

# Archived Information

## Interim Evaluation of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

### I. Brief Overview of Laboratory

Based on the reports given by various members of the different centers they were able to explain the functions of their center and reveal a level of synergy. During the past year the Lab ran a comprehensive school reform conference, which was an effort of the combined centers. The curriculum designs that were presented at the design fairs generated questions regarding the adequacy of the models presented to each district. A thousand copies of the resulting video were distributed. E P I C and scaling up had responsibility for developing the video. The design fairs were not a good idea because the Lab had not had an opportunity to work with the schools prior to their development. Of the 17 models that were developed they were only able to fit 5 into the districts. There was concern regarding getting services to Wisconsin and Minnesota and other users in need. NCREL has been good at marketing, developing the Captured Wisdom (cd) library, plugging in materials and assisted districts in writing their application and meeting standards for removal from probationary status.

### II. Implementation and Management

The intent has been to develop an organization that represents the mission, meets the needs of the consumers and reflected the logic of the work being done. The centers have many cross appointments, which do not allow any of them to function as an independent silo. Individuals may be identified with a center, but are affiliated closely with the Lab. Each center director has a budget and a scope of work plan. When there are new contracts the center directors decide which current center will undertake the task. The Board of Directors is selected on the basis of the allotted space per state. Each state is allocated three members, who are selected by

the state superintendent. They may serve a term of two three-year appointments, or be re-appointed. They meet three times a year for two consecutive days. They receive an annual report of the work of the Lab.

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

NCREL is charged with providing national leadership in the use of technology for education. To that end they are attempting to systematically explore research and best practices relative to how technology can be integrated into the classroom to achieve engaged learning and student outcomes. NCREL is expected to develop a range of technology for dissemination and developing products through CD-ROMs, videotapes, Web sites, and Internet exchanges. NCREL has sought to meet identified purpose, high intensity needs, logical dissemination and plans for implementation to select the best available knowledge resulting from research and practice while serving diverse populations. It is expected that they will seek to find out from their audiences through surveys what their needs are.

NCREL has begun to respond to those needs through the production of deliverables, conferences, the placement of consultants and the development of a web site. Several of their constituents have begun to report successes. Some of the successes reported are from the SEA level, since the inception of NCREL they have received training technological information and services and on site consultants to assist more directly in the implementation of learning through the use of technology.

The accessibility of sustained support has increased enthusiasm of teachers, administrators and students. One of the consumers near the Laboratory has been removed from probationary status as a result of the infusion of technology, consultants, and more precise

academic programming for the students, along with the training and more positive attitudes on the parts of the teachers and students. There is a need to find a way to get the information and other services to the more distant areas more quickly and timely. It is recommended that a better method of awareness be established along with the ability to supply demand.

### **1. Strengths**

The analysis of need and a specific prescription for change, enthusiastic Lab members, who accept criticism. NCREL uses GALLUP as its primary source of collecting data relative to needs assessment. GALLUP is a reliable measure for data collection that uses various methods of validation. The consultants are another method of direct feedback describing the needs in particular for the subscriber. The training sessions for the subscribers have been especially useful in enabling NCREL to attend to the necessary adaptations that might need to be made to the originally designed academic program.

NCREL has developed many of the proposed deliverables, while establishing partnerships, disseminating information across a large area, creating a network of Labs and promoting research and best practices are among the many tasks that have been initiated during this contract period. They has also maintained and enhanced the collaborations among the involved professionals and learners.

### **2. Areas of needed improvement**

There is a need to specifically identify those schools that have probationary status. These districts/schools may not have the necessary funding to pay for the connectivity, services or materials to improve their status. The board members are strategic for giving feedback to their constituents as it relates to the analysis of the needs assessment. Many of the available clients need only to be approached and be shown the ease with which the kind of assistance they are in

need of is available. Confidence building as a result of small successes will promote them as stakeholders.

### **3. Recommendations for improvement**

NCREL can do a better job of service delivery by having each tier of management participate in the needs assessment especially the consultants.

Outreach is often the fulcrum for promoting desire in a client who knows that there is a need, but, who does not know or have the time for analyzing what the specific or general need(s) are. Empowerment is an awfully powerful tool toward creating a level of independence that will lead to further curiosity.

