

# Archived Information

## Interim Evaluation of the Southeastern Regional Vision for Education

### **I. Brief Overview of Laboratory**

As part of the SERVE interim evaluation team, I participated in a one-week site visit to the Laboratory on May 10-14, 1999. I reviewed Laboratory materials extensively both prior to the visit and as a natural part of the flow of work during the site visit, including both materials mailed to us prior to the visit and on-site materials. I participated in numerous focus groups, presentations, and interviews with SERVE staff and customers. I had full access to information, and the staff readily provided additional resources and information upon request.

### **II. Implementation and Management**

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

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

SERVE is meeting obligations as outlined in its contract for this phase of the cycle. SERVE is a young organization, and it is in transition as we conduct this visit. While we spent the majority of time and effort looking at work that has been accomplished thus far by this fledgling organization, much new work is just beginning to be talked about with the change in leadership and the organizational restructuring underway. The organization is showing great promise in moving ahead and is clearly making strides to improve.

SERVE has assembled a wide range of talent, including a strong leadership cadre, policy analysis cadre, program-level cadre, and other strong personnel. There is clear indication of very

hard work as the norm, with people across the organization willing to go the extra mile with persistence and commitment.

In a very short time, SERVE has created a powerful infrastructure for wide-scale impact on policy formation and implementation across its service region. With highly trained policy analysts advising top state officials in every state, SERVE has strong ability to impact policy formation. With the strong professional development and training infrastructure created by the program-level personnel from SERVE, the organization has situated itself in a very short time to have major impact on implementation across the region.

At this program level, SERVE has strong impact on policy implementation by hosting conferences, providing training, developing and disseminating materials, and otherwise supporting state education departments, districts, schools and teachers in their work. The Lab has created a wide array of publications, developed training packages, selected and endorsed existing products and professional development opportunities that address the larger issues of education reform such as strategic planning and implementing standards-driven change.

Organizationally, SERVE has created a structure that allows the Lab to be responsive to needs of different states and regions. While the organizational structure presents coordination challenges to SERVE as a Lab, it also offers great opportunity by being disseminated across the region. The Lab has been very creative in finding ways to link across distance, and gives evidence of having an evolutionary process of growth in place so they are constantly aware of challenges and are constantly seeking ways to improve.

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

While SERVE has in many cases created quality products, adopted and shared effective programs, and disseminated effective professional development, consistency in high quality of

products/training created as well as that endorsed by the Lab is lacking. Because you have had such phenomenal success in creating an infrastructure for impacting educational change in a “to-scale” manner, these lapses in quality become critical because you have the capacity – and indeed the practice – of moving your work to scale. In context of your great success with infrastructure, you have much greater need for quality control.

### **3. Recommendations**

1. Celebrate your wonderful success in creating an infrastructure for having impact on the region, yet understand its power and be respectful of it. It is to your credit that you have created such a powerful tool for moving educational change to scale, yet it is also creates a greater responsibility to hold a very high standard of care because of the potential to move incomplete or inaccurate information to scale. As a growth step organizationally, SERVE needs to build in processes and controls that support dissemination of good choices, sound information, and a culture of thoughtfulness throughout SERVE’s work across the region – a critical area of focus because the dissemination infrastructure is so effective and so strong.

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

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

SERVE collects ongoing data on customer satisfaction and is highly responsive to customer needs. Working in conjunction with each state, SERVE has a cadre of policy advisors in place who provide ongoing and timely feedback to the organization. SERVE listens to states, both formally and informally, and adapts as the political context of each state changes. As personnel changes within the states (such as through changes in top elected officials) and issues of importance change within each state, SERVE responds accordingly. Through this network of policy advisors, SERVE has direct access to information on state level needs across the region. SERVE is also constantly “evaluated” for credibility by the governors, chief state school officers, and legislators throughout the service region through the natural checks and balances

inherent in their having multiple sources of information. Though informal, this process is a useful assessment piece naturally embedded in the work of these advisors and, indirectly, to the work of the SERVE staff who support these policy advisors.

