

# Transitions . . .

## Journey to a Balanced Assessment System

**Year-Eight Report**

**Comprehensive Evaluation of Nebraska's  
Assessment and Reporting System**



The University of Nebraska-Lincoln does not discriminate based on gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, veteran's status, national or ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.

UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Lincoln



# TRANSITIONS:

## *A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System*

Written by  
**Jody C. Isernhagen, Ed.D.**  
Principal Investigator, Nebraska Comprehensive Evaluation  
Associate Professor of Educational Administration  
132 Teachers College Hall  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, NE 68588-0360  
402.472.1088  
jisernhagen3@unl.edu

**Shirley J. Mills, Ph.D.**  
Secondary Investigator  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Educational Complex 1.606  
University of Texas-Pan American  
1201 West University Drive  
Edinburg, TX 78539-2999  
smills002@rgv.rr.com

Nebraska Comprehensive Evaluation Project – Year Eight  
Contracted by the Nebraska Department of Education  
Also supported by  
College of Education and Human Sciences,  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Submitted to the Nebraska Board of Education  
November 2009



|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Table of Contents</b></p> <p><b>Transitions: <i>A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System</i></b></p> |
|---|

Section 1: Introduction .....7

Section 2: Executive Summary .....11

Section 3: Research Studies

Study I: Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System.....47

Theme 1: *District Support*.....50

Theme 2: *Criterion-Referenced Assessment* .....59

Theme 3: *New Statewide Tests* .....68

Theme 4: *Instructional Impact*.....76

Theme 5: *Norm-Referenced Tests* .....87

Theme 6: *Data* .....88

Theme 7: *School Improvement*.....89

Theme 8: *Professional Learning Communities* .....89

Theme 9: *Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment*.....90

Rubric Analysis Results .....91

Study II: Professional Development Practices in Nebraska Schools .....95

Study III: 2006-2008 Reading, Math, and Science Achievement .....111

Study IV: 2006-2008 Statewide Writing Achievement .....119

Study V: 2006-2008 Achievement for Special Populations .....125

Study VI: The Impact of Student Mobility on Performance and Practice.....137

Study VII: Systematic Practices to Address Highly Mobile Students .....163

Section 4: Appendices:

A. IRB Approval Letter.....173

B. Researchers for the Project.....177

C. 2008-09 Study I: *Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System Survey* .....181

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>D. 2008-09 Study I: <i>Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System</i> Interview Protocol .....</b>                     | <b>191</b> |
| <b>E. 2008-09 Study I: <i>Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System</i> School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric .....</b> | <b>205</b> |
| <b>F. 2008-09 Study II: <i>Examination of Professional Development Practices in Nebraska Schools</i> Research Survey .....</b>                       | <b>209</b> |
| <b>G. 2008-09 Study VI: <i>The Impact of Student Mobility on Student Performance and Teacher Practice</i> Interview Protocol.....</b>                | <b>213</b> |
| <b>H. 2008-09 Study VII: <i>Systematic Practices Implemented to Address the Needs of Highly Mobile Students</i> Survey .....</b>                     | <b>221</b> |
| <b>I. 2008-09 Study VII: <i>Systematic Practices Implemented to Address the Needs of Highly Mobile Students</i> Interview Protocol.....</b>          | <b>233</b> |

## TABLES & FIGURES

### Tables

|    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 1  | District Support Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings .....  | 51  |
| 2  | Criterion-Referenced Assessment Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings .....   | 60  |
| 3  | New Statewide Tests Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings .....   | 69  |
| 4  | Instructional Impact Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings .....  | 77  |
| 5  | Professional Development Practices’ Alignment to NSDC Standards.....  | 101 |
| 6  | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Core Curriculum Area .....  | 102 |
| 7  | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices According to Free/Reduced<br>Lunch Rates (FRL) .....   | 103 |
| 8  | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Region .....  | 105 |
| 9  | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Elementary and Secondary<br>Levels.....   | 106 |
| 10 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on 2006-2007 Criterion-Referenced Tests and Baseline<br>Data for 2008 in Statewide Reading Assessment ..... | 113 |
| 11 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Norm-Referenced Tests in Reading .....   | 114 |
| 12 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Math.....  | 115 |
| 13 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Norm-Referenced Tests in Math.....   | 115 |
| 14 | Percent Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Test in Science .....  | 116 |
| 15 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on the Statewide Writing Assessment.....  | 122 |
| 16 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading for English<br>Language Learners (ELL).....                        | 128 |
| 17 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Math for English<br>Language Learners (ELL).....                           | 129 |
| 18 | Percent Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Science for English Language<br>Learners (ELL) 2008 .....                           | 129 |
| 19 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on the Statewide Writing Assessment for English<br>Language Learners (ELL).....                             | 130 |
| 20 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading for Special<br>Education Students (SPED).....                      | 131 |
| 21 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Math for Special<br>Education Students (SPED) .....                        | 132 |
| 22 | Percent Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Science for Special Education<br>Students (SPED) .....                              | 132 |
| 23 | Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on the Statewide Writing Assessment for Special<br>Education Students (SPED).....                           | 133 |
| 24 | Students Scoring Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Assessments .....   | 142 |
| 25 | Survey Section Descriptions and Questions .....   | 166 |

### Figures

|   |   |          |
|---|---|----------|
| 1 | Survey of Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System.....                      | 13 / 50  |
| 2 | Students Scoring Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Assessments .....                           | 32 / 143 |
| 3 | Educators’ Years of Experience at Current School .....  | 100      |
| 4 | Number of Educators Per Region .....  | 100      |
| 5 | Professional Development Practices’ Alignment to NSDC Standards.....                                      | 101      |
| 6 | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Core Curriculum Area .....                        | 102      |
| 7 | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices According to Free/Reduced<br>Lunch Rates (FRL) ..... | 104      |
| 8 | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Region .....                                      | 105      |

|    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 9  | Effect Size of NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices on Elementary and Secondary Teachers ..... | 106 |
| 10 | NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Elementary and Secondary Levels .....                  | 107 |

# **TRANSITIONS**

## ***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***

### **Section 1: Introduction**



The eighth annual report of the Nebraska Comprehensive Evaluation Project (CEP) is an independent evaluation of the transition to a Balanced Assessment System focusing upon Statewide Reading, Math, Science, and Writing Assessments, District Based Classroom Assessments, and District Selected Norm-Referenced Tests. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) characterized by the highest level of integrity, with respect and equitable treatment for all persons involved in the study in order to maintain confidentiality and protect the privacy of participants in the study (Appendix A). The CEP was originally contracted between the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS) in 2001. The CEP was supported jointly by the NDE and the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS).

Dr. Jody Isernhagen, Associate Professor, served as the Principal Investigator and Dr. Shirley Mills, Assistant Professor, University of Texas-Pan American, served as secondary investigator. Chelsie Guerrero, graduate student, assisted with Study I; Jackie Florendo, graduate student, authored Study II; Dr. Shirley Mills authored Studies III, IV, and V; Nino Zhvania, Georgia Ministry of Education, assisted with Study VI; and Dr. Jane Stavem,

Superintendent of Blair Public Schools, authored Study VII. All researchers and members of the research team for the Comprehensive Evaluation Project are listed in Appendix B.

## **OVERVIEW**

In the spring of 2008, the Nebraska legislature passed new legislation requiring a statewide test in Reading, Math, and Science. In 2008-09 the newly developed statewide reading test was piloted and in 2009-10 it will be administered statewide. In 2009-10, the math statewide test will be piloted and fully implemented in 2010-11. Nebraska's statewide assessment system has been constantly in transition since its inception. Nebraska is again charting new waters by revisiting its standards and developing new statewide tests. School districts are now engaged in conversations about how to monitor student learning using a balanced assessment system.

Nebraska educators have engaged in stimulating conversations about curriculum, instruction and assessment over the past eight years. Nebraska's approach to standards, assessment, and accountability, is grounded in the belief that decisions about student learning should be standards-based and should be based upon the knowledge of the student. Each year educators have continued to perfect the state assessment system to better meet the needs of Nebraska students. Nebraska educators have become assessment literate and data users. Their focus is now upon preparing students for a new statewide assessment. They will continue to perfect their instructional skills while implementing appropriate interventions.

## **SUMMARY OF THE EIGHTH-YEAR STUDY**

With the introduction of a balanced assessment system, seven studies were conducted during the eighth year. Studies focused upon the progress of the implementation of the new state reading assessment, reporting of district-wide student achievement and examining special programmatic issues related to teaching and learning.

### **STUDY I: Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System**

With the introduction of a new statewide assessment system, Study I examined the transition from a district-wide criterion-referenced assessment system to a balanced statewide approach. In this study (Study I), administrative and teacher perceptions were investigated focusing on four areas: district support, criterion-referenced assessments, new statewide tests, and instructional impact. Quantitative survey data was collected in the fall of 2008 while qualitative interview data was gathered in spring of 2009.

### **STUDY II: Professional Development Practices**

The second study (Study II) was an initial investigation of the degree to which professional development practices in K-12 schools across Nebraska aligned with the 12 National Staff Development Standards for professional development.

### **STUDY III: 2006-2008 Reading, Math, and Science Achievement**

The third study (Study III) was an achievement study conducted in 2008-09 examining district criterion-referenced achievement scores for the subjects of reading and math for 2006 and 2007, and individual student criterion-referenced achievement scores for reading, math and science for 2008.

#### **STUDY IV: 2006-2008 Statewide Writing Achievement**

The fourth study (Study IV) was a longitudinal study that focused on writing achievement. District writing scores on the Nebraska Statewide Writing Assessment (NSWA) from 2006 through 2008 were compared.

#### **STUDY V: 2006-2008 Achievement for Special Populations**

The fifth study (Study V) was an achievement study of English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students conducted in 2008-09 examining district criterion-referenced achievement scores for reading and math for 2006 and 2007 and individual student criterion-referenced achievement scores for reading, math and science for 2008.

#### **STUDY VI: The Impact of Student Mobility on Performance and Practice**

The sixth study (Study VI) was a mixed-methods study that examined the academic performance of highly mobile students. The study also examined the programs and services made available at the school and classroom level to assist these students in making smooth transitions from one school to another and be successful in their academic performance.

#### **STUDY VII: Systematic Practices Implemented to Address Highly Mobile Students**

The purpose of the seventh study (Study VII) was to identify practices implemented in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools to address the needs of highly mobile students. Schools identified for the study were analyzed in terms of mitigating factors that caused the practices to be implemented, the primary causes of student mobility, and district support for practices that lead to successful transitions for highly mobile students.

### **YEAR EIGHT COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION FORMAT**

This final comprehensive report has been designed to serve multiple audiences and provide the most pertinent information available relative to the transitions to a statewide assessment system.

This report is divided into four sections beginning with an introduction of the total report (Section 1); an executive summary of the findings of all studies conducted during the seventh-year study (Section 2); complete research papers of the seven major studies (Studies I-VII) conducted during the 2008-09 school year (Section 3); and the Appendices (Section 4).

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We thank the many districts and schools that opened their doors to talk with the researchers about the transition to a balanced assessment system. We offer a special thanks to the many teachers and administrators who took time out of their busy schedules to complete the surveys and participate in interviews.

A special thanks to: Roger Breed, Commissioner of the Nebraska Department of Education; Pat Roschewski, Director of Statewide Assessment; Jan Hoegh, Assistant Director of Statewide Assessment; John Moon, Assessment Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Education; Bob Beecham, Administrator of Education Support Services; Jackie Naber, Office Administrator of Statewide Assessment, and Carol Bom, Office Assistant. All have offered great assistance for the completion of the Comprehensive Evaluation Report.

We offer our sincere appreciation to Shirley Mills for serving as the secondary investigator for this project. A special thanks to graduate students Jackie Florendo and Chelsie Guerrero for their long hours and dedication to this project. Without their support, this report surely would not have been completed. We offer our thanks to Jane Stavem and Jackie Florendo who enriched the comprehensive evaluation with their studies and findings.

A special thanks to our Administrative Assistant, Susan Wilson, for her continued dedication to this project in its final year of publication. To Cindy DeRyke, Diane Gronewald, Shelia Hayes, and Tammie Herrington, thank you for your support throughout the years. A special thanks to Marjorie Kostelnik, Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences; L. James Walters, Associate Dean; and Larry Dlugosh, Chair of the Department of Educational Administration, for their continued support for the Comprehensive Evaluation Project.

# **TRANSITIONS: *A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***

## **Section 2: Executive Summary**



### **INTRODUCTION**

“No Child Left Behind” (NCLB, 2002) has driven education policy for the last eight years. This act required states to provide evidence of accountability. While education is a “states’ rights” issue in the United States, the federal government influences local education policy by tying federal funds to compliance with federal initiatives. These revenues average about 7% to 10% of local school district budgets nationwide.

“Today’s schools are less focused on merely sorting students and more focused on helping all students succeed in meeting standards” (Stiggins, 2007, p. 22). Nebraska school districts are now using a balanced assessment system including Nebraska statewide assessments (NeSA), criterion-referenced assessments (CRTs), and norm-referenced assessments (NRTs). The requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have been integrated into the accountability requirements of Nebraska’s system.

Since the implementation of Nebraska’s Assessment System eight years ago, educators have grown in their understanding of the relationship between assessment, curriculum, and instruction. Shepard (2000) writes that: “Often assessment reform is promoted without distinguishing among several different assessment purposes, yet it is well known that validity depends on how a test is used” (p. 32). Nebraska is in its first year of determining the relationship between the use of statewide and criterion-referenced assessments. In a survey conducted in January 2009 as part of the Study I contained in this report, all 171

administrators and 1081 teachers (100% of the respondents) returning surveys statewide indicated that they will continue to use their criterion-referenced test along with statewide assessments. In Nebraska, the use of a balanced assessment system will provide for the use of CRTs to evaluate the on-going learning process and statewide assessment to provide a summative view of student performance.

## **EIGHTH YEAR RESEARCH STUDIES**

There were seven major studies conducted during the eighth year of the Comprehensive Evaluation Project (CEP). These seven studies are summarized in this section of the report and presented as complete reports in Section III.

### **STUDY I: Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System**

**Jody C. Isernhagen, Ed.D., Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Jackie Florendo, M.Ed., Graduate Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Chelsie Guerrero, Graduate Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

#### **Introduction**

With the introduction of a new statewide assessment system, Study I examined the transition from a district-wide criterion-referenced assessment system to a balanced statewide approach. Administrative and teacher perceptions were investigated focusing on four areas: district support, criterion-referenced assessments, new statewide tests, and instructional impact. Quantitative survey data was collected in the fall of 2008 with qualitative interview data gathered in the winter and spring of 2008-09. In addition, a rubric titled *School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric* (Appendix E) was designed collaboratively by Ernst, Hoegh, and Boss (2008) for educators to use to assess their school's or district's level of literacy and implementation of standards, curriculum, and assessment.

#### **Methodology**

In this mixed-methods research study, administrators and teachers across the state were surveyed using an online instrument. Their perceptions about District Support of a balanced assessment system, the use of criterion-referenced assessments, the implementation of new statewide tests, and the instructional impact of the new balanced assessment system were measured.

For the purpose of this research, Nebraska public school districts were divided into two classifications, non-rural and rural, based on population characteristics unique to Nebraska. Non-rural districts were defined as metro-area districts in large and mid-sized cities, large towns, and the urban fringe as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. All other districts were classified as rural. Of the 254 public school districts operating in 2008-09, 17 districts (6.7%) were classified as non-rural and 237 districts (93.3%) were classified as rural.

Of these school districts, a total of 220 districts (86.6% of districts) returned surveys for the Comprehensive Evaluation Research Study. Of the administrator surveys returned, 14.9% were from non-rural districts and 85.1% were from rural districts. Surveys were received from administrators in 101 districts (39.8% of total districts). Of the teacher surveys

returned, 8.3% were from non-rural districts and 91.7% were from rural districts. Surveys were received from teachers in 204 districts (80.3% of total districts).

Educators responded to the 41-item survey (Appendix C) using a five-point Likert scale to explore four categories: District Support, Criterion-Referenced Assessments, New Statewide Tests, and Instructional Impact.

Secondly, open-ended interviews were conducted in two districts in each of four geographic areas in Nebraska identified by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). Forty-eight (48) individual interviews were conducted statewide during the 2008-09 school year. Detailed perceptions were collected using an interview protocol (Appendix D) to gather qualitative data from these eight districts. This interview protocol consisted of demographic information about participants, eight questions, and a rubric identifying the perceptions of the level of implementation in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and use of data. Eight sample districts were purposefully selected based on geographical area, district class, and district free and reduced lunch rates.

### Findings

Educators' perceptions of the new balanced assessment system were explored in four categories: District Support, Criterion-Referenced Assessments, New Statewide Tests, and Instructional Impact. Interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers in both elementary and secondary settings within eight school districts. Up to seven interviews were conducted within each school district. Administrative and teacher survey overall responses ranged from 1 to 5 on the five-point Likert scale with "5" representing "strongly agree." Figure 1 shows administrators' and teachers' average ratings of the four categories overall.

