



EdEVIDENCE

Newsletter of the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

As Stimulus Funding Flows, REL-NEI Has a Role to Play



Several members of the REL-NEI senior management team attended the REL Directors meeting last month in Washington, D.C. Held twice each year, these meetings are an opportunity for the leadership at the 10 RELs nationwide to share experiences, collaborate on projects, exchange ideas, and engage with the [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs) staff who oversee our work.

In Washington, we heard from Marshall "Mike" S. Smith, former undersecretary and acting deputy secretary for education in the Clinton administration and now senior advisor to Education Secretary Arne Duncan. Mr. Smith is working to implement the new federal stimulus package, or [The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act](http://www.eop.govt.gov/american-recovery-act), which provides over \$100 billion for public education, from pre-K through college. States will receive federal aid for school construction projects, special education, Title I school improvement programs, Head Start, teacher quality investments, data-system development, school-building modernization, and more.

Mr. Smith charged the RELs with helping state leaders in our respective regions to use the stimulus funds effectively by turning to evidence and research to guide their decision-making. He reminded us to be mindful of how we can support our states and jurisdictions at this historic moment of transition and reform. "Think of the role you can play," he said. "You can bring to bear knowledge, expertise in the schools, relationships with school officers. Use this opportunity. Don't let it dwindle away. The effort is to drive reform in a faster and more coherent way than we have in the past."

Smith outlined three goals for the stimulus package:

- to distribute the money quickly to create and save jobs;
- to use the money smartly so it doesn't incur future ongoing obligations that states can't afford; and
- to stimulate education reform as well as the economy.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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I welcome your own reflections about how we can work with the federal government and the states at this unprecedented moment. Watch our website for stimulus-related resources.

At the same time, we will continue to provide evidence-based research to our education stakeholders. On February 23rd, REL-NEI and the [New England Comprehensive Center](#) co-hosted a Policy Challenges Conference for Connecticut ESL teachers, their supervisors, and state-level officials. Educators there view their growing English language learner (ELL) population as a critical issue, and they seek guidance in raising these students' achievement. The conference brought Dr. Robin Scarcella, Director of the Program in Academic English/ESL at the University of California, Irvine, to Simsbury, Conn., to present evidence-based recommendations from an IES Practice Guide she coauthored:

["Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in Elementary Grades."](#) About 80 educators and policymakers from across the state attended.

REL-NEI will organize several similar events this year—meetings targeted to specific stakeholder groups that showcase IES and REL resources to address key issues of concern. Please watch our website and your e-mail for face-to-face and electronic opportunities to participate in these events.

Finally, on February 5–6, REL-NEI hosted the first joint meeting of our Governing Board and Technical Working Group. Governing Board Members identify and prioritize the educational needs of the region, review REL-NEI products, and assist with outreach and dissemination efforts. The Technical Working Group includes experts in rigorous educational research

who review our study designs and analysis plans to ensure they meet the highest quality standards. The meeting provided an opportunity for everyone to discuss our two ongoing randomized controlled trial (RCT) studies and to think about implementation and data collection in real school settings. Participants noted that the thoughtful design of these studies will help us to draw educationally meaningful conclusions from the findings.

As always, I welcome your feedback and ideas for making REL-NEI relevant to your school or district. Please e-mail me at relneiinfo@edc.org.

Sincerely,

Jill E. Weber
Director, REL Northeast and Islands

Connecticut Event Showcases Evidence-Based Recommendations for English Language Learners

On Monday, February 23rd, REL-NEI hosted its first event built around a Practice Guide published by the [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#). The key recommendations from ["Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades,"](#) published by IES in December 2007, were presented by Dr. Robin Scarcella, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, and a member of the panel of six experts that wrote the guide.

IES Practice Guides provide discrete recommendations that are meant to be actionable to help form a coherent approach to a multifaceted educational challenge. Most importantly, each recommendation is connected to a "level of evidence"—strong, moderate, low—supporting it.