At other levels, ranging from the Board to the practitioner in the classroom, SERVE obtains ongoing feedback in a variety of formats, such as through the Delphi process, focus groups, surveys, and informal contacts among others, with the majority of feedback focused on customer satisfaction. SERVE is adept at responding to this satisfaction feedback and at adapting services and supports accordingly.

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

SERVE needs to strengthen and intensify its quality control process, making it both more formal and more rigorous.

First, there is limited evidence of external monitoring and evaluation that is rigorous, independent, and specialized to fit the program or process under evaluation. According to staff interviews, the organization depends heavily on program directors deciding when external review is needed, particularly as related to content of materials and processes. Thus the people responsible for development are also responsible for initiating the tough evaluation process. There is limited evidence of rigorous external review, with much of the strong external feedback provided by clients who use the Lab's services and participate in development of Lab products. With an organization of this size and impact, failure to have in place rigorous external evaluation processes that are automatic is problematic as a quality control process.

Consistent, rigorous monitoring of student achievement and student success data as it relates to programs, processes, and products developed by and/or disseminated by SERVE throughout the service region is not evidenced. Student achievement data is added late in the

process, once the product or process is in a final or close-to-final stage or once it has been in use, rather than incorporating student success data in the construction and revision phases. For example, the Senior Project has been adopted and dispersed throughout the region, yet it has not undergone rigorous scrutiny in relation to student test score changes, or in relation to distinguishing characteristics and issues of students who are successful in completing the project versus those who fail or do poorly on the project. Thus a program is widely disseminated, with dissemination structures such as annual conferences in place, without critical analysis built in that might allow adaptations, changes, and growth of the program to make it better or to learn how to target and adapt for particular populations with the existing program.

SERVE gave little indication in presentations, interviews, and written materials including quarterly reports of having analytical processes in place to learn from the natural and inherent failures and limitations of programs, products and processes. The focus throughout presentations was on successes, with little reference to struggle with the complexity of teaching “all students” to achieve at high levels. While there is strong customer focus and ability to measure and respond to satisfaction data, there appear to be low levels of institutional ability to make content gains in a rigorous, formal way. There was little analysis of limited success or evidence of being organizationally analytical in assessing the success or limitations of SERVE programs.

Throughout interviews with staff and partners, presentations, and materials, the term “research” was used in a very broad, unrestricted sense. There was a wide range of understanding of what constitutes “research”: the term was applied to experts used to give advice, to the act of searching to find sources of information, to staff observations gleaned informally from projects in the field, and to practical projects in the field that seemed to be

working. The complication with this issue is that the research support base becomes naturally overstated, implying support well beyond the scope of evidence. Quality control processes that would allow the Lab to distinguish products, processes, and practices that have strong empirical support from those that have little support – or are appropriate only in particular instances with particular groups, for example -- are missing.

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

1. Institute a rigorous, external and totally independent quality control process, linked with increased internal processes throughout the work of the Lab. While this is done in some cases, such as through the national needs-assessment process in early childhood, it is not done routinely throughout the organization. Monitor the level of rigor and accuracy of the Lab's work through an ongoing, non-personal process rather than depending on people assigned to design and complete the task that needs scrutiny. Build in student and school success data from the beginning rather than at the end of selection, development, and/or utilization of products and services the Lab disseminates.
2. Institute significant rigor in using the term "research-based." As noted in conversations with clients, people in the field are making major choices based on the assumption that what the Lab tells them to do and use has an inherent guarantee of success, because it is "research-based." Strengthen the researcher voice, insuring input from multiple sources and depth of expertise in design and construction of products. Maintain a high standard of care in fidelity of the information to the research base. Screen materials and sources, being sure to cover the full scope of the research to understand the major issues and findings. While the organization has obviously responded valiantly to the requests that flood in, there is need to be vigilant because of the scalability factor in the infrastructure. The scope of adding this level of rigor is obviously beyond the reach of current staffing and organizational mechanisms and will need to be done through a system of external networks or evaluators, or through a combination of internal-external controls. In short, develop processes for screening materials and programs with a critical eye, limiting the term "research-based" to those empirically supported programs available and those grounded in data-driven, demonstrated student success. Add understanding of the strengths and limitations of each, the limitations of the literature-based knowledge, and the levels of tentativeness that are inherent in the term "research-based".

