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BRIEFLY

- » Effective state-level technical assistance relies on establishing credibility and expertise, building partnerships, and focusing on systemic capacity.
- » Convening cross-state groups can be a highly efficient way to provide technical assistance.
- » Technical assistance focused on systemic capacity can have a much wider and more lasting impact than just assisting individual SEA staff and leaders.

Increasing State Capacity Through Technical Assistance:

High Impact, But Hard to Quantify

Call to mind an image of public education, and that picture is *not* likely to include administrative offices in the state capital. State education agencies (SEAs) traditionally have focused on policy and compliance issues, typically considered distant from the daily action of classrooms. Yet SEAs are taking on deeper and more complex roles, often grappling more directly with challenges at the district and school levels. New accountability measures, for example, are leading states to work more closely with districts to help them better understand the measures and how to implement reforms.

Because expanding into these kinds of roles can be a tall order, SEAs are increasingly calling on outside expertise and partners for assistance. Often the call for help is answered by a comprehensive technical assistance center. There are 22 such federally funded centers charged with helping SEAs build their capacity to work with districts and schools to improve education for students.

WestEd is the lead agency in five such centers and serves as a partner in three others. A cross-agency group representing all of WestEd's comprehensive centers recently reflected on lessons learned from their many years of experience providing technical assistance to SEAs throughout the country. Their reflections are summarized in a white paper, *WestEd Comprehensive Centers: Building the Capacity of States Through Technical Assistance*.

"State-level technical assistance is high-impact work, yet hard to quantify," says Carlas McCauley, Director of WestEd's Center on School Turnaround, part of the national network of comprehensive centers. The role of technical assistance (commonly known as "TA") can be hard to pin

down because TA providers wear multiple hats. They may provide research findings or offer training, or serve as a thought partner, helping a client problem solve. Sometimes they act as coaches, and other times they directly suggest what should be done. Often the work is behind the scenes, supporting SEA leaders to accomplish their objectives and contributing to, rather than directly leading, their initiatives.

Effective TA has led to impacts such as: new policies and systems for assessing and supporting educator effectiveness; new ways of turning around low-performing schools; restructured granting and monitoring policies and procedures to better support districts; and adoption and implementation of college- and career-readiness standards built on a process of broad stakeholder engagement.

According to WestEd's recent white paper, key qualities of effective state-level TA that can lead to these kinds of impact include establishing relationships through credibility and expertise; building collaborative partnerships; and focusing on systemic capacity.





EFFECTIVE TA BEGINS WITH ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS AND EXPERTISE

According to the WestEd white paper's authors, outside assistance providers need to provide support that is customized and grounded in the context of a particular state and therefore must begin by knowing a state well — its history, values, policies, politics, and the SEA leaders and staff.

"Building trusting relationships is at the core of technical assistance," says Marie Mancuso, Co-Director of WestEd's West Comprehensive Center, which serves Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. "We build trust and credibility by being timely and relevant and by addressing SEAs' highest priority needs," says Mancuso. "It enables us to wear the different hats we ultimately wear: consultant, critical friend, provider of training."

Having the right background can help TA providers establish credibility. Many comprehensive center staff have held leadership positions in an SEA, which helps them understand the opportunities as well as the challenges and constraints that SEAs face. The center staff bring that experience to the client relationship; having "walked in their shoes," they have credibility with SEA staff, says Mancuso.

WestEd's comprehensive center staff also build trust by providing content and technical expertise — not just in TA, but also in research and development. Centers not only draw on the expertise of their own staff but are adept at leveraging other sources of expertise as well.

EFFECTIVE TA DRAWS ON PARTNERSHIPS

The comprehensive centers often convene communities of practice, bringing together SEAs to hear from experts and share ideas and strategies with each other. Convening cross-state groups can be a highly efficient way to provide technical assistance. When multiple states are focused on the

same issue, the TA provider can efficiently provide the same information and guidance to many states at once, maximizing the resources and widening the impact, instead of expending resources and time providing the same support and expertise multiple times in different states.

In 2011, for example, numerous states had just passed legislation establishing a state educator evaluation system, using student achievement data as a significant indicator of teachers' effectiveness, which had never been done before. In response to requests from states, the West Comprehensive Center created an Educator Effectiveness initiative and formed a regional community of practice with Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, to help each state develop and pilot an educator evaluation model and make adjustments based on findings.

"It was one of the most complex things we ever had to implement," says Robert Hammond, Colorado Commissioner of Education and a 26-year veteran education leader. "It involved designing an entire system focused on both professional practice and student growth."

The comprehensive center brought together state chiefs, board members, and legislators, as well as association leaders, district leaders, and even foundations. Over a five-year period, they've met more than a dozen times — hearing from national experts, sharing progress and challenges, and building cross-state relationships. Center staff have also provided state-specific assistance and partnered with other TA organizations for both regional and state-specific work. As a result, each state has fully implemented its educator evaluation system, moving from policy to practice.

"WestEd has been incredibly important, not only in getting players together," says Hammond, "but in networking to share promising practices across the country."

Our goal is to...facilitate national dialogue and develop a community of leaders around turnaround at the state level.

