

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University Synthesis Report

I. Brief Overview of the Laboratory

The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (LAB) is one of 10 regional laboratories. It was established in December 1995 under a five-year contract between the U.S. Department of Education through the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and Brown University. The LAB serves a large and complex region encompassing New England, New York, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, with a highly diverse population including both urbanized and rural areas. Partners for the LAB include the following: Abt Associates, Center for Applied Linguistics, Center for Resource Management, Jobs for the Future, RMC Research Corporation, Superintendents' Leadership Council, and TERC.

May 1999 marked the end of more than two-thirds of the five-year contract period. The focus of the interim review was upon the work completed in the first three years of the contract. Conforming with Section 941(h) of Part D of the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994 (Title IX of Public Law 103-227) the LAB was required to undergo an interim evaluation. OERI has developed standards to evaluate and assess the performance of the contract, which utilizes a system of peer review and is consistent with Part VII of the Department of Education 34 Part 702 "Standards for conduct and evaluation of activities carried out by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement-OERI--evaluation of the performance of recipients of grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts (10/27/98.)" Decision Information Resources Incorporated (DIR) contracted with OERI to execute the

evaluation.

The purpose of the review as presented in the Statement of Work document provided to all panel members is to provide feedback to the REL contractor to improve the quality of approved and funded activities and to provide information to OERI as it determines if the contractor is fulfilling the requirements of the contract.

Six national experts in disciplines related to the LAB's work were appointed to serve on the Peer Review Panel: Dr. Jamal Abedi (University of California-Los Angeles) Dr. Robert Bortnick (Community Consolidated School District 59-Illinois) Dr. Barbara Clements (Evaluation Software Publishing) Dr. John McFadden (University of South Carolina) Ms. Gladys Wright (Waterbury CT Board of Education) led by the Panel Chair, Dr. Louise Wilkinson (Rutgers University) whose role was to facilitate discussions, synthesize the panelists individual written reports. Each panel member, including the panel chair, was responsible for participating in all aspects of the review and writing an individual report.

In late April, DIR staff provided members of the Peer Review Panel with written materials and training materials to review prior to the on-site visit to the LAB May 24-28, 1999. The materials prepared by the Lab at Brown included the original proposal, revised plan of work, contract modifications, quarterly and annual reports, copies of numerous publications and examples of products produced by the LAB, descriptions of the two Signature Works selected for focus, a synopsis of five nominations for Signature Works, synthesis reports and publications for the projects, and project portfolios specific to the two Signature Works selected. Panel members participated in three training sessions, and the Panel Chair participated in an additional training session. In the third training session, representatives from the LAB presented an overview of their work. Other communication was

conducted by mail, teleconference, telephone, and email. Members of the Review Panel kept written notes on their review of the written materials, prior to arrival for the onsite review visit. DIR provided a copy of the “Standards for conduct and evaluation of activities carried out by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement-OERI--evaluation of the performance of recipients of grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts (10/27/98,)” which stated the review criteria applied during the review of the LAB. These criteria include the following: Implementation and Management; Quality, Utility, and Outcomes and Impact.

Members of the Peer Review Panel conducted the onsite review in Providence, Rhode Island at the LAB headquarters from May 24 to May 28, 1999. On the morning of May 24, the panelists met with DIR officials to review the procedures and responsibilities associated with the onsite visit and the peer review process. In addition to the first informal dinner meeting with DIR staff on May 23, the Members of the Peer Review Panel met privately at least once a day on all subsequent days with DIR staff present to discuss the individual perceptions based on the written data and presentations of the on-site review process and to deliberate findings that would be incorporated into the final individual and synthesis reports.

During the subsequent four and one-half days, the Members of the Peer Review Panel individually and collectively discussed and appraised projects and activities in development and applied research with research, development and administrative staff at the LAB. On May 24, the directors, Board members, and staff of the LAB provided an overview of goals, functions, framework and administration of the LAB. Two members of OERI were present Monday through Wednesday: The LAB Program Officer, Dr. Lynn Spencer and her supervisor, Dr. Robert Stonehill (Director, State and Local Services Division, OERI, USDOE).