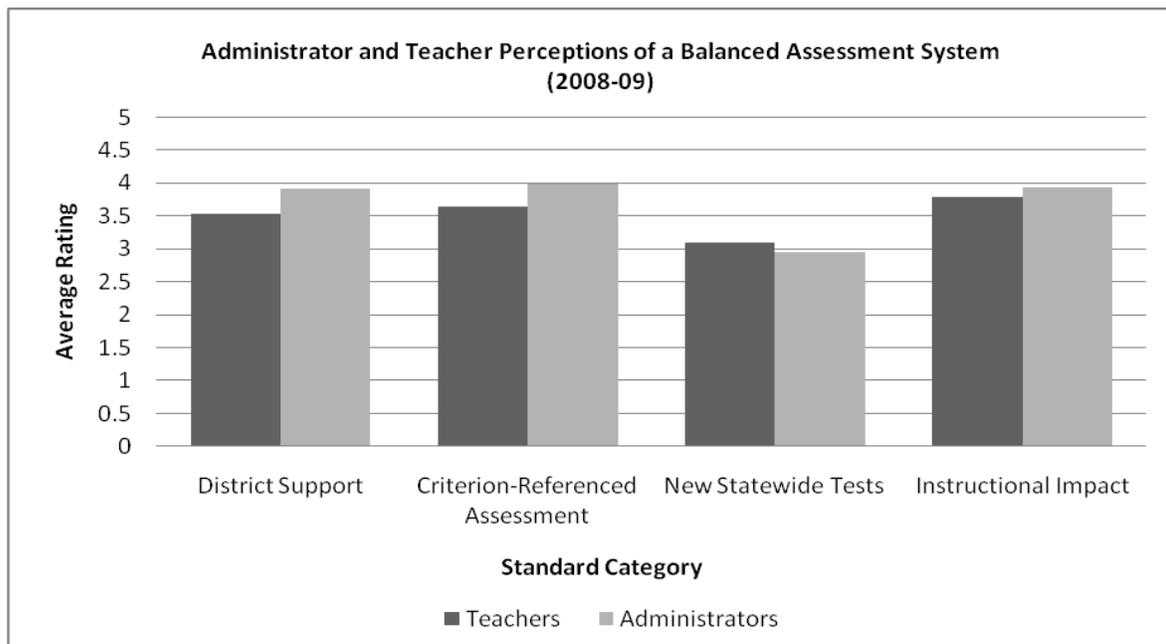


Figure 1. Survey of administrator and teacher perceptions of a balanced assessment system (2008-09).

### ***District Support***

In the category of District Support, the average response for all teachers was 3.53. The average response for administrators was 3.91. The strongest item rated by both teachers (4.45) and administrators (4.64) within the District Support category was, “My district encourages a culture of continuous school improvement.” The importance of this item was expressed by a non-rural special education coordinator, “Actually school improvement is very embedded. We have our team goals, classroom goals, and building goals. Really what all of those are, whether teachers realize it or not, is they’re all going through the school improvement process at different levels. So I think school improvement is embedded in everything that we do.”

The largest discrepancy in this category between teachers and administrators was, “My district has provided an adequate opportunity for me to learn about the new statewide reading test.” This could be due to the fact that the survey was administered early in the 2008-09 school year, and the legislation regarding state testing was passed in the spring of 2008, giving little time to disseminate test information prior to the survey. Teachers were more likely to rate this item “disagree” or “undecided” with an average response of 2.84, whereas administrators rated this item as “undecided” or “agree” with an average response of 3.59. A rural female special education coordinator shared, “I really don’t know a lot about it... I’m only familiar with the ones that we’ve been doing (CRTs).” A rural secondary male teacher shared, “What I’ve heard about it is it’s going to be a test of a certain amount of questions to give in April, and it will cover comprehension and vocabulary, from what I’ve heard. It sounds like it’s either online or it’s going to be paper pencil, and I’m assuming that we’ll go online to do it and as far as how it’s affected what I’m doing right now, I don’t think it’s affected anything yet.”

Another inconsistency between teachers and administrators was, “My district provides adequate time to work collaboratively to review assessment results.” Teachers rated this item mainly as “undecided” with an average response of 3.09, whereas administrators rated this item primarily as “agree” with an average response of 3.80. A non-rural female elementary principal shared, “The first of August of every year, we have our data retreat with our school improvement team. We take our results back to our staff and we talk about those. This year we took them to a different level. We talked about them at the building. But then, I had every teacher, every grade level take the historical data and program data that we had and break it down.”

The lowest-rated survey item by administrators was “My district has identified an assessment philosophy regarding criterion-referenced assessment since the new state tests were approved,” with an average of 3.45. Teachers rated the item, “My district has provided an adequate opportunity for me to learn about the new statewide reading test” (2.84) the lowest of all items in this category.

### ***Criterion-Referenced Assessment***

In the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment (Questions 11-21), the average response for all teachers was 3.65. The average response for administrators was 3.99. Two items were rated high by teachers and administrators within the Criterion-Referenced Assessment category. The first item, “Teachers modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on their criterion-referenced assessments,” was rated 4.16 by teachers and 4.12

by administrators. Additionally, the item, “Teachers use criterion-referenced assessment results to question, modify, and adjust their own teaching” was rated 4.10 by teachers and at 4.02 by administrators. A non-rural male superintendent expressed how assessment results are connected to instruction, “Everything that we’re doing right now from student success to staff development to instructional strategies at the building level and the district level is all based upon our assessments.”

A rural female special education coordinator explained how teachers now understand the importance of aligning lesson plans to standards, “I think that they’ve all learned to code them, to show what they’re teaching has a purpose. They’re all coded now for what you’re working towards. So when the teacher is planning her lesson plans, I think she is now a lot more aware of the standard, whereas before, she might have just planned lessons. We teach reading, but what part of reading? It (coding for standards) really breaks that out. Now they’re so use to coding everything, it’s just second nature.”

In the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment, the largest discrepancy between teachers and administrators was in the item, “Teaching has improved as a result of the use of criterion-referenced assessments.” Teachers were more likely to rate this item from “Undecided” to “Agree” with an average response of 3.35, whereas administrators’ average response was higher at 4.09.

Another inconsistency between teachers and administrators was on the item, “Criterion-referenced assessments are helping students improve.” Teachers rated this item between “undecided” to “agree” with an average response of 3.36, whereas administrators showed stronger agreement with this item with an average response of 3.99.

The lowest rated item by administrators was “Test strategies are taught to prepare students for criterion-referenced assessments” (3.71). The lowest rated item by teachers was “Administrators in my school/district communicate a clear vision for how to use criterion-referenced assessment results in the classroom” (3.24).

### *New Statewide Tests*

In the category of New Statewide Tests (Questions 22-31) the average response for all teachers was 3.10, and for administrators was 2.94. One of the strongest items rated by teachers and administrators within the New Statewide Tests category was “Teachers will modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on the statewide tests.” The average rating for teachers on this item was 3.83 and for administrators, 3.66. A rural female high school language arts teacher stated, “With the state reading test, I’m hoping that it will show us how our students are doing so we know what areas we need to work on as a staff.” A rural female special education coordinator shared, “We look at that data to see our strengths and weaknesses. I know this year, like with our state writing, we’re testing all grades instead of just fourth, eighth, and eleventh graders, so we can identify weaknesses faster so that we can improve.” In contrast, a non-rural female assessment coordinator shared teachers’ perceptions of the purpose for statewide test results, “Teachers in the room said ‘so that legislators and politicians can compare schools.’ They get it, and they should. That’s OK because that is the purpose. Yet they know that it does not inform their teaching.”

There were several items in the category of New Statewide Tests that were rated low by both teachers and administrators. One of the lowest rated items was, “The statewide tests accurately measure what students know and can do.” Teachers and administrators were more likely to rate this item “Disagree” or “Uncertain” with an average of 2.59 and 2.49, respectively. A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “What we’re anticipating is that it’s only going to be a very general score of reading and a very general score of vocabulary. We want to use that as one piece of our balanced system.” Additionally, a rural female elementary principal shared, “I think in some ways, it doesn’t allow for different kinds of demonstrations of learning. But I think it can still give you basic things that kids need to know. If they don’t, then we need to go back and take a look at what are we doing in the classroom.”

Another item rated low by administrators and teachers was, “Student achievement will improve in our school as a result of statewide tests.” Teachers and administrators were more likely to rate this item “Disagree” or “Uncertain” with an average of 2.75 and 2.67, respectively. The lowest rated item by administrators in this category was, “Statewide tests will replace the use of criterion-referenced assessments in our schools” (2.46). Teachers rated the item “The statewide tests accurately measure what students know and can do” the lowest (2.59).

### ***Instructional Impact***

In the category of Instructional Impact (Questions 32-41), the average mean response for all teachers was 3.79. For administrators, it was 3.94. One of the strongest-rated items by both teachers and administrators within the Instructional Impact category was, “My district holds high achievement standards for all students” with teachers rating this item an average of 4.34 and administrators rating it an average of 4.43. Another high rated item was, “Teachers in my district/school are responsible for weaving assessment into instruction” with teachers rating this with an average of 4.21 and administrators 4.17. A rural female assessment coordinator explained how they use data to enhance student achievement, “We give data back to teachers to say ‘In this quarter, we were going to teach these three skills. How have the kids done in relationship to those skills? What are we going to do with those kids who aren’t getting it? Do we have high enough expectations? Are they too high?’ Adjusting instruction to be a good balance.”

In the category of Instructional Impact, the largest discrepancy between teachers and administrators was, “Administrators in my school/district assist teachers in making instructional decisions based on multiple types of assessment data.” Teachers rated this item between “Uncertain” and “Agree” with an average response of 3.33, whereas administrators showed agreement with this item by rating it 4.00. A rural male superintendent explained, “The assessment coordinator meets with different buildings, the principal and teachers, going over the results of the assessments that we have.”

Another discrepancy between teachers and administrators was on the item, “New teachers in my school/district are involved in curriculum review so they better understand how curriculum, assessment, and school improvement are aligned.” Teachers rated this item between “Uncertain” and “Agree” with an average response of 3.25, whereas administrators generally agreed with this item with an average response of 3.92.

The lowest item rated by both teachers and administrators was, “Administrators and teachers focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences” (3.04 and 3.35 respectively). A non-rural male superintendent explained how this process is just beginning in his district, “The growth in the quality of year-end summative evaluations shows that our teachers are getting better information on what they can do to be better facilitators of learning.”

### **Additional Themes That Emerged**

In addition, during the interview process conversations ensued in which other themes emerged that were not originally aligned with a survey question. The themes that emerged were: Norm-Referenced Tests, Data, School Improvement, Professional Learning Communities, and Assessment, Curriculum, and Standards.

#### ***Norm-Referenced Tests***

The theme of Norm-Referenced Tests (NRTs) emerged during the interviews. Educators shared their thoughts on the purpose of NRTs in examining group student performance as well as trends. A rural female secondary English teacher explained how the purposes differ between NRTs and CRTs, “With classroom assessments, we are looking at individual students, and with a norm-referenced test, we look at groups. We look at the data and try to figure out what populations are lacking and in what area and what we can do school-wide.” Some comments focused on the use of NRTs to determine how students compare to other students outside of their district. Furthermore, comments also focused on the use of specific NRTs that provide timely feedback. A non-rural elementary principal explained, “We use a test (NRT), and that gives us instant scores when students finish.”

#### ***Data***

The theme of Data was also discussed. Interviewees revealed that data has been an important part of the assessment journey since 2000. Educators shared various ways assessment data is used in school districts. A non-rural assessment coordinator stated, “At the end of the year they get all the data and determine how the student(s) did on each standard. They’ll see the district average. They can see it by assessment and by standard . . . then compare the trend data from one year to the next.” Schools are breaking data down to better understand specific needs of students. A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “We found that when we went through all the data, it is our reading. Our primary concern was the literacy of reading. We saw that there was a difference between standard lunch and low (free/reduced lunch rate) and that there was a difference between girls and boys in reading. We found that a lot of them were falling in that lower quartile.”

#### ***School Improvement***

School improvement was identified numerous times by educators as the driving force for many of the activities in their schools, and how assessment data is a vital part of this. A rural female elementary principal shared, “I think we’ve done everything that technically we’re supposed to do. We’ve done it with a lot of heart and a lot of gusto. I think for the last couple years we’ve had PLCs and teachers are going (participating), *that’s school improvement!* We have a focus on what we need to do.” School improvement philosophies were shared by several educators, such as this rural male elementary principal, “Well, our

school improvement process is based on the data. That's how teachers come up with the improvement goals that we make. It's a big part of it."

### ***Professional Learning Communities***

Another theme that emerged in the interviews was Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs were identified as a professional development strategy used to positively enhance the curriculum-assessment-learning process. During the interview, a question was posed, "Do your teachers participate in learning teams and/or PLCs, and what is the focus of the learning teams/PLCs?" There was a strong response to this question. A rural female special education coordinator shared how each PLC in her district is used to meet specific building goals: "Each PLC has a goal in mind. The high school department is looking at study halls, which is a problem." A rural female assessment coordinator shared how school improvement, student achievement, and PLCs are integrated: "We're in a state of flux right now because we've had more of a traditional school improvement process, but now we're moving more into using PLCs as the way to improve kids' learning. But as the teachers learn to work more and more closely together, I want it to become theirs, they are taking more ownership as they are seeing the benefits and working more closely together. They are taking ownership of what needs to be done."

### ***Assessment, Curriculum, and Standards***

Theme nine emerged through discussions revolving around curriculum and standards. A major learning that occurred during the STARS journey was once again reiterated. Educators shared the importance of their growth in assessment literacy. They explained how teacher conversations would not be the same today without the focus on standards, curriculum, and assessment over the past eight years. But ultimately, its most important outcome was the impact on student achievement. A rural female English teacher further explained the advantage that standards have brought for educators, "I'm very glad that we have standards because I really think, everyone might have been able to teach whatever they wanted or whatever their textbook company prescribed. I think it's good that we have standards. If students haven't done well on something, you re-teach it. You cover everything until it is taught (students learn)." School districts continually re-evaluate curriculum while re-aligning to the new standards. A rural male superintendent stated, "We use our DIBELS program to progress-monitor our reading program, and we have a reading coach that helps us implement this. It's based on our curriculum. So, we made sure that this matched our curriculum or our curriculum matched standards."

### **Rubric Results**

The *School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric* (Appendix E) was used to assess a district's level of literacy. The rubric used four defined levels of implementation to measure four separate components: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Use of Data. The rubric was designed as a table and participants were asked to circle the level that best described their perception of their district's level of development for each of the components. Level I through Level IV was scored on a 1-4 scale, and the means are representative of the 1-4 scale. The results are a combination of all school districts in the state.

### ***Rubric Curriculum Component***

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “the decisions about what to teach are left to chance by individual actors” and “a guaranteed and viable curriculum is not evident.”
- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “the school has drafted curriculum documents” and “the school has begun a process to provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “the school has a guaranteed and viable curriculum” and “the school has declared the important skills and content necessary for all students.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school routinely monitors the attainment of the guaranteed and viable curriculum” and “the curriculum is closely aligned to the mission of the school.”

In the Curriculum Component, the average for all responses was 3.31. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.45 and for all non-rural respondents, 3.06. Analyzing the data by respondent category, the mean for teachers was 3.35 and for administrators was 3.27. The overall mean for all male respondents was 3.20, while for all female respondents it was 3.36.

### ***Rubric Instruction Component***

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “decisions about instruction are left to chance by individual actors.”
- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “the school has begun a process to identify instructional strategies that will improve student learning. The extent to which strategies are used will vary.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “the school encourages the use of research-based instructional strategies. The school has created pockets of success.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school employs a research-based instructional program and the strategies are utilized by the staff to a large extent.”

In the Instruction Component, the average for all responses was 3.00. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.03, and for all non-rural respondents the mean was 2.94. Analyzing the data by respondent category, the mean was 3.13 for teachers and 2.80 for administrators. The overall mean for all male respondents was 2.94 and for all female respondents, 3.03.

### ***Rubric Assessment Component***

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “the assessment system and the subsequent data are left to chance by individual actors.”
- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “the school has begun the process of developing an assessment system. Some assessments are aligned to the curriculum.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “the school has an assessment system aligned to the curriculum” and “formative or summative assessments provide information about student learning.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school has an assessment system aligned to the curriculum” and “the school utilizes a comprehensive balanced system that provides timely feedback about teaching and learning.”

In the Assessment Component the average for all responses was 3.25. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.35 and for all non-rural respondents the mean was 3.06. Analyzing the data by respondent category, the mean for teachers was 3.22 and 3.13 for administrators. The overall mean for all male respondents was 3.07, and for all female respondents the mean was 3.33.

### ***Rubric Data Component***

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “data collection is left to chance by individual actors” and “data are rarely analyzed or leveraged for improvement efforts.”
- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “a process for data collection has been drafted” and “data are occasionally analyzed by individuals and occasionally leveraged for improvement efforts.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “a systemic process for data collection is in place” and “data are routinely analyzed by groups to inform collective action and leveraged for improvement efforts.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school utilizes data to routinely inform decisions about fulfilling the school mission, teaching and learning and to guide all improvement efforts.”

In the Use of Data Component, the average for all responses was 3.23. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.29, and for all non-rural respondents it was 3.12. The mean for teachers was 3.30 and 2.93 for administrators. The overall mean was 3.20 for all male respondents and 3.24 for all female respondents.

