

# Archived Information

## Interim Evaluation of the WestEd Regional Educational Laboratory

### I. Brief Overview of Laboratory Activities

The WestEd Regional Educational Laboratory review visit took place at the Laboratory headquarters (San Francisco, California) on April 12-16, 1999. I reviewed all the materials assigned to the team. I also requested and interviewed the Language and Cultural Diversity staff. In addition to the group interviews shown on the visit agenda, I also had an in-depth conversation with Sharon Nelson-Barber.

### II. Implementation and Management

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

##### Strengths

WestEd appears to be meeting or exceeding expectations in most areas. Most project implementation has followed plans presented in the Technical Proposal and contract modifications. There are some exceptions; these are discussed below in the section on **Areas of needed improvement**. One example of where successful adjustments to the original plan were made is in the Western Assessment Collaborative (WAC). The WAC required considerable adjustment at the end of Year 1 due to the unsuitability of some of the schools selected initially to carry out the work proposed for WAC. The basic four-component design has been followed, but much rethinking and reorganizing has been done on the basis of the first year experience. While such realignment needed to be done to accomplish the goals of the proposed project, some valuable time was lost in moving forward. To WestEd's credit and that of the WAC staff,

adjustments have been made, and the project appears to be proceeding along as initially planned. In the long run, valuable lessons were learned, and these appear to have contributed to the depth of the project.

WestEd proposed and initiated a training center for scaling up the Success for All (SFA) program as part of its core strand on Whole School Reform. The services of the Training Center proved to be in such demand that it was a constant challenge to keep sufficient personnel employed to meet the requested services. Unfortunately, the developers of the SFA made the decision to establish a private training foundation for this program and, by mutual consent, the training center at WestEd became defunct. This appears to have left a void in the REL-sponsored work in WestEd's core strand of Whole School Reform. However, funds freed up from the SFA project have been reallocated to allow expansion of the WAC project.

Except for the products and services relevant to the projects discussed in the section below on Areas of needed improvement, WestEd appears to have produced the deliverables specified in its contract, modifications, and annual updates and to have executed the REL program of work in a timely fashion.

A major strength of WestEd is its ability to respond in a timely manner to emerging customer needs. This implies, of course, that it has within its ready resources the expertise and staff availability to deploy assistance fairly quickly across a broad range of topics. WestEd's staff appears to be highly knowledgeable, versatile, and dedicated. The Nevada State Strategy is an excellent example of an approach to providing timely and needed assistance at the state level, addressing directly OERI's mandate to provide assistance to states in their reform efforts. Other examples can be found in WestEd's ability to generate and disseminate policy information in a rapid fashion (e.g., in the case of California's Class-Size Reduction initiative; charter schools) and

in generating research-based information to address current information needs (e.g., development of the monograph “Educating LEP Students” in the face of Proposition 227 and similar rumblings in the state of Arizona).

Pertaining to use of other internal resources to enhance the REL monies, WestEd certainly meets expectations in leveraging resources internally to enhance REL services and products. It successfully incorporates services of its Eisenhower Math and Science Consortium and other units as appropriate into its service delivery, shares communications assistance across various units within WestEd, and maintains the capability to reassign staff temporarily in order to bring the needed expertise to bear upon a given task.

WestEd has also been highly effective in leveraging external funds to support and extend the work of the REL. A prime example of this are the funds that WestEd has been able to secure from private foundations to enhance the work of WAC. Another example is that of working with partners to submit proposals for additional funding, as in the case of the Northern Nevada Technology Consortium (NNTC); a further example is that of cost-sharing with the state of Nevada agencies to support the work of The Nevada State Strategy project.

WestEd is well-linked and networked with a number of influential federal and state organizations, other RELs through the Laboratory Network Program, research organizations (e.g., RAND, PACE, AIR) and state and local consortia (e.g., Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, Utah’s Student Service Alliance; NNTC). In fact, WAC has made a conscious effort to become a part of an existing network and to engage other networks in awareness sessions and discussion of standards-based reform. This effort serves as a form of dissemination of the project’s philosophy and beliefs as well as facilitating opportunities to further its work. All of these networks and alliances greatly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the REL work.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