The following four days were dedicated to in-depth presentations and discussions of the Signature Works and other Selected Works. This included plenary sessions attended by the two OERI officials, the LAB researchers, developers, staff, and clients such as teachers, educational administrators, and others. Most often, individuals associated with the LAB were physically present at the sessions; occasionally, individuals participated by teleconference. On May 25, Signature Work #1 was presented and discussed: “Implementing Standards with English Language Learners;” on May 26 Signature Work #2 was presented and discussed: “Secondary School Restructuring.” On May 27, two areas of work selected from the inventory were presented and discussed: “School Change and Capacity Building,” and “On-Line Information Resources.”

The Exit Interview presentation by the Members of the Peer Review Panel to the LAB was made on May 28. During this presentation to the LAB, Panel Members reviewed overall findings and general impressions about the work of the LAB; this included indications of the conclusions and recommendations to be included in the final synthesis report. Bulleted statements in bold in subsequent sections of this synthesis report were presented in the exit interview with LAB staff; these statements represent the Panel’s consensus in response to the questions listed on the “Reporting Format for Final Individual Written Evaluation.” On May 28, prior to departure from the site, each individual Panel Member submitted her/his own completed report of the review to DIR and the Panel Chair.

The Panel Chair submitted the Synthesis Report in draft form to DIR on June 1, 1999. This draft report provided the summary and synthesis document, which drew on all the individual reports of the Members of the Peer Review Panel and reflected the findings and conclusions of the review process. It integrated and summarized the individual Panel Members’ assessments and recommendations and was intended to represent the collective evaluation perspective of the entire

Panel. The document and the final version were organized around the template provided by DIR, in the categories of: (1) Implementation/Management, (2) Quality; (3) Utility; and (4) Outcomes/Impact. This document was reviewed by each Member of the Peer Review Panel with feedback submitted to DIR and the Panel Chair by June 7, 1999. The final version of the Synthesis Report was submitted by the Panel Chair to DIR on June 8, 1999.

The primary mission of the LAB is: Increasing students' learning through improving instruction and systemic school change. The mission is addressed in three ways: Building capacity for reform, supporting collaborative inquiry, and sustaining strategic alliances. The particular specialty area for the LAB is: "Language and Cultural Diversity," including assisting schools to serve effectively, culturally and linguistically diverse students, families, and communities. The LAB has noted that the Northeast and Islands regional context is characterized by the following key elements: (1) educational and cultural resources in place; (2) professional organizations involved in educational reform; (3) increasing cultural and ethnic diversity; and (4) the need for collaborative approaches. The educational context is characterized by four challenges: (1) standards, assessment, and accountability; (2) urban education; (3) secondary school restructuring; and (4) inclusion of all students and families.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the LAB doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

1. Strengths

-The LAB has met contractual obligations: The LAB has executed the program of work as outlined in the contract and its modifications. The program appears to be on time; in general the required reports have been submitted to OERI by deadlines.

-The LAB has benefited through its affiliation with Brown University: The LAB has benefited from the utilization of Brown's management systems (e.g. budgeting, personnel, grants-management, and legal services) as well as some of the communications services. Brown is a progressive institution in support of educational improvement. Efforts have been made to leverage Brown's considerable intellectual resources in support of LAB activities and programs, such as Brown faculty participation in the Pell Seminar on education policy and the Dean's Forum---a new network dedicated to the sustained improvement of pre-K-16 education in the region. In 1999, Brown University allocated \$100,000 in support of core operating expenses for the Education Alliance, of which the LAB is a part.

-The Board structure represents citizens and regional interests; members are strong and active supporters of the LAB: The Board is a strong, guiding force, constituted by leaders in education, business and industry, and the public sector. The Board has been involved in conceptualizing LAB activities and monitoring the quality of services provided; the Board appears to be instrumental in setting LAB priorities.