### **Summary**

Nebraska educators are making the change to a Balanced Assessment System, as illustrated through the survey, interview comments, and rubric results. Both administrators and teachers discussed the nature and purpose of the various types of assessments that will be available to them including the addition of a new statewide test. The greatest focus was upon the use of data yielded by each assessment and its value to teaching and learning.

Educators’ comments regarding the change toward new statewide assessments varied. Some showed apprehension, while others expressed optimism. A non-rural assessment coordinator explained their vision for the statewide test: “I see it (the state test) being used similar to the way we use our NRT, as another piece of data. It really just gives you another snapshot in time. I don’t know that it will be able to drive instruction like our CRTs really do at the district level.” Educators are realizing that maintaining the balance is critical as illustrated by this elementary teacher, “You talk about balance. This really is one more piece and we’re not going to over emphasize it.”

## **STUDY II: Professional Development Practices**

**Jackie Florendo, M.Ed., Graduate Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

### **Introduction**

This eighth year study was an initial investigation of the degree to which professional development practices in K-12 schools across Nebraska aligned with the 12 National Staff Development Standards for professional development.

In the spring of 2008, Nebraska legislators passed new legislation, entitled NeSA (Nebraska State Accountability), requiring a statewide test in reading, math, and science. Over the past seven years of STARS, Nebraska educators were engaged in professional development practices that they believed positively impacted student learning (Isernhagen & Mills, 2008). STARS demanded the enhancement of assessment literacy skills from Nebraska educators throughout the seven year process. With the implementation of NeSA, the question arises: What impact will the change have on current educational practices, policies, and procedures in Nebraska schools? What impact will this have on professional development practices? Will professional development practices continue to provide a positive impact on student learning as was witnessed with STARS?

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the degree to which professional development practices of K-12 teachers in Nebraska schools align with the 12 national staff development standards at the elementary and secondary levels.

### **Methods**

An online survey developed by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), the SAI (Standards Assessment Inventory), was used to measure professional development practices in Nebraska schools. This survey was “based on research and best practices to assess the alignment of schools’ professional development practices with the NSDC standards” (Watkins & Sheng, 2008). The survey inventory consists of 60 items aimed to measure professional development in three major standard areas: Context, Process, and Content. Educators gained access to the survey through a website. The survey is rated on a Likert scale from “4-0” with “4” representing “Always,” “3” “Frequently,” “2” “Sometimes,” “1” “Seldom,” and “0” “Never.”

A purposeful sampling of teachers based on geographic location (western, central and eastern parts of the state), school district class/size (small, medium and large schools), and the percentage of students on free/reduced lunch (FRL) (high FRL, middle FRL, low FRL – based on the statewide average) were selected to participate. Each region had a common student population. Both rural and non-rural school districts participated. Non-rural districts are defined as metro-area districts in large and mid-sized cities, large towns, and the urban fringe. All other districts are classified as rural.

## **Findings**

Of the ten school districts participating, 134 educators from 23 schools responded to the online survey. One hundred thirty-three (133) of the respondents were teachers. The results of the study revealed that only one of the 12 professional development standards' mean ratings had a mean rating above "Frequently" (3), the "Equity" standard (3.1). The five professional development standards scoring the lowest are: Learning Communities (2.2); Evaluation (2.2); Data Driven (2.5); Learning (2.5); and Family Involvement (2.5).

When this data was further disaggregated into curriculum content areas of language arts, math, and science, secondary teacher responses revealed that only two categories showed any sizable difference in professional development practices between these curriculum content areas: "Design" (effect size ( $d$ ) =.79) and "Quality Teaching" ( $d$ =.81). This difference was not significant.

Disaggregated results revealed additional information on how school districts base their professional development practices on student needs. Results were broken into three levels based on Nebraska's average Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rate of 34%: schools with below average FRL (below 25%), approximate average FRL (26% to 40%), and above average FRL (41% or above). In all categories, the High Average FRL school districts rated the highest mean in **all** categories. Thus, results indicate that the quality of professional development practices at these schools were consistently higher than schools with average or below average free and reduced lunch rates. Disaggregated results also revealed that professional development practices varied little across different regions of the state as well as secondary curriculum content areas.

Finally, for all categories of professional development standards, the mean ratings of elementary school teachers were higher than those of secondary school teachers for all survey questions. The strongest difference between elementary and secondary school teachers was in the "Data Driven" category, as revealed by an overall large effect size of  $d$ =.90. Elementary school teachers' mean rating for this category was 2.82, while secondary school teachers rated this category 2.24, indicating that elementary teachers are using data more frequently than secondary teachers in Nebraska.

## **STUDY III: 2006-2008 Reading, Math, and Science Achievement**

**Shirley Mills, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Texas-Pan American**  
**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

### **Introduction**

The third study (Study III) was an achievement study conducted in 2008-09 examining District criterion-referenced achievement scores for reading and math for 2006 and 2007, and individual student criterion-referenced achievement scores for reading, math and science for 2008.

No Child Left Behind requires that states adopt challenging academic content standards for mathematics, reading/language arts, and science. The standards reflect what students should know and be able to do at each grade level as well as establishing curriculum that promotes

rigorous content and the teaching of advanced skills. These standards are measured at grades three through eight and once in high school.

Nebraska was the only state that opted to develop its own system of local assessments to fulfill No Child Left Behind. This system was based on six quality criteria developed by the Buros Center for Testing (Plake & Impara, 2000). This system was called the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). Established in 2001, STARS required each district to either adopt state standards or develop local standards that were at least equal to or exceeded the state standards. Each district then developed a plan for assessing their standards, usually involving the development of their own criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) and always including a norm-referenced test (NRT). Districts began reporting criterion-referenced reading scores in 2001 for grades fourth, eighth, and eleventh. Criterion-referenced math scores for grades fourth, eighth, and eleventh were reported starting in 2002. In 2008, the science content area was added.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine student achievement data for reading, math, and science for all students from 2006 to 2008.

### **Sample**

Data for the years 2006 through 2008 included Class III, IV, and V school districts. The districts in this study represented all public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). For the years 2006 and 2007, the criterion-referenced scores for reading, math, and science were the average percentage of students meeting the proficiency level or better defined by the local districts for their locally developed measure. No individual student data was ever reported. In 2008, scores were the state average percent of individual student performance reported by districts as proficient or better on their locally developed measure in reading, math, and science. The norm-referenced score was the district average percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles on the nationally standardized test used by that district. While the norm-referenced measure used will vary, the data reported (percent of students in the top two quartiles) was constant for all districts from 2006-2008.

### **Results**

#### ***Criterion-Referenced Reading Achievement***

The district average percent of student scores reported by districts as proficient or better in locally defined criterion-referenced reading at the fourth-grade level was at 91% in 2006 and increased to 92% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual student scores reported by districts as proficient or better at the fourth-grade level was 91%. The district average percent proficient at the eighth-grade level increased from 88% in 2006 to 90% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual student scores reported by districts as proficient or better at the eighth-grade level was 92%. The district average percent proficient at the eleventh-grade level increased from 86% in 2006 to 87% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual student scores reported by districts as proficient or better at the eleventh-grade level was 89%.

### ***Norm-Referenced Reading Achievement***

The district average percent of students in the top two quartiles on the norm-referenced reading test used by districts at the fourth grade decreased from 69.42% in 2006 to 69.25% in 2007 and to 67.69% in 2008. The eighth grade increased slightly from 63.24% in 2006 to 63.61% in 2007, and further increased to 64.23% in 2008. The eleventh grade decreased from 63.59% to 62.05% between 2006 and 2007, and decreased to 61.58% in 2008. Proficiency, as determined by the percent of students in districts in the top two quartiles on norm-referenced measures decreased by 1.73% from 2006 to 2008 at fourth grade, increased by 0.99% at eighth grade, and decreased by 2.01% at eleventh grade.

### ***Criterion-Referenced Math Achievement***

The district average percent of student scores reported by districts as proficient or better in locally defined criterion-referenced math at the fourth-grade level was at 91% in 2006 and increased to 93% in 2007. The state average percent of individual student scores reported by districts as proficient or better at the fourth-grade level was 94% for 2008. The district average percent proficient in math at the eighth-grade level increased from 83% in 2006 to 86% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual student scores reported by districts as proficient or better in math at the eighth-grade level was 90%. The district average percent proficient in math at the eleventh-grade level increased from 80% in 2006 to 84% in 2007. The state average percent of eleventh-grade individual student scores reported by districts as proficient or better in math was 86% in 2008.

### ***Norm-Referenced Math Achievement***

The district average percent of students in the top two quartiles on the norm-referenced reading test used by districts at the fourth grade decreased from 73.83% in 2006 to 70.48% in 2007 to 68.26% in 2008. The eighth grade increased from 67.83% in 2006 to 68.60% in 2007. Scores for 2008 decreased slightly to 68.40%. The eleventh grade decreased from 67.62% to 66.49% to 64.88% in 2008. Proficiency, as determined by the percent of students in districts in the top two quartiles on norm-referenced measures decreased by 5.57% at fourth grade, increased by 0.57% at eighth grade, and decreased by 2.74% at eleventh grade.

### ***Science Achievement***

The average percent of individual student scores reported as proficient or better at the fourth-grade level was 88% for 2008. The average percent of individual student scores reported as proficient or better at the eighth-grade level was 86%. The average percent of individual student scores reported as proficient or better at the eleventh grade was 83% in 2008. This was the first year for districts to report student achievement scores in science.

### **Summary**

Average criterion-referenced reading scores for all grade levels remained consistent from 2006 to 2008, ranging from 89% in fourth grade to 92% in eighth grade in 2008. Norm-referenced reading scores for 2006-2008 decreased at fourth grade but increased at eighth and eleventh grades. Average criterion-referenced math scores increased across all grade levels from 2006 to 2008, ranging from 86% in eleventh grade to 94% in fourth grade. Norm-referenced math scores decreased at fourth and eleventh grades between 2006 and 2008, and increased slightly at the eighth grade. Science, which was assessed for the first time in 2008, showed scores ranging from 83% in eleventh grade to 88% in fourth grade.

District criterion-referenced measures for grades four, eight, and eleven for the year of 2008 were similar to the 2007 scores, even though the percentages derived from the scores reflected individual student averages across the state, rather than district averages. The general improvement in scores from 2001 to 2008 indicates that STARS helped Nebraska educators take steps to improve student achievement.

### **STUDY IV: 2006-2008 Statewide Writing Achievement**

**Shirley Mills, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Texas-Pan American**  
**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

#### **Introduction**

The fourth study (Study IV) was a longitudinal study that focused on writing achievement. District writing scores on the Nebraska Statewide Writing Assessment (NSWA) from 2006 to 2008 were examined. In accordance with Nebraska Legislative Bill 812, which required district involvement in a statewide writing assessment as a part of STARS, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) recommended that districts adopt the *6+1® Writing Model* developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL, 2008). In Nebraska, this model has often been referred to as the Six Trait Writing Model.

This model emphasized teaching writing as a process and provided a common language among educators (NWREL, 2008). Nebraskans felt that using statewide assessments to inform teaching and learning was critical to the improvement of writing instruction. Nebraska's statewide writing test is conducted at 4th, 8th and 11th grades, and students respond to an annual writing prompt that is scored by Nebraska's teachers using a Six Trait Writing Model rubric.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the district achievement data on the Statewide Writing Assessment.

#### **Sample**

Data for this study included Class III, IV, and V school districts. The districts in this study represented all public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). The unit of analysis for this study was the district average percent of students rated as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at grades four, eight, and eleven.

#### **Statewide Writing Assessment Prompt Development**

The process of the development of writing prompts for use in the Statewide Writing Assessment relied on the involvement of Nebraska classroom teachers. Participating teachers were recommended by their district superintendent or assessment contact person and selected by the NDE each year to take part in a writing development task force. During the workshop, participants read and discussed examples of current research related to best practices in the teaching and assessment of student writing. A number of examples of

writing prompts including those that had been used in previous Nebraska statewide writing assessments were also reviewed.

### **Statewide Writing Assessment Prompts Field Testing Process**

From information gathered at the Writing Prompt Development workshop, school districts representing various sizes and geographic locations were selected to field test the writing prompts with students in grades four, eight, and eleven before the end of the current school year.

### **Results**

The district average percent of student scores rated as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased from 83% in 2006 to 85% in 2007 to 91% in 2008. The 2007 increase was not significant, but the 2008 increase was significant ( $p < .005$ ). In eighth grade, the district average percent of student writing scores reported by districts as proficient or better increased from 87% in 2006 to 91% in 2007. This increase was significant ( $p < .001$ ). The percentage in 2008 was 93%, a significant increase ( $p < .005$ ). In eleventh grade, the district average percent of student scores reported as proficient or better showed no change from 2006 to 2007, at 92%. This was not a significant change. In 2008, proficiency increased to 94%. This was a significant increase ( $p < .005$ ).

Overall fourth grade writing scores increased by 8% from 2006 to 2008. In eighth grade, writing scores increased by 6% from 2006 to 2008. Eleventh graders experienced a 2% increase in writing scores. Nebraska students' writing scores continue to show improvement.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine district achievement data available for the Statewide Writing Assessment. Results indicated that students at all grade levels made gains in the pre/post comparisons. Nebraska's writing results show the positive effect that the Statewide Writing Assessment component of the STARS process had on informing teaching and learning.

## **STUDY V: 2006-2008 Achievement for Special Populations**

**Shirley Mills, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, University of Texas-Pan American**  
**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D, Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

### **Introduction**

The fifth study (Study V) was an achievement study of Nebraska's special populations (English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students) conducted in 2008-09 to examine district criterion-referenced achievement scores for reading and math in 2006 and 2007, individual student criterion-referenced achievement scores for reading, math and science in 2008, and Statewide Writing Assessment scores from 2006-2008. Special education student populations held steady at 15% from 2004 to 2008. Nebraska's ELL population reflects the national landscape with a growth in the number of ELL students from 6% in 2004 to 7% in 2008 (Nebraska State Report Card, 2008).

Beginning in 2007, the ELL and SPED students were required to take their assessments at their respective grade level. This change was mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in order to demonstrate increased academic achievement for all students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine academic change of special populations defined as English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students.

### **Sample**

Data for this study included Class III, IV, and V school districts. For the years 2006 and 2007, average scores for special populations were computed using district average proficiency percentages on their locally developed measures that were then averaged statewide. The 2008 criterion-referenced average scores were computed based on all ELL and SPED individual student scores of proficient or better on their locally developed measures, averaged across the state of Nebraska. The districts in this study represented all public school students in Nebraska. Scores were reported at grades four, eight, and eleven. The district data for this study were included on the state website and use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

### **Methodology**

The data for this study were described as unconventional. Traditional inferential statistics, therefore, were not appropriate measures to use. Instead, the researchers conducted a study of descriptive data. For the years of 2006 and 2007, researchers averaged the district proficiency averages statewide and reported the change from year to year. For 2008, the individual student scores were reported to NDE and averaged across the state to achieve a baseline score for reading, math, and science. The writing assessment was a common measure across districts and used an equal interval scale.

### **Results**

#### ***ELL Reading Achievement***

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the fourth-grade level increased from 72% in 2006 to 79% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual ELL students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced reading assessments at the fourth-grade level was 79% for 2008.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eighth-grade level increased from 60% in 2006 to 65% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual ELL students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced reading assessments at the eighth-grade level was 75% in 2008.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level increased from 53% in 2006 to 57% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual ELL students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced reading assessments was 68% in 2008.

Therefore, the state average percent of ELL students scoring as proficient or better in reading increased for eighth- and eleventh-grade students from 2006 to 2008, and remained constant at the fourth grade.

### ***ELL Math Achievement***

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the fourth-grade level increased from 80% in 2006 to 83% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the fourth-grade level was 87% for 2008.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eighth-grade level increased from 61% in 2006 to 62% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eighth-grade level was 76% in 2008.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level increased from 48% in 2006 to 61% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eleventh-grade level was 68% in 2008.

The state average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better in math increased at all grade levels from 2006 to 2008, showing noteworthy gains.

### ***ELL Science Achievement***

In 2008, the state average percent of individual scores for ELL students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments in science was 76% at the fourth-grade level and 66% at the eighth-grade level. At the eleventh-grade level, the state average percent of individual ELL students reported by districts as proficient or better was 61%. Because this is the first reporting year, no other scores are available for comparison for ELL students in science achievement.

### ***ELL Writing Achievement***

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased from 66% in 2006 to 69% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of ELL students reported by districts as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment then further increased to 85% in 2008.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient at the eighth-grade level increased from 56% in 2006 to 62% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of ELL students reported by districts as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment then further increased to 79% in 2008.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eleventh-grade level increased from 53% in 2006 to 56% in 2007. Using

individual student scores, the state average percent of eleventh-grade ELL students reported as proficient on the Statewide Writing Assessment further increased to 75% in 2008.

Therefore, the state average percent of ELL students proficient or better in writing increased at all reporting grade levels from 2006 to 2008. Between 2006 and 2008, ELL students scored as high as a 20-point gain.