Proposed work relative to The Talent Development Model (TDM), now going into Year 4, has barely gotten off the ground, despite considerable effort by WestEd to move the adoption of this work forward. It is doubtful that the proposed work can be completed within the five-year contract timeframe. The proposed Language and Culture Diversity (LCD) plan appears to have been altered considerably at the end of Year 1. Component A (Integrating Successful Practices in Diverse Classrooms) took the form of the LCD Web site, and Component C (Ensuring Equity in Assessment) seems to have been shifted into the Task 7 Specialty Area of assessment. Work proposed for Component C has been addressed to some extent; however a major task of that proposed work, developing a set of processes and materials that schools can use to adapt and create assessments that are fair and useful for language minority students, has been rescheduled for development in Year 4 Updated Plan, 1999. Originally proposed for a five-year scope of work, it is doubtful that such in-depth work can be accomplished during the time remaining in the contract, unless considerable attention and resources are brought to bear on the work.

With the SFA program no longer a part of WestEd's "scaling up" strategy, and the TDM getting off to such a slow start, there appears to be a substantial void in WestEd's work scope related to scaling up.

WestEd is well linked and networked with a host of appropriate agencies and organizations including CRESPAR. However, there appears to be limited collaboration with other relevant national centers such as CRESST and CREDE, both located in California.

## Recommendations for improvement

1. WestEd may want to reevaluate its effort to continue to pursue adoption of TDM. Even if it were able to get the adoption of the model moving forward in a couple of Los Angeles schools and possibly one in Utah, it is doubtful that enough time remains in the current REL contract to track the adoption through much more than the early stages of implementation. Perhaps WestEd should consider pursuing instead the documenting of “lessons learned” from this effort. In particular, barriers to the adoption and implementation process could be documented and analyzed. Similarly, “lessons learned” about scaling up of SFA could contribute to a summary document that could be quite useful to schools around the country that are struggling with frail reform adoption/implementation.
2. Given that the Western Region comprises large language minority populations in two of its states (California and Arizona) and growing substantially in its other two states, a strong focus on work dealing with language and cultural diversity is essential. There is undoubtedly a great need for information relative to language and cultural diversity (LCD) issues. While the development of a Web site devoted to LCD issues is laudable, WestEd may wish to reevaluate its current LCD Web site in terms of the extent to which it duplicates effort of Web sites such as those of the Center for Applied Linguistics, CREDE, and the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE), centers that have greater resources to develop such sites. Perhaps WestEd’s LCD Web site could enhance its service by focusing its resources on needs that are unique to the Western Region (e.g., information relative to effects of Proposition 227 and ways schools are, or could, respond to the changing policy environment). Links to other sites could provide information of a more generic nature. Active collaboration with CREDE and NCBE could enhance WestEd’s effort in this regard. Similarly, collaboration with CRESST and CREDE could provide greater depth to the work of developing a set of processes and materials that schools can use that are fair and useful for language minority students. Both of these centers have substantial expertise in this area that can be tapped. CREDE, in particular, currently has a strand of research in assessment that speaks directly to this effort.

Similarly, WestEd should explore the possibility of collaborating with CREDE’s research strand on School Reform to produce a joint publication on “lessons learned” from attempts to scale up externally developed school reform models in schools serving a high proportion of language minority students. Work from various WestEd projects could contribute to this (e.g., TDM, SFA, WAC, CSRD).

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

**Strengths**

WestEd has an extensive plan and procedures for Quality Assurance (QA) of products and services that involve expert input from both internal and external sources. Also required is consumer input — a real strength of the QA process. In addition, QA measures are built in up front in all projects. WestEd's Communications Unit and evaluation staff provide some in-house QA assistance as well. Throughout the Nevada State Strategy Project, there is clear evidence of the QA process at work, beginning with Dr. Chow's careful analysis of the requirements of Nevada's Reform Bill and its implication for service delivery from WestEd. All four strands of that project were subjected to various internal and external reviews and numerous versions were drafted incorporating recommended revisions. Other prime examples of QA in action can be found in the conceptualization and development of the *Focus: California Class Size Reduction*, where the full RD&D cycle is evident, and also in feedback solicited and incorporated in the development of *Toolkit '98*.