-The Executive Director and staff are knowledgeable, capable, and dedicated to the work: The staff is engaged in continuous improvement of the quality of the programs and in their execution and appear to work effectively as a team.

-Partners and alliances have contributed to establishing the LAB's credibility in the region, both effectively and efficiently: The LAB has placed a priority on forming, sustaining, and extending strategic alliances and partnerships with education agencies such as the Chief State School Officers in the region, associations of school administrators, school districts, teacher professional organizations, and other networks. Vigorous efforts have met with success to form extensive alliances

and partnerships with various education and other public constituencies. For example, the formal partners of LAB have linked their networks with LAB, thus extending the benefits of collaboration for school improvement. The extensive network of 700 public schools accredited by New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Public Secondary Schools' review process has been changed to a focus on the quality of teaching and learning in schools, as a direct result of the technical assistance provided by the LAB's Secondary Restructuring Signature Work #2. The LAB's own partners are strong in their own right and effective in collaboration with each other. LAB has made an effort to collaborate with other RELs (e.g. SEDL and PREL) and national centers (e.g. CREDE).

2. Areas of needed improvement

-The need to utilize effectively the strengths and capabilities of Brown University: A heightened visibility and sustained working relationship with university is encouraged. While there are some examples of such involvement already (e.g. the Secondary School Restructuring Initiative work in accreditation), there are opportunities to enrich the research base with Brown's resources in a variety of ways.

-The timely development of technological applications to support LAB management: There is a concern regarding the efficient and effective application of technologies (such as the Internet and videoteleconferencing) that can be applied throughout the programmatic and management elements of the LAB. Documentation and assessment of the effectiveness of LAB programs can be supported to a greater extent by technologies, resulting in greater efficiencies and opportunities for cost reduction.

-The LAB staff needs to be more reflective of diverse population living within the region: Central to accomplishing the LAB's core mission, development and applied research, are the quality and experiences of the staff. While the competence of the staff is high, the corps as a whole can

be enriched by greater diversity. By continuing to address this issue successfully, the LAB can increase its effectiveness in the delivery of services and utilization of their products.

3. Recommendations for improvement

-Increase leveraging from Brown; bridging the gaps in the pre/K-16 education system in creative, effective, and sustained ways: Examples of leveraging the considerable intellectual resources of Brown University are apparent and can be expanded substantially. Efforts to reach out to other pre/K-16 educational institutions, particularly higher education institutions, and leverage the impressive intellectual and leadership resources of the region can be encouraged. One area that in all likelihood Brown could make a substantial contribution to better support the LAB's work is in the area of making available and supporting applications of the new interactive technologies for both programmatic and managerial activities.

-Incorporate use of the new interactive technologies effectively to support programs and activities, both programmatic (development and applied research) and management.

-Increase efforts to identify, recruit, develop, and retain outstanding members of the staff who are representative of the diverse population within the region.

B. To what extent is the LAB using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

1. Strengths

-The LAB has made an effort to design and implement a program to provide self-monitoring and quality assurance: The LAB has modified the programs, activities, and planning process as a result of the feedback. Examples are as follows: The LAB Board of Directors provides on-going feedback, reflecting the diverse population of the region and has an interest in educational

improvement. The Program Council, including all program staff and LAB Partners, meets quarterly to review and discuss progress on the work plan and to make indicated modifications. Other needs assessment mechanisms include the State Liaison System, visits from Chief State School Officers of the region, and general feedback from the network of RELs and alliances with constituencies. Quarterly reports and annual reports to OERI provide specific information on actions taken in response to problems identified, such as the termination of three projects originally contracted. New procedures and management activities (such as product review and database of projects and workplans) have been established as a result of the 1998 review by Abt Associates.

2. Areas of needed improvement

-The more effective use of and collection of additional information for self-monitoring: For example, inclusion of more diverse members of the staff and governing Board. The extension of the formal data collection (e.g. the Abt survey) to all projects could benefit planning for scale-up and general strategic planning.