The topic of school turnaround is another for which states throughout the country face common challenges. But there has been no single entity providing a national perspective on this issue until recently. Today, WestEd's Center on School Turnaround is helping move the conversation away from a school-by-school issue and toward leveraging expertise for change on a national level. "Our goal is to not only support the capacity of agencies with resources and tools," says McCauley, "but to also help facilitate national dialogue and develop a community of leaders around turnaround at the state level."

McCauley provides another example of the importance of collaboration around technical assistance: The Center on School Turnaround worked with a state where multiple SEA offices were active in low-performing schools. Each office was driven by its own funding stream, focused on everything from special education and English learners to school improvement grants. Due to lack of communication, these different SEA groups were not coordinating with each other — the proverbial left hand was unaware of the right, an all-too-common silo effect, notes McCauley.

To address this issue, "our center developed a strategic plan that incorporated the different offices touching these lowest-performing schools," says McCauley. "Now they monitor jointly, provide TA jointly, and host conferences jointly."

EFFECTIVE TA BUILDS SYSTEMIC CAPACITY

Another way that effective TA helps alleviate the silo effect is by focusing on systemic improvement. Going beyond just assisting individual SEA staff or leaders, TA that is focused on systemic capacity can have a much wider and more lasting impact by contributing to policy changes, such as promoting professional development or aligning support between feeder schools and high schools, says McCauley.

For example, a systemic capacity problem faced by many low-performing schools is that they need the best and the brightest teachers but often can't compete to identify, recruit, and develop them. To address this issue, some districts in Louisiana, Oregon, Texas, and elsewhere now have policies allowing the lowest-performing schools to recruit teachers and principals four months prior to other schools. The Center on School Turnaround helps promote these kinds of changes through identifying promising practices, highlighting case studies of what's effective, and sharing these exemplars around the country.

Systemic capacity-building also addresses a problem endemic to SEAs: lack of continuity due to frequent changes in initiatives, leadership, and staff. Orienting TA toward the organization's systemic capacity, rather than any individual's capacity, helps establish systems, processes, and procedures that are sustainable beyond any individual's tenure. It also requires TA providers to be nimble as direction changes when leadership changes, priorities change, or new legislation comes along.

Discussing his retirement and subsequent transitions in staff, Hammond acknowledges the impact a systemic approach to the Educator Effectiveness initiative has had. "No matter what happens here, we have changed professional practices across the state," he says. "I'm confident the work will go on." And that is exactly the nature of the impact for which the comprehensive centers strive — systemic change that sustains.



For more information about technical assistance provided through WestEd's Comprehensive Centers, contact Marie Mancuso at 602.322.7003 or mmancus@WestEd.org.



BRIEFLY

» A case study documents the positive impacts of a leadership training program and the challenges of sustaining improvements in districts serving large numbers of disadvantaged students.

» The program helped leaders generate higher academic expectations, data use and awareness, and staff collaboration in their districts.

» Although sustainability is a challenge due to leadership and staff turnover, the case study documents the importance of involving the community in the turnaround process.

TAKEAWAYS FROM

School Leadership Development in Challenging Districts

During the 19 years he worked as a principal in Arizona's Yuma Elementary School District #1, Rusty Tyndall participated in many initiatives designed to boost achievement in the high-poverty district. So three years ago, when he was invited with other administrators to the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Specialist Program, Tyndall expected the training to feel familiar, "like going to failing-school camp."

Instead, he says, "It felt brand new because they didn't just talk at us with all the answers. The consistent message was that school leaders should look inward and find solutions based on their own experience and expertise." In other words, Tyndall says, "what can *you* do as a leader to leverage your influence, power, authority, and personality to help your team become more effective?"

On his return to Gila Vista Junior High School, Tyndall and his leadership team developed a 90-day action plan outlining their vision, goals, challenges, actions, and timetable as well as identifying the responsible parties and evidence that would show progress. They began helping teachers focus on data — rather than rely on assumptions and anecdotes — to analyze student performance.

Tyndall also made it possible for teachers to meet regularly on collaborative teams and encouraged their tough conversations about why students were missing learning targets and what combination of social, emotional, and academic supports might move them ahead. To personalize learning for every child, the school plans to adopt a one-to-one technology initiative so teachers can better differentiate instruction.

"We have not yet reached the goal" of universal achievement, Tyndall acknowledges as he enters retirement in 2015. But the seeds of excellence are sprouting.

A new case study by WestEd finds evidence to support Tyndall's optimism, but it also documents the continued challenge of sustaining improvements in districts that serve large numbers of disadvantaged students. The report, *Understanding the Impacts of Leadership Development*, examines the turnaround efforts in both Yuma and the Whiteriver Unified School District, which serves the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona.

CONTEXT FOR LEARNING ABOUT LEADERSHIP TRAINING'S IMPACT

During the summer of 2012, 23 administrators and teacher leaders from Whiteriver and Yuma attended the School Turnaround Specialist Program at the University of Virginia, with support from the West Comprehensive Center at WestEd. The program provides state, district, and school leaders with the kind of executive education that traditionally has prepared business leaders to manage large corporations. Participants receive leadership-based professional development and monitoring over a two and one-half year period with the goal of producing significant gains in student outcomes. By analyzing and applying case studies of how teams historically have solved intractable problems, school administrators learn how to focus on raising achievement in persistently low-performing schools.

