them," said another teacher. "They are learning that there is another way of learning."



## APPRENTICING STUDENTS AS ANALYTICAL READERS

The unit emphasizes the apprenticeship model of learning, in which students participate in guided academic practices deliberately designed to provide opportunities for students to become autonomous experts over time. When teachers offer various levels of support, or scaffolding, tailored to each student's needs, students progressively develop their ability to work independently. As they move from informal and collaborative group settings to formal group and individual presentations, students practice and gain confidence as they learn to articulate ideas, interpret information, and present and defend claims. Assessments, such as peer editing with clearly defined rubrics or finding textual evidence to support conclusions, are also designed to build students' autonomy as purposeful readers and writers over time.

One student commented that "in this unit, we used a lot of charts to lay out our ideas in organized ways. They would ask us questions and we would realize, 'Oh, this is a technique [former Texas Congresswoman Barbara] Jordan used, and so did Martin Luther King,' and we would connect different ideas." Another student described the unit as "more challenging," compared to previous learning experiences, because, instead of offering "fun activities," teachers made the lessons both engaging and demanding, signaling their high expectations for students' performance.

If one student doesn't initially grasp a strategy or idea, other students can step in to help. "We have the benefit that most of us here speak two languages, English and Spanish," a student shared with researchers. "There were some challenging parts, but being bilingual, there is the benefit that, if someone understands it and they can't fully explain it in English, then speaking in the other language, everybody can understand [their ideas]."

## NEEDED: "SUSTAINED, POWERFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT"

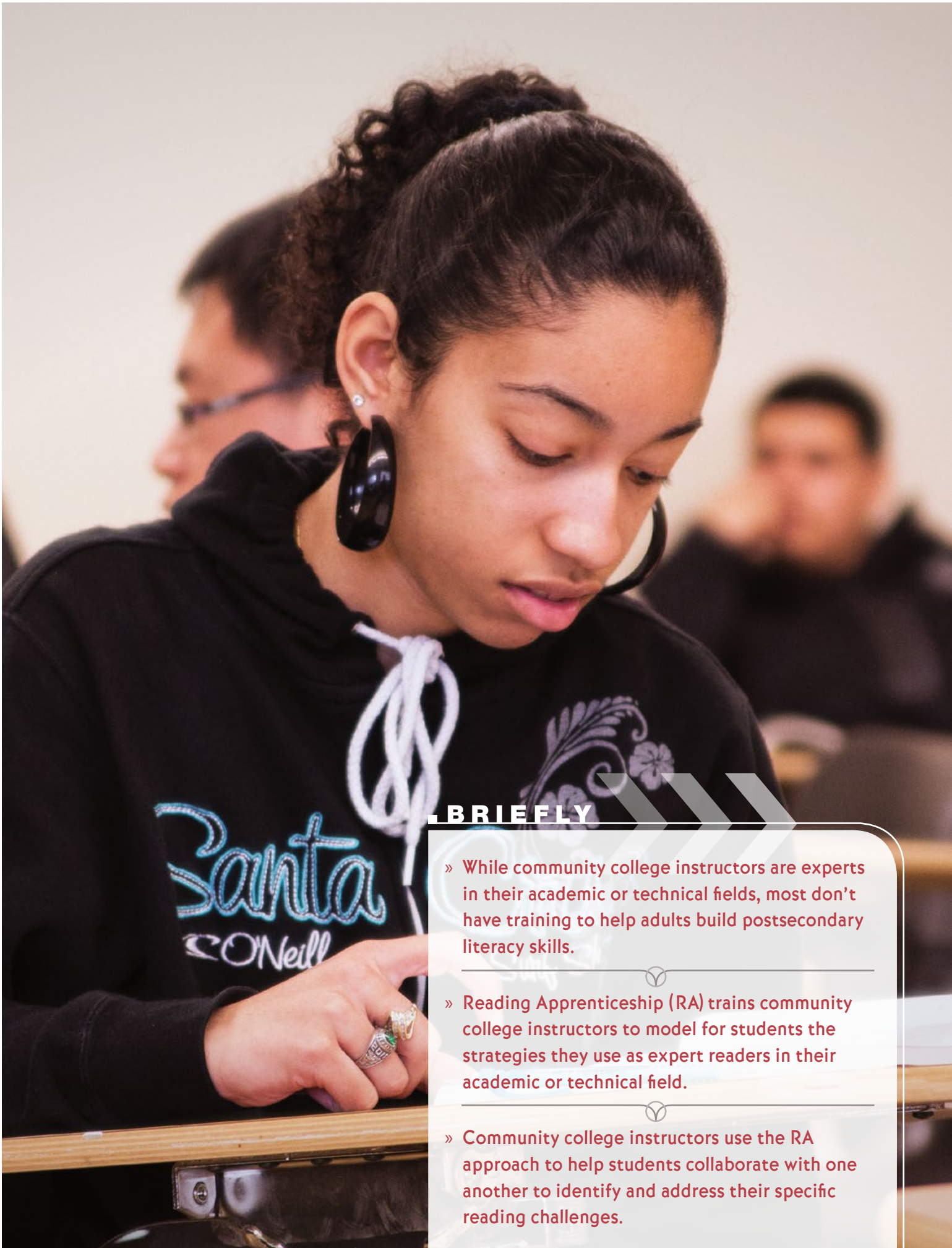
The unit is available online for teachers to use as is or adapt to their needs, with downloadable materials for both teachers and students. Walqui says that the unit team plans to post comments from students and teachers online and to share video clips from classrooms, as well as students' work samples obtained during implementation. The team also plans to share additional implementation research based on pilot sites, webinars, and extension activities.