3. Recommendation for improvement

-Improve the methods for self-monitoring, which can include but not be limited to the design and implementation of formal quality improvement assessment and document both quantitatively and qualitatively the baseline and the results of changes. This can include, for example, frequently collected data on client satisfaction and regular self-reflection activities among staff. The Abt telephone interview for the Lowell project (Signature Work #1) of 15 educators is an example of the kind of assessment that could be applied to all projects. Communicate with residents within the LAB's region and other RELs the results of the process and seek recommendations for increasing

effectiveness of the self-monitoring process that will lead to continuous improvement in programs, activities, services, products and administration.

The dissemination of the Abt study to the Lowell district personnel and the effect of that dissemination can be determined.

III. Quality

A. To what extent is the LAB developing high quality products and services?

1. Strengths

-The LAB is conducting excellent research efforts that are significant, well-designed, informed by state-of-the-art research, and competently executed: For example, the Implementing Standards with English Language Learners---the Lowell middle school professional development project---is an example of school improvement effort that has been well-designed, informed by current theory and research from relevant areas, and has been conducted with a high degree of competence. A second example of a major project that is based on well-founded research and has informed the development of an educational improvement tool is the NEASC revised accreditation review process.

-The LAB is willing to conduct “in the trenches” applied research projects: As a consequence, existing and planned projects reflect significant R&D ideas whose anticipated results will be useful to the field.

-The LAB staff members are devoted to the use of research to inform and develop applied research activities: Both Signatures Works #1 and #2 exemplify the application and interpretation of a strong research base to inform applied research and development projects.

2. Areas of needed improvement

-Dissemination of research to the national arena for exposure and critique: There is a need for highlighting the work of the LAB at the national level. Some efforts are underway, and more can be done including: Publishing in nationally-recognized applied research journals and presentations at major national and regional meetings. Major conferences should be conducted and followed-up by continuous collaboration and sustained communication. LAB has undertaken some efforts, such as the conference in its specialty area: “Institute on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity,” and the associated activities after the institute concluded.

-Selection of the development and applied research agenda so that it is better informed by systematic needs assessment that is conducted throughout the region and informed by multiple levels of the education and public sectors, and

-Important research questions need to be initiated and explored in additional locations that are receptive to the LAB’s involvement: There are possibilities to expand the input from the field to better inform the choice of particular projects. This can include obtaining information from the multiple layers of the educational and public sectors. Further, it appears that dissemination of what has been learned will be conducted primarily through written materials of a “research format” and in presentations to relevant groups (e.g. NABE, TESOL, AERA, and the regional associations.) This can be expanded as well. The LAB could provide much-needed information about implementation of the research-based activities as they try them out in a variety of sites. The vast majority of work discussed with the Panel consisted of work in one locality or one city---even though New York City and Boston are large enough to be considered by some to be multiple localities.

3. Recommendations for improvement

-Visibility and national exposure of the work of the LAB should be a high priority.

-Conduct systematic, region-wide needs assessment, which can inform the choice of a development and applied research agenda.

-Design and implement collaborative programs and activities that will support educational improvement throughout the region that include contributions and active participation from all pre/K-16 education sectors, including higher education.

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by the LAB useful to and used by customers?

1. Strengths

-Numerous educators use the products/reports disseminated by the LAB and attest to their usefulness: The Panel reviewed evidence and heard many testimonials that educators have altered their teaching and assessment processes as a direct result of LAB projects, specifically tailored to client's expressed needs. For example, the teachers in the Lowell Project, who participated in the LAB's review, provided anecdotal evidence that they changed their practices of teaching, the curriculum materials, and their assessment of English Language Learners as a result of participating in the professional development project. The Abt telephone study documents the level of satisfaction with the LAB project. The Lowell school teachers who participated in the project, as well as the principal of the Wang School, plan to scale-up one element of the professional development work to other teachers throughout the school; plans are being discussed to take the project district-wide. These teachers plan to be teacher-leaders, both in terms of actual methods as well as motivating other teachers.