### ***SPED Reading Achievement***

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the fourth-grade level increased from 74% in 2006 to 81% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the fourth-grade level was 79% in 2008.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eighth-grade level increased from 66% in 2006 to 72% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eighth-grade level was 78% in 2008.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better at the eleventh-grade level increased from 61% in 2006 to 65% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of individual student reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level was 71% in 2008.

Therefore, the state average percent of SPED students proficient in reading increased at all reporting grade levels between 2006 and 2008.

### ***SPED Math Achievement***

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the fourth-grade level increased from 75% in 2006 to 82% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of SPED students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the fourth-grade level was 85% in 2008.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eighth-grade level increased from 56% in 2006 to 64% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of SPED students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eighth-grade level was 73% in 2008.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better at the eleventh-grade level increased from 46% in 2006 to 55% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of SPED students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level was 62% in 2008.

Therefore, the state average percent of SPED students proficient in math continued to increase at all reporting grade levels from 2006 to 2008.

### ***SPED Science Achievement***

In 2008, the state average percent of SPED students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments in science was 79% at the fourth-grade level. At the eighth-grade level, the state average percent of SPED students scoring proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments was 68%. At the eleventh grade, the state average percent of SPED students scoring proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments was 65%. Because this is the first year for reporting science achievement scores, only one scoring year for individual student scores averaged across the state was reported.

### ***SPED Writing Achievement***

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased from 64% in 2006 to 69% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of SPED students scoring proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased to 77% in 2008.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eighth-grade level increased from 63% in 2006 to 67% in 2007. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of SPED students scoring proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased to 76% in 2008.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eleventh-grade level remained constant from 2006 to 2007 at 65%. Using individual student scores, the state average percent of SPED students scoring proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eleventh-grade level then increased to 76% in 2008.

The state average percent of SPED students proficient in writing increased at all grade levels from 2006 to 2008.

### **Summary**

With the new reporting system of individual student scores averaged across the state, fourth grade ELL scores in reading remained the same, while eighth and eleventh grade reading scores increased. ELL math and writing scores continued to increase across all grade levels from 2006 to 2008.

SPED reading, writing, and math scores generally increased for fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades from 2006 to 2008.

While Nebraska educators and students should be proud of these results, there is still room for improvement. Special population students are making progress in reading, mathematics, and writing achievement. The achievement gap is narrowing, indicating that the hard work and emphasis that has been placed on teaching and learning in Nebraska schools is having a positive effect.

## **STUDY VI: The Impact of Student Mobility on Performance and Practice**

**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Nino Zhvania, M.A., Graduate Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Nadia Bulkin, B.A., Project Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

### **Introduction**

The sixth study was conducted to examine the influence of student mobility on student performance and teacher practice. This trend of “student mobility,” defined as “non-promotional school change” (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999, p. vi), is known to be a contributing factor to the “academic achievement gaps” historically attributed to race, ethnicity, gender, and social/economic status (Paik & Phillips, 2002).

Student mobility is an increasingly common issue that impacts education in many areas, including rural Nebraska. Students in rural areas have an approximate mobility rate of 15% – comparable to the national average (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1994). According to Biernet and Jax, mobility that results in school change is the greatest threat to academic achievement and the school environment (2000). There is a strong correlation between poverty and the risk of academic failure, and a strong correlation between poverty and frequent mobility (Wright, 1999). Teachers in highly mobile classes frequently fault mobility for their inability to effectively preserve the learning environment and deliver quality instruction (Bruno & Isken, 1996; Kerbow, 1996; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Offenber (2004) theorizes that any given level of school performance might be attributed to school mobility rates and not to school characteristics (e.g., highly qualified teachers, well developed teaching and learning programs, school policies, etc.). However, contrasting studies have found that mobility had no significant independent effect on students’ academic performance (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to determine the impact of student mobility on student performance and teacher practice.

### **Methods**

This was a mixed-methods study using both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data was gathered by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and provided to the researchers for this study. Disaggregated data of highly mobile and non-highly mobile students, gathered from 212 school districts, in Nebraska was used. Highly mobile students were defined as those students that entered or left school between the last Friday in September and the last day of school. Additionally, criterion-referenced individual student data was aggregated statewide and reported for fourth, eighth and eleventh grades for the first time in 2008. With this system, the academic achievement of students – especially mobile students – will be easier to track on a long-term basis. Consequently, only one year of data will be shared regarding the achievement of highly mobile students within the state as past data is not comparable.

Qualitative data was collected through interviews conducted at schools with high mobility and high student performance and at schools with high mobility and low student

performance. Classroom teachers, specialized teachers and administrators were interviewed. The purpose of these selections was to gain information on what schools are doing to support highly mobile students.

## Results

As shown in Figure 2, a smaller percentage of highly mobile students scored proficient or better on all the locally defined criterion-referenced assessments in 2007-2008 compared with non-highly mobile students. The largest percentage of highly mobile students scoring proficient or better was 90% on the fourth-grade math criterion-referenced assessment, with the state average at 94%.

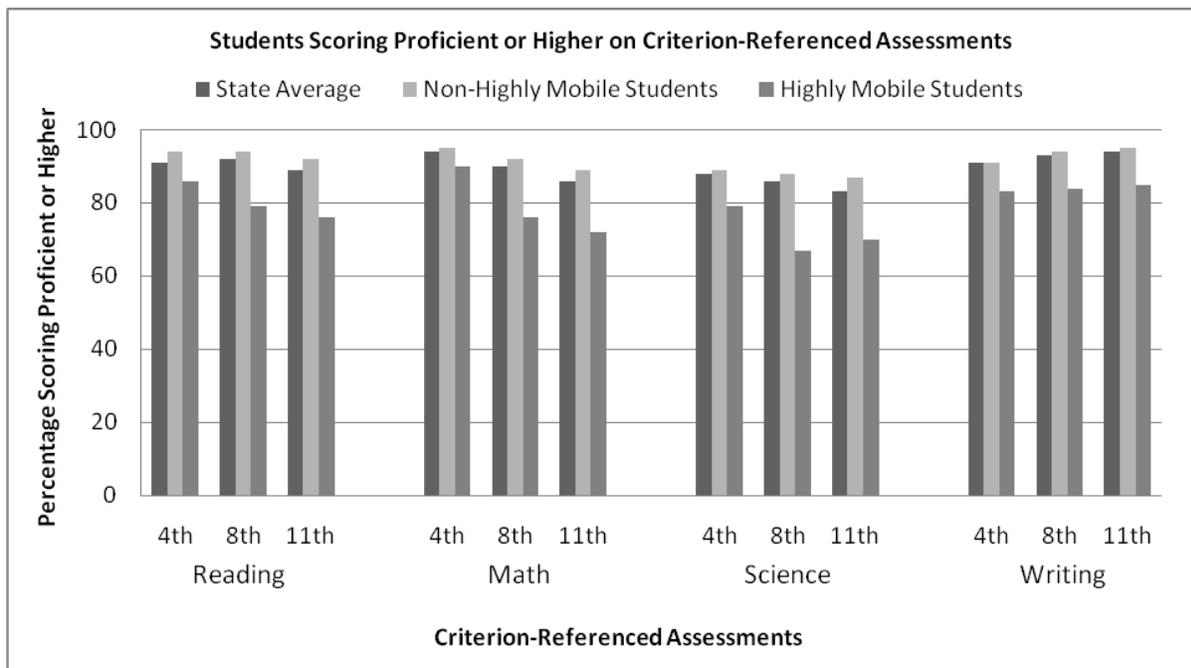


Figure 2. Students scoring proficient or better on criterion-referenced assessments.

The largest discrepancy between highly mobile and non-highly mobile students was in eighth-grade science, where 88% of non-highly mobile students scored proficient or better and 67% of highly mobile students scored proficient or better. The smallest discrepancy was in fourth-grade math, where 95% of non-highly mobile students scored proficient or better and 90% of highly mobile students scored proficient or better.

As these numbers clearly show, highly mobile students consistently scored lower than non-highly mobile students in regards to the state average. There appears to be a connection between mobility and academic performance.

Causal links between mobility and decreased academic achievement are difficult to prove, given the multiple factors involved when students change schools. Mobility may only be a symptom rather than a cause of poor school performance (Rumberger, 2003). The interviews were conducted in an effort to gather information regarding classroom strategies, interventions, or practices, and school or district policies that have successfully addressed

student learning and achievement issues caused by student mobility. Questions focused on the impact of mobility on classroom practices, individual student learning, teacher perceptions, and school/district policies. Five themes emerged from the interviews: Transitioning Mobile Students; Needs of Mobile and Non Mobile Students; Administrative Support and School Procedures; Teacher Perceptions and Support; and Classroom Strategies and Systems.

During interviews, teachers and principals shared strategies that were currently being used in classrooms to better support the social and academic needs of highly mobile students. One principal emphasized the importance of identifying at initial entry the academic needs of mobile students by stating, “We are spending a lot of time trying to find out where they are and what we need to give the student to get them caught up to where they need to be.”

### **Summary**

In examining student performance results for the state of Nebraska, this study found a link between mobility and academic performance in Reading, Math, Science, and Writing for grades four, eight, and eleven. However, it was not possible to prove a causal relationship between high mobility and low academic performance because of the presence of other mitigating factors, such as a high ELL population and a high Free/Reduced Lunch rate. However, researchers noted that when districts provided more services to a school, all students in that school were more likely to achieve.

In order for educators to better meet the needs of highly mobile students, schools identified a myriad of services for families transferring into a new school district. These strategies included: the involvement of counselors in obtaining records, providing a comprehensive school-wide tour, and identifying buddy systems for new students. Teachers shared the procedures for guiding the learning and behavior of mobile students. Both individualized and group processes were employed to instruct mobile students. Additionally, empathy for families in situations beyond their control was reflected in educators’ motivation to embrace the challenges of high mobility. They shared stories of what they were doing to positively impact students and their learning.

## **STUDY VII: Systematic Practices Implemented to Address Highly Mobile Students**

**Jane Stavem, Ph.D., Superintendent, Blair Public Schools**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify practices implemented in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools to address the needs of highly mobile students. For the 2007-2008 school year, there were 220 Schoolwide Title I programs identified in Nebraska. Of those, 211 were at the elementary level (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2007). A Schoolwide program permits a school to use funds from Title I, Part A and other federal education program funds and resources to upgrade the entire educational program of the school in order to raise academic achievement for all students (Archived Information, 1996). Opportunities provided by Schoolwide programs are designed to assist

schools, districts, and states in raising the achievement level of all children, particularly the intended beneficiaries of Title I: poor children, low-achieving children, migrant children, children who are neglected or at risk of dropping out, and limited-English-proficient children.

Little research is available in terms of the relationship between rates of student mobility and procedures that are put in place to address the specific needs of Title I students in order to provide for a child's academic, social, and emotional needs as they make the transition to a new school. There are schools that have realized the needs of mobile students and as a result, have made specific changes to accommodate those needs.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify practices implemented in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools to address the needs of highly mobile students. Two research questions guided this study: What practices and procedures are used to transition mobile students into Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools, with the intention of connecting students academically, socially, and emotionally as systematically as possible as defined by current best practices? What are Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools doing to systematically transition highly mobile students?

### **Methods**

The specific type of mixed methods design used for this study was the explanatory mixed methods design, which consisted of collecting quantitative data first followed by collecting qualitative data that was used to explain or elaborate on the quantitative results (Creswell, 2005). Phase I of this study collected quantitative data obtained through online surveys in order to provide a general picture of the research problem. Schools identified for the study were located across the state of Nebraska in a wide range of settings including both rural and urban locations. An online survey was conducted based on best practices, which were identified and broken down into eight main sections – enrollment; academic placement; student placement; classroom connections; family connections; unique needs; school/community connections; and exit transitions. Phase II of the study, which used qualitative research, focused on expanding and enriching the results of Phase I. The Phase II follow-up interviews were added to gain additional information that further explained the results (Creswell, 2005).

Case selection of schools to be interviewed for Phase II was based on responses from schools that indicated a high level of implementation of best practices for highly mobile students. The researcher identified exemplary ratings in at least four out of the eight survey categories. Exemplary was defined as the top 10% of scores in each survey category. Using the survey results after descriptive quantitative data in Phase I had been analyzed, respondents from four sites were selected for follow-up interviews.

### **Results**

From the results of the interviews at the exemplary schools, best practices were supported by a recurring set of components. First, exemplary schools had solid practices and procedures in place for transitions that were consistently followed, and a mindset of continuous improvement in meeting the needs of students. Administrators created a culture of caring in

their buildings, and ongoing training for staff members focused on meeting the needs of highly mobile students. In addition, exemplary schools featured quality programs before, during, and after school that supported student learning by meeting multiple needs – academic, social, physical, and emotional. They also emphasized strong community partnerships and consistent communication with families.

### **Summary**

Through the online survey and follow-up interviews, multiple practices were identified that can be replicated by other Nebraska schools. Specific practices can be purposefully identified and used in a written transition plan that helps support all mobile students make effective transitions into and out of Nebraska schools. Transition plans can be carried out most effectively by staff members and administrators who are committed to helping mobile students make effective connections to their schools, classrooms, and communities.

## **CONCLUSIONS FOR STUDIES I-VII**

### **The first seven years...**

**This year’s journey and the journey ahead brings with it new conversations.** New paths were taken this past year as educators looked ahead to a new era with the addition of statewide tests as a part of Nebraska’s assessment system. The new reading test was piloted in spring of 2009. These past seven years have helped prepare Nebraska educators for these statewide tests, as shared by one rural high school math teacher, “I think that through this process (the past seven years’ STARS journey), we have more people that do understand what’s going on and that’s probably one of the good things about it.”

Over the past seven years, Nebraska educators’ journey has prepared them well for what lies ahead. Researchers noted educators’ knowledge, skills, and new learnings that have occurred as a result of STARS, the impact of this on the achievement of students, and the future development of the Nebraska assessment system, specifically:

- Standards, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Student Achievement
- Teacher Confidence and Accountability
- Teacher Ownership and Collaboration

The essence of these new learnings is shared through the voices of Nebraska Educators:

### **The Integration of Standards, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment!**

Over the years, educators’ conversations were consumed with five elements: Standards, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment *and* the connection among them. Most educators acknowledged that without partaking in this journey, they would not have produced the same conversations and ultimately impacted student learning in new ways, “The research says that you have to know exactly what it is these kids need to be taught. You have to find the best way to instruct them and the best way to assess it.”

- **Reflecting on the early years of this process, one recalls that starting out, this was a difficult process with a great deal of change,** “So where do we begin? Do

we assess every single standard? Do we clump them together?” asked a teacher. Teachers and leaders felt that they were not experts but then began to realize that others could provide guidance and training as shared by this staff developer, “Our primary role has been a facilitator of the design and refinement process. We really facilitate the process of both the development and the refinement of criterion-referenced assessments.” With some practice, and some patience, Nebraska educators began to see the possibilities and what they truly were capable of doing when acting in the best interest of students. As educators looked back through the years, they commented, “When it’s all lined up and we see the finished product, we can see that it is a good thing.”

- **The “right” curriculum was seen as a key to positive student progress as shared by a female elementary teacher,** “Before we started our assessments, we spent a long time redoing our curriculum. I think that was key for us working with fourth grade which is such a big assessment year. But once we got the curriculum where it flowed a little bit better, it made sense. I think it made it easier for our assessments. So everything flows a little better since we’ve gone through the curriculum first.”
- **Teachers are more focused on the appropriate instruction for students to be successful as shared by this administrator,** “The important thing out of all of this is that as we learn to be better at assessments, we learn to be better at instruction.”
- **Educators worked to broaden their teaching practices to include intervention strategies in order to reach all students.** “We’re [working in] learning teams. We’re focusing on strategies and interventions. We have used data to be a driving force in interventions that we are providing and will continue to provide, and also a driving force in staff development.”
- **A superintendent summarized the impact of STARS on standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and the connection between them,** “What we’ve seen is that we went from the beginning of this process spending all of our time on curriculum and assessment development and nothing on the instructional piece. It was the curriculum assessment process. Now it’s the curriculum, instruction, and assessment process. We’ve evolved to the point that we are now focusing on the instruction piece.”

### **Student Achievement**

District criterion-referenced measures at grades four, eight, and eleven during the past seven years continued to show growth over time in the areas of reading and math. District norm-referenced measures have generally increased in reading and math at fourth and eighth grades, with a small decline at eleventh grade from 2001 to 2007.

Nebraska’s special populations of ELL and SPED students continued to demonstrate significant achievement gains. ELL students increased their scores in reading, math, and writing from 2001 to 2007. SPED students increased their scores, as well, over the 2001-2007 time period. These special populations, however, continued to score lower than their fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade counterparts on group district averages. This is consistent, however, with most research in this area and, indeed, the basis for the special programs that are provided to support ELL and SPED students academically.

Statewide Writing Assessment results over the past five years (2002-2007) indicated that the fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades have made significant gains. Writing scores continued to increase in all grades. Positive perceptions of teachers that were involved in the development and implementation of the Nebraska Statewide Writing Assessment System (Anderson 2005, 2007; Gallagher, 2003) demonstrate the value of involving teachers in this process and were consistent with the literature relative to the value of teacher involvement in the writing process.

### **Teacher Confidence and Accountability**

**It is evident that teacher accountability is now more than ever a part of educators' conversations** as shared by a rural, high school educator, "We . . . want to go in our room and just do our thing and say leave us alone. But we do need to be accountable to our patrons, to our students, to the parents."