WestEd uses an extensive self-assessment process, including Program Reviews, Portfolio Reviews, and reviews by the Board of Directors. There is a good deal of evidence that self-assessment is used to improve performance, as attested to by interviews with members of the Board of Directors and examples provided in staff presentations. Dr. Chow's early work in the Nevada State Strategy Project (see above) and feedback in his role as State Liaison for Nevada are evidence of self-assessment in action. To cite another example, much self-assessment occurred during Year 1 in the WAC project when staff dialogues were held and advice sought from in-house colleagues relative to the intervention planned for the Kyosei schools. The

intervention was then revised and a set of indicators were developed to measure progress. In keeping with WestEd's QA process, these were then reviewed by colleagues and school reform partners. A similar process was used in developing partnership activities with the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center (SCCAC) relative to co-development and presentation of a seminar on "Creating an Effective District Assessment System." Other evidence of on-going self-assessment is apparent in various feedback forms (e.g., CSRD, Reading Tutors and Indian Students), pilot tests (California Proficiency Assessment - CPA), and evaluation reports (*Toolkit '98*).

WestEd seeks external/independent critiques from at least two sources: a Program Advisory Panel and formative evaluation activities. A number of examples were cited in both the materials that were provided to the review panel and in staff presentations in which these activities had resulted in changes in program activities or structures (e.g., feedback in the development of the WAC Accountability Dialogues).

### **Areas of needed improvement**

WestEd needs to be explicit and public about how results of the QA process, self-assessment, and client feedback have been used to improve both program and organizational performance. This would be helpful to not only contracting agents and clients, but to institutional staff as well.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

1. Provide a public document that describes: (a) how information from self-assessment and external reviews has influenced, or will influence, subsequent decisions and actions and (b) present the rationale for incorporating or not incorporating such results/feedback into subsequent performance.

### **III. Quality**

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

##### **Strengths**

Overall, WestEd demonstrates not only a very good understanding of school reform, systemic thinking, and the concept of “scaling up” but also an understanding of forces that affect schooling. This is evident in the selection and documentation of the research base that underlies its products and services. This research base is well documented in WestEd’s materials.

Although time did not permit a close examination of project research plans, they appear to be appropriate and are executed in a sound manner. Based on evidence from the Signature Works reviewed (see below), the QA process is used in an appropriate manner in these works as are findings from applied research.

Some cross-project activities and development have occurred which minimize duplication and strengthen the effort (e.g., planned development of two guides jointly by WAC, Specialty Area, and LCD). Many such opportunities exist for this to occur. Portfolio reviews should also minimize duplication.

WestEd’s technical proposal presented a coherent and sustained program of work built around the concepts of “putting the pieces together” and “scaling up.” The “putting the pieces together” has been largely sustained (e.g., WAC and Nevada State Strategy); however the “scaling up” efforts have been less successful (e.g., the loss of SFA and the extremely limited accomplishment in scaling up TDM). WAC appears to be ready for scaling up (in fact, such an effort is underway in Arizona) but the degree of scalability it offers is not proven at this time. It appears to be quite labor-intensive and requires considerable expert guidance. On the other hand,

the Nevada State Strategy employed at WestEd can be said to be an example of working at scale at the state level, with scaling up efforts occurring at the district level.

WestEd is nationally recognized in its Specialty Area of assessment. It has been forceful and effective in its leadership in the Laboratory Network Program (LNP) on assessment, compiling a highly praised and badly needed *Toolkit '98*. WestEd staff regularly appear on the program of several prestigious national professional associations (AERA, APA, NAEYC, ASCD) and have made some presentations at relevant international conferences. They also regularly appear on state-level and regional conferences and are sought by regional education and policy groups to provide leadership in dealing with emerging and crisis issues (e.g., committees on Proposition 227 in California, charter school evaluations, discussion groups and policy briefs on class size reduction). The Specialty Area staff have also provided technical assistance to the National Skills Standards Board in the area of assessment and certification and to the Arizona Governor's Division of School to Work in the area of evaluation.

WestEd employs state-of-the-art knowledge, processes, and tools to design and implement products and services. The QA process described by WestEd should result in consumer-friendly, useful, and state-of-the-art products. Services appear to involve much interaction and feedback to guide the delivery of services, as evidenced in the Nevada State Strategy. We also see much evidence of coaching and facilitating through job-embedded training (e.g., WAC).