Researchers were interested in exploring the impact of this program in Yuma and Whiteriver primarily because of



They began helping teachers focus on data — rather than rely on assumptions and anecdotes — to analyze student performance.

the districts' challenging contexts: Yuma is about 15 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border and serves a high percentage of Latino students, including those with limited English proficiency; Whiteriver serves an isolated community where about 80 percent of adults are unemployed.

Both districts have a history of low achievement and have qualified for many state and federal initiatives to improve teaching and learning. Indeed, some staff complained about having "school change fatigue" because they had been asked to participate in so many reform initiatives over the years. Some educators resisted implementation of past leadership training recommendations, figuring they could simply avoid making changes until the grants and program monitoring ended.

IMPACT ON INSTRUCTION, CULTURE, AND DATA USE

According to WestEd's case study, the training influenced how leaders in Yuma "approached short-term strategic planning, scheduling, observation, and feedback within their schools," and the instructional and administrative changes "had a clear impact on the school cultures of the five middle schools" that participated. Specifically, the administrative changes generated higher academic expectations, increased data use and awareness, and more staff collaboration.

Yuma educators note that the School Turnaround Specialist Program "helped to take teachers out of the silos of their classroom," says Evelyn Baca, a researcher with the West Comprehensive Center and coauthor of the report. "One principal mentioned that after teachers aligned the curriculum, students began to perform more consistently across classrooms."

Learning to use various forms of data to diagnose students' learning gaps was among the most significant impacts that the school turnaround program had in Yuma. Previously, "teachers and administrators described data use as something that was done on a teacher-to-teacher basis and indicated that it was not systemic or regulated at the administrative level," according to the report. Afterward, "there was a fundamental shift in the way student data was used for collaborative purposes to inform instruction." Data-driven practices became embedded in everyday campus culture through collaborative team meetings, structured intervention periods, personalized student monitoring, data displays, and targeted professional development.

A key part of the transformation process in Yuma, as noted by principal Tyndall, has been learning to look for answers within their sphere of influence, rather than blaming outside factors that may contribute to students' learning problems. The WestEd report notes that the leadership training tried to imbue the districts with "an anti-deficit approach to learning," asking educators to raise their expectations of students and of themselves. Putting this approach into action, most teachers formed professional learning communities to improve their instruction.

"We can't let teachers and principals say, 'It's the kids' fault,'" says Kriss Rico, associate superintendent of Yuma School District One. "We have to coach teachers and give them the tools and resources to make kids successful, such as enhanced curriculum and proven classroom practices, including differentiated instruction, small-group learning, and individualized instruction."

IMPROVEMENTS TEMPERED BY CHALLENGES

In Whiteriver, researchers found less sustained impact. Although administrators have become more strategic and teachers more collaborative, “sustainability of the school turnaround efforts was a challenge in Whiteriver, mainly due to the turnover of staff, faculty, and administration.”

The report describes conditions that make turnover high on the reservation, including its remote location, long commutes, high cost of living in the nearest town, difficult circumstances that teachers see the students go through, and low salaries. To recruit experienced administrators who had successfully led other schools through turnaround, Whiteriver used federal grants to pay them higher salaries. But given challenges such as long commutes and the intensity of the jobs, it has been difficult for the district to retain experienced administrators after funding for higher salaries dried up. Eventually all of the administrators who participated in the University of Virginia training left the school district.

Other legacies of the leadership training do endure, however. To help students dealing with poverty, abuse, and gang violence, Whiteriver hired counselors, social workers, and behavioral health workers for every school, and these new staff have been instrumental in improving the school culture. When grant funds that supported these positions ran out, district leaders turned to the White Mountain Apache Tribe, which then partnered with the district to retain most of the behavioral health workers.

“A takeaway from this was the importance of involving the community in the turnaround process,” says Jameson Lopez, coauthor of the report. “The community wasn’t

involved in all aspects of school turnaround. Tribal councils have power on the reservation, and some people in the district” with ties to the council have never bought into the reforms.