Walqui cautions that schools and school districts must give teachers time to explore and experiment with the recommended practices for ELL students, preferably through sustained professional development and professional learning communities. "Sustained, powerful professional development is needed," she says. "If we want our teachers to invite students to learn in dramatically different ways, we need to invite the teachers themselves to engage in dramatically different ways of learning. Such learning must weave theory and pedagogical practice together so that teachers know how to deliver instruction purposefully, based on understanding why and how effective practice works."

One of the key lessons learned from implementation of the unit, she observes, is that, although teachers can readily add productive activities to their instructional repertoire as a result of this training, more than just a few hours of professional development are needed to make deep and coherent changes to long-held instructional beliefs and practices.



For more information about QTEL or the "Persuasion across Time and Space" unit, contact Aida Walqui at [awalqui@wested.org](mailto:awalqui@wested.org) or 415.615.3262. Copies of the unit are available on the Understanding Language initiative's website at [http://ell.stanford.edu/teaching\\_resources/ela](http://ell.stanford.edu/teaching_resources/ela)



## BRIEFLY

- » While community college instructors are experts in their academic or technical fields, most don't have training to help adults build postsecondary literacy skills.
- » Reading Apprenticeship (RA) trains community college instructors to model for students the strategies they use as expert readers in their academic or technical field.
- » Community college instructors use the RA approach to help students collaborate with one another to identify and address their specific reading challenges.



## Boosting reading skills in community college

Like many community college teachers, Nika Hogan chose her career because she wanted to help students from all backgrounds succeed in higher education. But despite her commitment to equity and her knowledge of best teaching practices, students in her composition classes did not actively engage with the expository texts she selected to stimulate classroom discussions and guide their writing assignments.

"I knew that when students struggled to understand the reading they were assigned, they would rely on the teacher to tell them about the text," says Hogan, who is a professor of English at Pasadena City College in California. "But I wanted them to be able to read in a way that allowed them to construct meaning from the text themselves, and I was frustrated because I didn't know how to work that magic."

That changed in 2007, when Hogan learned about a new professional development program created by WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative. Building on the popular and proven Reading Apprenticeship model for middle and high school teachers, the Community College Faculty Seminars in Reading Apprenticeship evolved to meet the demands of institutions serving adult learners. In the higher education setting, Reading Apprenticeship shows teachers how to draw on what they know and do as knowledgeable, discipline-based readers in chemistry, dental hygiene, refrigeration repair, or other academic and technical fields, and then how to share those skills with students.

