

# R&D

## A L E R T

*While improving science literacy has long been a national priority, surprisingly little attention has focused on the tools used to measure what students know and can do in science.*



WestEd's Partnership for the Assessment of Standards-based Science (PASS) works to change this, giving teachers assessments that impact classroom instruction and, ultimately, student achievement. Funded initially by the National Science Foundation (NSF), PASS develops and administers standards-based, large-scale science assessments for elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

Throughout PASS's six-year history, science teachers, resource specialists, and district staff have been an integral part of the assessment development process — from item development to scoring. "This collaboration has created an effective tool for improving science education," says Tamara Kushner, project manager. "What is exciting about PASS is the 'Aha!' moment when teachers realize that the

data reveal what their students think, know, and can do. To them, PASS is not just a test, it is also a learning tool."

#### WHAT MAKES PASS UNIQUE?

Two important features distinguish PASS assessments from others. First, PASS has developed one of the only large-scale assessments aligned with the National Research Council's *National Science Standards* and designed specifically for use with standards-based science programs. Second, PASS assessments use not only multiple-choice items, but also an array of performance-based measures. Because students must demonstrate their abilities through scientific inquiry and hands-on activities, PASS assessments are more authentically aligned with standards than are assessments using only multiple-choice items.

*(continued on page 6)*

Creating a test that is also a

science **LEARNING** tool



# WestEd

Improving education through  
research, development, and service



*Assessment* has a wide variety of meanings. It can refer to a standardized test taken by students, a survey of family health behaviors, a teacher's daily judgments about her class's needs, or an evaluation of teaching skills. An assessment can be a preliminary measurement or a final judgment.

## ASSESSMENT FOR EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT

Although sometimes feared, assessments are an indispensable part of education and human development. At their best, assessments help people to learn and grow.

Much of WestEd's work focuses on making sure assessments are fair, consistent, and useful. We create large-scale assessments for use with thousands of students as well as classroom-based assessments designed to help a single teacher and his students. We directly assist policymakers who want to develop effective assessments, interpret the results, and use those findings to improve instruction and youth development initiatives. We also carry out research to learn more about assessments and their use in education and human services.

Recognizing the breadth and quality of our work in this area, the U.S. Department of Education selected WestEd's Western Regional Educational Laboratory as the one laboratory among ten to provide national leadership in the area of assessment.

This issue of *R&D Alert* provides a sampling of what we are learning related to assessment.

The lead article, about WestEd's Partnership for the Assessment of Standards-based Science (PASS), illustrates a point that is evident in much of our work: Assessment is not just about student learning. It also can be an important tool in the professional development of educators. In this sense, assessment is about developing knowledge and leadership, not just about tests.

Other articles highlight what we are learning about ensuring that assessments are appropriate for students whose cultural backgrounds differ from the mainstream; assessing the well-being of youth and families in newly immigrant populations; helping teachers assess what students know and can do in science on a day-to-day basis in the classroom; assisting states and districts to ensure the appropriate participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessment systems; and assessing teachers for certification to teach English language learners.

We hope you find the information in this issue of *R&D Alert* useful in your own work.

Glen H. Harvey  
Chief Executive Officer

pooling resources & expertise:

# the ARIZONA Assessment COLLABORATIVE

# AzAC

For many of the smallest school districts in Arizona, lack of resources and expertise hamper their efforts to implement state-mandated standards. But with guidance from WestEd's Western Regional Educational Laboratory (WREL), a group of such districts is working together to overcome this challenge.

The Arizona Assessment Collaborative (AzAC) includes 17 districts from the Phoenix metropolitan area and 1 from Tucson. Collectively these districts serve about one sixth of Arizona's total student population.

Working together, says WestEd's Jeanne Miyasaka, has enabled these districts to develop quality assessments that none could do alone. Pooling resources, expertise, and training with the help of WREL and Arizona State University West, AzAC has developed summative and diagnostic reading and mathematics assessments in line with state standards in English and Spanish for grades two

through eight; produced and printed more than 60 test booklets and score reports at low cost; and conducted research on their tests in relation to state assessments.

Perhaps most impressive has been the growth in local leadership, says Miyasaka. When AzAC began in 1997, WestEd led participants through the development of reading assessments. Miyasaka made sure participants were involved in every step, and she documented the process in a technical manual. As a result, the group was able to lead its own mathematics assessments development. "They are getting to the point where they can develop high-quality assessments without me, which is where you want to be," says Miyasaka.