### **III. Quality**

#### **A. To what extent is SERVE developing high quality products and services?**

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

SERVE has developed a unique and highly effective infrastructure with capacity for disseminating research-based practice and moving research to scale by impacting both policy formation and policy implementation – creating, in fact, a strong infrastructure for a specialty area in policy in the future, should that become a possibility within the Lab system.

At the top level of the policy continuum – the policy formation level -- in conjunction with member states, SERVE has created a system of senior policy advisers who impact policy development in each of the states. They are charged with providing research-grounded information and advice and, to the extent they are able to do so, have the ability to impact policy at the top level of the system.

On the other end, at the site-based policy development and implementation continuum, SERVE has developed a strong infrastructure of programs and partnerships that allows SERVE to have hands-on impact at the state department, district and school levels as evidenced by interviews with consumers, materials, quarterly reports, and other documents. The Lab is uniquely situated to view educational change both at the top and at the bottom, of the system. These two pieces, together, provide SERVE with a unique and powerful infrastructure in place for learning more about the policy development and implementation process in its full form.

The SERVE infrastructure is particularly suited for and acclimated to the culture and norms of the region, and the Lab has facilitated a web of personal relationships and informal networks as a conduit for the larger work, in addition to more formal organizational structures. The policy advisors and leadership, in particular, has strong connections to organizations and

individuals across the region and the nation that allow instant and deep responses to needs for information and support. While changes in organizational structure are underway, leadership is moving toward maintaining a responsiveness and a fluid structure that allows the Lab to change with the needs of its clientele and to continue to harness the strength of this informal but powerful web. The dispersed office structure, while posing challenges, seems to fit this style of working and the preferences of the region.

In addition to its strong positioning for implementing policy in context of cultural norms, SERVE has built a powerful infrastructure for disseminating and sharing information. SERVE hosts a wide range of seminars and workshops such as Senior Project Institutes and Networks and has major annual conferences in place that have become an institutionalized part of the educational culture, such as the annual SERVE Regional Forum on School Improvement. Through state, district, and school partnerships, SERVE provides strong, persistent, personalized training and support. Through wide dissemination strategies, SERVE has created a common language and common base of understanding across school, district, state, and regional lines. For example, the concept of Senior Projects is widely understood and gives high school teachers, administrators, students, and parents common language for dealing with critical issues in changing curriculum and assessment across a geographically broad audience.

Individual products have received high acclaim, such as *Achieving Your Vision of Professional Development*, which won the NSCD Book of the Year in 1998. This publication is one example, among others, of high quality use of research, involvement of strong expertise from the research community working with practitioners, and a high quality exemplar project for the region. Throughout the Lab's work, materials and packaging are of high quality throughout and are appealing and professional quality. Writing is clear and user-friendly, with publications

such as *Hotspots* and *Using Accountability as a Lever for Changing the Culture of Schools* as representative examples.

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

While SERVE has a powerful infrastructure in place across the region, the quality of the content of products and services being disseminated is uneven. There are a number of complications that contribute to this issue, despite the obvious talent, dedication, and hard work of the staff involved. First, program level work is complicated by the volatility, volume, and scope of requests that flood the program level, particularly with the combined needs of the policy advisors in each state who require ongoing, rapidly changing, short-timeline responses. This need is beyond the capacity of the program level of the organization to respond with accuracy across the board. Second, the organization is young, and is still under development. It took a great deal of institutional energy, time, and talent to create the policy infrastructure that is such an exemplar for influence to scale. Organizationally, SERVE is just now in position to be able to respond to this area of quality control, and with the changes in organizational focus that have been underway for the past 18 months the Lab is well situated to make these gains. Nonetheless, it is a critical area to be addressed at this timely juncture in the growth of the organization and deserves mention.