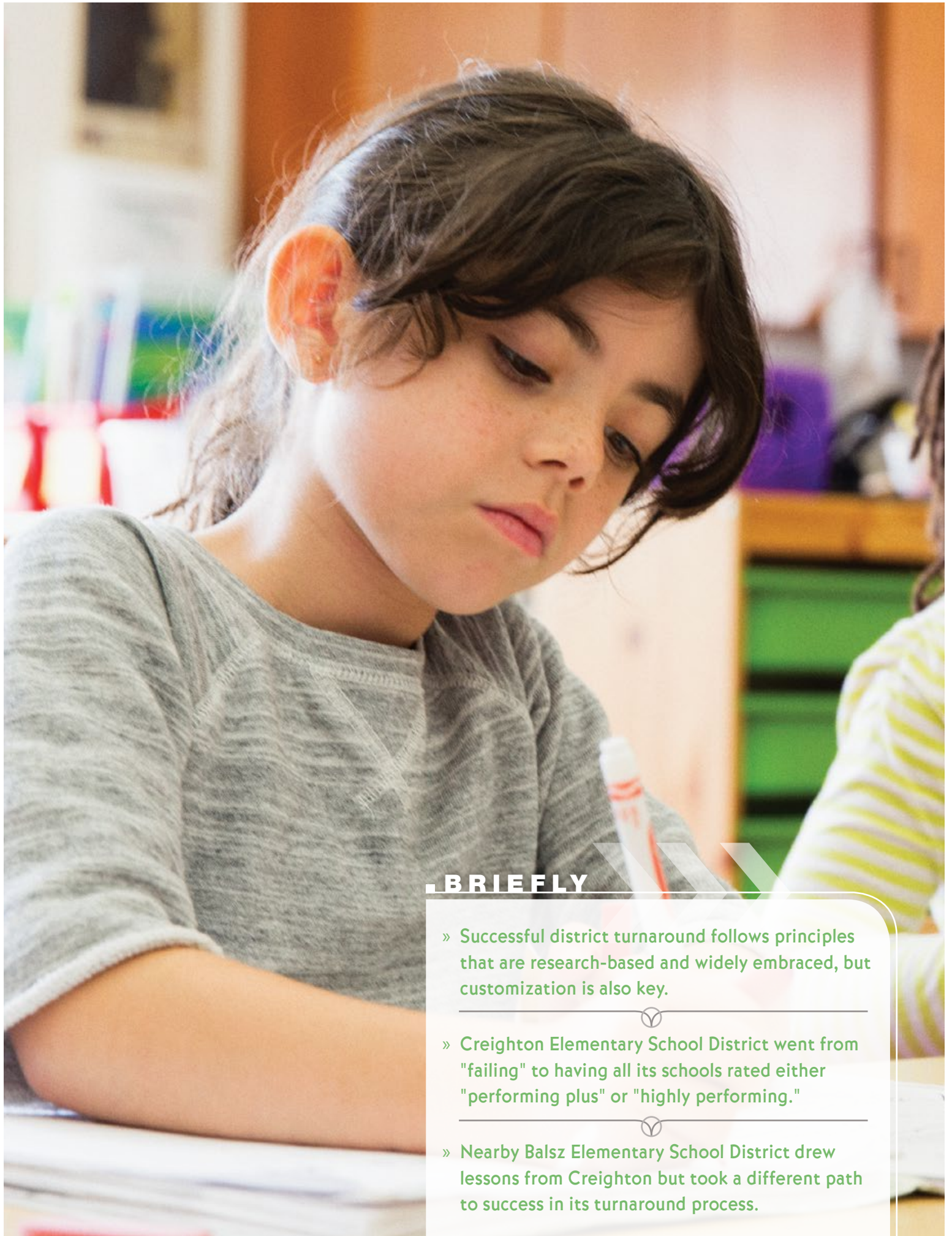
In Whiteriver, district leaders have discovered that they can get high-quality educators and reduce turnover by hiring people with ties to the White Mountain Apache Tribe. For example, the incoming superintendent is White Mountain Apache, and the district also recently promoted two educators to be new principals — one of whom is a tribal member, and the other had married into the tribe.

“The kids will see these women and tribal members in positions of authority,” Lopez notes.

Another lesson learned from the district’s experiences concerns the limitations of education alone to make a difference in the community. One administrator says that during his 18 years in the district, 61 students died from suicide and alcohol-related and drug abuse. In cases where students do excel, they have had to face the choice of leaving the reservation to pursue college or careers or stay behind with few prospects of employment. The lack of economic development may ask them to make a cruel bargain with future prosperity.

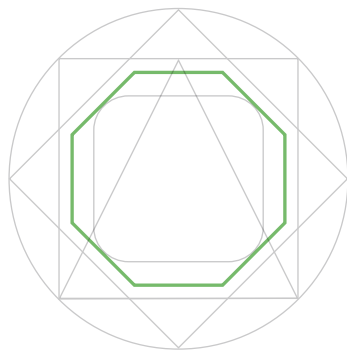


For more information about the WestEd study, contact West Comprehensive Center Director Paul Koehler at 602.322.7004 or pkoehle@WestEd.org, or Associate Director Marie Mancuso at 602.322.7003 or mmancus@WestEd.org.



» BRIEFLY

- » Successful district turnaround follows principles that are research-based and widely embraced, but customization is also key.
- » Creighton Elementary School District went from "failing" to having all its schools rated either "performing plus" or "highly performing."
- » Nearby Balsz Elementary School District drew lessons from Creighton but took a different path to success in its turnaround process.



REPLICATING DISTRICT TURNAROUND: WHAT WORKS IS CUSTOMIZATION

Once leaders in Phoenix's Balsz Elementary School District committed to embarking on serious school improvement, they didn't have far to look for an inspirational model. Nearby Creighton Elementary School District was already several years into a comprehensive turnaround process, and achieving considerable success.