Local leadership is crucial, agrees WestEd's Danielle Briggs, who has studied partnerships and collaboratives, including AzAC. Other factors for success include specific goals, organizational structure, clear communication, and a sound budgetary plan.

"This Collaborative succeeds because people work well together," Miyasaka reports. "Even early on, members shared their district plans and strategies in a number of curriculum and instructional areas and provided training and assistance to each other."



AzAC participants work together on assessments — from left to right: Karen Henrie, teacher at Ruth Fisher Elementary School; Patricia Tate, Director of Curriculum, Osborn Elementary School District; Daniel Wegener, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Sunnyside Unified School District; and Ronda Elliott, teacher at Buckeye Elementary School.

For more information, contact Miyasaka at 602.322.7006 or [jmiyasa@WestEd.org](mailto:jmiyasa@WestEd.org), or visit AzAC's Web site at [www.globalc.org/osd/azac/azacweb](http://www.globalc.org/osd/azac/azacweb). 

Designing tile patterns for kitchen countertops and calculating their cost may be a good way for some children to demonstrate math skills. But it would be an ineffective measure for students who have no idea that people are able to make such selections.

This is only one example of assessment tasks that might not be meaningful for students from a variety of backgrounds, says Research Associate Nanette Koelsch of WestEd's Culture and Language in Education (CLE) program. Her work and a new CLE study on "cultural validity" address the alignment of assessments with students' culture, language, and life experiences.

Funded by the National Science Foundation, CVA staff interviewed fourth and fifth graders from 10 locations — including urban, suburban, and rural areas — to better understand how they think when solving science and mathematics problems. The students constitute a sampling of the United States' rich ethnic and cultural mosaic, from Hispanics and Yup'iks (Eskimos) to Haitians.

Though results from the study are still being analyzed, some notable observations are emerging. For example, students' personal, firsthand experiences appear to play a larger role than formal instruction in interpreting and answering test questions.

## assessing students for **What They Know,** *not where they come from*

In the Chinle (Arizona) Unified School District, Koelsch helped teachers develop and implement assessments that are relevant to students while also measuring their achievement of state-mandated standards. One such assessment involved modifying the tile task so that its content was rug weaving, an activity familiar to Navajo students who constitute a majority of the district's population. Funded by the district since 1994, WestEd began working with fifth grade teachers and has since expanded to include grades one through eight.

The collaboration has paid off. Chinle Elementary School, for example, is one of only eight schools of similar socioeconomic status in Arizona to demonstrate gains of more than a grade level on Stanford-9 achievement tests for three consecutive years. Staff and administrators attribute the improvement in part to this long-term, standards-based professional development program.

The Chinle-WestEd collaboration also has contributed to the development of local leadership and expertise. According to Koelsch, university researchers and student teachers visit the district and often remark that Chinle teachers know more about standards than teachers in any other district they have visited.

Whereas Chinle's experience demonstrates the importance of modifying assessments for a local context, WestEd's Cultural Validity in Assessment (CVA) project seeks to help assessment developers avoid cultural mismatch from the beginning.