Since 2006, Reading Apprenticeship has trained more than 1,000 community college teachers in 25 states, leading to "transformative" shifts in instruction, according to participants. Research has shown that Reading Apprenticeship gives teachers an increased sense of responsibility for addressing literacy in subject-area classes and

a wider repertoire of resources and tools for addressing student reading difficulties, which inspires them to share the approach with colleagues across their campuses.

### COLLABORATION, CONVERSATION, AND COMPREHENSION

Reading Apprenticeship differs from other remediation approaches at the community college level in that it is adaptable to all divisions, including developmental education, career and technical education, and "gateway" courses that enable students to progress toward degrees. It also can be used in any content area.

"I had never experienced professional learning in this way, ever. I really didn't know it existed," Hogan says. "It's smart and research based. Reading Apprenticeship starts from the premise that students come to us with strengths that we can build on, and that your job as a teacher is to figure out what those are."

Reading Apprenticeship offers a framework of instructional routines that teachers can use to create respectful, collaborative adult learning environments. The program addresses four critical interactive learning dimensions:

- » **Social dimension**—Students and teachers establish classroom norms to encourage teamwork and share reading comprehension strategies through discussions, book talks, and other protocols.





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- » **Personal dimension**—Students learn to assess their reading performance and set goals that lead to reading fluency and range. They begin to build the habits of mind and intellectual discipline that are essential for success in higher education.
- » **Cognitive dimension**—Teachers break down the steps for reading in their disciplines and work with students to monitor the students' comprehension.
- » **Knowledge-based dimension**—Students learn to identify and use text structures, language signals, and discipline-specific discourse styles that are key to unlocking subject-area content.

Teachers integrate these four dimensions into instruction through routine metacognitive conversations with students, aimed at drawing out what students do and don't understand in texts. Once those conversations begin, the students and teachers construct living lists of reading strategies that they use to support understanding. They are able to borrow each others' strategies to enlarge their individual reading repertoires.

Through discussions and peer-group sharing, students learn to make personal connections to texts, which aids comprehension. "Becoming a more active reader, learning to purposefully engage with text, and practicing problem solving in class are all part of the process," says Ruth Schoenbach, Co-Director of the Strategic Literacy Initiative. "It's okay to be confused as long as you work with each other and dig into the text. Students who have a strategy for learning feel more successful and believe that, the next time they're facing difficult text on their own, they will have a better way of tackling it."

Through think-alouds and other modeling strategies, teachers share how they read, how they get tripped up in reading, and how they work around obstacles. This scaffolded approach to building meaning from reading benefits both teachers and students.

"We don't want our faculty necessarily becoming experts in teaching reading," says Michele Lesmeister, a tenured faculty member in the basic studies department at Renton Technical College in Renton, Washington. "We want them to apprentice students in the ways of reading for their field, and modeling reading skills needed by a legal secretary is going to be very different from modeling good reading practice for a student in nursing assistance.

"We inspired our faculty by explaining to them, 'You are the expert in this field, and you have the capacity to communicate to students how you read in your field of expertise,'" Lesmeister adds. "These are new eyes on your textbooks and your handouts, and it is your responsibility, as the master reader in the class, to show students how to access, engage with, and comprehend the materials." She also notes that watching students' learning progress provides reinforcement for faculty: "When you start to see your students 'being smarter,' doing things you didn't think they could do, it's very energizing."

#### "PHENOMENAL" RESULTS

Nika Hogan described a colleague who, for years, had failed about 75 percent of the students who took her microbiology course, and was overjoyed to discover new ways to reach students through Reading Apprenticeship. Hogan also spoke of a history teacher and a psychology

teacher, both talented lecturers, who had been moved to adopt more collaborative and interactive practices because they realized that their students learned more that way.

“It’s hard to describe how discouraging it can be, teaching at a community college and not being successful,” says Hogan, who has taken on a leadership role with Reading Apprenticeship. “On the national level, community college faculty are seen as being intractable and unwilling to change. They’re not. You’ve got to open up a space for the learning that needs to happen, and Reading Apprenticeship offers that.”