-The LAB has provided services and products that are directly responsive to the clients' needs: In addition to the Lowell projects cited above, the entire NEASC accreditation review process has been revised as a direct result of the Secondary School Restructuring project. The new NEASC has not been fully implemented as yet, so that summative evaluation data are not available. However, the Director of this NEASC project expressed her strong satisfaction with both the process and outcome of the LAB's technical assistance in informing and guiding the revision.

-The LAB has conducted useful research reviews and has facilitated the application of that research to improve both practice and policy: Both the Signature Projects #1 and #2 exemplify this strength, as described above---the Lowell project for the improvement of classroom practice with English Language Learners and the NEASC project for the vast majority of secondary schools in New England.

2. Areas of needed improvement

-Production of research reports that are more reader-friendly and useful to teachers: The materials and reports produced by the LAB could benefit from being written more effectively for the practicing educator, to include a format with more visual appeal. The accessibility and the supporting materials that well need to be developed in conjunction with the written documents needs to be of high quality and be focused on maximal use.

-Expanded access to LAB materials prepared in multiple formats and modes: Access to LAB materials and documents can be documented by obtaining systemic measures of utilization and calibrating production and dissemination in response to feedback. Some of the materials produced are visually engaging, such as *Electronic Collaboration*. However, the prevalence of materials with both engaging designs and reader-friendly format does not appear to be wide-spread. The concern here is

to verify the utilization by multiple users and re-design documents to achieve the highest level of usage by clients. Documents that summarize applied research findings could include, for example, background information, methodologies used, results, and checklists and activities that the user could actually use in practice.

3. Recommendations for improvement

-Tailor versions of publications specifically for educators.

-Disseminate publications and other products in multiple modes and formats, both “really” and virtually.

B. To what extent is the LAB focused on customer needs?

1. Strengths

-Customer needs are a major focus of the LAB, which is sensitive to and attempts to be responsive to the needs of its clients. Most of the input from the clients the Panel met during the on-site visit and from the materials reviewed, was highly positive, even laudatory. The evidence provided to the Panel was virtually all testimonial and anecdotal. Without exception, the LAB staff members were complimented for their credibility, visibility, and non-threatening support provided to clients.

-The State Liaison System of the LAB is a valuable source of needs assessment: The system effectively informs the LAB’s work. For example, the LAB’s support and guidance of Signature Work #1 and Signature Work #2 appeared to be invaluable. These projects, as well as the New York City Parents Advisory Council, would not have been conducted without the dedicated and effective support of the LAB.

-The LAB uses customer feedback to refine products and services: One example of this strength is the effective use of the State Liaison system described above. Increased communication and

a high level of service to the field is a direct result of the system. Further, the Dissemination Plan that was submitted in draft form to the Panel is ambitious and targets clients throughout the region and at all levels of the education and public sectors. Feedback from the field, as described in this document, will help the Lab to serve their clients' needs, even more effectively.

2. Areas of needed improvement

-The LAB is challenged to develop a comprehensive needs assessment plan to guide for meeting customer needs in the future: This can go beyond the testimonial evidence presented. A well conceptualized and extensive documentation, assessment, and evaluation of the effects of the utility of programs such as the Lowell professional development project, and customer usage of materials/products such as the v-LAB is an area of concern. Evaluation of the effects of services and products can include measurement of client satisfaction. The comprehensive needs assessment can guide future planning for LAB strategies and priorities.

3. Recommendations for improvement

-Develop a comprehensive needs assessment plan and timely method for implementation: This plan can include multiple measures including, but not limited to, client satisfaction. Particular attention should be paid to the LAB's reaching out to help those who reside in localities who have not engaged the LAB in the past. Additionally, these localities are potential sites for replicating significant and successfully LAB initiatives. The potential contribution of technologies (e.g. videoteleconferencing, and Web-based work) is significant.