- **An educator shared how the STARS process has increased their confidence and made them a better teacher**, "So, as much as I probably 'scoffed' at looking at the standards, they gave me a basis of knowing what I needed to teach my kids, and to assure that when my kids walked out of my room, they were getting what they needed just like any other eighth grader across the state of Nebraska. I changed a lot . . . . I think it (STARS process) makes you a better teacher. It makes you more accountable and it makes you more aware of what your students need. I applaud what Nebraska has done."
- **As educator accountability increased, they became more knowledgeable about the process and their confidence continued to build, as indicated by one teacher**, "I feel I have grown a lot. I have a better understanding of what all of this means, and realized, we have to keep this process going . . . getting better . . . reaching what we need to for our students. Globally, we're taking some very big steps and without this process, I don't think we would probably keep up as well, but we know what those expectations are, what we need to meet." An administrator echoed the growth in knowledge and confidence, "Our teachers want our kids to be successful. They'll do whatever because ultimately they realize it does reflect on them and them alone personally. Why didn't they get that better grade? Why weren't they proficient? They are accountable and they do take it personally. They are doing all things in their power."
- **The Portfolio Peer Review Process also yielded increased educator confidence in the assessment process** as shared by this teacher, "It was kind of more my attitude at first. I'm just thinking, 'I hope I can do this all right.' (Now) I feel more confident about giving the assessments. I don't feel intimidated by giving assessments, and I feel I am definitely a better assessor."

### **Teacher Leadership and Ownership**

Through the STARS process, teachers developed ownership over the process of student improvement.

- **Teachers have established ownership in this process.** As one teacher echoed, "It's an exciting process . . . the exciting part to me is that teachers are designing this, teachers are the people that are using it and are really involved in the whole process of designing the questions . . . there's ownership in the whole process."

- **Teacher leadership roles have also emerged during this process.** There is newly found “leadership in the classroom.” Many teachers today are wearing various “hats” such as classroom teacher and co-assessment coordinator. The benefits are evident as shared by this rural superintendent, “They’re in the classroom, they’re in the trenches, and they’re in every building. They share the information with the other teachers. They coordinate, they report directly back to administration and leadership. It just seems to be a better fit.”

## Data

**Over the years, educators gained the ability to compile, analyze, and use data to improve teaching and learning.** With practice, they learned to use data and information to impact student achievement.

- An elementary teacher emphasized the importance of looking at gap data, “I think if you see large gaps, if you see areas that perhaps you’re weak in, or even areas that you’re strong in, I think that dictates then what it is you teach. So I think that data is very important.”
- An elementary principal shared how data is being used to plan the improvement of student learning through the use of objectives, “We’ve looked at the data and we’re establishing objectives based on that data on how to improve student outcomes.”

## Motivating Students

**Challenging students and learning new ways to use assessments in a manner that motivates learners has been a part of this journey.** Educators have walked students outside the familiar, outside of their comfort zone that extends their learning to new heights.

- A rural teacher shared, “It truly is about, ‘Can they learn this specific thing?’ Then give them a chance to learn it and assess it. That’s what we’re doing. It’s made us better. I think that we are better, but the bottom line is, it makes our kids better . . . learning is long term, not just short term.”

## SUMMARY OF THE PAST SEVEN YEARS

**Overall, the past seven years brought educators along a positive learning path that has positively impacted student achievement.** Learning has been a process, an insightful process as shared by one educator, “I think it’s a really good process. I think the State of Nebraska has been, and I know continues to be, commended. It’s not an easy process. It’s hard work. But I think it’s valuable, it’s valuable work! Putting the classroom and the teachers at the heart of the process adds the value.”

- One administrator summed up the impact of STARS by stating, “. . . the knowledge that people had gained because of the process (STARS) . . . the processes that we had to go through, have been just exceptionally good for staff at all levels.” Teachers have become skilled practitioners in their own area *and* contributors to the process.

Although educators recognize the positive intent of the new legislation requiring a statewide test, they voiced some apprehension moving to a statewide testing format:

- A rural superintendent shared, “We’re all concerned with what’s going on with the legislature and the impact of throwing away what we’ve done. I do feel that the general public, and this is being reflected by the legislature, values simplicity as much

as content. That's very dangerous because if the goal is to be simple, you lose content."

- A Nebraska educator stated, "You lose that ownership. Nebraska teachers work hard. We're good and our kids learn. I think that . . . we're doing the best we can. I think it will be interesting to see what happens."

As they transition to Year Eight, one educator summarized the value of the journey to the new learning ahead, "We have enough expertise now. We've developed enough expertise with our teachers that even if the state doesn't mandate that we do local assessing, we're still going to continue doing it because it's what's good for kids!" Finding the balance is the next challenge for Nebraska educators as they transition to a new system of accountability.



## **TRANSITIONS. . . The eighth year**

### **From STARS to NeSA balanced assessments!**

Nebraska's assessment journey continued during the 2008-2009 school year with the implementation of **Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA)**, the new statewide accountability system featuring statewide tests in reading, math and science.

### **NeSA... Nebraska's New Balanced Assessment System**

This new system (NeSA) formalized the concept of balanced assessments. In the eighth year, NeSA was implemented, beginning with the pilot of the new Statewide Reading Assessment. The use of multiple assessments to inform teaching and learning continues, but on a different level. Educators this past year are now engaged not only with criterion-referenced assessments and norm-referenced tests, but also the new statewide test. With this new journey arose new reflections...

### **Criterion-Referenced Assessments (CRT)**

Educators still feel strongly about the positive impact that locally developed CRTs have on teaching and student learning. Administrators remained optimistic about the benefits of CRTs and indicated that instructional practices were strengthened by the use of them. Furthermore, both teachers and administrators shared that instructional strategies were modified to better meet student learning needs when they did not perform well on CRTs.

CRTs are still seen as an important tool to improve student learning by administrators and teachers, and this year's research results concur that their use will continue in combination

with the statewide test. The entire administrator and teacher population returning surveys (171 administrators and 1081 teachers) stated that they would continue the use of CRTs even after the full implementation of the statewide tests. A rural female middle school special education teacher explained, “We will continue to use our local assessments because we feel that they’re a good measure of our curriculum and a good measure of making sure that every student gets the opportunity to learn the same things.”

### **Norm-Referenced Tests (NRT)**

NRTs will continue to be a piece of the assessment puzzle, in particular for examining group data and trends. Two benefits of NRTs that educators stated they will continue to utilize are comparison data and timely feedback. A non-rural elementary administrator explained, “NRTs are the big snapshot. We look at it to see if we see a pattern in our kids: are they performing the way we’re expecting them to? It’s that check and balance – are our kids where we think they are?”

### **Statewide test reflections**

Over the past year, Nebraska educators were involved in the process of developing both the new reading standards and the Statewide Reading Assessment. The pilot reading test was implemented statewide in the spring of 2009. Educators shared their opinion about how the statewide test will guide instruction based on student performance. A rural male elementary teacher shared, “I think we should use it (the statewide test) to see how the students are learning and how the teachers are teaching and if we need to change any of our curriculum. (We need to) make sure that what we’re teaching is meeting what the goals should be.”

On the other hand, the researchers determined that both teachers and administrators were apprehensive concerning whether the statewide test could accurately measure what students know and can do. A rural female middle school principal stated, “The statewide test... I don’t know that that’s a clear representation of who our kids are and what they can do.” They also questioned whether student achievement would improve as a result of the statewide test. Teachers throughout the state were unsure as to the content of the statewide test, as some felt they had limited opportunities to learn about the test. A female non-rural elementary ELL teacher shared, “I see it (the statewide test) as something that people will be very guarded about until we get to know it, how it works, and how to read the data.” Thus educators shared both hope and apprehension regarding this new assessment.

### **Culture of Continuous School Improvement**

Regardless of the assessment process that is legislated, educators feel strongly that a culture of continuous school improvement is critical to student achievement. Both teachers and administrators strongly believed that their district holds high achievement standards for their students. The STARS journey has embedded the philosophy of school improvement into the everyday practices of schools, and many reflected that these practices will continue. A female non-rural elementary ELL teacher stated, “I know that we talk about school improvement and how to do it. We also do quarterly meetings where we talk about students and how they’re performing. We’re constantly talking about how to improve.”

## **Professional Development**

Embedding professional development into the school improvement process is critical for the improvement of student performance. A first-year study examined professional development practices in Nebraska schools as aligned to NSDC standards. It found that only 1 of the 12 professional development standards was identified as being frequently used: the “Equity” standard, “preparing educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.” “Learning Communities”, “Evaluation”, “Data Driven”, “Learning”, and “Family Involvement” were five professional development standards that were less frequently identified as being used. For all professional development standards, the ratings of elementary school teachers were higher than those of secondary school teachers.

## **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

For some schools, the practice of using professional learning communities (PLCs) began under the auspices of continuous school improvement. PLC(s) were identified as a strategy that positively enhanced the curriculum-assessment-learning process. Although learning communities were one of the less frequent professional development practices that teachers reported using, many teachers who did report using PLCs had a strong positive response to them. A rural female special education coordinator shared, “I think (PLCs) have given the teachers an opportunity to think of the school as a whole, talk about the school as a whole.” Because the STARS journey is ending, educators viewed the extent of opportunities for working collaboratively as unclear. Perhaps attention should be paid to the expansion of teacher collaboration in the form of professional development as this research-based strategy has been shown to positively impact student achievement.

## **Data**

The practice of using data has been an important part of the school improvement process. Disaggregation of data as well as understanding and utilizing trend data assisted educators in better understanding the specific needs of students. A rural female elementary special education teacher shared, “I feel we have a lot better handle on (data) this year, really looking at the data. Not just collecting it, but really starting to look at the data – what do we need to do differently? What’s not working for this kid? What else can we do?” Teachers continue to enhance their skills in the use of data generated by each assessment and its value to teaching and learning. The need for these skills will not dissipate in this new NeSA era.

## **Alignment**

The practice of aligning standards, curriculum, and assessment is embedded in the school improvement process. The new standards have only reinforced this concept. A non-rural high school language arts teacher shared the way her school aligned standards to curriculum, “We do have the standards that we put on our lesson plans and we keep that in mind when we’re in the classroom. We try to get the different standards, the different things that we want kids to be accountable for. So there’s a much larger accountability, and now I understand we need to write down on our lesson plans how we plan to assess the kids, and what the outcome was.” The STARS journey has better equipped teachers with the skills and experience necessary to implement this practice.

## **Instructional Strategies**

The practice of utilizing assessment data to guide instruction continues to be echoed by teachers and administrators. This practice has now become routine! Teachers have become so assessment literate that training sessions and administrators were no longer vital for making instructional decisions based on the use of data. Administrators primarily serve as facilitators in this process, while teachers lead the way. A rural high school principal shared, “When we give assessments, our teachers will examine the results from the assessments and look for areas that need to be re-taught, look for areas of weakness.” School improvement requires that instructional strategies meet the various needs of *all students*. Reaching each student still remains a vital part of the school improvement process.

## **Supporting Highly Mobile Students**

Research indicates that high mobility students demonstrate a persistent pattern of lower achievement scores on criterion-referenced assessments versus their non-highly mobile classmates (Study VI). This corresponds with research conclusions that mobility is the greatest threat to academic achievement and the school environment (Biernat & Jax, 2000). With this in mind, educators understand that support systems for highly-mobile students are vital. Having solid practices and procedures in place and following them consistently were two important elements that were found to be critical for supporting mobile students. In addition, a mindset of continuous improvement for all students regardless of mobility was always evident in schools that were more successful in dealing with mobility. A middle school math teacher explained the importance of mobility, “Even though we may not directly be addressing the mobility issue, everything around here is related to mobility and getting the students caught up.”

## **Teacher Evaluations**

The practice of integrating standards-based student achievement results into teacher evaluation conferences is beginning to emerge. A non-rural assessment coordinator shared how this practice is being implemented in their district, “Through our evaluation system, we have goal setting. But there was never any consistent way to approach the goal or get any support on that goal. So (now) we tie that process in together.” A non-rural male superintendent in another district explained how this method, integrated with PLCs, is being implemented in their district,

*We used PLCs to look at some teacher evaluation pieces over the last three years. We asked them (principals) to bring in a sample of a summative evaluation prepared on a teacher who was one of their gunners – somebody who just does everything right. Then one of those that are having some struggles and they’re trying to work on a growth objective. Black out the names, but bring it in and let the PLC administrative team read it and give you feedback because that feedback to teachers is much more valuable instructionally. Just in the last two years, the growth in the quality of year-end summative evaluations shows that our teachers are getting better information on what they can do to be better facilitators of learning.*

This practice provides evidence for teacher accountability. A non-rural elementary facilitator stated, “If we want our kids to improve, the teaching has to improve. Our kids will improve right along with our teaching.”

### **EIGHTH YEAR SUMMARY**

Nebraska educators and leaders are on their way to finding the balance between classroom-based assessments, criterion-referenced assessments, statewide tests, and norm-referenced tests. Teachers and administrators must continue to boost their understanding of the nature and purpose of statewide tests. Researchers found that criterion-referenced tests continue to be an important and well-understood part of the classroom as well as the school improvement process. It appears that the STARS experience has prepared Nebraska educators well for the new balanced assessment system (NeSA).

School improvement has become a foremost priority for many Nebraska schools. Educators have implemented a variety of methods in order to maintain a culture of continuous school improvement, including professional learning communities, the use and understanding of achievement data, aligning curriculum to standards, guiding instructional strategies through the use of assessment results, integrating assessment results into teacher evaluation conferences, and supporting highly-mobile students. By focusing on school improvement, educators have also solidified teacher accountability, assessment literacy, and collaborative learning. Many of these methods will continue in the NeSA era.

Educators have once again been challenged by new efforts to improve achievement in Nebraska schools. It is a complicated process, because assessment and achievement are more than just numbers, as a non-rural assessment coordinator explained, “Certainly, evaluation isn’t tied to how high your (achievement) results were. It’s ‘How did you respond to students? How did you work the process of school improvement? Did you analyze your results? Did you make changes based on those results? Did you re-analyze and reflect and talk with your peers about what’s next, what did you do, what works? It’s a district-wide process.” The knowledge gained over the past eight years has reinforced the confidence of educators, enabling them to take bold steps to improve teaching and learning for all Nebraska students as they move ahead in this new assessment era.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Dauber, S. L. (1996). Children in motion: School transfers and elementary school performance. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 90(1), 3-12.
- Anderson, S. (2005). *Statewide writing assessment scoring: Effective professional development for the classroom teacher. Charting STARS: Voices from the field. Year-Four Report. Comprehensive Evaluation of Nebraska's School-Based Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS)*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Anderson, S. (2007). Statewide writing assessment scoring: Effective professional development for the classroom teacher. In J. Isernhagen & S. Mills (Eds.), *Charting STARS: Pathways to success. Year-six report. Comprehensive evaluation of Nebraska's School-Based Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS)* (pp. 38–40). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Archived Information: Schoolwide Programs – Title I, Part A Policy Guidance. U.S. Department of Education. (1996). *Electronic preference formats recommended by the American Psychological Association*. Retrieved on March 30, 2005, from [http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA?Title\\_I/swpguid1.html](http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA?Title_I/swpguid1.html), 3.
- Biernat, L., & Jax, C. (2000). Limiting mobility and improving student achievement. *Hamline Law Review*, 23(1), 1-37.
- Bruno, J. E., & Isken, J. A. (1996). Inter and intraschool site student transience: Practical and theoretical implications for instructional continuity at inner city schools. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 29(4), 139-252.
- Creswell, J. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Gallagher, C. W. (2003). *Charting STARS: Sustainability as challenge and opportunity. Year two report*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska.
- Heinlein, L. M., & Shinn, M. (2000). School mobility and student achievement in an urban setting. *Psychology in the Schools*, 37(4), 349-357.
- Isernhagen, J., & Mills, S. (2008). *Charting STARS: Engaging Conversations. Year-Seven Report. Comprehensive Evaluation of Nebraska's School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Kerbow, D. (1996). Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 1(2), 147-169.
- Lash, A. A., & Kirkpatrick, S. L. (1990). A classroom perspective on student mobility. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(2), 176-191.
- Nebraska State Department of Education. (2007). 2007-2008 Schoolwide Project List. Retrieved on January 30, 2008, from <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/federalprograms/TITLEI/schoolwide.htm>
- Nebraska State Report Card. (2008). Retrieved on July 27, 2009, from <http://reportcard.nde.state.ne.us/Main/Home.aspx>
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (2002). *An Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind* (Pub. No. 0757). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. (2008). *6 + 1 Writing Traits*. Retrieved on June 8, 2008, from <http://www.thetraits.org/about.php>
- Offenberg, R. M. (2004). Inferring adequate yearly progress of schools from student achievement in highly mobile communities. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 9(4), 337-355.
- Paik, S., & Phillips, R. (2002). *Student mobility in rural communities: What are the implications for student achievement?* Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Plake, B. C., & Impara, J. C. (2000). *Technical Quality Criteria for Nebraska's District Assessments*. Lincoln, NE: Buros Center for Testing.
- Rumberger, R. W. (2003). The causes and consequences of student mobility. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1), 6-21.
- Rumberger, R. W., Larson, K. A., Ream, R. K., & Palardy, G. J. (1999). *The educational consequences for California students and schools. Research Series*. (Report No. PACE-99-2). Berkeley, CA; Stuart Foundation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED441040).
- Shepard, L. A. (2000). *The role of classroom assessment in teaching and learning*. Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE Technical Report # 517). Los Angeles, CA: University of California.
- Stiggins, R. (2007). Assessment through the student's eyes. *Educational Leadership*, 64(8), 22-26.
- U.S. Government Accounting Office. (1994). *Elementary school children: Many change schools frequently, harming their education*. (GAO/HEHS Publication No. 94-45). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Watkins, S., & Sheng, Z. (2008, 30 July). *Professional development practices in rural schools: Implications for educational leadership program*. San Diego, CA: National Council of Professors of Educational Administration.
- Wright, D. (1999). Student mobility: A negligible and confounded influence on student achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 92(6), 347-353.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *These recommendations remain from previous studies:*

1. Work collaboratively with ESUs to provide data training, alignment of appropriate grading and reporting systems, assessment knowledge for new teachers, and instructional interventions for students.
2. Educate **all** constituencies about the different purposes and results of criterion-referenced assessments, Nebraska Statewide Accountability Tests, and norm-referenced tests.
3. Continue to involve teachers in statewide initiatives to improve student learning i.e., test development, revision of standards, etc.
4. Encourage districts to designate a person(s) that coordinates curriculum, instruction and assessment for continuous improvement in each district within the state.