Reading Apprenticeship has had a profound impact on community college students. A 2011 study of 25 classrooms by the Renton Technical College Research Center showed that the percentage of students completing courses at the institution had increased from an average of 60 percent before Reading Apprenticeship to 90 percent afterward. Other research has shown that Reading Apprenticeship students acquire a greater range of strategies to support comprehension, which boosts their confidence and improves their reading and writing skills in courses beyond English.

Fully 80 percent of Renton Technical College’s faculty has been trained in the Reading Apprenticeship methods, and its teachers and students report having stronger relationships and more supportive communities for learning. “It’s phenomenal how it changes the classroom dynamic between the teacher and students,” Lesmeister says. “The PowerPoints are gone, and the students are doing the reading. That’s what education should be about.”

## LESSONS LEARNED

Both Lesmeister and Hogan say that one of the important lessons of the Reading Apprenticeship experience at the community college level is that schools need to build curricular and social bridges to help adult learners adapt to the college environment and academic demands. In the same way that many high schools set up ninth grade academies or that four-year colleges offer freshman

orientation courses, community colleges, Hogan says, should provide common first-year experiences that help students acclimate to higher education.

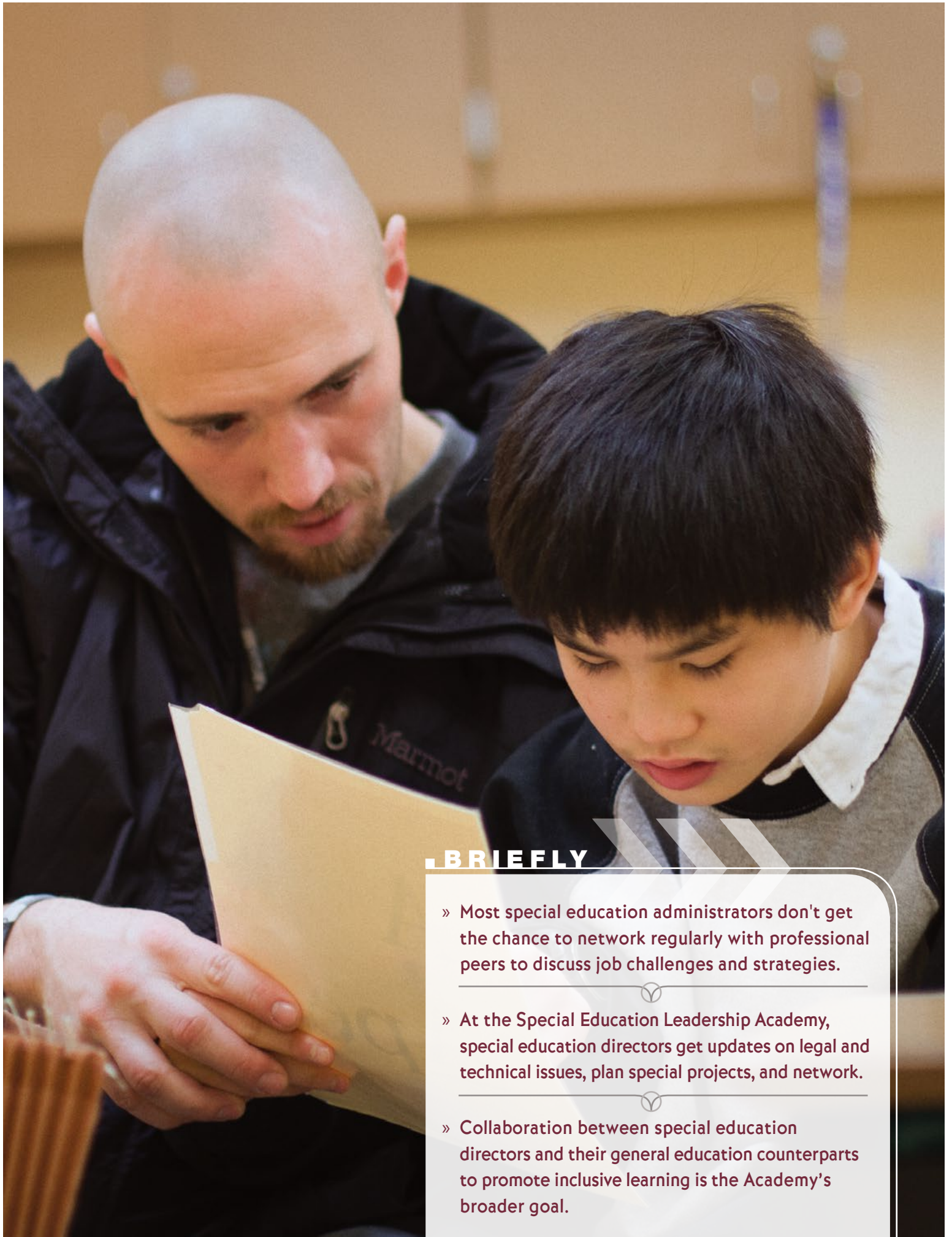
For example, building on the success of Reading Apprenticeship, Pasadena Community College initiated a required seminar for first-year students. The open-access seminar, which includes reading shared texts, analyzing peer-reviewed articles, and practicing strategic problem solving, is a three-unit course, transferable to University of California institutions. At the end of the semester, students must complete extensive research projects and present their findings at a conference.