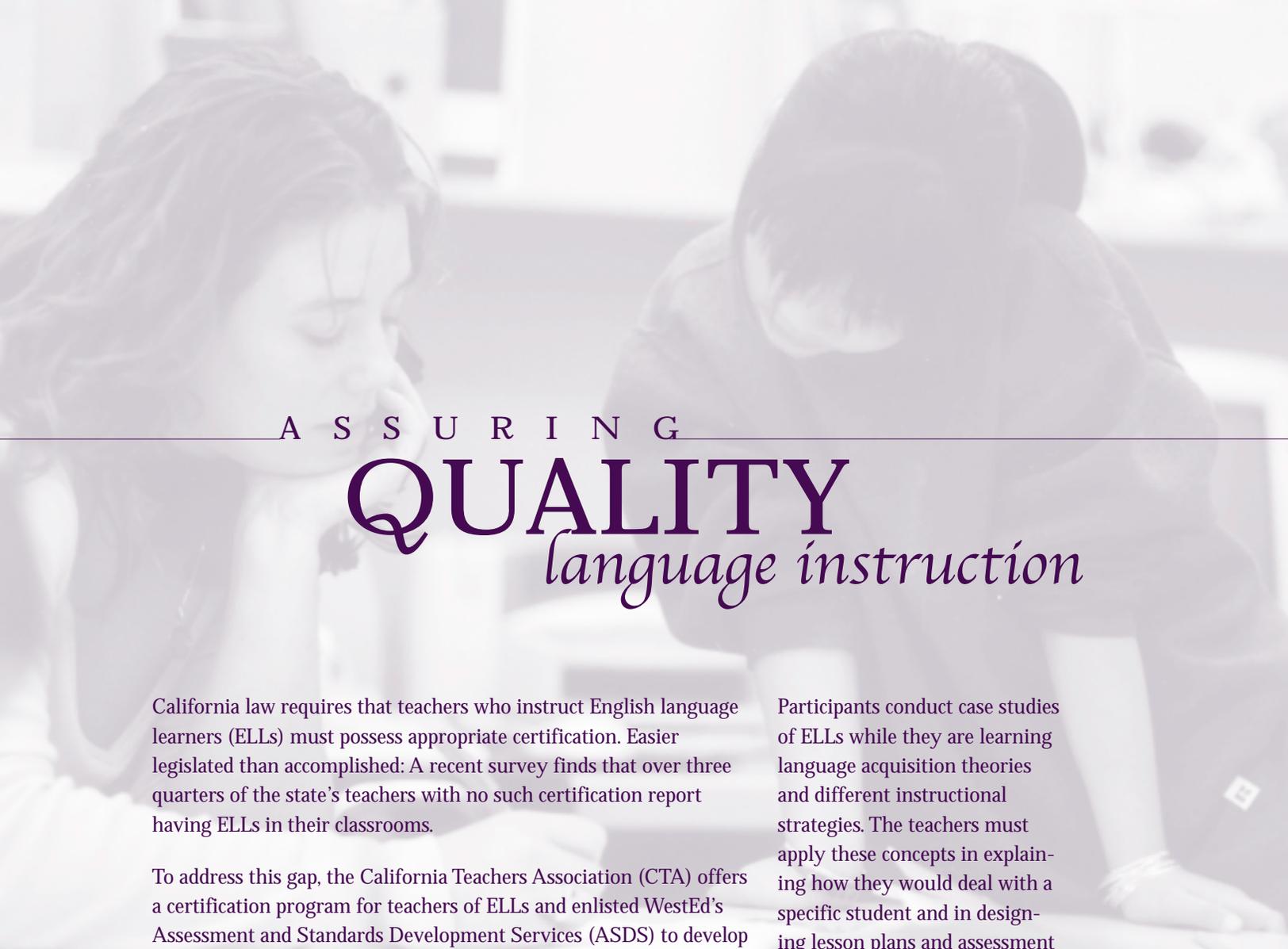


WestEd Project Director Guillermo Solano-Flores thinks the findings will substantiate the relevance of "cultural validity," a term he defines as "the effectiveness with which assessments address the sociocultural influences that shape student thinking."

"We are looking for patterns in which test taking and culture interact," says Solano-Flores, explaining that this approach, while common among cross-cultural psychologists and child development specialists, is still new to current assessment development practices in education.

For more information on the Chinle-WestEd collaboration, contact Koelsch at 415.615.3224 or [nkoelsc@WestEd.org](mailto:nkoelsc@WestEd.org).

For more information on CVA, contact Solano-Flores at 202.467.0652 or [wsolano@WestEd.org](mailto:wsolano@WestEd.org), or visit [www.WestEd.org/cva](http://www.WestEd.org/cva). 



A S S U R I N G

# QUALITY

*language instruction*

California law requires that teachers who instruct English language learners (ELLs) must possess appropriate certification. Easier legislated than accomplished: A recent survey finds that over three quarters of the state's teachers with no such certification report having ELLs in their classrooms.

To address this gap, the California Teachers Association (CTA) offers a certification program for teachers of ELLs and enlisted WestEd's Assessment and Standards Development Services (ASDS) to develop a system to assess whether participants qualify for certification.

"This assessment system is receiving concerted attention because of the need to certify practicing teachers to support English language learners," says Sri Ananda, Co-Director of ASDS.