Assist those underserved schools in writing proposals for funding or for partnerships. Direct attention to them so as to make them healthy institutions for children to learn. There should also be other resources to support collaboration in the schools currently receiving services, in the form of professional libraries and planning session along with all of the school staff.

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

After receiving surveys from consumers NCREL analyzes the data and would proceed to implement the curriculum design that was specific to the needs of the particular classroom. This would include the involvement of a consultant along with the necessary technology and other resources. It appears that in certain cases that the process was a little longer than expected. This would lead to loss of interest. In another instance it was believed that NCREL believed that once the school received the information they would begin to use it. This gap in implementation time and nurturing evidently leads to a lack of interest, which makes it difficult to garner that initial interest.

## **1. Strengths**

There is a plethora of data available so that NCREL can make pointed recommendations regarding what is needed to make the necessary changes. The staff exhibited and is reported to have a high level of skill and personal ability. These traits should make for a harmonious and professional working relationship. Given these skills of the Lab and the needs of clients and their availability, and what the Lab has done proves that the Lab has the capacity to get the clients to buy into the opportunities that are only several keystrokes away from implementation.

## **2. Areas of needed improvement**

The data that has been gathered should be analyzed thoroughly to assess where changes have been made, so as to determine where the gaps are and what should be done about them. There should be an increased attempt to include the marginalized population. The intermediate school districts are strategic sources for networking the services that are available and doing direct training with each client in the service area.

## **3. Recommendations for improvement**

Encouraging the Superintendents of the school districts to mandate the participation in a forthright needs assessment of each of their schools. The needs assessment should be scrutinized, by the local school district, for accuracy and completeness, then moved to the intermediate level and finally to the Laboratory.

## **III. Quality**

### **To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?**

There are reports both in text and verbal to indicate that demonstrate that there are many types of technology services available. Accepting the responses of the current participating community of learners and their engaged participation, the technologies and services that are

being provided, they know that these are the reasons for their successes. These participants and the review of the materials created, suggests that NCREL has developed an array of programs and deliverables that can be consumed regardless of the level of connectivity.

### **1. Strengths**

The available texts and individuals laud the production of the materials and on site services that they receive. Given the number, skills, and desire to serve on the part of the CNREL staff, each client schools has the ability to be a part of this change process. Partnerships are encouraged for those schools whose regular resources do not allow for their independent participation. The Regional Conference was a great success and as a result, the outcomes created interests in certain districts that have become regular and enhanced users of the available services.

### **2. Areas of needed improvement**

There is a need for training or a session with the entire school staff in attendance to observe how the determination is made regarding the selection of material or selected methodology is decided on, with examples of engaged learning.

### **3. Recommendations for improvement**

Plan staff developments that would include all staff during the process of deciding the best practice for changing the climate in a classroom or a teaching method. The Regional Conference should not be the only setting for exhibiting the technologies that are available. There should be scheduled conferences or symposiums at the state district and school levels, where research to practice information and the different deliverable are available and are experienced by each potential user.

## **IV. Utility**

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

The respondents indicated that as a result of the products and services rendered by the Lab they are able to attack the academic concerns with assistance and not having any fear of not meeting the needs of the students or the expectations of parents and other concerned members. These improved services have allowed teachers to work with teams and with consultants. The array of deliverables is such that every school has the capacity to bring about change in the necessary classroom(s).

**1. Strengths**

Students are now able to work more independently or in small groups making discoveries and presentations, while expanding their knowledge base. When NCREL visits, the teachers can relax more, because it is not a staged visit, and they dialogue about what needs to be done to make changes. There are a number of technological developments, printed materials and human services that are available at the Laboratory.

**2. Areas of needed improvement**

Teachers would like to know how the curriculum decisions are made. Those teachers who use the web site would like more web-based resources. Work on PD, bring people from other states together, to connect and dialogue on specific methodologies as a means of problem solving. Local administrators must see the utility and gains that can be had through the use of NCREL's technological developments. This level of buy-in would create interests in each succeeding tier of school personnel.