Hogan says faculty members are always moved when they see students who may have entered college with weak reading or comprehension skills expertly sharing their investigations of topics such as informed consent, institutional racism, and the relationship between literacy and power. “What’s changed,” she says, “is that, as a result of ‘apprenticing’ to an expert reader in a supportive, collaborative environment, they’ve improved their reading strategies, fluency, and stamina. They have the confidence to dig for ideas and meaning in texts.

“It sends the most powerful message,” she adds. “Reading Apprenticeship is really helping us show that the deficit model—the common misconception that, because adult students lack some formal academic preparation for college, they don’t have the capacity to learn college-level material—is absolutely wrong.”



**For more information about the online and face-to-face faculty learning opportunities available through WestEd’s Strategic Literacy Initiative, contact Kate Meissert by email at [kmeisse@wested.org](mailto:kmeisse@wested.org) or by telephone at 510.302.4211, or go to the Reading Apprenticeship website at <http://www.readingapprenticeship.org>.**



## ■ BRIEFLY

- » Most special education administrators don't get the chance to network regularly with professional peers to discuss job challenges and strategies.

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- » At the Special Education Leadership Academy, special education directors get updates on legal and technical issues, plan special projects, and network.

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- » Collaboration between special education directors and their general education counterparts to promote inclusive learning is the Academy's broader goal.



# Academy breaks the isolation of special education directors

School-district special education directors routinely juggle complex, difficult, time-consuming, and emotion-laden job demands, but when things get tough, they usually find themselves solving problems on their own.

"Special education administration is a difficult and isolating job," says Susan Marks. "Between the heavy daily workload and the fact that they don't have regular contact with their professional peers, special education directors don't get the chance to compare notes, discuss strategies, or toss around ideas with other people who understand the job."

Marks is part of a long-standing and successful initiative to address this issue. Since 2011, she has co-directed the Special Education Leadership Academy in Massachusetts, which, for the past decade, has been offered to experienced special education directors in the state by WestEd's Learning Innovations program. Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) and free to participants, the Academy aims to build directors' capacities to do their jobs effectively and minimize burnout. In fact, a major reason that MA DESE funds the Academy is to retain veteran directors in their positions longer, so that students and educators—especially those coming up through the special education ranks—can benefit from their knowledge and experience.

Citing the Academy's ten-year track record, Marks credits it with helping special education directors "feel more empowered," and improving the likelihood that they stay on the job. Patricia Bullard, director of Pupil Personnel

Services for the Masconomet Regional School District in Topsfield, Massachusetts, agrees. Bullard, a 2011 graduate of the Academy, says that the opportunity to "meet, establish relationships with, and learn from" her peers is its best feature. Describing the Academy as "rejuvenating," Bullard adds that participants establish support networks that continue long after the Academy ends.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

A special education director's job description includes a somewhat unusual, complex mix of responsibilities. Like other district-level personnel with administrative responsibilities at school sites, a special education director supervises a districtwide group of teachers, paraprofessionals, and other support personnel, and oversees programs, services, and practices. Additionally, a special education director's job involves implementing the myriad provisions of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a 1975 law mandating that students with disabilities receive a "free and appropriate" education in the "least restrictive environment" and are "educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible."