-Use the results of systematic needs assessment to inform strategic planning: This may include raising questions that deserve investigation, even though a specific request for assistance has not been received, particularly in areas where there has previously been little engagement with the LAB.

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the LAB work contributing to improved student success particularly in intensive implementation sites?

The priority for the LAB projects reviewed by the Panel was not directly targeted on student achievement.

1. Strengths

-The LAB recognizes that student achievement and other valued student outcomes are an important focus for programs of educational development and applied research: The Technical Proposal has highlighted the importance of all planned initiatives upon students' learning. The Panel reviewed and heard testimonial information from staff and clients that efforts to improve students' learning are the ultimate and highly valued outcome for LAB activities.

-The perception of some teachers is that the two LAB projects (Lowell, Jobs for the Future) did affect students' positively, e.g. increased grades, better writing skills: Both the standards based work with English Language Learners in Lowell, and the restructuring of secondary schools through the Jobs for the Future, provide examples of teachers' perceptions that the LAB-funded interventions to improve students' learning have in fact worked as planned. The LAB projects have attempted to raise standards, focus on best practices, promote equity of opportunity, and teachers report positive changes at the classroom level.

2. Areas of needed improvement

-The measurement of student outcomes as a high priority in the design and implementation of development and applied research projects: While the two signature works

provide many elements that research has identified as critical to improving students' learning, documentation and evidence for this effect in these cases have not been given. Further, there is a concern that there are not clear and well-developed plans to collect systematically the data to determine the impact of LAB programs on students' learning. The focus needs to include both students' learning and long-term and sustained gains in student achievement as measured in the ways that states and islands in the region value. There are significant opportunities in the region. For example, in 1999, Massachusetts has implemented state-wide student achievement assessments. This provides a realistic, timely, and cost-effective way to obtain data for longitudinal studies on students' progress in mastering the core curriculum. The LAB can consider how to use existing and planned data collection projects already underway by state departments of education and the federal government.

-Replication and follow-up of pilot and proto-type projects as a top priority for funding: Consideration of the how the results of the LAB work will be applied to various sites needs to be considered carefully. Planning for the eventual replication and scale-up of successful school-improvement interventions should be a part of the initial design. Pilot tests with materials can be enhanced as the materials are tailored for professional development.

3. Recommendations for improvement

-Design and implement a comprehensive plan for the assessment, documentation, and evaluation of significant student outcomes---such as student achievement, and include both quantitative and qualitative approaches: Expand the measures of quality to include: (a) teacher outcomes directly related to students' learning/achievement and (b) a wide set of student outcomes that include multiple measures of students' learning/achievement of the core curriculum specified by their

states. The plan should include assessment of curricular, instructional, and other contextual factors that affect student learning outcomes.

-Continuously monitor and modify, as indicated, this plan so that the results for student outcomes inform both the policy and practices of education within the region.

-Replicate and extend the pilot projects for validation and impact, thereby increasing the national and regional access to significant LAB achievements.

B. To what extent does the LAB assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

1. Strengths

-The LAB has assisted in and helped to inform the processes for accreditation of secondary schools in the New England region: The NEASC accreditation review process has been revised as a direct result of the Secondary School Restructuring project. The new NEASC has not been fully implemented as yet, so that summative evaluation data are not available. However, the Director of this NEASC project expressed her strong satisfaction with both the process and outcome of the LAB's contributions.

-The LAB has conducted dissemination services, such as the creation of "best practices" electronic sites: Both the Nanduti Web-site and the "Portraits of Success" Web-site and data collection tool are invaluable sources of information for educators who are struggling to successfully implement standards-based curricula with cultural and linguistic minority students. The Nanduti site provides assistance to schools and to parents in their efforts to support students' learning of world languages as second languages.

-The LAB has conducted dissemination services, such as forums on comprehensive school reform that have presented throughout the region: Additional LAB projects have resulted in prototypes for interactive collaboration supported by technology. The “Portraits of Success” of model bilingual programs is expected to be highly useful when fully implemented. This work and the other work on standards-based reform are integral to the system-wide improvement of pre K-12 educational institutions.