In too many instances, research reviews that undergird Lab products and processes were incomplete, yet the materials, presenters, and training was delivered as “research-based” practice that was, therefore, effective. There was an air of authority conveyed by the broad utilization of the research-base claim, when in fact the research fails to support the claim to that same degree. The tentativeness of using research to draw conclusions was missing throughout publications, presentations, interviews, and training materials – gaps, inconsistencies, limitations, and strong

support are all part of the picture and were not acknowledged either in style or in content. For example, the publication *Improving Student Motivation* raises a timely, important and often silent issue in the field of standards-based reform: student engagement. While extremely well-done in many ways, it has some serious flaws in empirical grounding as it might be applied to secondary schools and students. The publication distinguished between intrinsic motivation prominent at the early grades and extrinsic motivation prominent at the upper grades, which fits the knowledge base. Rather than reviewing the literature fully to understand those differences as a tool to be used and, perhaps, a natural part of the developmental process, the material implies that this shift is a flaw and that it is linked to flawed school processes. While that is one strong view and schools certainly make major mistakes that contribute to lack of student motivation, there is another equally strong view that supports the use of extrinsic motivation as a fundamental necessity for moving students to high performance at the secondary level. This large body of empirical literature is quite strong is declaring that secondary student achievement occurs almost solely in context of external motivation – it isn't necessarily a school or student flaw, it simply "is". In short, schools making decisions using this body of information are handicapped by limited view. While it might not have been possible to review all the literature, acknowledging the limitations of the work and limiting the population to which it might be applied would have added significantly to the quality and usefulness of a publication that was well-done in many other ways.

In the practical arena, SERVE gives uneven evidence of intellectual rigor. The organization remains highly focused on serving the region and rolling out programs, with less evidence of placing the work in context of larger issues, in strong awareness of knowledge gaps in the field that require contribution, or in seeing the Lab's work as a developmental step in

context of regional growth. For example, there are distinct limitations in training programs designed for professional development on alternative assessment, and Lab staff showed little awareness of those limitations as part of the presented signature work. Understanding of alternative assessment cannot be separated from analysis of student work. Student work is essential to anchor “how good is good enough.” Without it, there are still no standards in place to drive instruction or to measure high achievement in the classroom. While there was some small focus on using student work, there was little evidence in presentations, interviews, materials, and training programs of the essential nature of this piece of the standards and assessment puzzle, in the sense of “next steps”, or of placing this work as a partial piece of the puzzle.

In another example, Senior Project, while making major contribution in changing student and teacher climate for learning, is separated from the rigorous level of achievement that would be demanded in a system with benchmarks. By instituting such a program region-wide without incorporating the reality of benchmarking, there is no way for teachers to understand the critical need to know “how good is good enough” – and thus no incorporating the essence of the standards.

The issue here is limits in organizational and individual awareness of the limitations of Senior Project and the assessment work, limited placement of these training pieces in the larger picture to facilitate “next steps” planning for the region, and limited use of a critical eye in judging the programs selected and their impact on high student achievement.

While the Lab used existing work and existing training in many instances, duplication of effort and failure to use existing work to the fullest extent was also an issue. For example, in Signature Work 2, the Schoolwide Improvement Planning Process is fundamentally a replication

of a widely available and traditional strategic planning model. That model is very effective for helping organizations focus on key issues in context of data, but it is very ineffective in creating a resilient, fluid organization capable of evolutionary planning and managing effectively in a volatile, highly changing environment. The Lab spent considerable time and energy developing work that was already available and failed to move beyond existing base of knowledge and practice with that considerable effort.