The CTA program focuses on theories of second language acquisition and instructional strategies to help students learn English and grade-level subject matter. Participants are assessed in two ways, explains Ananda. One is through a comprehensive formative assessment, or case study, completed during the program. Participants then take a summative assessment consisting of multiple-choice and short-answer items.

"It's a very fair assessment that validates teachers' experience," says Denise Stewart, a high school English as a second language teacher in San Jose who has taught the course. A high percentage of the more than 6,000 teachers who have taken the CTA course since 1998 believe the process made them more knowledgeable about teaching ELLs than teachers certified through other programs.

Participants conduct case studies of ELLs while they are learning language acquisition theories and different instructional strategies. The teachers must apply these concepts in explaining how they would deal with a specific student and in designing lesson plans and assessment tasks to address the student's needs.

The case study portion of the assessment process includes valuable feedback from peers and other instructors. "The approach helps to reinforce what teachers learn during the course," Ananda says. "When they try different instructional strategies, there are some important moments of insight."

For more information, contact Ananda at 415.615.3166 or [sananda@WestEd.org](mailto:sananda@WestEd.org), or visit [www.WestEd.org/asds](http://www.WestEd.org/asds). 

# LOCALLY IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS

*After more than a decade of standards-based reforms, almost every state in the nation has content standards in place. But to educators at the local level, the work is just beginning.*

"Implementing standards-based practice is complicated work," says Trudy Schoneman, Director of the Instructional Leadership Initiative (ILI), part of WestEd's Western Assessment Collaborative. "Instead of starting from a particular topic, teachers begin with what students need to know and be able to do, and then design an assessment and work backward to design lessons."

With the guidance of ILI, high school department chairs and curriculum leaders develop and implement standards-based instructional plans and set schoolwide performance standards.

One of the challenges of standards-based practice is to design assessments that provide enough evidence for teachers to decide collectively if a child has met the standard, Schoneman says. Getting teachers within a department to agree on what a standard means is also challenging. Each teacher might have a different interpretation of a phrase as simple as "needs to understand."

"Standards-based practice is not something you do alone," Schoneman says. "It is important for teachers to decide together what quality of student performance meets the standard and how to provide further instruction for those who need it."

With ILI now starting its second year, the first year's participants are spreading the approach by helping others design additional instructional units with assessments, and are facilitating conversations within their schools to set rigorous performance standards and ensure that all students meet those standards.

"[ILI] significantly changed the way I think," says one participant, "reorienting how I plan and teach so that *all* of my students meet the standards."

For more information, contact Schoneman at 415.615.3130 or [tschone@WestEd.org](mailto:tschone@WestEd.org). 

*(continued  
from page 1)*

Including performance-based items has not compromised the ability to use the assessments with large numbers of students. "We have learned that it is possible to obtain valid and reliable results from large-scale assessments using performance-based items," says Project Director Kathy Comfort. By training and monitoring scorers who apply a carefully constructed scoring procedure, PASS has reported reliable results for over 200,000 students in 17 states.

## KEY PASS ELEMENTS

Students are not the only ones who benefit from effective assessments. Teachers and administrators use the PASS assessments to improve and guide instructional practice, plan curricula, and communicate achievement outcomes to students, parents, and the community. Certain elements must be in place for PASS — or any other assessment — to have this kind of impact:

- *Understanding how and when to use a variety of science assessments.* In addition to developing large-scale, external assessments aligned with standards,

PASS staff help districts create classroom-level assessments that can be used to assess student progress more frequently than the external assessments. Together these assessments provide a more comprehensive picture of student learning than either type could do alone.

- *Opportunities to respond to assessment data.* As key players in implementing the national standards and keeping curriculum, instruction, and assessment closely linked, teachers need opportunities to learn how to use assessment data to inform instruction and change practice.

- *Administrative leadership for systemic reform.* Administrators must believe that assessment is more than a test score and communicate their commitment to that belief to all stakeholders, particularly teachers. Administrators must ensure that data are not merely reported, but used to guide decisions about teaching and learning.

- *Teacher leadership.* A cadre of similarly committed teachers who can share knowledge and training must be developed — and must be given the resources it

needs to succeed. In this manner, teachers can move beyond results limited to their own students, and can discuss schoolwide outcomes and effective practices.