2. Areas of needed improvement

-Develop specific plans to pilot, evaluate, and scale-up the work that has been demonstrated to be successful: The emphasis needs to be upon the development of specific plans for scale-up of successful (e.g. through evaluation) pilot projects to impact targeted populations. The expansion can include the measures of utility to include teacher outcomes directly related to students’ learning/achievement and a wide set of student outcomes that include multiple measures of students’ learning/achievement of the core curriculum specified by their states. Plans to scale-up successful pilot projects can be developed and revised throughout the developmental period of a project.

-Priority for the objective study of the impact of accreditation and standards work: In order to plan for future programs throughout the region, LAB needs to have knowledge of the level of impact of these two signature programs, in particular. Such information is essential for guiding the adaptation of the programs for maximal effectiveness.

-Expanded electronic collaboration activities and measurement of their effects to assist in scale-up of successful programs: The goals can include: The effective use of technologies to achieve impact and economies of scale can be built into scale-up plans. It is important for the LAB to increase the ways to share their knowledge. The inclusion of successful models in various venues

throughout the region---programs, conferences, symposia---is a first and laudable step. It is also important to expand these opportunities through multiple dissemination activities that extend the visibility to classroom teachers, parents, and other educators. These efforts can be complemented with the commitment of broadly initiating and expanding collaborative activities utilizing the newly available interactive technologies. The electronic collaborative activities reviewed by the Panel were few and do not appear to take full advantage of the technologies available to educators in this country. For example, activities including videoteleconferencing and streaming video can be accomplished via the Internet without requiring special facilities and with little additional costs to the host institution.

-Expanded visibility of the LAB's successful models to the national arena: As noted in the previous section, the LAB can consider how to bring its successful work to the attention of a the national audience of practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers, who potentially use the work to inform their own initiatives.

3. Recommendations for improvement

-In combination with the dissemination plan, develop and execute plans for the infusion of technologies to support the scale-up of demonstrated successful programs and projects in the specialty area.

-Comprehensively evaluate and document the small pilot projects to establish the basis for the scale-up and development into a comprehensive school reform initiative.

-Infuse technology into programmatic efforts to increase access to and expand collaboration with partners, on both a regional and national basis.

-Expand collaborative activities to support scale-up and actively pursue regional and national visibility.

C. To what extent has the LAB made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

The specialty area for the LAB is: “Language and Cultural Diversity,” including assisting schools to serve effectively, culturally and linguistically diverse students, families, and

communities.

1. Strengths

-The focus on cultural and linguistic minority students and in particular English Language Learners permeates the work of the LAB.

-Several LAB projects that have already been completed are significant, well-designed, informed by state-of-the-art research, and competently executed: For example, the Implementing Standards with English Language Learners---the Lowell middle school professional development project is an example of a school improvement effort that has been well-designed, informed by current theory and research from relevant areas, and has been conducted with a high degree of competence. The dissemination of this research study nationally and its' potential scale-up throughout the Lowell district and beyond have the potential to contribute to the LAB's national reputation in the specialty area.

-Some national recognition has been achieved: The collaborative relationship with NABE in the "Portraits of Success" and with CAL in the Nanduti Web site exemplify the well-designed nationally recognized effort to improve the education of English Language Learners.

-Some LAB-generated policy recommendations have been adopted: The LAB has achieved regional recognition as demonstrated by the Maine project, and the New York City Parent Advisory Council project, which has informed policy-making in the states.

2. Areas of needed improvement

-The application of technologies to support the expansion of the programs: The efforts of the LAB in all venues, and in particular in the specialty area, can be complemented with the commitment of broadly initiating and expanding collaborative activities utilizing the newly available

interactive technologies. The electronic collaborative activities reviewed by the Panel were few and do not appear to take full advantage of the technologies available to educators in this country. For example, activities including videoteleconferencing and streaming video can be accomplished via the Internet without requiring special facilities and with little additional costs to the host institution.