"I like the level-of-evidence indicator," offered one English language learner (ELL)



Dr. Robin Scarcella outlines recommendations for improving English language instruction for English language learners to Connecticut district administrators, ESL teachers, and state-level specialists.

program director from Connecticut's Meriden Public Schools during a table talk after Dr. Scarcella's keynote. "We do try to look at the research and see what the obstacles are, but districts don't have time to go through mounds of data."

As the number of ELLs in U.S. classrooms rapidly increases, educators face daily challenges to help these students learn English and succeed in school. The event, called a ["Policy Challenges Conference: Bridging Research and Practice"](#) was designed to support the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) interest in developing policies and practices to improve instruction for this student population.

"As we project ahead, Connecticut will lose population in the future, but we will gain English language learners," George Coleman, Connecticut's deputy education commissioner, told the audience of 80

gathered at The Simsbury Inn. "Our goal is to make sure that when our students leave our high schools, they will be highly functional in English."

Assistant superintendents of the 15 high-priority districts actively engaged with the CSDE's Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) were invited to bring a team of three to the event: an assistant superintendent, the district ELL program administrator, and a principal or teacher. Thirteen of the districts participated, along with a dozen personnel from the CSDE.

In her presentation, Scarcella, who directs UC-Irvine's Program in Academic English/ESL, observed that ELLs generally lag behind their peers in reading and will not achieve academically at high levels without strong reading skills. At the same time, she said, ELLs can learn to read at a rate comparable to native English speakers when they are given additional instructional supports and taught to read in English, regardless of whether they can speak in English.

"Do not wait until students have developed strong oral English proficiency before teaching reading," she said.

Scarcella discussed the five recommendations in the Practice Guide for improving

the reading achievement and English language development of ELLs in the elementary grades. These recommendations are:

1. Screen for reading problems and monitor progress;
2. Provide intensive small-group reading interventions;
3. Provide extensive and varied vocabulary instruction;
4. Develop academic English; and
5. Schedule regular peer-assisted learning opportunities.

"It may not seem so monumental that I'm making these recommendations, but I'm thrilled that there's a research base for them," she said. "For many years, there was not enough evidence for me to feel comfortable making recommendations."

After Scarcella's presentation, participants broke into small groups to discuss the implications of the recommendations for their districts and schools. Their conversations focused on topics including: the challenges of developing strategic vocabulary lists; defining "academic English;" identifying valid formative assessments; the need for deliberate, coherent professional development in ELL instruc-

tion; and determining the threshold for exiting students from ESL programs.

Over lunch, a panel of four speakers discussed the distinct challenges presented by highly mobile ELL students, particularly Puerto Rican students who travel back and forth between Puerto Rico and the mainland United States. Maria-Paz Avery, REL-NEI Liaison to Rhode Island and a representative of the [New England Comprehensive Center](#), said that education reform and accountability is based on the premise that children stay in the same school but, in fact, 15 to 18 percent of school-aged children each year change their residence. She said the research literature shows that high student mobility doesn't just lower the academic achievement of the students who move but creates obstacles for schools to providing consistent and coherent instruction to all their students.

In the afternoon, participants chose to attend one of three breakout sessions:

- The [What Works Clearinghouse](#) and [Doing What Works Website](#): A Resource for Educators to Assist Them in Applying Research Findings to Practice
- Findings from a REL Appalachia Issues & Answers Report: ["Preparing to Serve ELL Students: School Districts with Emerging ELL Communities"](#)
- Preliminary Findings from a REL-NEI Project: ["Processes and Challenges in Identifying Learning Disabilities Among ELLs in Three New York State Districts"](#)

Mary Jennings, Director of Literacy for the Stamford Public Schools, said the conference provided her with valuable and relevant information to bring back to her district and colleagues. In particular, she was excited about the resources for professional development in ELL instruction that are available on the Doing What Works website.

"If districts use these resources, we don't have to reinvent the wheel," she said. "The website's various levels of implementation and review of the research was most significant."