#### STRENGTHENING AND EXPANDING ASSESSMENT IN SCIENCE EDUCATION

PASS staff are pursuing two major research projects designed to strengthen and expand the role of assessment in science education. The first project, Research in Standards-based Science Assessment, will attempt to answer two questions: Which assessment component (e.g., multiple-choice items, performance tasks), or which combination of components, best measures scientific inquiry for different types of learners? And, does training in the use of data actually result in improving teachers' instructional practice and students' science learning?

The second project explores achievement gap issues in science learning. With funding from NSF, PASS staff are analyzing data from a variety of

districts that have used PASS assessments over the past six years, and examining the characteristics of achievement gaps along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. Next steps include convening a panel of experts in both measurement and science education to review results, summarize findings, and suggest further research.

The entire PASS process — from developing assessment tasks to scoring them, from pursuing professional development to conducting related research — ultimately is geared toward enhancing learning in its broadest sense. “Skills aren't developed in isolation from one another,” says Comfort. “The processes of science, interwoven with scientific knowledge and reasoning, have broader applications. These are lifelong learning skills that can reach far beyond the science lab and into our students' daily lives.”

For more information about PASS or to order a PASS Assessment, contact Administrative Assistant Sanjay Pardanani at 415.615.3106 or [spardan@WestEd.org](mailto:spardan@WestEd.org). 

## ADDRESSING (and assessing) Precursors to Academic Failure

Frustrated that one of her brightest students was struggling academically, Ms. Valero referred Maria to Creciendo Saludable (CS), a project developed by Educational and Community Initiatives at WestEd. Six months later, the 11-year-old's classroom behavior had improved, along with her test scores and attendance.

Encouraged by such successes, WestEd researchers collected rigorous assessment data to determine what was working and under what conditions. In a context that other researchers might find daunting — a newly immigrant population with a student mobility rate over 50 percent and 87 percent living below the poverty level — CS staff were able to gather and analyze data on hundreds of students like Maria. They found that she is not unique in benefiting from CS.

Creciendo Saludable (or “Growing Up Healthy”) addresses precursors to academic failure — including violence and use of alcohol, tobacco,

and other drugs — among school-age youth in a predominantly Hispanic population.

“Our goal is to promote child and family well-being. Students under chronic stress rarely succeed academically,” says WestEd's Cynthia Peck, who directs the study funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools.

Assessment has been key to identifying needs and evaluating CS's effectiveness. For three years, the project surveyed and collected other information about students and their families who receive counseling and other intervention services through CS at Lowell Elementary School in Santa Ana, California. CS staff compared the progress of this target group with a control group in two other local schools with similar demographics.

The study used validated, reliable surveys designed for Hispanic immigrant populations.

Project staff — all bilingual and bicultural — are familiar with the needs of the families involved and able to communicate directly rather than relying on child translators.

After a year of CS services, the target students improved more than the control group on standardized test scores (Stanford-9); exhibited 60 percent lower unexcused absence and suspension rates; experienced a 10 percentage point decline in use of alcohol and other drugs over a 12-month period; and reported substantially larger declines in exposure to family stress than students in the comparison group.

The study's findings indicate that CS's rigorous and culturally sensitive approach is right on target. The U.S. Department of Education agrees; it funded CS for replication this year at another school.

For more information, contact Peck at 714.648.0333 or [cpeck@WestEd.org](mailto:cpeck@WestEd.org), or visit [www.healthy-ninos.com](http://www.healthy-ninos.com). 

# INCLUSION

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN ASSESSMENT

departments of education nationwide. The LRE project, funded by the California Department of Education, develops resources for districts and families to help students access the least restrictive environment possible for their abilities. LRE staff helped California

*In the 25 years since the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandated equal opportunity for students with disabilities, the meaning of “education for all” has undergone radical change.*

“For students with disabilities, there has been a real, tangible shift from focusing on procedural compliance to actually demonstrating positive outcomes,” says Michael Opuda of WestEd’s Northeast Regional Resource Center (NERRC). Furthermore, there is an increasing emphasis on holding them to the same high expectations as all other students. Assessment plays a key role in ensuring this inclusion. “If all students are expected to succeed in the same curriculum, we must have the means to assess all students to measure whether they are meeting the expectations of that curriculum,” says Dona Meinders of WestEd’s Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) project.