As noted earlier in this report, WestEd employs a variety of internal and external advisory groups to inform products and services. Most laudable is the involvement of "customers" or recipients of the services in the planning and evaluating of those products and services.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

There appears to be an overemphasis on attendance and participation in AERA's annual conference (e.g., planned for the 1999 conference in Montreal are some 23 staff members in attendance, 15 people presenting in 19 sessions, 8 attending but not presenting). Given the need to disseminate information to a wide array of audiences and to monitor trends in various aspects and levels of education, it would seem prudent to focus resources for conference presentations to a broader array of professional events. Also, conference presentations tend to influence the tone, content, and presentation format of publications on which these presentations are made. WestEd's publications, to a large extent, should be addressed to practitioner and policy makers, and a lesser extent to research-oriented audiences.

While "catchy" or scholarly titles for publications and conference presentations may be appealing at times, "good journalism" and enhancement of customer appeal might be addressed in more-user friendly, less stilted titles for presentations and publications relative to standard-based reform and assessment in general.

Considerable thought by the WAC staff and clients has been given to the issue of scalability of the various components of WAC. There needs to be a great deal of emphasis on resolving this issue in the coming year. However, during the review process clients from various levels of education that participated in an hour-long focus group with members of the review panel, expressed concern that effective school reform efforts such as WAC might be cut short of the needed depth of its implementation in favor of "scaling up" to reach more school/classrooms. Indeed, they expressed the notion that the questions for policy makers should be, "What outcomes do you want? How much money will it take? Are we ready to spend such amounts to realize those outcomes?" They further voiced the possibility that the concept of "scaling up" as

currently understood at the federal level may be misguided, that there would be a greater pay-off in education in the long run if monies were provided to “go deep rather than wide” in school reform.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

1. Continue and expand cross-project collaboration and collaboration with relevant national centers (e.g., CRESST, CREDE)
2. Continue to seek external funds to provide on-going development and revitalization activities over time in the Kyosei schools.
3. Consider convening a panel of experts, a “think tank,” to help WestEd staff work through how scalability of this work (WAC) can be increased. Also investigate how technology can be used effectively to deliver this work, while at the same time reducing the intensity of the labor demands.

## **IV. Utility**

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

#### **Strengths**

WestEd’s portfolio shows considerable variation across projects. Some projects appear to encompass a narrow scope (e.g., Bridging Cultures, TDM, CPA), small sample size (e.g., Bridging Cultures, MSSP) and are of low intensity (e.g., TIE). Nonetheless, some of WestEd’s products and services are of sufficient size, scope, duration, and intensity to produce sound guidance toward improvement/student success efforts. The work coming out of the Specialty Area promises to be of great utility (e.g., *Toolkit ‘98*).

In addition, the products and services of the two Signature Works are good examples of potential utility. At this point in the WAC project, the Kyosei is limited to a sample of schools in which intensive work is undertaken over an extended period of time. The size and scope is sufficient to produce sound guidance toward improvement/student success efforts in those

schools. The staff is studying the impact of various processes and tools in these schools. This effort over the next two years should provide information to allow evaluation of the potential impact of this work, sustainability, and scalability. The staff is exploring facilitator training and developing tools for use by external staff that could assist in the spread of this reform model.

The Nevada State Strategy is a prime example of utility of an REL's work. Being a state-level response in all major areas of Nevada's reform, it is of sufficient size, scope, and intensity to produce sound guidance toward improvement/student success efforts. Since WestEd has made a commitment to complete certain phases of each strand of work, has worked to help secure funding for subsequent phases, and has assisted in drafting subsequent legislation to further and sustain the reform, it can be assumed that it is of sufficient duration as well to accomplish the desired outcomes.

Most of WestEd's projects appear to conduct on-going interaction with participants; WestEd has an extensive plan of needs sensing involving feedback gathered by a variety of means: telephone surveys; focus groups; state liaison personnel; and input from a rather large, highly involved Board of Directors.

Evaluation feedback suggests that "customers" use WestEd's products and services and find them to be highly useful. This was evident in interviews with clients during the peer review site visit and is clearly documented in WestEd's *'99 Evaluation and Quality Assurance Reports* .

WestEd makes work available through a variety of dissemination strategies, including face-to-face sessions, print (in the form of articles, monographs, toolkits, newsletters), seminars, institute presentations and activities, and electronically through the WestEd and related project Web sites.