Scarcella closed the conference by sharing some of her own research into academic English. She said all students need to be given challenging, academic English instruction to acquire the high-



Dr. Scarcella shares her expertise with Connecticut ESL teachers and administrators.

level literacy skills needed to access and master advanced content. She urged districts and states to develop coherent policies and a challenging curriculum for academic English instruction.

"Teaching academic English can make an enormous difference and can open doors for people," she said.

The event was co-hosted by REL-NEI and the New England Comprehensive Center.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [IES Practice Guides](#)
- [What Works Clearinghouse](#)
- [Doing What Works Website](#)

RELATED REL RESEARCH:

- [English Language Proficiency Assessment in the Pacific Region](#) (REL Pacific)
- [New Measures of English Language Proficiency and Their Relationship to Performance on Large-Scale Content Assessments](#) (REL Northeast & Islands)

Increasing Education Equity in Connecticut: Q & A with Governing Board Member George Coleman

As a graduate student at Columbia University's Teachers College, Connecticut Deputy Commissioner of Education George Coleman became disenchanted with the quality of education of the minority students who lived in his community. His concern for these children, and their future, led to a career that has spanned from teaching preschool and high school to researching early childhood development, advocating universal pre-school, and running the Connecticut State Division of Teaching and Learning Programs and Services. Coleman joined REL-NEI's Governing Board in 2006 and spoke with *EdEvidence* on March 5th.

Q. What are the key changes in educational priorities and policies you've seen in Connecticut during your tenure?

There are three key areas of change that I have experienced and helped to promote:

- The issue of preschool and the commitment of the Connecticut State Legislature and the State Department of Education to move to universal preschool and to acknowledge that kids without it enter primary school very far behind their peers.
- The need to reform secondary school education in order to prepare all students for the challenges of the 21st century and a global work force.
- The need to develop an international perspective as a state: How do we begin to fashion our ability to compete for the high-quality jobs that Connecticut will have to have and the role schools play?



Connecticut Deputy Education Commissioner George Coleman speaks about the state's growing English language learner (ELL) population at a recent REL-NEI Policy Challenges Conference.

Q. What are the critical educational issues Connecticut faces today?

The great educational disparities across socioeconomic and racial lines and between native English speakers and nonnative speakers; and convincing an otherwise affluent community that our system needs to change because of the new economy.

Q. How would you characterize Connecticut's engagement with REL-NEI over the past three years?

I've seen our REL really grow in terms of its authority and in the investment that its nine jurisdictions have in bringing first-class data to our work. Frankly, our department was doing great research

and data collection before, but now to know we have an entity we can collaborate with and explore issues with before having a full design of our own, it's made us smarter about research and the analyses we should do.

Research provides a context, and in some cases answers, to policymakers about the issues that inform the investments that we make. It also encourages us to explore our good ideas and to develop some kind of evaluative system that measures the impact of those ideas.

Q. In February, you attended a joint meeting of the REL-NEI Governing Board and Technical Working Group, a panel of expert researchers who review and advise all REL-NEI research study designs. What was your experience of that meeting?

I haven't had an experience as rich as that since graduate school where people are serious about reviewing research and the people doing the research had to stand in the well to defend what they are doing. It was wonderful to see people whose sole job is to ask the tough questions about the research in the service of policymakers. I was impressed by the level of integrity that was inherent in the system of review.

Q. What is the role of statewide data systems in improving education and student achievement in Connecticut?

Given the demographic changes in our state, we're very concerned about the increasing diversity of our students and the transient nature of that diversity. The state has to be responsive to those students, but how do we know the effects of the

inputs we have given those students? How do we know they are achieving? In Connecticut, we are developing a statewide data system so we can measure and track how students across the state are performing, even if they move from district to district. This helps us to be more accountable and to know whether the taxpayers' investments have paid off.