Because a wide variety of conditions — from visual impairment to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder — may affect how students with disabilities handle assessments, ensuring their appropriate participation in large-scale assessment systems is not easy. That’s where WestEd’s NERRC and LRE come in.

NERRC is part of a network of federally funded technical assistance projects serving the special education programs of state

determine parameters for accommodations on assessments and alternate assessments, and assisted in developing a self-assessment tool that helps districts and schools comply with state and federal requirements.

“States have struggled with how to implement these assessments,” says NERRC Director Kristin Reedy. “Fortunately, states function as laboratories and can learn from one another.”

One key finding is that early involvement of teachers, parents, and administrators is critical to creating buy-in and maximizing results for students. As a result, more than half of the states nationwide report increases in student participation in assessments. Two thirds of these states report either stable or improved performance for students with disabilities. In addition, special education teachers no longer operate in isolation, as communication and collaboration among general and special education teachers, parents, and administrators have improved dramatically.

Most importantly, says Reedy, “students are being held to higher expectations and are meeting them because we show them that we believe they can do it.”

The federal government maintains a Web site with information about assessing students with disabilities: [www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP). Check with each state department of education for state-specific requirements and allowances.

For more information about:

- NERRC — contact Reedy at 802.951.8218 or [kreedy@WestEd.org](mailto:kreedy@WestEd.org), or visit [www.WestEd.org/nerrc](http://www.WestEd.org/nerrc);
- Alternate Assessment — contact Opuda at [mopuda@msn.com](mailto:mopuda@msn.com) or 207.685.4564; and
- LRE — contact Meinders at 916.492.4013 or [dmeinde@WestEd.org](mailto:dmeinde@WestEd.org). 

# Continuous Assessment

*WestEd's Center for Science Education and Professional Development (CSEPD) is experimenting with a unique approach to assessment — “continuous assessment” — that is more ongoing and student-centered than the state-mandated, high-stakes testing about which much is written these days.*

“Continuous assessment tells the teacher where each student is at any given moment while the learning is happening,” says Susan Holmes, a participant in CSEPD’s professional development activities and science educator at the Franklin Institute Science Museum in Philadelphia. “Assessment takes place during learning, not later, when assessing what has been learned is often a judgment call.”

Strengthening Science Inquiry, Assessment, and Teaching — CSEPD’s current project, funded by the National Science Foundation — works with professional developers like Holmes to spread the word on continuous assessment. Since 1998, the project has reached more than 150 professional developers, hundreds of teachers, and thousands of students nationwide.

Because continuous assessment involves daily observations and documentation of student work while they are engaged in inquiry investigations, it occurs in “real time,” not at the end of a unit or a semester. Teachers document student performance through note taking, photographs, videotape, and audiotape, and use this documentation to inform their practice. This approach allows teachers to capture what their students are doing and thinking in the moment and over time. As a result, teachers can more effectively gauge student progress and, subsequently, make better-informed instructional decisions that support student growth.

“I take digital photos of my students at work — when they’re investigating a science concept or making discoveries about the natural world,” says Pat Fitzsimmons, who teaches science in Barre, Vermont. “I then ask them to explain what’s going on in the photo. As a result, I better understand my students’ current thinking, and I can then determine what next steps to take.”



Engaging in continuous assessment encourages teachers to become more involved with their students by listening to their ideas and asking informed questions. “Continuous assessment gives teachers permission to step out of the spotlight and let kids take some responsibility for their learning,” says the project’s Co-Director, Karen Reinhardt.

In addition to enhancing student learning, continuous assessment also contributes to teachers’ professional growth by allowing them to take a step back and reflect. “As a teacher, it keeps me engaged in an inquiry process of my own,” says Fitzsimmons. “I am constantly questioning what I am teaching, how I am teaching, and how I can improve my teaching in the future.”

For more information, contact CSEPD Co-Director Maura Carlson at 802.951.8201 or [mcarlso@WestEd.org](mailto:mcarlso@WestEd.org); Reinhardt at 802.951.8219 or [kreinha@WestEd.org](mailto:kreinha@WestEd.org); or visit [www.inquiryassessment.com](http://www.inquiryassessment.com). 