WestEd's Web site is well done and useful. The overview effectively informs the reader of the range of work undertaken by the Laboratory, and at the same time, delimits by omission those areas of assistance that are not in the purview of a regional Laboratory (e.g., general technical assistance). The Recommended section, currently addressing CSRD, is very useful in that clients are directed clearly to high priority work of the Laboratory. The Resources section is excellent; not only does it make available to the client those resources that the Laboratory produces and/or deems of particular value, but it provides hotlinks to a good variety of state, regional, and national sources.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

The Web site directory of personnel is of limited use, since the user must know the person's name to enter the directory; no opportunity is provided to bring up a total listing of employees, for the purpose of selecting an appropriate person to contact on a given matter.

Now that the projects have reached the mid-point in the contract and several are now shifting their focus to communicating their findings and initiating "scaling up" activities, WestEd may want to revisit its dissemination plan and program emphasis for the final two years of the contract.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

1. Consider broadening the Web site directory to include a listing of personnel by project or topic association.
2. At this point in the contract, WestEd should consider expanding dissemination efforts, including products and processes and allocating funds for this purpose. Greater effort should be devoted to "getting the word out" about projects and soliciting input from colleagues across disciplines.
3. WestEd should consider obtaining increased technical assistance and staff development for the WestEd REL as a whole to enhance its dissemination effort. Potential areas for assistance include: (1) how to disseminate to non-specialists (e.g., policy groups, the general public); (2)

how to better package and market WestEd's work to a variety of audiences, particularly policy makers; and (3) which channels are most appropriate and what additional avenues WestEd might use. It appears that WestEd should give greater emphasis at this point to communicating with education leaders, policy makers, faculties of colleges and universities, and the general public, while at the same time continuing some outreach to researchers, practitioners, and communities in which WestEd is currently working.

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

**Strengths**

WestEd conducts extensive formal needs assessment and incorporates input from state liaison personnel and its Board of Directors. The WAC project is particularly strong in this area. Customers were selected on the basis of knowledge of schools from previous experience with the schools in Year 1 of the contract. Potential customers are identified through WestEd's formal needs assessment process and through requests from the field and work with SCCAC partnership. Feedback to the project from Kyosei schools is extensive and ongoing, not only through surveys and group activities but also from on-site coaches. A process is in place to solicit feedback from other project activities. Evaluation is built into all aspect of the project. Projects and services are tailored to client needs, using Accountability Dialogues as one tool to gather data to accomplish this. There is much evidence that WAC uses customer feedback to refine products and services. Much of the content of feedback instruments asks about how products and services can be improved. Similarly, many planning activities occur that involve WAC staff and clients, resulting in development and refinement of services and products that incorporate clients' feedback.

The Western Region is highly diverse and has many needs, thus WestEd must be selective and set priorities for its work. Given the amount of funds that are provided to WestEd to address the great many needs of the region, it is awe inspiring to observe what has been accomplished under these circumstances. A major strength of WestEd has been the ability to secure additional

funds to extend the work of its REL projects and to target those work scopes that are calculated to have the greatest pay off. This latter point is exemplified by the major effort undertaken in the Nevada State Strategy Project and also in the selectivity in responding to the many requests that are forthcoming to the WAC staff for assistance.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

Given that WestEd, for a variety of reasons, must be selective in choosing targets for its work, there is a major population that does not appear to be incorporated into WestEd's current work. There are great needs for services to populations along the U.S./Mexico border in California and Arizona.

There appears to be a concentration of WestEd's R&D work in the urban centers of California, particularly in the Bay Area, to the neglect of rural areas and urban centers of WestEd's other three states.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

1. Make a special effort to include the border area populations in WestEd's needs assessment activities; understand those needs; and serve as a voice with the WestEd's Board of Directors and other influential bodies to insure that this population receives equitable services from WestEd.
2. Reevaluate the distribution of WestEd's development sites; try to include a broader array of localities in future site selections. Given that it is undoubtedly more cost effective to have the R&D sites located closer to homebase, there may be off-setting benefits to including some sites in other states and in other localities in California.