A key provision of IDEA is that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each special education student must be developed and monitored. "That responsibility



alone means special education directors have a lot of contact with parents regarding education services for their children and participate, in some cases, in difficult and emotional IEP meetings,” says Marks. “As a result of the legal mandate, special education directors are much more likely to be involved in administrative hearings and litigation than their general education peers.”

Because IDEA also calls for special education students to have access to general education curriculum and instruction, special education directors must work not only with special education teachers and paraprofessionals, but also with general education classroom teachers and other school and district-level administrators. Also, district compliance with provisions of IDEA and with state special education rules and regulations requires a massive amount of documentation, much of which must be submitted to federal and state officials. Marks notes that ensuring this compliance is very time-consuming for special education directors and that it takes time away from program-related activities.

### UPDATING CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND PROMOTING PEER CONNECTIONS

The Academy is open to special education administrators with five or more years of experience in a Massachusetts public school district, charter school, or regional collaborative serving multiple districts. It runs for three and a half days in August, followed by three additional full-day follow-up sessions later in the school year, plus annual two-day follow-up seminars (“reunions”) for prior Academy participants. All participants can receive continuing-education credit, including graduate-level credit.

According to Marks, annual attendance at the Academy averages between 15 and 20 participants from throughout Massachusetts. Highly interactive sessions cover a broad range of issues, such as leadership skills; system changes; staff recruitment, retention, and development; program evaluation; and data collection and analysis. Marks, who has worked as an attorney specializing in special education issues, typically updates participants

on legal issues related to special education and leads discussions on recent cases that could affect directors’ work. She also teaches conflict resolution strategies: “Conflict resolution is a big issue in special education,” she notes.

The Academy requires that participants complete individual projects, and gives them time for this project work. For example, a special education director might design and plan a year-long professional development program for paraprofessionals working in his or her department. “Often, paraprofessionals get little or no [professional development],” says Marks, “despite the fact that they are often the ones working directly with the students with the greatest needs.” Another participant might choose to design a teacher evaluation system, a task recently made more complex by federal and state requirements to link teacher evaluation with student performance. Notes Marks: “This [linkage] can be a problem for special education teachers, whose students may not perform as well on standardized tests.”

While working in the North Reading School District and attending the Academy, Bullard tackled a project that involved expanding a co-teaching model, in which special education and content-area teachers worked side by side in classrooms including regular education and special education students, to all five schools in her district. Such innovative local projects, Marks says, are difficult, if not impossible, for special education directors to tackle while mired in the day-to-day demands of their jobs. “We provide them with a project-planning template, a process to use, and time to talk with us and each other about what their project is going to look like.”

During the Academy’s evening sessions, participants have time to share with peers the details of successful projects, or copies of effective materials that they have developed in the past. “I can’t overemphasize how valuable it is for these special education directors to have a chance to interact,” says Marks. “We provide the

We provide the structure, setting, and a lot of information, but what they learn from each other is particularly valuable.

structure, setting, and a lot of information, but what they learn from each other is particularly valuable.”

Academy graduates echo Marks’s observations. In fact, 100 percent of those polled in a recent survey say they would recommend participation to a colleague. “When I have a question that stumps me,” Bullard notes, “I put it out there to my peers I’ve met at the Academy, and I know a good portion will respond.” Learning Innovations maintains an email list to facilitate communication among Academy participants.

Bullard also appreciates that “prior to the Academy participants are asked: What are your biggest issues? What do you want addressed?” Customizing Academy programs to meet the needs of a specific group of special education directors is invaluable, Bullard says, particularly in managing current “hot topics” such as transition planning for students with disabilities who have completed high school and are ready to move to a postsecondary educational setting or a career.

### INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

WestEd’s Learning Innovations program is also home to the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs’ Northeast Regional Resource Center. Center Director Kristin Reedy says the Academy is one way in which the program is working to accomplish an even broader goal: to bridge gaps between special and general education. “One of our major themes,” she says, “is to find ways to help special education directors work with their counterparts in general education to help develop school systems that are more inclusive and responsive to all students.”

Reedy notes that many special education directors are at or near retirement age, which makes learning and networking opportunities such as those provided by the Academy particularly important. In some cases, the Academy has convinced directors to stay on the job a bit longer, which Reedy appreciates. “Individuals now working in these positions of leadership began their careers in the 1970s and remember what conditions were like for kids with disabilities prior to the enactment of IDEA,” she says. “Their perspective is valuable and may be lost unless we continue to support leaders in special education in ways that not only remind them of the gains that have been made but also help them remain vigilant about the work we still have to do.”

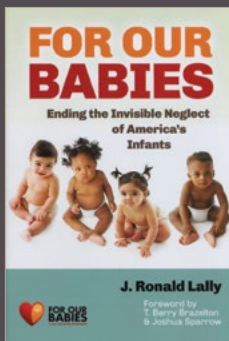
According to Reedy, although programs similar to the Academy are offered in some other states, through universities and professional organizations, “it’s safe to assume there remains a critical need, among currently practicing special education directors at the local level, for such opportunities. WestEd is helping to meet that need.”



**For more information about the Special Education Leadership Academy, contact Susan Marks at [smarks@wested.org](mailto:smarks@wested.org) or 802.951.8216, or Kristin Reedy at [kreedy@wested.org](mailto:kreedy@wested.org) or 802.951.8218.**



# Featured Resources



## For Our Babies: Ending the Invisible Neglect of America's Infants

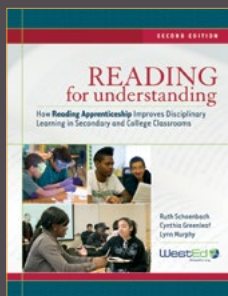
J. Ronald Lally

Forward by T. Berry Brazelton and Joshua Sparrow

*For Our Babies* paints a bleak picture of how societal changes in the United States over the past 60 years have affected babies. Today's infants and young children have less access to their parents, spend longer time in child care, and receive substandard child care and services.

Written by J. Ronald Lally, Co-Director of the Center for Child & Family Studies at WestEd, the book shares the hopes, worries, and frustrations of American parents, who receive little support for their children or themselves as parents. It also reveals their lack of awareness about how little assistance they receive compared to parents in other countries.

ISBN: 978-0-8077-5424-5 | Copyright: 2013 | Format: Trade Paper | Pages: 192  
Publisher: Teachers College Press and WestEd | Price: \$24.95



## Reading for Understanding: How Reading Apprenticeship Improves Disciplinary Learning in Secondary and College Classrooms, 2nd Edition

Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, and Lynn Murphy

This significantly updated edition of *Reading for Understanding* shows how teachers and students can work together to boost literacy, engagement, and achievement.

Specifically, this book helps readers use the Reading Apprenticeship framework to increase student engagement and academic achievement in subject-area classes.

ISBN: 978-0-470-60831-9 | Copyright: 2012 | Format: Trade Paper | Pages: 416  
Publisher: Jossey-Bass | Price: \$29.95

## FEATURED FREE RESOURCES FOR DOWNLOAD



### How the Common Core Must Ensure Equity by Fully Preparing Every Student for Postsecondary Success

Produced by The Regional Equity Assistance Centers | Copyright: 2013

In this new position paper issued collectively by the directors of the nation's 10 regional Equity Assistance Centers (EAC), the authors underscore their commitment to successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards by identifying six equity goals that must be addressed if the new standards are to ensure that every student will succeed—especially those who have long been underserved.