Q. On February 23rd, REL-NEI and the New England Comprehensive Center co-hosted in Simsbury, with your support, a Policy Challenges Conference focused on Improved Instruction for English Language Learners. In what ways was the event valuable to participants?

Participants at this event were staff members and administrators from the 15 school districts in our state participating in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sanctions as a result of their English language learner (ELL) population failing to make

adequate yearly progress (AYP). From what I've heard, those who attended felt the conference was some of the best training they have ever had because they had direct access to the speakers and an opportunity to collaborate with one another. The expert recommendations also were an affirmation of what they believed were essential for teaching their ELL students but hadn't been articulated as clearly and as concisely.

Q. The federal government is about to invest over \$100 billion in public education through The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or stimulus plan. What are Connecticut's priorities in using the funds your state will receive?

To the extent that we have the ability and choice to focus the resources we receive, we will place attention on improving programs for our ELLs, moving forward with our Secondary School Redesign

Initiative, expanding public preschool through increased training of providers and developing new facilities, and especially helping those communities and schools that are under NCLB sanctions to target the funds to addressing their needs.

Q. How can REL-NEI help the states and jurisdictions in our region effectively use their stimulus funds?

One of the great things about the REL is the [Reference Desk](#), which provides quick turnaround referrals in response to specific research questions. We're going to have to plan for these federal funds and get out grant applications for the competitive dollars quickly. REL-NEI's capacity to point us to research findings and studies that will inform our proposals will be invaluable to us.

Online Algebra Access: What Can We Learn from Middle Grades Classrooms?

Researchers and education stakeholders around the Northeast and Islands Region [met via webinar](#) on February 10th to explore the design and implications of REL-NEI's three-year study examining eighth-grade access to Algebra I in 70 mostly rural Maine and Vermont schools. The [Pathways to Math Achievement Study](#) will measure the impact of increased access to Algebra I through an online course on eighth-graders' math achievement and math course-taking patterns through 10th grade. Funded by the [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#), the study began in fall 2008 and continues through 2010.

Webinar participants from around the country included state education agency (SEA) leaders from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, as well as math curriculum specialists, superintendents, principals, and senior researchers, among others.

The research is not designed to compare online algebra with a face-to-face algebra



EDC researcher Cheryl Tobey (left) and Maine Liaison Pamela Buffington monitor a chatroom during a webinar discussing REL-NEI's three-year study of online algebra access in mostly rural schools.

course, noted study evaluation director Jessica Heppen at the [American Institutes for Research \(AIR\)](#), a REL-NEI partner organization. It is focused, rather, on “the impact of using an online course to broaden access to Algebra I.” The overarching research question is: What is the impact of offering Algebra I, using an online course, in schools that do not typically offer an Algebra I course to eighth-graders? The findings are expected to be particularly useful for rural and small schools, which often face financial and geographical obstacles to offering eighth-grade algebra.

Elaine Pinckney, superintendent of the Chittenden South school district in Vermont and a REL-NEI Governing Board Member, told the group that from her perspective success in Algebra I is “a powerful indicator in terms of not only future course-taking, but future success in upper-level science and math classes.” She said the study’s findings could provide important information to help policy decisions regarding student access to Algebra I.

Participating schools identified their eighth-grade students who were ready to take Algebra I, explained Margaret Clements, co-principal investigator and senior researcher at [Education Development Center, Inc. \(EDC\)](#), which administers REL-NEI. Half the study schools were randomly chosen to provide those “algebra-ready” students with an online Algebra I course this academic year while the re-

maining eighth-graders take the regular eighth-grade math class. The other half of schools—the control schools—are continuing with their regular eighth-grade math course for all students (including those considered “algebra-ready”). As a thank you for participating in the study, the control schools will receive the online algebra course for free over the next two years.

Short-term outcome measures include all students’ end-of-eighth-grade achievement on general math and algebraic concepts. Longer-term outcomes will include ninth-grade math grades and course-taking patterns through 10th grade.