Engaging in science inquiry at a CSEPD institute are, from left to right: Norma Neeley, Associate Director for Regional Projects (Austin, TX); Connie Duncan, Director of Battle Creek (MI) Area Math/Science Center; and Jennifer Kempf, Science Implementation Specialist from the Vermont Institute for Science, Math, & Technology (Montpelier, VT).

## A Video Exploration of Classroom Assessment

Shelley Goldman, Tina Syer, Jennifer Knudsen, Karen Cole, & MarshWorks

*The Institute for Research & Learning, 1999*



Designed to help teachers improve their classroom assessment systems, develop a new system, or experiment with new assessment techniques, this CD-ROM encourages teachers to reflect on their current system and to hear what other teachers have to say about their own assessment practices.

CD-ROM Price: \$39.95 Order #: CD-00-01



## Making Assessment Work for Everyone: How to Build on Student Strengths

Elise Trumbull, Guillermo Solano-Flores, Patricia Kusimo, Melissa G. Ritter, & Chris Ferguson, 2000

*Making Assessment Work for Everyone* represents the best understanding, derived from research and practice, of how to select, modify, or create assessments that allow all students, irrespective of cultural or linguistic background, gender, or ethnicity, to accurately demonstrate what they know and can do. *Making Assessment*

*Work for Everyone* explains research findings both about assessment and about cultural, linguistic, and other types of diversity. More importantly, it links these findings directly to classroom practice.

286 pages Price: \$20 Order #: REL-00-01

# WestEd's

For ordering information, please refer to the product order insert.



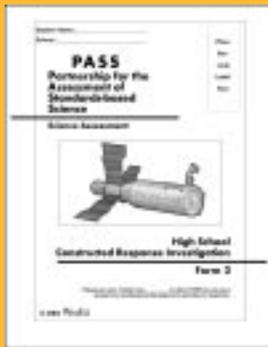
# Assessment Resources

## PASS Science Assessment

Partnership for the Assessment of Standards-based Science (PASS)

This standards-based science assessment allows educators to determine whether their students and schools are making meaningful progress toward science literacy. Aligned to the content recommendations of the *National Science Education Standards*, the PASS assessment is available at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The assessment contains multiple measures, including a "hands-on" performance task. In addition, PASS offers personalized assessment services, allowing schools and districts to develop customized versions of PASS aligned to their state standards.

Price: \$13/student Order #: PASS-01-01 (elementary school), PASS-01-02 (middle school), PASS-01-03 (high school)

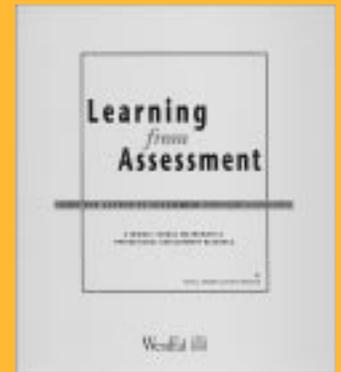


## Learning from Assessment: Tools for Examining Assessment Through Standards

Tania Madfes & Ann Muench  
*WestEd & the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1999*

This comprehensive training package for middle-school mathematics staff developers provides a collegial process for clarifying the meaning of standards, evaluating assessments in terms of their alignment to standards, and planning student learning experiences that reflect standards-based teaching practices.

196 pages Price: \$31 Order #: LFA-99-01



For additional WestEd assessment products, please refer to the *WestEd Resource Catalog – 2000*.

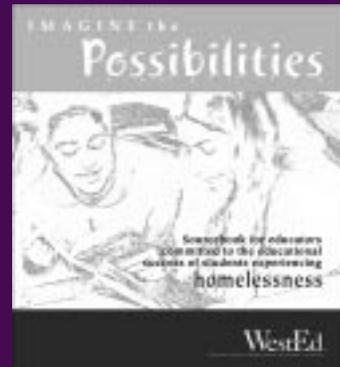
For a free copy, call 415.565.3000 or toll-free, (1.877) 4WestEd; or write: WestEd / 730 Harrison Street / San Francisco, CA 94107-1242. The catalog is also available at [www.WestEd.org/catalog](http://www.WestEd.org/catalog).



**Imagine the Possibilities: Sourcebook for Educators Committed to the Educational Success of Students Experiencing Homelessness**

BethAnn Berliner, 2001

What can educators do to help homeless students attend school and achieve once there? *Imagine the Possibilities* is a comprehensive sourcebook for people who work with homeless students — teachers, school secretaries, site administrators, school nurses, counselors, district or county office staff, shelter workers, and volunteers. Both research-based and practical, it includes reproducible awareness materials, training activities, classroom strategies and activities, and ready-to-use sample presentation and workshop agendas.