The path to replicating Creighton's improvements might have seemed straightforward. Balsz and Creighton share similar student demographics, each began with comparable student achievement challenges, and Balsz leaders brought in the same outside support that had guided Creighton's turnaround: a technical assistance team from WestEd and funding from the Ellis Center for Educational Excellence, a Phoenix-based foundation.

Yet Balsz pursued a path to turnaround that was very different from Creighton's — a difference that was both intentional and key to success.

School reform initiatives at the district level are always challenging, in part because no two districts are entirely the same, explains Joseph Sassone, director of Integrated Services for WestEd's Comprehensive School Assistance Program. "We know the principles that work, but going into a particular district and getting those principles fully implemented is another story," says Sassone. "Every situation is different. You have to customize."

The school improvement principles Sassone is talking about are time-tested, research-based, and widely embraced. They include the use of a viable curriculum;

data-based instruction and decision making; regular assessment of student progress, with intervention provided when and where necessary; and professional development and coaching for teachers and school leaders. But the process of putting such elements in place can lead to very different emphases and timelines, even in districts as similar as Balsz and Creighton.

CREIGHTON: THE MODEL

Creighton serves 7,200 students in kindergarten through grade 8, about 90 percent of the students are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch, and more than half are English language learners. When Creighton began a turnaround process in 2008, it was a struggling, underperforming district. The state had designated the district as "failing" and six of its nine schools as "underperforming."

Sassone, who helped lead the reform work undertaken in Creighton, said it focused on three areas: establishing a viable standards-based curriculum and measuring the extent to which students were meeting the standards; coaching teachers in high-quality classroom strategies to boost student achievement; and using data to refine instruction. "These are basic, research-proven



...No matter how similar two districts, the context is always different, and you have to understand that context.

characteristics of successful school turnaround programs," he says.

Six years and \$4.6 million later, Creighton is a different district. And the improvements, Sassone explains, came fairly quickly: By spring 2011, eight of its schools had been relabeled as "performing plus" and one as "highly performing." The percentage of students who met or exceeded proficiency in reading increased from 48.5 to 68 percent. Because the standards and assessments now used to measure student progress in Arizona have changed, it is difficult to compare current student achievement to earlier progress. But according to Creighton Superintendent Charlotte Boyle, achievement levels are holding steady, and less quantifiable results of the reforms — such as stronger district coherence, leadership ability, and the quality of the district's professional development — remain firmly in place.

REPLICATION IN BALSZ: TAILORING REFORM TO FIT CONTEXT

When the turnaround process in Balsz began in 2011, WestEd's team drew on lessons learned from Creighton and other districts. "But no matter how similar two districts, the context is always different, and you have to understand that context," notes Sassone.

In both districts, the WestEd team began by getting to know the district's needs and building relationships with administrators and educators. This process led to different, customized school improvement models in each site. Both districts focused heavily on curriculum and instruction and on support for English language learners, says Sassone, but whereas Creighton educators prioritized students' reading ability and the overall quality of classroom instruction, the priorities for Balsz were developing

principals' capacity to carry out reforms and improving math achievement. Balsz also chose to focus on developing strong school-based leadership teams. "That was something we had not concentrated on in Creighton," says Sassone, "but which we came to realize was critical if we wanted change to really take hold in Balsz."

Another key step in any effective replication process is actively engaging school leaders and other major players, getting them to commit to the hard work involved, Sassone says. It's that commitment that provides not only the impetus to create new policies and procedures, but also the drive to sustain them. "We can show you *what* needs to be done, and *how* to do the work," he says. "But you're the ones who actually have to *do* the work."

Alexis Wilson, Balsz's assistant superintendent of Administrative Services, says educators in Balsz were "honest about the fact that we needed help, and that if there were other experts with greater expertise in curriculum, using data, and professional development, we wanted their support." But they were also apprehensive, uncertain about the "big, outside entity that had come in to change Creighton."

In Balsz, Wilson says it certainly helped that she had previously worked with Sassone when she was a new principal at Griffith Elementary School and Sassone was a consultant for the district. As a result, "Joe and I had already built a relationship and it was easy for me to say to my staff, 'I know this guy, and he knows what he's talking about.'"

In the absence of long-standing, prior relationships such as the one that existed between Wilson and Sassone, engagement can often emerge from the results of a formal district needs assessment. Sassone says such an

instrument is a “good way to come to understand all the factors that make up a district and helps people realize that you really do comprehend their needs. Once you’ve done that, you can sit down together and with credibility start building relationships based on a high level of trust, which then leads to customizing a replication to fit a specific district.”

According to Wilson, it didn’t take long for others in Balsz to begin building those relationships with the WestEd specialists, and that laid the groundwork for a long-term, productive process. She says that ultimately it was the ability of Sassone and the WestEd team to communicate effectively that helped solidify their relationships with her teachers and principals, which in turn led them to commit to the improvement initiatives. She especially appreciated the WestEd staffers’ willingness to customize the process – to “listen to us, and then adjust their plans based on our input.”

Sassone notes that another necessary part of successfully customizing school reform is an awareness of and ability to respond to the political climate in a district, such as the nature of the relationship between the school board and superintendent. In Creighton, Boyle saw her role as a promoter and protector of the reform process. “Because of that, when things got rough, we could be confident that the board would continue to back the initiatives,” says Sassone. “I think the superintendent’s support made a huge difference.”