Implementation Director Cheryl Tobey, of EDC, described the online course as an “asynchronous learning environment,” where students and their teachers do not have to be online at the same time. While the teachers are remotely located, all study schools have on-site course proctors who provide technical support and monitor students’ behavior and participation.

Christine Downing, a mathematics education specialist for the New Hampshire Department of Education, asked how the study team would be able to disentangle effects of algebra in eighth grade from the mode of learning and whether information was being collected on what is taught in the regular eighth-grade math classes. “Because of the com-

parison as it is set up, we will not be able to tease apart the content, or the curriculum of the course, from the mode of delivery,” Heppen said. The study team, however, is recording how much algebra is taught in the regular eighth-grade classes to better understand the results of the study.

Cecile Carlton, a curriculum supervisor from Nashua, N.H., asked how the students and online teachers communicated and whether the online teachers were highly qualified. Tobey explained that all online teachers were required to be highly qualified math teachers in both Vermont and Maine. They communicate with their students through several modes, including live chat sessions or phone conversations.

Webinar participants remarked that the research could have relevant policy implications, even in states that are not part of the study. “I am very intrigued by this study and look forward to your initial findings. Since New Hampshire is in the middle of Vermont and Maine, we are hoping to benefit from this work,” Downing stated at the end of the discussion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Press Release](#)
- [Pathways to Math Achievement Website](#)

Vicki Hornus: ‘Data Has the Potential to Depoliticize’

The minute Vermont State Liaison Vicki Hornus learned that REL-NEI was hosting a webinar on its three-year [Pathways to Math Achievement Study](#), which involves eighth-graders from 20 mostly rural Vermont schools, she knew the perfect stakeholder in her state to bring into the session: Chittenden South Schools Superintendent Elaine Pinckney, who has a longstanding interest in eighth-grade algebra and student outcomes.

“I immediately reached out to Elaine and invited her onto the agenda,” Hornus says.

These are the kinds of connections that REL-NEI is fostering across the Northeast and Islands Region, where state liaisons are working to build dialogue among education researchers, practitioners, and key education decision-makers that can produce better policy over time.

“In my experience,” Hornus says, “school boards and other school policy-makers sometimes base their decisions on conventional wisdom or limited information. Particularly for school boards, a greater reliance on data and evidence has the potential to depoliticize many decisions.”



E-mail Vicki Hornus at vhornus@wested.org.

Hornus has worked at all grade levels from preschool through high school and has taught both traditional and nontraditional students in higher education. She also served as a school counselor and an administrator of special services, including special education and English language learning, a position she describes as “wonderful” because it allowed her to work with educators, families, school administrative staff, community agencies, and the school board. More recently, Hornus was at the Vermont Department of Education (DOE) as a special projects coordinator. She joined REL-NEI partner [WestEd](#) in 2002.

A main concern for Hornus is supporting Vermont’s state-directed initiative to transform its education system to prepare all students for success in college, careers, and 21st-century citizenship. Begun in October 2007 with public conversations about the future of education in the state, this initiative seeks to create an educational

system that is less bound by schedules and facilities and instead promotes flexible learning environments, critical thinking skills, abstract reasoning, creativity, lifelong learning, and civic and personal responsibility.

“Research into the transformational efforts by other states or districts can serve to inform Vermont’s policymakers and DOE staff,” she says. “Specifically, what effect have those efforts had on poverty? On students with learning differences and difficulties? On dropout rates and post-school outcomes? What has been the effect of engaging parents and families in the efforts?”

By understanding past, present, and future educational issues in Vermont, and knowing appropriate contacts, Hornus helps stakeholders prepare applicable research questions and delivers existing research directly to DOE policymakers, superintendents, and others. Recently, for example, she sent an [Issues & Answers](#)

[Report](#) about REL-NEI’s newly published database of dropout prevention programs in nine low-income urban school districts in the Northeast and Islands Region to a legislative council in Vermont. She knew the chair of the Senate Education Committee had sponsored a bill on school dropout prevention.