These limitations in quality are compounded by the context through which SERVE programs and services are disseminated -- the powerful and successful delivery system both at the top policy level and at the practitioner level that lets this information flood the region. It is of the essence that work put into this powerful system be of top quality, be thoughtfully linked to measured impact on student achievement, and be nested in context of systemic understanding of school, teacher, and student change.

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

1. Capitalize on your strengths in quality: the policy specialty area that directly connects policy formation and policy implementation; the ability of the program level personnel to create a strong, encompassing delivery system for products and processes as powerful infrastructure. The quality and expertise required to accomplish these significant and difficult tasks could be shared as major contribution to understanding moving to scale – it is a national level piece of work that could be analyzed, unpacked, written as process, and shared for other regions to follow.
2. Follow the model of the policy advisor network and focus on making a wide network of quality connections at the program level, thus building capacity to respond to a wide range of issues that is bound to flood the organization with the breadth of concerns faced by the region. It is impossible to develop internal knowledge base to match the broad area of concern at the policy development level across such a large region. Devise ways to assess – and to help customers assess – the quality of existing work. Find ways to help consumers best match existing work to their needs. Help schools connect to research-based information to use in context of their strategic planning, rather than leaving them to do their own research as part of that process. Develop new products and processes as a last resort, after considerable searching using this newly extended, sophisticated web of support at the program level.

3. Focus on identifying and utilizing existing work rather than creating products after a quick review of what is available. In some instances, such as in the case of the publication on professional development and the work on grading and reporting, there is a gap in the field and SERVE is positioned to make significant contribution. In others instances, the Lab would have been best served by spending more front end time and resources locating and analyzing existing work and more thoroughly exploring the research from all perspectives rather than shortening that step and moving quickly to creating new products and processes. With the scope of work demanded because of the policy focus at all states, it is impossible to respond in a deep way to so many different areas. For example, in terms of professional development for schools in the area of standards and assessment, the focus should shift drastically to include and center on student work. The Education Trust Standards in Practice model is an excellent benchmark, for example, and there are other excellent models available that could be used with little or no revision. In terms of strategic planning with districts and schools, move beyond the current format to the next step, focusing on creating resilience and responsiveness in schools – more like the type of organization SERVE is trying to become (you become the benchmark!). Models are readily available in business and industry, with globalization and rapid change a norm for their organizations, if the happen to not be available in the field of education.
4. Create a climate of curiosity in developing and disseminating work. Take advantage of opportunities to examine products and implementation as part of the work of program development, looking with open eyes at both the successes and failures, the strengths and limitations of the work itself and the expertise of Lab people.
5. The recommendation for quality control of the research-based claims made previously will also impact this area. Again, institute rigorous methods of external review across the board, particularly for large projects, products, and processes that are either developed by the Lab or adopted by the Lab for dissemination.

#### **IV. Utility**

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

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

In a few short years, SERVE has created an amazing infrastructure for delivering products and services of sufficient size, scope, duration, and intensity to flood the region with information and professional development opportunity. SERVE program level people keep in

close contact with users, and consumers we interviewed told detailed stories of the rapid responses that occur across the organization, of the quality way in which items were collected and shared, and of the friendly and responsive manner in which products are provided.

In analyzing customer satisfaction data, which was abundant, it is clear that customers across the region are highly satisfied with the products, processes, training, and services they receive from SERVE. There was evidence of adaptation of materials and training to the needs of the different sites, as explained by clients interviewed and the Board interview.

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

While there is tremendous success in the level at which customers use products and services, the Lab needs to be more deliberate in analyzing the best response to the issues customers are dealing with. There was focus on services without selectivity in adding to the knowledge base on what might be the best response to their underlying need. In addition to moving beyond requests, there is a need to look beneath the direct requests and analyze options that might best address the issue that underlies the request itself.