## **V. Outcomes and Impact**

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

#### **Strengths**

WestEd attempts to measure impact through the use of impact statements and indicators to judge its work. These are difficult to quantify and, consequently, are not entirely satisfactory. Data on long-term service, as gathered by a recent survey, suggest that WestEd's long-term service has had a positive impact in such significant areas as in expanding knowledge, cultivating new skills; opening new lines of communication, and creating and cultivating relationships. The data were less positive about any direct effect on improving student performance. This latter finding is not surprising, since WestEd's work by design is that which enables educators to improve education in ways that contribute to student success over time. Certainly, the work WestEd has done in Nevada should ultimately impact student learning. The standards effort now provide clear and measurable outcomes for students; these should also guide instruction, assessment, and professional development, leading to increased student success over time. Similarly, Nevada's High Stakes Performance Exam will directly impact student performance and should guide professional development and assistance to students. The state technology plan and the Northern Nevada Technology Consortium (NNTC) should result in increased opportunities for student learning that are only now becoming available to Nevada students. Throughout the past two years WestEd has been a prime source of information, facilitation, and guidance to key agencies and stakeholders involved in Nevada's reform efforts.

Certainly, WestEd's work addresses issues of national significance; those currently addressed are of high priority nationally: whole school reform, assessment, professional

development, and language and cultural diversity. It can be demonstrated that WestEd contributes to increased knowledge through its development of tools and processes for implementing standards-based school reform (e.g., WAC) and to generating knowledge about training teachers and paraprofessionals who work with language minority students (MSSP). Contributions to effective strategies development can be seen in its highly successful Nevada State Strategy and in WAC's Accountability Dialogues. Also, WestEd's policy briefs provide needed synthesis and analysis.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

An ongoing problem is to find definitive ways to show impact of the REL's work on student learning.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

1. Continue to seek more definitive ways to show impact of WestEd's work, not only on improving educators' capacity to provide high quality education to all students but also on student learning and opportunities to learn.

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

#### **Strengths**

WestEd proposed a major core area of work in its technical proposal that focuses on whole school reform and has built into each of its projects activities and expectations for "scaling up." The projects in that core area represent research-based models of school reform (e.g., WAC, SFA, TDM) and has since added the CSRD which draws only on well-tested models.

Through its Policy Support and Studies Program and various sections of its Web sites (e.g., LCD Web site), WestEd provides research-based information that offers access to information on best practices. Through its State Alliance projects and established state and local

networks and partnerships, WestEd assists its clients in engaging in various comprehensive school improvement efforts. WestEd generates needed materials (e.g., WAC tools, assessment and technology toolkits) and provides assistance through direct field-based R&D work (e.g., WAC) and field services, such as those offered through its state strategy (e.g., in Nevada with the NNTC).

Capacity-building is obviously a prominent goal of WestEd's work, as attested to by interviews with clients during the site review. For example, WestEd builds capacity of its partner sites through facilitator training and coaching procedures (WAC), serving in convening and facilitating roles in working with state alliance projects (e.g., Nevada technology planning).

WestEd also influences policy by gathering, analyzing, summarizing, and distributing research-based findings on emerging and crisis issues (e.g., class size and reduction and Proposition 227 in California). Further, policy may be influenced by WestEd's Web site selection labeled "Hot Topics" that address current issues; these often are designed and presented for that purpose.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

Given the diversity in the nature of WestEd's projects (e.g., in size, scope, duration, and intensity), the staff needs to look long and hard at how some of the current projects fit into "putting it all together," and how that can be done (e.g., Bridging Cultures, CPA, MSSP, MCFF), as well as to the scalability of some of its work (e.g., WAC).

WAC has the potential to influence policy and reform, therefore, much engagement in public discourse is warranted.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

1. Work with relevant national centers (e.g., CRESST, CREDE) to develop a model of school reform that addresses the needs of low performing schools that serve low income, largely ELL populations. Standards-based reform (i.e., WAC) is a good place

- to start, but need to work with CREDE for pedagogy and professional development research. CRESST can assist with assessment and evaluation issues.
2. WAC, in particular, should increase amount of engagement in public discourse and begin to reach wider audiences, especially policy makers and the general public.
- C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?**

### **Strengths**

WestEd's Specialty Area of Assessment and Accountability is recognized nationally. Staff members have provided technical assistance to the National Skills Standards Board and to the Arizona Governor's Division of School to Work, assisted in the development of assessment materials in collaboration with CTC, ETS, UC Santa Cruz and local school districts, and partners with various groups involved in activities related to assessment (Kentucky Dept. of Education, CCSSO, NPEAT). WestEd serves as the lead REL in this specialty area and has provided leadership in the development of a highly-praised assessment toolkit for use by other RELs that participate in the Laboratory Network Program. Staff members have been highly active in conducting trainer-of-trainer institutes, both regionally and nationally, with a high degree of satisfaction. These have been provided to nine other RELs and to various school district representatives. In addition, staff members have presented workshops and presentations to ASCD, NCME, and AERA.