### **3. Recommendations for improvement**

Offering specific courses for the purpose of in depth training and learning for those who desire them. But more specifically as a requirement (with inducement) for those schools, classrooms and teachers who are in dire need of the needed services. Establish partnerships with higher education for this purpose. Select curriculum developers and students from each school district should be offered summer camp (etc.) opportunities. These opportunities should engage them in the many uses and kinds of services that are available for implementation back home. Teachers and others may also be included. They will then become trainers.

#### **B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?**

NCREL has collected survey data from its constituents for purpose of determining what their needs are, while developing specific materials to fit those needs. They also provided a regional conference to make known what services they can provide. They also assisted school district in writing proposals and are now partners and will follow through to product development.

##### **1. Strengths**

The needs assessment data speak to what the general needs might be and how the expressed needs might be met. The pre-service teachers who have been exposed to the existing materials discuss their new knowledge and skills with excitement. They begin using the services and materials prior to their field placements or internships. This means that they will be proficient users when they enter the classroom.

##### **2. Areas of needed improvement**

It appears that the only way that a consumers needs are addressed is through the needs assessment. It is further evident that those outlying school districts or those schools that do not

believe they have the capacity for installing technology or have a keen knowledge relative to the services that are available will not respond. The consultants and other specialists must be empowered to do capacity building for these schools. Student test scores along with other measures such as learning environment and desire to learn along with teachers diminished desire to teach must be the engines that drive service delivery from NCREL.

### **3. Recommendations for improvement**

There is a need to make the needs assessment more user friendly. After the needs assessment has been responded to, someone at the school level should scrutinize the responses. This scrutiny is for clarification and specificity relative to real needs, and not just a response to a task. The local curriculum developer can make recommendations to the respondent on the basis of previous classroom evaluations.

## **IV. Outcomes and Impact**

### **A. To what extent is the REL's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?**

NCREL has assisted certain constituents in improving the performance of its students and attitudes of parents and teachers. This school was on probation, but has since gained regular status. Other participants have indicated that as a result of being-given specific recommendations, they were able to use the Engaged Learning program, which eliminated other distractions. In these instances on-task behaviors and attitudes toward learning were increased. These changes also increased positive teaching attitudes and the accomplishment of goals and objectives.

## **1. Strengths**

In the sites that needed intensive implementation, attendance, on-task behaviors, and teaching opportunities were greatly enhanced. The positive nature of the community of learners was contagious and involved parents directly. It caused parents to ask what was going on that was different, and caused them to observe more closely what was going on and to become involved. School administrators saw the need to invest and expand the services to other classes and teachers.

## **2. Areas of needed improvement**

There needs to be a more intense effort of targeting the schools in need of intensive implementation. These schools should definitely be targeted by including and assessing the building administrators regarding their impressions professionally, as to what they need to engage their teachers and students in teaching and learning. Each school staff should be involved in the specifics of what is involved in curriculum development and teaching. Training, wherever it is needed should include all members as a team. Mentors may be needed to model best practices.

## **3. Recommendations for improvement**

There should be clear understanding regarding curriculum development and what it entails. The entire school should be involved. Only certified teachers should be members of the staff in these schools with intensive needs. Regular staff development should be the main diet. Partnerships with institutions of higher education should be established for the purposes of training and to the pool of resources. Parents should become an integral part of these efforts.

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

Conversations with BOARD members and other consumers revealed that as a result of NCREL, their schools are using technology WEB SITE, printed materials and consultant services have designed their CSR. There is the dissemination of available technologies, services, and assistance in establishing partnerships, as well as the sharing of cutting edge knowledge related to learning and teaching.

**1. Strengths**

Minnesota acknowledged that as a result of using GATEWAY the teachers in her district are using ENGAGED LEARNING in science on the topic of energy in particular and they are using the web for additional information. She also stated that as a result of knowing what other districts and states are doing through this partnership, soon she will be calling a meeting of her state people to become more deeply involved in technology.

**2. Areas of needed improvement**

Even though alerts, magazines, newsletters and materials are sent and made available, there needs to be a database relative to the schools that are lagging in performance. Local school administrators and/or their designers along with the curriculum personnel should be directly involved.