REPLICATING SUCCESS

Within two years of Balsz beginning the reform process with WestEd, the district’s students had made significant gains in reading and math: The percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency in reading increased

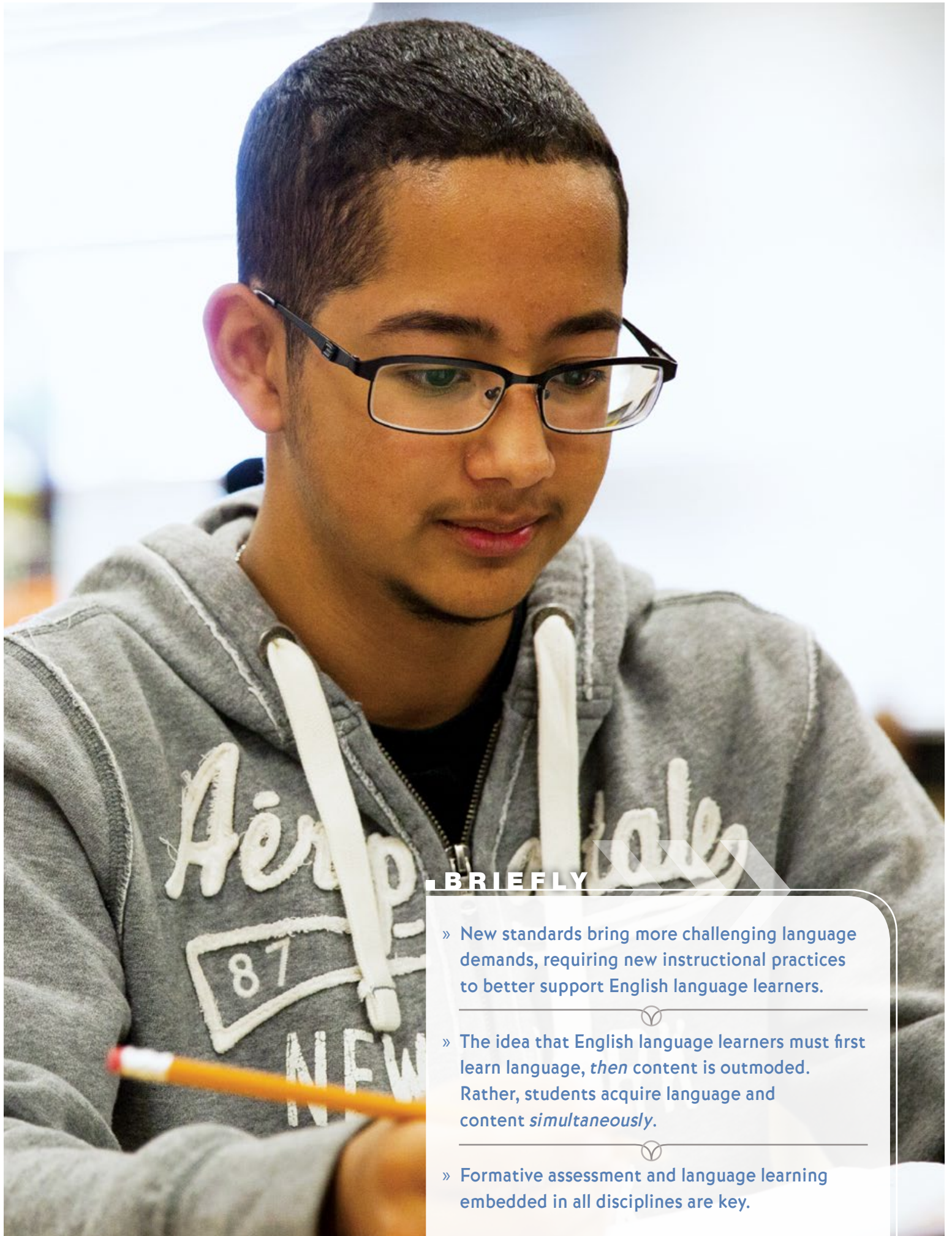
from 56 to 65 percent, and in math, the percentage increased from 49 to 59 percent. Griffith Elementary School won the National Center for Educational Achievement’s Higher Performing School Award. Now five years into the process, Sassone still visits the district five times per year to work on leadership issues, and a team of WestEd experts who specialize in teaching English language learners visits monthly, as does a team of math specialists.

In addition to working in Balsz and Creighton, WestEd’s Comprehensive School Assistance Program is tackling school turnaround in numerous other locales, including the Arizona border city of Douglas, three rural California school districts (Evergreen Elementary, Fairfield-Suisun Unified, and Konocti Unified), and a large, urban Wisconsin district (Milwaukee Public Schools).

In each case, a customized process is being used to replicate proven school improvement initiatives. As Wilson notes, replication “seems so basic, and makes so much sense: Take what you know has worked well somewhere else and put it in place in your district.” Still, she adds, “I attribute our success to the fact that while we replicated much of what happened in Creighton, our approach was different, modified, and it grew out of our communication with those on the WestEd team.”