Second, the SERVE web page has some excellent sources of information. I was particularly impressed with the links to other sites – they were of high quality rather than simply a broad array of sites clustered without regard to quality. Other than the web page and a few other items, there seems to be relatively little use of technology. The context of the rapid response requests that are an inherent part of the policy advisor role of the Lab and the rapidly evolving nature of the products and knowledge base in areas such as standards and assessment would seem to be particularly amenable to technology as medium.

## **3. Recommendations for improvement**

1. Move beyond responding directly to consumer requests, and insert a process for analyzing the underlying needs and issues those requests are intended to address. The

customer request might be the best response, or there might be a better solution to the problem undergirding the issue. Put in place a process to add this step of thoughtfulness rather than responding directly to customer needs in every case.

2. Consider expanding the use of technology as medium for work, to the extent it fits the capacity of the region to use it.

**B. To what extent is SERVE focused on customer need?**

**1. Strengths**

Customer service is one of the greatest strengths of the Lab. First, SERVE identifies and serves customers and potential customers at the policy formation level. Policy advisors offer the Lab strong partnerships with direct impact on policy in each state the Lab serves. Qualifications for policy advisor are stringent, and SERVE works individually and responsively with every state to accommodate their needs while managing to create major impact. Networks are both formal and informal, and the reach of the Lab's influence is strong at the state level across the region.

At the program level, the same holds true. SERVE identifies customers and extends the warm hand of Southern hospitality to districts, schools, and state department of education across the region. The Lab uses customer feedback such as Delphi, surveys, and informal networks to track customer needs and respond, to tailor products and services to the intended audience, and to use customer feedback to refine products and services.

All in all, SERVE is very "well plugged", to quote the Lab director. Connections to quality and ongoing information are woven into the fabric of the organization at both a formal and informal level. In addition to these strong connections to the field at both state level and implementation level, there is strong information feedback between SERVE policy advisors and program people as the normal work of the organization occurs, with policy advisors feeding key and timely information into the program field and receiving information in return. Despite

distance and diversity of state contexts, SERVE has created a strong network that allows focus on customer needs.

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

As mentioned in the previous section, there is a need to move beyond the direct customer request in some instances and to be thoughtful in analyzing the deep need that undergirds the request.

## **3. Recommendations for improvement**

Same as IVA1

## **V. Outcomes and Impact**

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

#### **1. Strengths**

SERVE is focusing on issues of national importance, such as systemic change and large assessment and accountability systems. SERVE is contributing to increased knowledge of educational problems and issues and is creating common terminology and programs that allow discussion across state and regional lines. For example, the SIP process is widely shared and allows conversation across district and school lines. With common language, a broader audience has the capacity to struggle with student achievement issues in common context. The SIP process, for example, is effective in helping sites focus clearly on objectives, obtain agreement among a wide range of stakeholders on those objectives, and set in place processes for making data-driven decisions about school reform.

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

It is extremely difficult to measure the impact of a single program or organization in context of the multiple interventions and complexity of intensive intervention sites. In spite of the difficulty, there are processes for monitoring student achievement and student success that would contribute to better understanding of the impact of SERVE projects on participating students and schools. There is limited indication of the monitoring of this data as an ongoing and integral part of the work of the Lab. Focus on teaching and learning seems to be disconnected in large part from focus on school and student success. Thus it is difficult to assess the impact of SERVE's work on student success.

## **3. Recommendations for improvement**

1. Implement quality control measures, including collecting, analyzing, and interpreting student and school success data as part of the development, adoption, utilization, and dissemination of SERVE products and processes.

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

#### **1. Strengths**

SERVE is dealing overall with critical issues in comprehensive school improvement. At the policy development level, SERVE advisors have input into policy formation across the region as key advisors for governors, chief state school officers, and legislators as evidenced by senior policy analyst memos and briefs, as well as quarterly report information. Policy analyst strategic alliances create a rich network of resources, information, and influence that cuts across a wide array of interests. Through this infrastructure, SERVE is capable of inserting research information directly into the policy arena, having strong impact on the creation of policy, and of moving to scale.