**3. Recommendations for improvement**

That NCREL makes the materials and technology more available in a more timely fashion. That the needs assessment be done region wide with the resulting analysis being distributed to each of the participating district/state. These results could be used as the agenda for a more comprehensive conference or meeting to offer precise curriculum suggestions for change

at each level (school/ district or state).

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

The available documents and consumers verify that when there has been consistent involvement with NCREL there has been a noticeable change in attitudes and performance at all levels in the schools and classrooms. The Regional Conference, the newsletter and magazine and other materials have made consumers aware of the fact that NCREL has the capability of making a major difference in the business of teaching.

**1. Strengths**

The NCREL Regional Conference is one of the first of many provisions that NCREL makes available that the Board members and other mentioned as being a boon in information sharing.

**2. Areas of needed improvement**

NCREL should not only depend on the availability of materials and services as being the end all. There should be continuous training opportunities.

**3. Recommendations for improvement**

NCREL can not be hands on for each and every training opportunity. There should be a method of reporting the participation to each level of administration if there is participation or not. NCREL should also report the performance data of each school to the appropriate administration for action. As a flagship developer of technology, NCREL, need not just develop materials for the sake of meeting the mandate of the contract. They should make certain that its being utilized by those in need, or find out why. Micromanage its consumption.

## **VI. Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services**

This thumbnail review of NCREL's works was compelling. The number and amount of materials and technologies that have been produced are revealing. They show the broad-based visions of the staff, and the amount of research that has gone into making the deliverables user friendly and adaptable. The Gateway web-site is one of the pieces that issued regularly by teachers and students. Students have begun to do research and present their findings outside of their schools.

Pre-service teachers are using Gateway, the magazine and the newsletter in particular, in preparations while on campuses, toward being adequately prepared for the classroom. The Engaged Learning Safari teaches teachers research to practice techniques and how to infuse these results into the curriculum – mathematics, science, literacy and the inter-disciplinary learning. Using Engaged Learning is the teachers' best classroom friend. The classroom consultants and trainers have been able to meet with the teachers and others involved in the school, with the results from the needs assessment and makes an impact almost immediately. The Captured Wisdom (cd) permits teachers to look at other learning situations and assist them in integrating best practices into their classrooms. When teachers find a route to the core of teacher content matter, generally the attitudes and climates for learning and teaching change dramatically. There are other flagship developments that suggest with supportive data, that NCREL has vested much research, effort and vision into the development of its products, services and staff selection. The partnerships that have been linked have also assisted in forging these efforts into action at a more disciplined and faster rate.

## **VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas for Improvement, and Strategies for Improvement**

The many strengths that are obvious, but become more apparent upon close scrutiny are many. Some of which are exclaimed in section VI of the overall evaluation. NCREL, has begun to take an in-depth look at the data they have collected, analyze it and make it more usable to the recipients of their services.

The local school district managers and Superintendents need to be able to look at and understand benchmarks and where their students are performing in relationship to these benchmarks. These kinds of revelations will make the efforts of everyone more real. To be “First in the World,” all participants involved in teaching and learning must be included at all levels. This kind of inclusion will assure us of a more acting and committed stakeholder. These schools that are in need of intensive implementation can not be expected to decide on their own to become an aggressive, come from behind participant.

They must be brokered on the basis of carefully and specifically planned curriculum designs that meets their needs. Their needs are most often so complex and overwhelming that they most times can only deal with the immediate and visible pains. They must be involved in the planning and have a sense of what it is that the curriculum design entails. They have to be partners, contacted directly, evaluated, while highlighting whatever positing there might be. They must have the best teachers and administrators who have a vision, and see the realities of standards and student needs in order to meet these standards. These efforts must be approached without fear of failure, having no regard for naysayers. These schools continue to have major difficulty with connectivity. This must not be tolerated, while broad bold strides are being made to bring them into the loop and made immediate believers in the possible suddenness of position

change. The implementation of training and technology must be perpetual. NCREL has a service area that is most vast. It also has a clientele that spans the socioeconomic levels and a geographic area that is unwieldy. The Center arrangement continues to cause concern as to how each Center knows what is going on in the other, and when does one know when the efforts of the other have kicked in.