Particularly laudable is the work that the Specialty Area staff performs in conjunction with other programs within WestEd. Staff members work with programs within the REL on assessment issues and collaborates with other projects in joint development of products. An example of this latter role is the joint development with WAC and LCD of two guides that address particular areas of assessment needs.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

While recognized regionally and nationally as noted above, there is little evidence of publication in appropriate journals.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

1. At mid-point in the contract, much of the work undertaken in this contract period has reached sufficient maturity to contribute to the national debate on assessment issues. WestEd's Specialty Area staff should focus more attention in the final years of the contract on : (1) getting the word out on the latest knowledge about assessment and related best practices, (2) engaging in and shaping public dialogue and debate on assessment issues, both regionally and nationally, and (3) increasing publications in major journals, both as a way of validating the work and also as a valuable dissemination strategy.

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

It is apparent that WestEd's work is significant for American education in two ways: (1) expanding the knowledge base on learning for a diverse student population and (2) guiding the formulation and implementation of effective school reform aimed at providing high quality learning opportunities for all students. The latter has been built, to a large extent, around OERI's challenge to address the hurdles of "putting the pieces together" and "scaling up" to effect systemic reform.

The work is timely, addressing major issues of national significance: whole school reform, language and culture diversity, assessment, and professional development.

WestEd's products are research-based, designed to meet identified customer needs, user-friendly, and incorporate feedback from customers as well as recognized experts in the field.

WestEd's services also have their base in research. They are timely and responsive to customer needs. WestEd has had to be selective, because of limited funding in the face of great need, in addressing needs. Not all needs have been met, nor have all needs been addressed.

However, WestEd has been creative in its response to the region. A substantial amount of external funds have been leveraged to enhance the services of the work of the REL, and creative ways have been found to secure greater pay-off in its services. The Nevada State Strategy Project is a prime example of this creativity.

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

### **Strengths**

WestEd appears to be well-managed, and much work has been accomplished to date. One of its major strengths lies in a management structure that allows sufficient flexibility to provide timely and responsive service to its clients. In addition, the organization appears to have created a culture that fosters professionalism, dedication to the contracted work, and a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. The staff appears to be very knowledgeable, highly versatile, and fully-tuned to current trends and issues in American education. A further strength is apparent in WestEd's knowledge of its region and of its region's needs. Extensive needs assessment procedures are in place, including a highly effective strategy of drawing upon first-hand knowledge of its extensive, highly-active Board of Directors. Creativity is also a strength of the organization and its leadership. Recognizing that the limited funds provided by the REL contract were insufficient to address pressing needs in the region, WestEd has successfully sought and obtained external funds to extend its work. Its staff has also been creative in designing services that have the potential for the greatest impact.

### **Areas of needed improvement**

Given limited resources, collaboration with relevant national research centers could greatly enhance the work of WestEd's REL contract. Located in California, both CRESST and CREDE, are currently carrying out work that could inform the work of WestEd. Similarly, WestEd's work could enhance the work of those two centers.

At mid-point in its current five-year contract, dissemination of efforts over the life of the contract requires concerted attention. Not only what is to be disseminated, but how to most effectively reach the most relevant and broadest array of audiences becomes a concern. Publication in major journals needs to be increased, not only as a way of validating WestEd's work, but also as a valuable means of dissemination.

### **Strategies for improvement**

At mid-point in its current five-year contract, WestEd has the potential and opportunity to challenge prevailing perspectives regarding large-scale school reform and schools and schooling for a diverse population, including language minority students and the culture(s) they represent. WestEd has the unique opportunity to engage forcefully in the national debate on issues about assessment in education, and particularly as it influences and is influenced by school reform efforts. Thus, WestEd may need to intensify its efforts to engage in public discourse and to expand its efforts to reach a broader audience.

There should be an attempt to diversify dissemination efforts, including products and processes, to reach more audiences. Both products and processes can be tailored to meet needs of particular audiences. WestEd should consider expanded use of technological support for this, including linking WestEd's resources (on the internet) with other web sites, and exploration of the ways in which newly available technologies (e.g., video conferencing and the internet) can better support collaboration and dissemination.