► <http://www.WestEd.org/ensuringequity>



### Technology to Support Next-Generation Classroom Formative Assessment for Learning

Edys Quellmalz | Copyright: 2013

Author Edys Quellmalz focuses on the various ways that technologies can support effective formative assessment, exploring:

- » Cognitively principled assessment design
- » Technology supports for alignment of embedded assessments with standards and targets
- » Technology-enhanced, curriculum-embedded assessments
- » Technology supports for teacher use of formative assessment processes

► <http://www.WestEd.org/nextgenformativeassessment>

# R&D ALERT

*R&D Alert* covers issues affecting schools, communities, and human development professionals throughout the United States. Current and previous issues are available at [WestEd.org/R&DAlert](http://WestEd.org/R&DAlert). Your comments are welcomed. Please address them to Noel White at [rdalert@WestEd.org](mailto:rdalert@WestEd.org).

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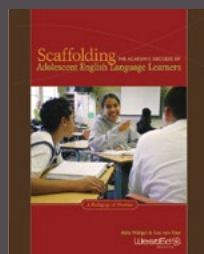


## Finding the Words, Finding the Ways: Exploring Reflective Supervision and Facilitation

Mary Claire Heffron and Trudi Murch

*Finding the Words, Finding the Ways*, developed by the California Center for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health at the WestEd Center for Prevention and Early Intervention, is designed for professionals responsible for the support, professional development, and oversight of those who work with infants, young children, and their families.

ISBN: 978-1-938287-13-8 | Copyright: 2012 | Format: DVD, Spiral | Pages: 64  
Publisher: WestEd | Price: \$120.00



## Scaffolding the Academic Success of Adolescent English Language Learners: A Pedagogy of Promise

Aída Walqui and Leo van Lier

Too often, the needs of English language learners are met with simplified curriculum and lowered expectations. What would happen if instead classrooms were organized to honor the promise of these students by increasing rather than decreasing the intellectual challenge of instruction, by increasing the support such challenge requires, and by increasing students' active engagement with their own learning?

This book is the result of a decade-long effort in school districts such as New York City, Austin, and San Diego to implement challenging instruction that is designed for classrooms that include English learners and that raises the bar and increases engagement for all learners.

ISBN: 978-0-914409-75-5 | Copyright: 2010 | Format: Trade Paper | Pages: 240  
Publisher: WestEd | Price: \$27.95

to order  
go to [WestEd.org/bookstore](http://WestEd.org/bookstore)



Toward a "Common Definition of English Learner": Guidance for States and State Assessment Consortia in Defining and Addressing Policy and Technical Issues and Options

Robert Linquanti and H. Gary Cook | Copyright: 2013

A just-released paper responds to a requirement by the U.S. Department of Education that states participating in the four federally funded assessment consortia are required to establish a "common definition of English Learner." The paper outlines central issues for defining English learners using a four-stage framework to:

- » Identify a student as a potential English learner
- » Classify (confirm/disconfirm) a student as an English learner
- » Establish an "English-language proficient" performance standard on the state/consortium ELP test against which to assess English learners' English-language proficiency
- » Reclassify a student to former-English learner status through the use of multiple exit criteria

► <http://www.WestEd.org/commondefinition>

*Address service requested*

**continued  
from page 5**

Ultimately, Lally says, the reasons to invest in our nation's babies are far more profound than a list of economic pros and cons. "A few years ago, my colleague was visiting France to look at their system of infant/toddler care services, which is largely publicly financed," remembers Lally. "She asked one of the French politicians how France could afford to offer all of these services. The politician looked surprised by her question and said, 'These are our children. They're our country's future—how could we afford not to provide these services?'"



**For more information about the Program for Infant/Toddler Care at WestEd, contact Project Co-Directors J. Ronald Lally at 415.289.2300, [rlally@wested.org](mailto:rlally@wested.org); or Peter Mangione 415.289.2310, [pmangio@wested.org](mailto:pmangio@wested.org). For details on the For Our Babies campaign, contact J. Ronald Lally or go to the project website: <http://forourbabies.org/wp/>. To order a copy of *For Our Babies: Ending the Invisible Neglect of America's Infants*, go to: <http://www.wested.org/resources/for-our-babies-ending-the-invisible-neglect-of-americas-infants/>**

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