For more information about WestEd’s district turnaround efforts, contact Joseph Sassone at 520.247.7111 or jsasson@WestEd.org.



BRIEFLY

» New standards bring more challenging language demands, requiring new instructional practices to better support English language learners.



» The idea that English language learners must first learn language, *then* content is outmoded. Rather, students acquire language and content *simultaneously*.



» Formative assessment and language learning embedded in all disciplines are key.

English Language Learners Need

New Pedagogy

to Meet the Latest Standards

“The face of the country is changing dramatically,” says Aída Walqui, director of WestEd’s Teacher Professional Development Program. According to data from the Economic Policy Institute, for example, the percentage of Latinos in the U.S. will increase by more than 300 percent in the next 15 years.

Many in this growing population are English language learners, and too many of these students keep underperforming, Walqui says. “It’s not that these students aren’t talented or don’t have immense potential. It’s that our education system, following standard approaches, doesn’t adequately support their potential to develop.”

Along with WestEd colleagues Margaret Heritage, senior scientist, and Robert Linqanti, project director and senior researcher, Walqui hopes to move the pedagogy in a more positive direction. The three jointly authored *English Language Learners and the New Standards: Developing Language, Content Knowledge, and Analytical Practices in the Classroom*, published by Harvard Education Press in May 2015.

Drawing on complementary specialties and perspectives — Heritage’s expertise with formative assessment, Linqanti’s policy and accountability background, and Walqui’s research-based advocacy for English learners and teacher professional development — the authors describe instructional practices and supportive policies that can best enhance current education reforms. They provide practical examples for how to support individual student learning, illustrated by classroom vignettes — all

drawn from each author’s respective experience working with teachers.

NEW STANDARDS BRING MORE CHALLENGING LANGUAGE DEMANDS

The book is a timely response to the latest standards for college- and career-readiness and to the new, more rigorous assessment systems flowing from those standards. As with previous waves of reform, the new standards and assessments have triggered a systemwide emphasis on accountability. But this time, the authors argue, the reforms must also foster the instructional practices needed for English language learners to succeed in meeting the standards.

Linqanti notes that the latest standards encourage more collaborative, interpretive, and productive uses of language such as having students “argue from evidence” or “discern key points and request clarification,” whereas previous standards often had simpler demands for declarative knowledge and factual recall. “This shift has given rise to more focus on students’ meaning-making and using language to get things done,” he says.



However, such heightened cognitive and linguistic demands are challenging for all learners and especially for those students also learning English, says Heritage. “In the context of these more rigorous expectations, it’s clear the pedagogical status quo won’t get them where they need to be.”

Regardless of whether educators are excited or apprehensive about the new standards, says Linqunti, the standards will necessitate a shift away from underlying, outmoded theories of how students learn language.

NEEDED: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

A strong theme in the book is that teachers need to move away from the idea that English language learners must first learn the language and *then* content. “In fact, students acquire language and content *simultaneously*,” explains Heritage.

This means all teachers need to see themselves as teachers of language use — a concept foundational to successful implementation of new standards, says Linqunti. The challenge is that many teachers have thought of English language development as something that happens for English learners at only one time of day or with just one teacher.

“But every teacher teaches students how to speak and read and write in their discipline — even in math, where reading is very different from reading short stories in a language arts class, for example,” says Walqui. “For teachers to realize this can entail a major reorientation, a monumental shift, one that can’t be accomplished overnight.”

To be successful with English language learners, teachers need to engage them in language-rich practices,

appropriate to the discipline. Doing so means focusing less exclusively on fluency and grammatically correct sentences, and more on comprehension and communication, says Walqui. She notes that teachers also need to reorient away from teaching isolated pieces of content and toward teaching how to make connections, ask questions, and solve problems — an organic, deliberate process that builds deeper understanding and more sophisticated language use in students.

“You can’t separate language from analytical or disciplinary practices and conceptual development,” adds Linqunti. Even when language is the primary focus of instruction, as in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, activities should still draw from and apply to what students are engaged in during the rest of the day, he says. Teachers of all subjects should collaborate as needed. “If ESL teachers know what other classes are focusing on, they can create opportunities to stretch students’ language in the service of learning content, just as content teachers have students use language extensively to carry out content practices.”

Another shift in pedagogy requires thinking of language learning as a process that is social and active rather than individual and passive, says Linqunti. English learners can best use and grow their English language skills in interactive settings.

“We need classrooms where students are actively engaged in discussing, writing, doing, and notating, as well as listening,” notes Walqui, “because it is through participation in those activities that they’ll be able to meet the new standards and develop their full potential.”

All teachers need to see themselves as teachers of language use — a concept foundational to successful implementation of new standards.

KEY COMPONENT OF EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

At the heart of this new pedagogy, says Heritage, is formative assessment. Teachers engaged in formative assessment do not simply assess achievement at the end of a sequence of learning. Instead, they intentionally elicit evidence about how students' thinking and language use are evolving *during the learning process*, and they act on what they hear and see in real time. For teachers of English language learners, this refocus also means continually attending to the emergence of language and responding in ways that advance language learning.