### *New recommendations based on the 2008-09 study:*

1. Encourage the use of the teacher evaluation process as an opportunity for consistent goal-setting and an opportunity to focus on student achievement results.
2. Align professional development to the national standards. Use disaggregated student data to determine teacher training priorities, monitor progress, and sustain improvement.
3. Implement solid practices and procedures to provide better transitions for highly mobile students.
4. Emphasize strong community partnerships and consistent communication with families.

**TRANSITIONS:**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Section 3: Research Studies**

**Study I: Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a  
Balanced Assessment System**



**Administrator and Teacher Perceptions of a  
Balanced Assessment System**

**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Jackie Florendo, M.Ed., Graduate Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Chelsie Guerrero, Graduate Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

**INTRODUCTION**

With the introduction of a new statewide assessment system, Study I examined the transition from a district criterion-referenced assessment system to a more balanced approach. A rural elementary school teacher described his school's approach to the Balanced Assessment System:

*I think we use each one of them (different types of assessments) and basically they're a source to see how the students are doing. We can compare one student with each test and if they're where they're supposed to be in each test, then that's telling us the student's probably working up to their ability. But if there was a lot of up and down in any of them... then maybe we need to change what we're doing.*

This eighth year primary study was a mixed methods research design using both quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of the study was to examine administrative and teacher perceptions about District Support, Criterion-Referenced Assessments, New Statewide Tests and Instructional Impact. Quantitative survey data was collected in the fall of 2008 with qualitative interview data gathered in the winter of 2009.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This mixed-methods research study focused upon the change to a balanced assessment system with the implementation of the new state tests. Administrators and teachers across the state were surveyed using an online instrument regarding their perceptions about district support of a balanced assessment system, the use of criterion-referenced assessments, the implementation of new statewide tests and the instructional impact of the new balanced assessment system.

For the purpose of this research, Nebraska public school districts were divided into two classifications, non-rural and rural, based on population characteristics unique to Nebraska. Non-rural districts were defined as metro-area districts in large and mid-sized cities, large town, and the urban fringe. All other districts were classified as rural. Of the 254 public school districts operating in 2007-08, 17 districts (6.7%) were classified as non-rural and 237 districts (93.3%) were classified as rural.

Of the 254 Nebraska school districts operating in 2007-08, a total of 220 districts (86.6% of districts) returned surveys for the Comprehensive Evaluation Research Study. Of the administrator surveys returned, 14.9% were from non-rural districts and 85.1% were from rural districts. Surveys were received from administrators in 101 districts (39.8% of total districts). Of the teacher surveys returned, 8.3% were from non-rural districts and 91.7% were from rural districts. Surveys were received from teachers in 204 districts (80.3% of total districts).

Participants responded to the 41-item survey (Appendix C) using a five-point Likert scale to explore four themes: District Support, Criterion-Referenced Assessments, New Statewide Tests and Instructional Impact.

Secondly, open-ended interviews were conducted in two districts in each of four geographic areas in Nebraska identified by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). Detailed perceptions were collected using an interview protocol (Appendix D) to gather qualitative data from eight school districts. These eight sample districts were purposefully selected based on geographical area, and district Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rate. Forty-eight (48) individual interviews were conducted statewide during the 2008-09 school year. Five additional themes emerged during the interviews: Norm-Referenced Tests (NRT); Data; School Improvement; Professional Learning Communities; Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment.

In addition to the surveys and interviews conducted for this study, a rubric titled *School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric* (Appendix E) was designed by Ernst, Hoegh, and Boss

(2008) for educators to use to assess their school's or district's level of literacy and implementation of standards, curriculum, and assessment.

### **Instruments**

The survey (Appendix C) was designed by the researchers to collect perceptions about the new statewide tests and the implementation of a balanced assessment system. The survey examined the areas of (1) District Support, (2) Criterion-Referenced Assessments, (3) New Statewide Tests and (4) Instructional Impact. Participants responded to the 41-item survey on a five-point Likert scale for each item, with "1" representing "strongly disagree," "2" "disagree," "3" "neutral," "4" "agree," "5" "strongly agree." Analysis of variance was used to compare mean scores of the survey data.

The Research Interview Protocol (Appendix D) consisted of demographic information about participants, eight questions and a rubric identifying the perceptions of the level of implementation in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and use of data. Interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers in both elementary and secondary settings within eight school districts. Up to seven interviews were conducted within each school district. The questions targeted the participants' perceptions of each of the four survey areas and their preparation and initial thoughts of a balanced assessment system. Probes were identified for interviewers to use with each question. Interviewers were provided a Nebraska Comprehensive Evaluation Interview Manual and received training prior to conducting the interviews.

The *School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric* (Appendix E) was used to assess a district's level of literacy. The rubric used four defined levels of implementation to measure four separate components: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Use of Data. The rubric was designed as a table and participants were asked to circle the level that best described their perception of their district's level of development for each of the components.

## **RESULTS**

**In this study, four categories of administrator and teacher perceptions were identified: District Support, Criterion-Referenced Assessments, New Statewide Tests, and Instructional Impact, as shown in Figure 1. Administrative and teacher survey overall responses ranged from 1 to 5 on the five-point Likert scale with "5" representing "strongly agree."**

**In addition, during the interview process, conversations ensued in which other themes emerged that were not aligned with a survey question. The themes that emerged were: Norm-Referenced Tests, Data, School Improvement, Professional Learning Communities, and Assessment, Curriculum, and Standards.**

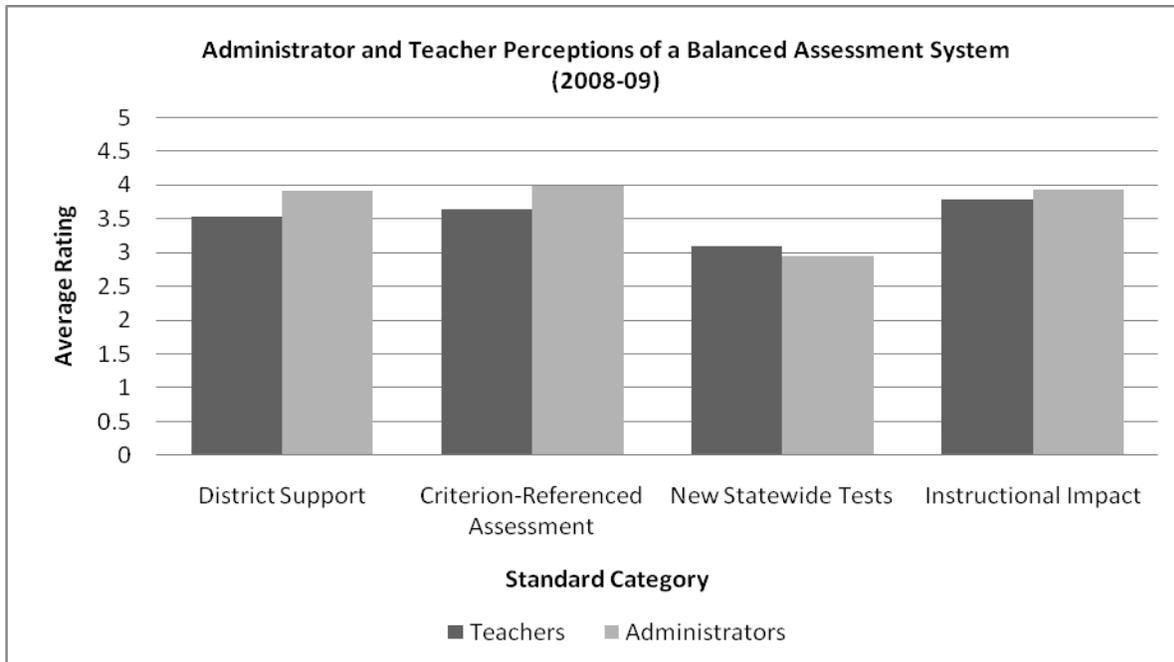


Figure 1. Survey of administrator and teacher perceptions of a balanced assessment system (2008-09).

### Theme 1: District Support

**In the category of District Support (Survey Questions 1-10), the average response for all teachers was 3.53. The average response for administrators was 3.91. There was a significant difference between administrator and teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ).**

The item rated strongest by both teachers (4.45) and administrators (4.64) within the District Support category was, “My district encourages a culture of continuous school improvement.”

The largest mean discrepancy between teachers and administrators in the category of District Support was, “My district has provided an adequate opportunity for me to learn about the new statewide reading test.” Teachers were more likely to rate this item “disagree” or “undecided” with an average response of 2.84, whereas administrators rated this item as “undecided” or “agree” with an average response of 3.59. Another inconsistency between teacher and administrator responses was, “My district provides adequate time to work collaboratively to review assessment results.” Teachers rated this item mainly as “undecided” with an average response of 3.09, whereas administrators rated this item primarily as either “agree” or “undecided” with an average response of 3.80.

**Administrator** responses in the category of District Support ranged from 1.80 to 5.00 with an average of 3.91. There was a significant difference found between rural (3.84) and non-rural districts (4.11), where rural districts rated the category “District Support” significantly lower than non-rural districts ( $p=.008$ ). Males rated the category 3.92, while females rated it 3.89. Administrators rated the survey item, “My district has identified an assessment philosophy regarding criterion-referenced assessment since the new state tests were approved,” the lowest with an average of 3.45, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*District Support Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings*

|                     | Administrators  | Teachers  |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Highest Mean Rating | 4.64<br>“My district encourages a culture of continuous school improvement”   | 4.45<br>“My district encourages a culture of continuous school improvement”                                     |
| Lowest Mean Rating  | 3.45<br>“My district has identified an assessment philosophy regarding criterion-referenced assessment since the new state tests were approved” | 2.84<br>“My district has provided an adequate opportunity for me to learn about the new statewide reading test” |

**Teachers** gave the category of district support an average rating of 3.53. Rural teachers rated the category of District Support 3.45, whereas non-rural teachers rated it higher at 3.62. Male teachers gave this category a 3.51 rating, and female teachers gave it a 3.53 rating. Teachers rated the item “My district requires teachers to be assessment competent” the highest of the category of District Support (4.04). Furthermore, teachers rated the item, “My district has provided an adequate opportunity for me to learn about the new statewide reading test” (2.84) the lowest in the category, as shown in Table 1.

The survey reliability statistic (Cronbach’s Alpha) for the category, District Support, was 0.880 for administrators and for teachers was 0.878.

### District Support Discussion

#### *Survey Items with Supporting Interview Quotes*

**Item 1: “My district has identified an assessment philosophy regarding criterion-referenced assessment since the new state tests were approved.” This item was rated by administrators as 3.45 and by teachers as 3.52.**

**Administrators** rated this item the lowest in the category of District Support. Rural administrators rated this item lower (3.32) than did non-rural administrators (3.78). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses ( $p=.030$ ). Males rated this item higher than did females, (3.60 and 3.23 respectively). There was a significant difference between male and female responses ( $p=.049$ ). Special Education (SPED), English Language Learners (ELL) and Educational Service Unit (ESU) administrators rated this item similar with the mean of 3.52. For superintendents, the mean was 3.38, elementary principals 3.68 and middle/high school principals 3.56.

**Teachers** rated this survey item 3.52 with rural teachers rating this item lower (3.36) than did non-rural teachers (3.68). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). Males rated this item similar to females (3.56 and 3.50 respectively). The item mean was 3.44 for language arts teachers, 3.38 for math teachers, 3.37 for science teachers, and 3.60 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean

for elementary teachers was 3.59, for middle school teachers was 3.40, and for high school teachers it was 3.48.

- A non-rural elementary special education coordinator said, “I don’t think it’s going to change our philosophy. We see it (new statewide tests) as another piece. It doesn’t mean that we’re doing less of them (Criterion-Referenced Tests [CRTs]). We’re still doing exactly what we’ve been doing instructionally and assessment-wise. Our teachers know what we’re doing works for kids and it’s best for our teachers and for our kids. So I don’t think that the statewide test will change that.”
- A rural secondary language arts teacher shared, “We’re talking about getting rid of ours (CRTs) completely. But I wouldn’t be surprised if some of the stuff that we test for becomes incorporated in the classroom in the sense that we’re still going to want to know the information that we got when we tested. But it won’t necessarily be something that we report to the state. It’ll be more a checks and balance for us.”
- A rural female special education coordinator declared, “I know some of the teachers thought with the statewide test that we could throw out all our STARS tests. We talked about how we’re still going to use those assessments. It’s just to monitor students’ progress. It’s an information gathering tool.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator declared the use of CRTs and STARS assessments will not change, “The vision of STARS was to take your classroom-based assessments and report them to the state. That’s what we did. Just because we’re not reporting to the state doesn’t mean we’re doing anything differently.”

**Item 2: “My district encourages a culture of continuous school improvement.” This item received the strongest response from teachers and administrators, with an average of 4.45 and 4.64, respectively.**

**Administrators**, both male (4.62) and female (4.67), rated this item similarly. Rural administrators (4.58) rated this item lower than did non-rural administrators (4.83) with a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses ( $p=.003$ ). For superintendents, the item mean was 4.79, while the mean for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators was 4.52. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.82 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.67.

**Teachers**, both males (4.38) and females (4.47), rated this item similarly while rural teachers rated this item lower (4.38) than did non-rural teachers (4.53). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.003$ ). The survey mean was 4.35 for language arts teachers, 4.46 for math teachers, 4.30 for science teachers, and 4.44 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.53, for middle school teachers was 4.44, and for high school teachers, 4.37.

- A rural female assessment coordinator shared a benefit of the statewide test, “The benefit to that (statewide test) will be [for] our current school improvement goal, improving reading comprehension across the curriculum. We don’t have any tests in place right now that can actually tell us if we have improved. We will be able to have

- each subject area have a reading test that mimics a reading assessment. We'll be able to use that data to know if our school improvement efforts are working.”
- A non-rural elementary principal shared, “We have a process which gets school improvement to every single teacher. They analyze results from this current year’s students and identify a goal based on those results. They look for areas of strength, they look for areas of weakness, and they identify a goal. It’s how you respond to students. It’s ‘How did you work the process of school improvement? Did you analyze your results? Did you make changes based on those results? Did you re-analyze and reflect and talk with your peers about what is next, what did you do, what can I study, what works?’ It’s a district-wide process.”
  - A non-rural special education coordinator shared, “Teachers are using those [CRTs], so we monitor that at a district level which then goes into your school improvement portfolio. You monitor that over years, look at trend data.”

**Item 3: “My district requires teachers to be assessment competent.” This item was rated high by both teachers and administrators with an average of 4.04 for teachers and 4.13 for administrators.**

**Administrators**, both male (4.15) and female (4.10), rated this item similarly. Rural and non-rural administrators also rated this item similarly (4.10 and 4.22, respectively). For superintendents the item mean was 4.21, while for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the item average was 3.93, the lowest rating among administrators. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.11 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.28.

**Teachers** scored this item as their second highest rated item in the category of District Support with an average rating of 4.04. Male teachers (4.02) rated this item similarly to that of females (4.03). Rural teachers rated this item lower than did non-rural teachers, 3.94 and 4.14, respectively. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). The survey mean was 3.88 for language arts teachers, 3.93 for math teachers, 3.91 for science teachers, and 3.96 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.18, a higher rating than high school teachers (3.89) and middle school teachers (3.98).

- A male rural superintendent shared, “One of the things that I think this (STARS) has done, even with the new teachers coming in, is that we have our teachers much more assessment literate. We grade our own skills test and exchange ideas professionally. The knowledge is helpful no matter what assessment process is being used.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator indicated, “One, we need to continue to provide our teachers with the expectation that we expect them to be lifelong learners and, two, we’re going to help them, give them time and support them. So bringing them the appropriate staff development opportunities that will help them become better teachers, providing them with more strategies, providing them with better insight into assessment, all of those pieces.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator emphasized the importance of teachers being involved in assessment discussions, “Every teacher serves on a professional learning community. All the teachers in our district serve on special learning communities

where they plan curriculum – long term planning, short term planning – they double-score assessments, and they look at students who are not successful from the data.”