Hornus points to REL-NEI’s [“Ask a REL” Reference Desk](#) resource, where anyone can submit questions on an education topic and receive references to relevant research, as “an untapped gem,” because of its quick turnaround and expertise.

“I see more and more people using it, and expect that it will continue to grow,” she says. “Educators and policymakers at the school, district, and state level are often overwhelmed by the sheer volume of day-to-day work to be done. Giving them evidence-based information to use in their decision-making is a gift.”

English Literacy Skills Linked to English Language Learners’ Performance on State Exams

A new [REL-NEI Issues & Answers Report](#) is a resource for classroom teachers, ESL specialists, district administrators, and state education officials working to improve English language learner (ELL) students’ academic achievement. The report examines the relationship between ELLs’ scores on a new English-language proficiency exam and their scores on a state math, reading, and writing assessment.

Published in January by the [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#), the report finds that English literacy skills—reading and writing—were a stronger predictor of ELLs’ performance on state subject-matter tests than were English speaking and listening skills. English-language skills were measured by the ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State) for ELLs proficiency exam, and knowledge in reading, writing, and math were measured by the NECAP (New England Common Assessment Program),



a state-level exam administered in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

The findings speak directly to the importance of ELLs mastering academic

English, as well as social English, explains lead researcher Caroline Parker at [Education Development Center, Inc \(EDC\)](#), which administers REL-NEI. Academic English

refers to a specific kind of language that's required for success in academic subjects and includes particular vocabulary and grammatical structures, whereas social English is what is required for successful interaction among peers. Parker says research shows it takes about seven years for ELLs to obtain the academic English necessary to perform as well on content tests as native English speakers, given their content knowledge.

The report also speaks to the role that language plays in learning mathematics. Parker and her coauthors, Josephine Louie at EDC and Laura O'Dwyer at Boston College, found a strong correlation between the ELLs' English-language reading and writing scores and their NECAP math performance.

"There's a sense that mathematics uses less language than reading and writing, and I think it used to be that people thought math...was 'its own language,'" Parker says. "But there's more of an understanding now that math does require language skills. We found a much stronger-than-expected relationship between English-language reading and writing skills and mathematics outcomes."

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), ELL students must take their state math exam, if required at their grade level, the first year they are enrolled at a school; however, they can take the test in their native language, if available.

The report, titled "[New Measures of English Language Proficiency and Their Relationship to Performance on Large-Scale Content Assessments](#)," analyzes the scores of fifth- and eighth-grade ELLs in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont on the 2006 ACCESS exam and the 2006 NECAP exam. Specifically, the report finds that:

- NECAP reading, writing, and mathematics scores in fifth and eighth grades were significantly and positively predicted by ACCESS reading and writing scores, after accounting for student and school characteristics.
- ACCESS reading and writing scores (literacy) were stronger predictors of NECAP reading, writing, and mathematics scores in the fifth and eighth grades than were ACCESS speaking and listening scores (oral proficiency).

Education officials in the three states requested the analysis to inform their

efforts to bring ELLs to proficiency on the NECAP. ELL students consistently score lower than native English speakers on state subject-matter tests, often by as many as 20–30 percentage points, and NCLB requires states to reduce this achievement gap.

Parker and her coauthors hope their report spurs further research exploring ELLs' performance on assessments, including longitudinal studies of student performance as well as analyses that examine more fully how characteristics such as gender, student poverty, and school poverty may be related to ELL student achievement.

The report details the methodology used to collect and analyze the test scores, as well as the project's limitations. The authors caution that the findings are correlational and readers should not draw causal conclusions from the report.

RELATED REL RESEARCH:

- [English Language Proficiency Assessment in the Pacific Region](#) (REL Pacific)
- [Preparing to Serve ELL Students: School Districts with Emerging ELL Communities](#) (REL Appalachia)

Data Agreement Signed with Virgin Islands; All SEAs Now Share Student-Level Data

REL-NEI last month secured a data-access agreement with the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE), speeding up the process for researchers to obtain student-level data for their research studies. With the VIDE contract signed, REL-NEI has successfully negotiated data agreements with all nine states and jurisdictions in the Northeast and Island Region.