At the program level, SERVE is dealing with critical school change issues such as the areas addressed in Signature Works 1 and 2. The focal areas of standards and assessment and school change intersect and encompass a wide area of critical importance in the field of school improvement. The SERVE programs have cast a broad net across the region and developed a powerful infrastructure for professional development that facilitates widespread access to information on best practices within the region. The effort to learn in the area of grading and reporting is a cutting edge arena that has the ability to contribute at the intellectual level as well as the practical level, since the old “sorting system” meets the standards-driven system at this point in the overall school reform process and the area is relatively unexplored.

Together, with the policy analyst network at the policy formation level in conjunction with the policy implementation network established at the programmatic level, SERVE has created an amazing infrastructure with capacity for moving to scale, for rolling out research-based practice, and for impacting the region in a deep and significant way.

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

As mentioned previously, a critical area of needed improvement in using this powerful infrastructure to impact school improvement is to institute and maintain high standards of quality and to create a thoughtful, analytical environment for selection and development of SERVE efforts in the field.

While SERVE policy analysts and SERVE program level people work together around common issues and need for collecting and sharing information, there is little evidence of linkages that promote understanding of the total policy process. For example, some program level surveys, publications, and interview concerns revolve around the problems of “teaching the test.” While this is a downside in one sense and is a particular concern of schools and teachers

who actually implement policy, it is also a function of the design of the system: the accountability system is designed to force teaching of the test as a tool for school change and increasing student achievement. There was little evidence of SERVE taking opportunity to capitalize institutionally on opportunity to have this conversation, to struggle with the two perspectives around a common agenda and a common “table”, and to make contribution to the field of implementers by helping practitioners understand the “upside” of teaching to the test and helping policy designers understand the potential negatives.

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

1. Deliberately explore and maximize the potential to impact change through a policy development and implementation specialty area, whether as a formal part of the next Lab funding phase or as an informal area of strong expertise. Focus on analyzing the system and making the knowledge replicable through publications both professional and practical or through other sources of assistance to those outside the region.
2. As mentioned previously, institute rigorous quality standards and quality control processes. Create a thoughtful, analytical culture in program selection, development, and implementation with focus on learning from both successes and failures as well as making contribution to the field in uncharted waters.

### **C. To what extent has SERVE made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its field?**

#### **1. Strengths**

SERVE has created links and partnerships of organizations working in the area of early childhood education. The Lab has produced a number of publications on areas of strong interest and impact in the field.

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

The Lab needs to focus more on expanding its influence beyond the limitations of the region.

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

1. While the Lab has begun to establish a firm reputation, SERVE needs to target a national audience and to focus on disseminating specialty area products both inside and outside the region.

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

Overall, SERVE is evolving organizationally. SERVE has gathered a strong cadre of people, made strong connections across the region at the program level and across the nation at the policy analysis level. The Lab has many strong programs, products, and services in place, and it is evolving organizationally so it is better able to deal with issues and needs for growth.

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

Overall, there are two major areas of improvement needed. First, the quality of the work, particularly in context of the fidelity of the content and processes to the best empirical knowledge available, is uneven. Second, there are too few quality control processes in place to create a climate of thoughtfulness and standards that will allow the organization as a whole to raise the quality of work with consistency.

Second, there is great opportunity for making contribution to the national field in the area of moving to scale through impacting the policy process in powerful ways both at the policy development level and the policy implementation level. In a few short years, SERVE has created a benchmark for scale, yet it is not capitalizing on this contribution in a deliberate, systematic way.

## **Recommendations for improvement**

The following recommendations for improvement are threaded throughout the remainder of this document:

1. Create a strong system of quality control processes in the area of content and projected impact of Lab products, processes, and services. Analyze the level of quality of work, particularly in relation to fidelity of content to literature and making broad statements that move beyond the scope of the available evidence. Link product development, selection and endorsement of products/services, and professional development to student and school success data.
2. Capitalize on the strengths developed in policy formation and implementation as a system.