**Item 4: “My district provided adequate opportunities for educators to learn about the new statewide reading test.” Teachers (2.84) rated this item lower than administrators (3.59), with a significant difference of  $p=.003$ .**

**Administrators**, both male and female, had a mean of 3.59 for this item. Furthermore, rural administrators (3.56) and non-rural administrators (3.67) rated this item similar. For superintendents the mean was 3.77, while for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the mean was 3.59. The mean was 3.32 for elementary principals and 3.60 for middle/high school principals.

**Teachers** rated this item the lowest in the category of District Support with an average rating of 2.84. Male teachers (2.86) rated this item similar to that of females (2.83). Furthermore, rural teachers (2.91) rated the item higher than did non-rural teachers (2.79). The item mean was 2.91 for language arts teachers, 2.76 for math teachers, 2.51 for science teachers, and 2.89 for SPED and ELL teachers. The mean for elementary teachers was 2.85, for middle school teachers 2.77, and for high school teachers 2.83.

- A rural female assessment coordinator shared, “We’ve kept them (staff) informed about what’s coming down the pike with the state test. We will be taking some staff (to the training) and I’ll be helping facilitate training at our service unit.”
- By contrast, a rural male principal shared that neither him nor his teachers know much about the tests at this time, “Not a whole lot to tell you the truth.”
- A rural male superintendent discussed using school improvement committees to keep teachers informed about the new statewide test, “Our school improvement team talks every Thursday morning before school. Then we have our reading, math, and science committees – the representative on the school improvement committee goes back and meets with them (teachers) and keeps them informed as to what we’re discussing and how we’re going to try to be prepared for the statewide tests.”
- In some districts, information is slow getting back to teachers, as shared by this rural female secondary language arts teacher, “I knew that we were going to have a new statewide test. But that’s as far as I knew.”
- A rural female elementary principal shared how teachers are becoming familiar with the new /revised reading standards in connection to the statewide test, “Whenever we’ve met, we’ve always looked at the different drafts of the reading standards. We’re using those and making teachers more familiar with those. I think that’s important.”

**Item 5: “My district continues to provide criterion-referenced assessment training.” Teachers responded with an average of 3.41 and administrators with 3.89.**

**Administrators** of rural schools rated the item significantly lower than did administrators of non-rural schools ( $p=.001$ ). The mean for rural administrators was 3.75 and the mean for non-rural administrators was significantly higher at 4.28. Male administrators completing

the survey responded with a rating of 3.91 and females with 3.87. For superintendents the item mean was 3.82, while for SPED, ELL and ESU administrators the mean was 3.85. For elementary principals the item mean was 3.89 and for middle/ high school principals the item mean was higher at 4.21.

**Teachers** in rural schools (3.27) rated this item lower than did teachers in non-rural schools (3.56). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). Male teachers completing the survey responded with an average of 3.48 and females 3.39. The survey mean was 3.36 for language arts teachers, 3.53 for math teachers, 3.17 for science teachers, and 3.31 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.42, for middle school teachers was 3.30, and for high school teachers 3.46.

- A non-rural elementary principal shared the benefit of teacher /team meetings regarding assessment training, “This is one of the best ways for professional development on assessments because you have discussions about assessments. Then the discussion is, ‘Was that the best way to assess those kids? Did that really give you the information that you wanted?’ So, those discussions become that assessment literacy component.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator shared, “The first part is reviewing those standards and making sure that our curriculum reflects those expectations. The second step is to continue to provide our staff with training on what is a quality assessment so that as they do their local formative work, they’re building assessments that really are the best that they can be. We’ve done that through our professional learning communities and we definitely have some work to do yet.”
- A rural male elementary principal shared, “We have a lot of in-service. Once a month we have either early out or late start. We usually have some kind of teacher in-service on various topics. A lot of those things that we come up with are based on the results we find from these tests.”

**Item 6: “My district plans to continue administering criterion-referenced assessments in my school.” Teachers rated this item as 3.95 and administrators rated the item 4.20.**

**Administrators** rated (4.20) this item the second highest item in the category of District Support. Male administrators and female administrators responded similarly at 4.23 and 4.16, respectively. Rural administrators rated this item significantly lower than did non-rural administrators ( $p=.004$ ), with a mean of 4.10 for rural and 4.48 for non-rural. For superintendents the item mean was 4.15 and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the mean was 4.22. For elementary principals the mean was 4.25 and for middle/ high school principals 4.30.

**Teachers** responded with ratings of 4.09 from males and 3.93 from females. Rural teachers (3.85) rated this item lower than did non-rural teachers (4.05). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). The item mean was 3.83 for language arts teachers, 3.94 for math teachers, 4.05 for science teachers, and 3.92 for

SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.98, similar to both middle school teachers (3.95) and high school teachers (3.97).

- A non-rural assessment coordinator shared, “Nothing will change. Our criterion-referenced assessments work for classroom use, for district use, for state reporting, for federal reporting. So, the only difference for us is we won’t report them anymore. Like the reading, for example next year we won’t report those same assessments to the state and federal. But we will continue to report them at the district level.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator stated, “The only change we’ll have is a new piece to share for improvement purposes in terms of school improvement and that will be the statewide reading test. So we’ll definitely look at that piece. But nothing else will change.”
- A non-rural elementary principal acknowledged, “I would say we will continue using them (CRTs) in the same way. We’ll just have one more data source.”

**Item 7: “My district involves all teachers in changes made to the assessment process.” This item had an average rating of 3.21 for teachers. Administrators responded with an average rating of 3.78. There was a significant difference between teachers and administrators (p=.000).**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated the question slightly lower (3.77) than did non-rural administrators (3.85), while males rated the item 3.79, similar to females (3.76). For superintendents the item mean was 3.85 and for SPED, ELL and ESU administrators the mean was 3.70. For elementary principals, the mean was 3.71, and for middle/high school principals it was 4.05.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated the item (3.22) similar to that of non-rural teachers (3.20). Male teachers rated this item with an average of 3.24 while the average female rating was 3.18. The item mean was 3.01 for language arts teachers, 3.24 for math teachers, 3.13 for science teachers, 3.16 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.27. Middle school teachers and high school teachers both rated the item 3.12.

- A non-rural elementary principal talks about their assessment system, “It’s totally teacher driven. Writing the assessments is part of that toolbox. In order to write and develop an assessment you have to understand assessments.”
- A non-rural elementary principal stated, “Right now we have spent last year and this year identifying best practices, ‘What does research say about it (language arts)? What are the standards? What are the state standards? What are the national standards?’ ‘What are those critical learnings? What is it that kids need to know?’ That becomes our framework. One of the last things we do then is identify the curriculum because we have to understand the framework of what we want. We talk about what’s best for kids and then the materials to support that. Assessment development is a huge component of that.”

**Item 8: “My district provides adequate time to work collaboratively to review assessment results.” This item was rated significantly lower for teachers (3.09) than for administrators (3.80) (p=.000).**

**Administrators** in rural schools (3.73) rated this item lower than did non-rural administrators (4.00) while males rated this 3.81, similar to females (3.79). For superintendents the item mean was 3.95 while for SPED, ELL and ESU administrators the mean was 3.67. Elementary principals rated the item similar to that of middle/high school principals (3.89 and 3.91 respectively).

**Teachers** in rural schools (2.95) rated this item significantly lower than did non-rural teachers (3.23). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses (p=.000). Male teachers rated this item with an average of 3.01 while the average female rating was 3.09. The survey mean was 2.82 for language arts teachers, 3.08 for math teachers, 2.72 for science teachers, and 3.23 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.19, for middle school teachers was 3.07, and for high school teachers was 3.12.

- A rural female elementary principal stated, “This year, when the teachers get together, the conversations have drastically improved in that they’re more focused on student learning. Teachers are beginning to share, ‘How do you teach this? How come your kids know this and mine don’t?’ I think they’re becoming a little bit more comfortable with that, not being so isolated and being able to share with others.”
- A rural female middle school language arts teacher shared, “The other eighth grade language arts teacher and I are very much a team in the sense that 99% of our assessments are the same assessments. We give the same tests. Several times a year we give the same writing assessment and we grade each others’ assessments and get feedback of what we are both doing well, or need to improve on.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator acknowledged, “Our goal is to have staff who work collaboratively to identify key ideas that kids need, and to write assessments. Then, measure those things and work collaboratively to figure out how to become better teachers. We’re trying to bring that collaborative culture to our district.”
- A rural female elementary principal acknowledged, “The way that we grade our CRTs is to have teachers grade them. I’ve always found it to be useful, even when I was a classroom teacher, because you had a lot of good discussion going on about how things could be taught or ‘this is something our kids don’t seem to know’ or ‘this is something they do really well at’. It gives teachers a chance to share ideas. Plus it gives you, as an individual classroom teacher, the ability to say ‘our kids don’t know this so we need to look back and change something’.”

**Item 9: “My district defines how statewide test data fits into effective teaching and learning.” There was a significant difference for teachers and administrators on this item (p=.000), with teachers rating this item 3.26 and administrators 3.63.**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item (3.59) lower than did non-rural administrators (3.72). Male administrators rated this item at 3.81 while females rated it at

3.61. For superintendents the item mean was 3.79, while for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the mean was 3.52. Elementary principals rated this item at 3.50 and middle/high school principals rated it at 3.58.

**Teachers** of rural schools rated this item (3.17) lower than did non-rural teachers (3.36). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.004$ ). Male teachers had an average rating of 3.15 and females responded with an average of 3.28. The item mean was 3.05 for language arts teachers, 3.17 for math teachers, 2.99 for science teachers, and 3.42 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, elementary teachers rated this item higher at 3.40 than both middle school teachers (3.19) and high school teachers (3.13).

- A rural female special education coordinator shared, “Our hope is you can test several times and know where kids are at. Hopefully, by the time they take the statewide tests we’ll already know where they’re at. How those are going to be aligned to each other, I don’t know, as we don’t know what’s going to be on the statewide test.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator discussed the discrepancy between local assessments and the statewide writing test, “When our teachers get the writing results back, they say, ‘Oh my goodness. We do not consider these students (who score proficient on the Statewide Writing Assessment) as proficient writers on our own assessments with our own cut score.’ So we understand that the statewide assessments are used for a different purpose, different audience, different stakeholders, and we take that into consideration. We don’t tell parents that these are proficient writers because our own district measure said that they are not.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator revealed, “Our current criterion-referenced tests, for STARS, will give us more information for teaching and learning. They will give us more specific information, we believe, than the new statewide tests.”

**Item 10: “My district defines how criterion-referenced assessment data fits into effective teaching and learning.” There was a significant difference between teachers and administrators ( $p=.000$ ), with teachers rating the item 3.52 and administrators 4.00.**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item (3.90) lower than did non-rural administrators (4.28). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural ( $p=.005$ ). Males rated this item at 3.94 while females rated it at 4.09. For superintendents the item mean was 4.15 and for SPED, ELL and ESU administrators the mean was 3.89. For elementary principals the mean was 4.11 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.95.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated this item (3.42) lower than did non-rural teachers (3.62). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.002$ ). Male and female teachers rated the item at 3.30 and 3.56 respectively. The item mean was 3.31 for language arts teachers, 3.45 for math teachers, 3.27 for science teachers, and 3.53 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.68, for middle school teachers was 3.45, and for high school teachers was 3.33.

- A male elementary principal indicated, “We take the data (CRT) pretty seriously. Everything is based on data, all the decisions we make. We use the data to plan our curriculum, make sure we’re covering the things we need to cover.”
- A male rural superintendent shared, “I think they’ll use those results to try and improve themselves and improve the school individually.”
- A rural elementary principal stated, “Our own criterion-referenced tests need to become extremely effective so that we’re sure that kids are learning skills. We can also administer those more often and frequently so that we get better feedback.”
- A rural female elementary principal explained, “Our assessments are what we look at to determine if we’re meeting our goals, if we’re making improvement, if we’re making progress. I still feel we can do a better job of that. I still think that we have a ways to grow in that area, so that assessment becomes more something that teachers really use to determine teaching decisions.”

## **Theme 2: Criterion-Referenced Assessment**

**In the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment (Survey Questions 11-21), the average response for all teachers was 3.65. The average response for administrators was 3.99. There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment (p=.000).**

Two items were rated high by all teachers and administrators within the Criterion-Referenced Assessment category. The first item, “Teachers modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on their criterion-referenced assessments” was rated by teachers as 4.16 and by administrators as 4.12. Additionally, the item, “Teachers use criterion-referenced assessment results to question, modify, and adjust their own teaching” was rated by teachers as 4.10 and at 4.02 by administrators.

In the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment the largest discrepancy between teachers and administrators was “Teaching has improved as a result of the use of criterion-referenced assessments.” Teachers were more likely to rate this item from “Undecided” to “Agree” with an average response of 3.35, whereas administrators’ average response was higher at 4.09. Another inconsistency between teachers and administrators was on the item, “Criterion-referenced assessments are helping students improve.” Teachers rated this item between “undecided” to “agree” with an average response of 3.36, whereas administrators showed stronger agreement with this item with an average response of 3.99.

**Administrator** responses in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment ranged from 1.82 to 5.00 on the Likert scale, with an average of 3.99. Administrators in rural schools rated this category an average of 3.90, while non-rural administrators rated it 4.22. This was a significant difference (p=.004). Males rated this item lower (3.90) than did females (4.11). The lowest rated item by administrators was “Test strategies are taught to prepare students for criterion-referenced assessments” (3.71), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Criterion-Referenced Assessment Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings*

|                     | Administrators   | Teachers  |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Highest Mean Rating | 4.12<br>“Teachers modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on their criterion-referenced assessments” | 4.16<br>“Teachers modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on their criterion-referenced assessments”                    |
| Lowest Mean Rating  | 3.71<br>“Test strategies are taught to prepare students for criterion-referenced assessments.”                                 | 3.24<br>“Administrators in my school/district communicate a clear vision for how to use criterion-referenced assessment results in the classroom” |

**Teacher** responses in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment had an average response of 3.65. Rural teachers rated the category 3.57, while non-rural teachers rated it higher at 3.72. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural districts in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessments ( $p=.000$ ). Males rated this category at 3.43 while females rated it 3.69. As shown in Table 2, the lowest rated question was “Administrators in my school/district communicate a clear vision for how to use criterion-referenced assessment results in the classroom” (3.24).

The survey reliability statistic (Cronbach’s Alpha) for the category, Criterion-Referenced Assessment, was 0.824 for administrators and for teachers was 0.884.

### **Criterion-Referenced Assessment Discussion**

#### *Survey Items with Supporting Interview Quotes*

**Item 11: “Teachers participate in learning teams to discuss criterion-referenced assessment in my school.” Administrators indicated an average rating of 4.04 for this question while teachers rated the item as 3.46.**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item lower (3.89) than did non-rural administrators (4.43). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses ( $p=.001$ ). Male administrators rated this item at 4.00 while females rated it at 4.09. For SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the mean was 3.81. For superintendents the item mean was 4.08, elementary principals 4.07, and middle/high school principals 4.30.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated this item (3.33) lower than did non-rural teachers (3.58). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.001$ ). Male teachers responded with an average of 3.39 and females 3.47. The mean was 3.36 for language arts teachers, 3.37 for math teachers, 3.46 for science teachers, and 3.24 for special education and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the mean for elementary teachers was 3.55, for middle school teachers was 3.50, and for high school teachers was 3.33.

- A male superintendent explained, “We spend time with PLCs (professional learning communities). We have half-day dismissal every month and we work on professional development. They work in their own departments and grade levels. We send people (25 people and 3 administrators) to the national PLC 2-day institute in summer.”
- A non-rural elementary principal stated, “It could be a combination of district assessments. It could be the state writing. It could be any assessment data. Then they work as a team to impact each other’s classroom performance.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator noted that reliability is a part of the learning team discussions, “We have double scoring in all of our professional learning communities, our teams. It’s part of their teamwork they do weekly. Our curriculum committees are looking at all the QCs (quality criteria). That’s good practice for assessment.”
- A non-rural female elementary principal explained the purpose of their learning teams, “(Teachers) analyze their assessments with their team and talk about the strengths and the weaknesses. From there, they set a goal. Then the team meets monthly. They brainstorm strategies and interventions and provide resources to each other to help impact that classroom goal that they have.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator indicated, “I think the knowledge base of our staff in terms of ‘what is a quality assessment, what are clear targets,’ they just didn’t have that as much as I would have liked. I think the way that the groups (PLCs) are clicking now seems to be pretty effective.”

**Item 12: “Criterion-referenced assessment will continue to be a part of classroom instruction in combination with the new statewide test.” There was an average rating of 3.82 for teachers and 4.12 for administrators for this item.**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item lower (4.02) than did non-rural administrators (4.41). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural ( $p=.007$ ) administrators. Male administrators rated this item as 4.15 and females as 4.09. For superintendents the item mean was 4.28 while SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators rated it as 3.96. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.29 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.07.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated this item as 3.76 and non-rural teachers rated it as 3.88. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.039$ ). Male teachers rated this item as 3.69 and females as 3.86. The survey mean was 3.86 for language arts teachers, 3.89 for math teachers, 3.65 for science teachers, and 3.66 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.92, for middle school teachers was 3.87, and for high school teachers it was 3.69.