Useful formative assessment also involves students in the process — enhancing their agency in the learning process, she adds. "Involving students in formative assessment can help them become skilled at self-monitoring, knowing whether they're stuck or struggling, and provides a repertoire of ideas and strategies to make progress."

Teachers can use formative assessment most effectively when they know their students well, including knowing about English language learners' native languages, cultures, early childhood experiences, and family histories, says Heritage. "This knowledge goes a long way toward addressing assumptions that English language learners are a homogenous group who all learn in exactly the same way."

ALSO NEEDED: SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS TO BETTER SERVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Unfortunately, the system has de-skilled teachers in the art of gathering and responding to ongoing evidence during the flow of instruction, says Linqunti. "Our system tells them it's all about teach, test, and remediate, when it should really be about assess and assist, assess and assist. There's

been so much focus on testing events we've forgotten that the classroom is where learning occurs."

Teachers will require concerted support to learn skills like how to effectively implement formative assessment and how to consciously embed language learning in all disciplines, says Walqui. "We know from every other advanced country in the world that teachers spend hours a day working on their craft — collaborating with peers, discussing student work, and analyzing results to decide what's next."

Teachers and administrators also need the authority to actively shape education policy, says Linqunti. "A lot of policy has been very prescriptive about how teachers are supposed to teach English language learners." As Linqunti writes in the book's final chapter, ". . . we need to flip the prevailing paradigm of school improvement. That is, instead of attempting to improve instructional practice from the outside in with external mandates and controls, we need to create knowledge and cultivate expert practice from within local settings."

Although the pedagogical changes recommended by the authors require enormous shifts, says Linqunti, good results with English language learners can provide a kind of leading indicator. "If the practices we advocate in the book are successful with English learners, they're very likely to be effective with all students. We will succeed or fail in implementing the new standards for *all* students based on the quality of teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom."



For more information about *English Language Learners and the New Standards*, contact Margaret Heritage at mherita@WestEd.org, Robert Linqunti at rlinqua@WestEd.org, or Aída Walqui at awalqui@WestEd.org.

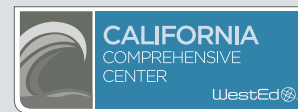
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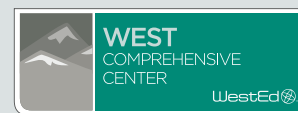
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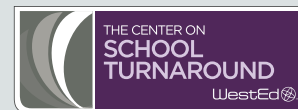
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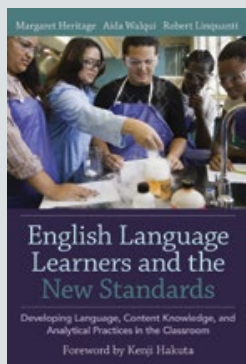
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FEATURED RESOURCES



English Language Learners and the New Standards: Developing Language, Content Knowledge, and Analytical Practices in the Classroom

Margaret Heritage, Aída Walqui, and Robert Linquanti
Foreword by Kenji Hakuta

This new book from Harvard Education Press presents a clear vision and practical suggestions for helping teachers engage English language learner students in simultaneously learning subject-area content, analytical practices, and language. It clarifies the skills and knowledge teachers need to integrate content knowledge and language development, shows how teachers can integrate formative assessment into ongoing teaching and learning, and provides classroom vignettes illustrating key practices.

ISBN: 978-1-61250-801-6 | \$32 | 224 pages | Harvard Education Press | 2015
▶ WestEd.org/resources/english-language-learners-and-the-new-standards

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R&D Alert Editor
Noel White

Contributors
Holly Holland
Priscilla Pardini
Annie Stuart

Copy Editor
Tracy Landauer

Proofreader
Jacob Richardson

Art Direction
Christian Holden

Design
Michael Medina

Photographs
Christian Holden

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Making Sense of SCIENCE: Genes & Traits for Teachers of Grades 5–12

Kirsten R. Daehler and Jennifer Folsom

These comprehensive professional development course materials for teachers of grades 5–12 are designed to deepen science understanding in the context of student learning. Complementing any curriculum, these materials support the learning of key concepts related to genetics — from the origins of traits to the many factors that influence gene expression.

ISBN: 978-1-938287-27-5 | \$249.95* | Multimedia | WestEd | 2015
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Making Sense of Student Work: A Protocol for Teacher Collaboration

Kirsten R. Daehler and Jennifer Folsom

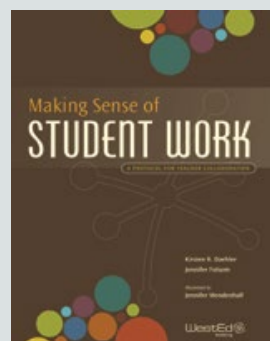
This resource is a self-facilitated protocol, ideal for collaborative groups of 3–24 teachers. It is divided into five 2-hour sessions, each with a specific focus. The protocol provides a framework to help teachers have evidence-based discussions about students' work and students' thinking, examine and come to understand students' ideas and the logic behind these ideas, strengthen their abilities to make instructional choices in response to the specific ways students are thinking, and analyze and improve the formative assessment tasks they use with students.

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