"These agreements allow researchers to obtain more complex data and conduct more sophisticated analyses, including longitudinal studies, of the educational data collected under No Child Left Behind," said REL-NEI Data Coordinator Kevon

Tucker-Seeley of [Education Development Center, Inc. \(EDC\)](#), which administers REL-NEI. "With this new agreement, we can better serve policymakers and education leaders in the Virgin Islands, as we do in other jurisdictions in our region, by providing detailed answers to questions they ask about student performance."

Sharing student-level data is a sensitive issue for state education agencies (SEAs) because the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) imposes strict limitations on the release of student data. The negotiated data-access agreements, however, allow the region's SEAs to provide student data to REL-NEI for research pur-

poses, which complies with FERPA rules.

"The region's SEAs often lack the staff resources to do the analyses that REL-NEI researchers can do," said REL-NEI Director Jill Weber. "Thanks to the persistence and dedication of Kevon Tucker-Seeley in developing formal data agreements with all our jurisdictions, REL-NEI can equitably serve the research needs of all stakeholders, from the Caribbean to the Canadian border."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

["Researchers Negotiate Sensitive Agreements for Student-Level Data"](#) (Nov/Dec 2008 EdEvidence Newsletter)

Researchers Share Findings with Massachusetts Special Ed and Math Staff

On February 25th, REL-NEI researchers Amy Brodesky, Stacy Ehrlich, and Josephine Louie presented findings from two published research reports to staff at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE).

["Performance Patterns for Students with Disabilities in Grade 4 Mathematics Education in Massachusetts"](#) describes the statewide performance of fourth-graders with disabilities on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) math exam from 2004 to 2006.

["Math Education Practices for Students with Disabilities and Other Struggling Learners: Case Studies of Six Schools in Two Northeast and Islands Region States"](#) presents six schools in New York State and Massachusetts perceived by education leaders as exemplary in math teaching and learning. The report finds all the schools use both math-specific interventions, such as additional math support time, and schoolwide practices, such as teacher collaboration, to enhance math education for students with disabilities.

Both reports were published by the [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#).

The presentations were especially timely because members of the Massa-



chusetts ESE math team and special education team have recently increased their efforts to work collaboratively to support districts and schools with their math instruction for students with disabilities. Participants gathered from several ESE departments, including the Office for Mathematics, Science, and Technology Engineering; Office of Special Education; and Office of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation.

Life LeGeros, ESE Director of Statewide Mathematics Initiatives, urged a continued look at more recent data on the mathematics performance of students with disabilities, particularly student achievement data linked with promising practices. "Such data would help us to better understand existing trends in the performance patterns of students with disabilities and

the achievement gap between students with disabilities and general education students," he said.

Another math-specialist participant added that the overall findings of the case study report mirror what she hears in the field and what she conveys to district leaders—that approaches to changing practices within classrooms must be systemic and require support and structure from the highest levels of district administration.

The ESE math assistance team will share the reports with their contacts at the district level, LeGeros said. The findings will catalyze discussion and further collaboration on improving math teaching and learning in Massachusetts classrooms, he said.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [NY, MA Studies Track Performance Among Fourth-Graders with Disabilities](#) (Nov/Dec 2008 EdEvidence Newsletter)
- [Math and Students with Disabilities: Support Time, Teacher Teamwork Highlighted](#) (Nov/Dec 2008 EdEvidence Newsletter)

DISCLAIMER

The Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands (REL-NEI) is run by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), the American Institutes for Research (AIR), and WestEd's Learning Innovations program. REL-NEI is one of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. REL-NEI provides rigorous research that is relevant to national education priorities, responsive to local needs, and usable for policy and practice.

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