204 pages Price: \$27.95 Order #: HD-01-01



**Do High-Stakes Tests Drive Up Dropout Rates? Myths Versus Reality**

Stanley Rabinowitz, Joy Zimmerman, & Kerry Sherman, 2001

This knowledge brief, which includes research and policy recommendations, addresses a common perception that, for many borderline students, anticipating or failing a high school exit exam or an end-of-grade promotion test might prompt a decision to give up and quit school entirely, leading to higher dropout rates overall. It explains how

efforts to explore this issue are hampered by flawed dropout identification and tracking practices and by the limitations of the research methodology most commonly applied to understanding why students drop out. It also explains what we do and don't already know about why students drop out, and it proposes that because high-stakes testing is simply one aspect of the broader standards and accountability reform movement, any change in dropout rates must be examined in that larger context.

12 pages Price: \$8 Order#: KN-01-04



**Computer-Based Assessment: Can It Deliver on Its Promise?**

Stanley Rabinowitz & Tamara Brandt, 2001

This knowledge brief examines the potential of computer-based assessment to push beyond the

limits of traditional testing methodologies to make assessment more informative and more efficient. It also explains the logistical impediments that must be addressed if computer-based assessment is to be valid and fair, its potential fully realized.

8 pages Price: \$8 Order #: KN-01-05



**Building a Workable Accountability System (Policy Brief)**

WestEd, 2001

This brief identifies and annotates seven key questions that must be carefully addressed in developing or refining a statewide education accountability system: What are its primary goals? What indicators should be included? Which students should be tested, and when? What accountability model best serves the purpose? What consequences can the system support? How can intended and unintended consequences be evaluated?

2 pages Price: Single copies available free of charge; 10 copies for \$3 Order #: PO-01-02

For ordering information, please refer to the product order insert.

*R&D Alert* covers issues affecting schools in the Western Regional Educational Laboratory's four-state region — Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah — and throughout the United States.

Your letters are welcomed. Please send comments to Noel White, WestEd, 730 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107-1242; fax, 415.512.2024; or email, [nwhite@WestEd.org](mailto:nwhite@WestEd.org).

**Chief Executive Officer**  
Glen Harvey

**Director, Office of Policy  
& Communications**  
Max McConkey

**R&D Alert Executive Editor**  
Colleen Montoya

**R&D Alert Editor**  
Noel White

**Contributors**  
Karen Fanning  
Barbara Fuller  
Glen Harvey  
Jan Ferris Heenan  
Andrea Jachman

**Copy Editors**  
Rosemary De La Torre  
Tracy Landauer  
Nimfa Rueda

**Graphic Designer**  
Christian Holden

**Photographers**  
Ed Aust  
Jeanne Miyasaka  
Jennifer Cheek Pantaléon  
Cybèle Elaine Werts

WestEd, a nonprofit research, development, and service agency, works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. While WestEd serves the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah as one of the nation's Regional Educational Laboratories, our agency's work extends throughout the United States and abroad. It has 16 offices nationwide, from Washington and Boston to Arizona, Southern California, and its headquarters in San Francisco.

For more information about WestEd, visit our Web site: [WestEd.org](http://WestEd.org); call 415.565.3000 or, toll-free, (1.877) 4-WestEd; or write: WestEd / 730 Harrison Street / San Francisco, CA 94107-1242.

© WestEd 2001. All rights reserved.

*This newsletter was produced in whole or in part with funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract #ED-01-CO-0012. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Education.*

## highlights from inside...

3

POOLING RESOURCES  
& EXPERTISE: THE  
ARIZONA ASSESSMENT  
COLLABORATIVE

5

ASSURING  
QUALITY  
LANGUAGE  
INSTRUCTION

8

INCLUDING  
STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES IN  
ASSESSMENT

9

SPREADING  
THE WORD ON  
CONTINUOUS  
ASSESSMENT

# WestEd®

730 Harrison Street | San Francisco, California 94107-1242

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
P A I D  
Los Alamitos, CA  
90720  
Permit No. 87

*Address service requested*