-Greater national visibility and exposure to the variety of audiences who could benefit from the specialty work, including educators, researchers, and policy-makers: The focus needs to be upon greater visibility on national venues, such as professional and research meetings. As noted in the previous section, this can include the comprehensive documentation and assessment of the “success stories,” using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

-Expanded collaboration with the two relevant RELs (SEDL and PREL) and national centers, including CREDE: The LAB has already been engaged in working effectively with the other nationally funded education R&D centers/labs. The LAB has exerted leadership in this area, such as highlighting the importance of the creative application of the new technologies to expand the national infrastructure for education reform. These efforts have just begun and need to be a priority for the LAB.

3. Recommendations for improvement

-In combination with the dissemination plan, develop and execute plans for the infusion of technologies to support the scale-up of demonstrated successful programs and projects in the specialty area.

-Comprehensively evaluate and document the small pilot projects to establish the basis for the scale-up and exposure in the national arena.

-Actively pursue venues to present the LAB's work at national and regional meetings and national and internationally-recognized publication outlets (e.g. journals, monographs.) Increase the presentations and publications of specialty work at regional and national research and development forums.

-Expand collaboration with RELs who share common focus, with CREDE, whose central commitment is effective schooling with at-risk students, and with institutions of higher education whose research and development agenda is shared with the LAB.

VI. Overall Evaluation of Total LAB Programs, Products and Services

It was apparent to the Peer Review Panel that the work of the LAB is significant for American education in two ways: (1) development of services and products that promote the improvement of K-12 education, particularly for a diverse student body, that is: (a) standards-based, and is (b) oriented to increasing students' learning, teachers' professional development, and leaders' effective management of schools; (2) applied research and evaluation on the formulation and implementation of effective educational programs for all students and, in particular, for those who are English Language-Learners.

Overall, the LAB's work is significant and addresses a major policy issue in American education, the educational success of all students, in particular those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The agenda focuses on increasing students' learning, through improving instruction and continuous school improvement. The LAB has developed services, products, and an applied research agenda that encompasses building capacity for that improvement by supporting collaborative inquiry and sustaining strategic alliances. One example of significant specialty area work is: Signature Work #1

which has focused on the implementation of a standards-based curriculum and assessment program with English Language Learners.

This orientation and focus of the LAB's work is consistent with education research and

development for students who are at-risk for educational failure in American schools. Because of factors associated with English proficiency, ethnicity, poverty status, and geographical location, a growing number of American students are at-risk for educational failure. From research conducted over the past three decades, much has been learned about what constitutes effective schooling for all students and those who are at-risk, in particular. As yet, there has not been the large-scale implementation of school reform that results in high achievement for all students. We have not seen the wide-spread implementation of school reform that sustains effective educational programs and instructional strategies that support these programs. The work of the LAB is directly relevant to this significant policy issue in the country. It is anticipated that the LAB's work will ameliorate, to some significant degree, at-risk factors related to the English Language Learners' school achievement, ultimately resulting in improved student learning.

VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas of Needed Improvement, and Recommendations for Improvement

The work of LAB is well-founded and off to a good start, having attained some initial success such as the Signature Works #1 and #2, with the expectation to extend, expand, and scale-up these projects to render significant school reform resulting in high achievement for all students, and in particular English Language Learners and other cultural minority students. The array of strategic alliances and partnerships is a strength that should be sustained and expanded, both regionally and nationally among other RELs and relevant national centers. Continued efforts to develop a comprehensive vision that integrates the disparate successful R&D projects can be encouraged. The effective use of technologies to support and extend the impact of successful projects is an essential

element for widespread scale-up and effective management. Comprehensive evaluation, documentation, and assessment of all research and development projects is an essential element for the continued expansion of LAB work and large-scale impact. A sustained focus on improving students' learning can be encouraged. The LAB is in a strong position to build on the firm foundation already established, and to expand the vision and execution of programs, activities, services and products thus maximizing impact on improving students' learning.