- A non-rural assessment coordinator emphasized, “We use criterion-referenced assessments for reporting in our district. Those (CRTs) are our district assessments, assessments for the classroom, for grading, for parents, for reporting, for feedback. The only change is we won’t report them (now).”
- A rural female elementary principal shared her anxiety about too many assessments, “Are those common assessments going to become our criterion-referenced tests? I think there’s a fear with some teachers that there’s going to be too much testing.”

- A non-rural assessment coordinator revealed, “We use the XXX process. We develop our understanding of our objectives to begin with and then teachers on curriculum committees write common summative assessments to measure what students know and are able to do. We won’t be reporting those for STARS anymore. But we’ll still use those same assessments for district-based measures.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator stated, “I see it (the state test) being used similar to the way we use our NRT, as another piece of data. It doesn’t come back necessarily as quickly and it doesn’t give you diagnostic information. It really just gives you another snapshot in time, maybe for school improvement. I don’t know that it will be able to drive instruction like our CRTs do at the district level. It’s a different purpose than our CRTs, which are definitely for the teachers.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator explained, “I don’t see any difference. I think the teachers will continue to have conversations about the CRTs. The school improvement team uses the NRT data, which means that the building is looking at that data at the beginning of the school year and throughout.”

**Item 13: “Teachers modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on their criterion-referenced assessment.” This was the highest rated item by teachers and administrators, with an average rating of 4.16 and 4.12, respectively.**

**Administrators** rated this item 4.12, the highest rating in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment. Rural administrators rated this item lower (4.04) than did non-rural administrators (4.35). There was a significant difference ( $p=.006$ ) between rural and non-rural administrator ratings. Male administrators rated the item as 4.04 while females rated the item as 4.24. For SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators, the mean was 4.00. For superintendents the item mean was 4.21, elementary principals 4.32 and for middle/high school principals 4.07.

**Teachers** agreed or strongly agreed with this item, giving it an average of 4.16. This item was the highest-rated in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment. Furthermore, rural teachers rated this item lower (4.08) than did non-rural (4.24). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.001$ ). Male teachers responded with a mean of 3.92 and females 4.21. The item mean was 4.17 for language arts teachers, 4.05 for math teachers, 3.91 for science teachers, and 4.13 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.32, for middle school teachers was 4.15, and for high school teachers it was 3.97.

- A non-rural special education coordinator discussed how teachers use assessment results, “They are starting with the end in mind. ‘What do we want kids to end up knowing at the end? What skills and knowledge do they need to know?’ After the assessment is over, they do quite a bit of double scoring, have conversations about the scores, ‘If your kids understood this concept, how did you get that?’”
- A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “That’s what assessment is really all about: accurately measuring what it is we expect of kids and then using that performance data to make changes.”

- A non-rural male curriculum coordinator stated, “If students weren’t successful on the assessment, then they (teachers) need to re-teach the material and then re-assess the student. There needs to be a teaching component to address whatever they didn’t master, teachers shouldn’t just turn around and give them the test again.”
- A rural male superintendent emphasized, “We look at those (CRTs) to try to see where each student is to know where we need to work with them. Teachers use this information and as a school improvement committee we look over it to see any curriculum areas that we might need to be looking at.”
- A rural female high school language arts teacher shared that sometimes instructional strategies include working with individual needs, “I pull them in and say, ‘you didn’t do as well as I think you could have, so let’s look at this again and see what we can figure out.’ It could just have been a really bad morning at home, so they didn’t do well. I try as many different ways as I can without driving them crazy.”

**Item 14: “Teachers use criterion-referenced assessment results to question, modify, and adjust their own teaching.” The item responses showed agreement among teachers (4.10) and administrators (4.02).**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item as a 3.96 which was lower than non-rural administrator responses (4.17). Male administrator responses (3.92) were lower than were female (4.16) responses. There was a significant difference between male and female administrator responses ( $p=.025$ ). The item was rated as 4.00 by SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 4.05, for elementary principals 4.11 and for middle/high school principals 3.95.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated this item as 4.04 while non-rural responses were lower (4.17). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.008$ ). Male teachers rated the item a mean of 3.90 while females rated it as 4.15. The item mean was 4.11 for language arts teachers, 4.01 for math teachers, 3.88 for science teachers, and 4.07 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.24, for middle school teachers was 4.11, and for high school teachers it was 3.92.

- A rural female secondary language arts teacher shared, “With classroom assessments, we’d be looking at individual students, and with a norm-referenced test, we look at groups. We look at the data and try to figure out what populations are lacking in what areas, and what we can do school-wide, or at least in different grade levels.”
- A rural female middle school language arts teacher revealed, “(We) use data to assess whether or not we’re teaching it well, with the assumption that once the kids have it, they’ll be fine.”
- A rural female middle school language arts teacher shared, “Cross-teaming, aligning of curriculum, common assessments, actual reviewing of the data – that’s one of the things that we do. We’ll give a quiz and we’ll actually go, ‘How did they do? Was it a good test? Was this a good question?’ We noticed that on our last test practically every child missed one question. So we obviously didn’t teach it or it’s a bad

question. So we go back and look at what are we testing and why and what we need to do to make it a better assessment, a more accurate assessment.”

**Item 15: “Teachers in my school use criterion-referenced assessment data to develop interventions.” This item had an average rating of 3.74 for teachers and 3.97 for administrators.**

**Administrators** in rural schools (3.91) had a lower average rating for this item than did non-rural administrators (4.13) and male administrators (3.92) rated this item lower than did female administrators (4.04). The item mean was 3.93 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 4.10, for elementary principals 4.11, and for middle/high school principals 3.88.

**Teachers** in rural schools (3.57) had a lower average rating than did non-rural teachers (3.90). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). Male teachers responded with an average mean of 3.48 and females 3.79. The item mean was 3.45 for language arts teachers, 3.66 for math teachers, 3.31 for science teachers, and 3.81 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.97, for middle school teachers was 3.70, and for high school teachers it was 3.92.

- A rural male elementary principal stated, “Well, I think they (teachers) have taken what they’ve learned from the data and incorporated ways of teaching different theories to make sure it’s taught right. A lot of interventions are used for the kids.”
- A rural female special education coordinator shared, “Well one thing they do is measure if there’s going to be progression in the summer. That helps determine if school year services are necessary. At the elementary level, it helps determine if RTI is necessary.”
- A rural female elementary principal pointed out, “We wrote our assessments. Each group wrote their own norms. This year they’ve writing common assessments and getting some practice on what to do with that information when they get it (results) back. We are at the point where we need to really start looking at a more systematic approach to intervene with kids to create those interventions.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator explained, “Within our PLCs, we have a process that we call student interventions – they talk about students who are not successful. It’s not so much like the SAT (Student Assistance Team) process. We have that too, of course.”

**Item 16: “Teaching has improved as a result of the use of criterion-referenced assessments.” This item represents the largest rating discrepancy between teachers and administrators in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment, with an average rating of 3.35 for teachers and 4.09 for administrators.**

**Administrators** in rural schools had an average rating of 3.99, whereas non-rural administrators had an average rating of 4.35. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural administrators ( $p=.007$ ). There was a significant difference between male (3.98) and female responses (4.26) ( $p=.020$ ). The item mean was 4.26 for SPED, ELL, and

ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 4.21, for elementary principals 4.18, and for middle/high school principals 3.98.

**Teachers** in rural schools had an average rating of 3.37, while non-rural teachers had an average rating of 3.34 for this item. Male teachers responded with an average of 3.08 while female teachers rated this item as 3.41. The item mean was 3.21 for language arts teachers, 3.37 for math teachers, 2.88 for science teachers, and 3.22 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.52, for middle school teachers was 3.42, and for high school teachers it was 3.44.

- A rural female special education coordinator shared, “We look more at curriculum decisions also (as well as the criterion-referenced assessments): ‘Is there an area where we’re low? Is our curriculum matching that? Are we teaching that?’”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator stated, “Let’s talk as a team about the kids who are not successful in our classes. Did we move too quickly for them? It’s not the curriculum or the delivery that’s the problem so much. We were too fast.”
- A rural female high school language arts teacher admitted, “It’s been good for me, because I need to be held accountable, but I need to know how I will be held accountable. Rather than saying, the scores really count, this is [forcing] me to go back and make sure that we do this, and make sure that the kids can do this.”

**Item 17: “Criterion-referenced assessments are helping students improve.” This item yielded a difference in responses between teachers (3.36) and administrators (3.99).**

**Administrators** in rural schools had an average rating of 3.90 and non-rural administrators had an average rating of 4.22 while male administrators rated the item 3.87 and female administrators rated the item 4.16. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural ( $p=.011$ ) and male and female responses ( $p=.010$ ). The item mean was 4.15 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 4.08, for elementary principals the item mean was 4.00 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.88.

**Teachers** in rural schools had an average rating of 3.38 and non-rural teachers had an average rating of 3.36. Male teachers rated this item 3.15 and females 3.40. The item mean was 3.26 for language arts teachers, 3.25 for math teachers, 3.01 for science teachers, and 3.23 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.53, for middle school teachers was 3.42, and for high school teachers it was 3.01.

- A rural middle school language arts teacher shared, “We constantly check those (CRTs) to monitor who is improving and who isn’t, because our reading classes are actually leveled so there’s that fluid movement between those who need more help with certain skills.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “We have the curriculum aligned to the standards, so we feel confident we’ve been assessing on the standards over the course of the year. When we get to the state test, we should have pretty high confidence that our students are going to perform. We might have some that aren’t going to be proficient, but we should have a pretty good idea of who those kids are.”

- A rural female special education coordinator shared how her school would use criterion-referenced tests, “To show growth and compare our students. In special education we try to get good information on where their regular peers are to compare to where our special kids are. Where we’re lacking in our instruction, where they need more, where they’re doing good.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator shared, “The purpose of our district assessments is to give us meaningful information, to give students and parents meaningful information about our strengths and weaknesses for individual kids. If we keep our focus on the purpose, CRT data gives us what we need.”

**Item 18: “Criterion-referenced assessments are integrated into instruction and used to inform teaching and learning.” This item average for teachers was 3.90 and for administrators 4.12.**

**Administrators** in rural schools had an average rating of 4.04 for this item while non-rural administrators rated this item as 4.33. Male administrators rated the item as 4.03 and female administrators rated it as 4.24. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural ( $p=.011$ ) and male and female responses ( $p=.035$ ). The item mean was 4.04 for SPED, ELL and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 4.26, elementary principals 4.21 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.00.

**Teachers** in rural schools and non-rural teachers had an average rating of 3.90. Male teachers responded with an average rating of 3.65 and females 3.95. The item mean was 3.88 for language arts teachers, 3.80 for math teachers, 3.71 for science teachers, and 3.74 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.04, for middle school teachers was 3.95, and for high school teachers it was 3.03.

- A non-rural male assessment coordinator suggested, “(CRTs) should be embedded in your curriculum, should measure what you’re teaching. They shouldn’t be something separate. It’s not going to be an isolated skill here and there that we’re testing for. This is more of a summative type of assessment.”
- A rural male superintendent stated, “We look at those (CRTs) very closely now. I think in the past, every teacher used to get the print-out of their students and they would look and say ‘Language mechanics might be something we need to work on’. But now, we see the read-outs on our students’ reading and that helps us put them in groups. We are looking more at the progress they’re making each year.”

**Item 19: “Student achievement has improved at our school as a result of criterion-referenced assessments.” Teachers gave this item an average rating of 3.30 and administrators 3.92. There was a significant difference between teachers and administrators ( $p=.000$ ).**

**Administrators** in rural schools had an average rating of 3.84 and non-rural administrators had an average rating of 4.13. Male administrators returned an average rating of 3.77, whereas females had an average rating of 4.13. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural ( $p=.037$ ) and male and female responses ( $p=.004$ ). The item mean was

4.22 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 4.03, elementary principals was 4.00, and for middle/high school principals it was 3.74.

**Teachers** in rural schools had an average rating of 3.25 and non-rural teachers had an average rating of 3.35. Male teachers had an average rating of 2.95, while females had a higher average rating of 3.37. The item mean was 3.19 for language arts teachers, 3.12 for math teachers, 2.84 for science teachers, and 3.37 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.46, for middle school teachers was 3.42, and for high school teachers it was 3.67.

- A rural female assessment coordinator emphasized, “As soon as the kids are done with the test, you can go in and see how they did. We can have a class report, a student report, see what percentage of the class got a certain score.”
- A rural female elementary principal pointed out, “Our CRTs, the idea was more of a minimum requirement, so that all kids could pass them. That’s difficult for teachers when they try to create common assessments because they are still thinking in terms of ‘every child has to pass.’ So the purpose is changing to challenging kids. Keep those minimum requirements in there, but also be able to give kids an opportunity to demonstrate higher levels of learning.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator stated, “When they get to the statewide reading or the statewide writing, because our local assessments are a little more rigorous, we believe our students will do very well.”

**Item 20: “Administrators in my school/district communicate a clear vision for how to use criterion-referenced assessment results in the classroom.” For this item, teachers had an average rating of 3.24, while administrators rated it as 3.79. There was a significant difference between teachers and administrators (p=.000).**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item lower (3.70) than did non-rural administrators (4.02). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses (p=.020). Male administrators had an average rating of 3.70 and female administrators 3.91. The item mean was 3.67 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 3.95, elementary principals 3.96, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.81.

**Teachers** rated this item the lowest (3.24) of any item in the category of Criterion-Referenced Assessment. Male teachers had an average rating of 3.04 and females had an average rating of 3.26. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teachers (p=.000), where rural teacher ratings (3.01) were lower than non-rural ratings (3.46). The item mean was 2.92 for language arts teachers, 3.08 for math teachers, 3.00 for science teachers, and 3.31 for SPED and ELL teachers. The item mean for elementary teachers was 3.41, for middle school teachers was 3.24, and for high school teachers it was 3.00.

- A non-rural male assessment coordinator stated how the principals in his district get information to teachers, “Our office runs a lot of reports for principals. They say, ‘I

would like to look at my data this way,' so we'll run reports for them, give them some things to look at and think about. I know they're talking to their teachers about data."

- A rural female secondary language arts teacher shared the lack of direction in her school's use of criterion-referenced results, "I think we're going to still continue to have a portfolio of sorts, although that hasn't all been worked out, as far as local assessments and how we're giving those for the different standards. I'm not really sure how we're going to do that yet. Maybe we'll just have some kind of spreadsheet where we show how the kids have done in each area."

**Item 21: "Test strategies are taught to prepare students for criterion-referenced assessments." Teachers responded with an average rating of 3.68 and administrators had an average rating of 3.71.**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item 3.65 while non-rural administrators rated it 3.89. Male administrators rated this item 3.61 while female administrators rated it 3.86. There was a significant difference between male and female responses ( $p=.042$ ). The item mean was 3.70 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 3.82, elementary principals 3.79, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.72.

**Teachers** in rural schools responded with an average of 3.62 while non-rural teachers rated this item an average 3.74. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.047$ ). Male teachers (3.46) had a lower average rating compared to female teachers (3.73). The item mean was 3.63 for language arts teachers, 3.49 for math teachers, 3.69 for science teachers, and 3.73 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.82, for middle school teachers 3.68, and for high school teachers it was 3.53.

- A non-rural assessment coordinator emphasized, "We don't give any multiple choice tests because we want our students to generate their own thinking and their own answers, not pick someone else's. The teachers think about, 'how do we make sure they're ready for a multiple choice test and the thinking that comes along with that?'"
- A non-rural male high school language arts teacher stated his opinion that teaching test strategies should not be necessary at this level, "If it's something you're not doing, I think then something's wrong. Juniors should be able to do this sort of thing. I think we're already teaching those things."
- In contrast, a rural female high school language arts teacher stated her opinion, "When we get through it the first time then you know what the kids need to know. I took a certain piece of literature, and we talked about everything they needed to know. I told them why it was important, and we practice, practice, practice! I try to find out as much as I can of what our kids are going to be held responsible for. Then I think it's my job to say, 'this is what we need to know, this is why we need to know it, this is what we're going to do.'"

### Theme 3: New Statewide Tests

**In the category of New Statewide Tests (Questions 22-31) the average response for all teachers was 3.10 and for administrators was 2.94. There was a significant difference between administrator and teacher responses in the category of New Statewide Tests (p=.001).**

One of the strongest items rated by all teachers and administrators within the New Statewide Tests category was “Teachers will modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on the statewide tests,” The average rating for teachers on this item was 3.83 and for administrators 3.66.

There were several low rated items in the category of New Statewide Tests by both teachers and administrators. The lowest rated item was, “The statewide tests accurately measure what students know and can do.” Teachers and administrators were more likely to rate this item “Disagree” or “Uncertain” with an average of 2.59 and 2.49, respectively. Another item rated low by administrators and teachers was, “Student achievement will improve in our school as a result of statewide tests.” Teachers and administrators were more likely to rate this item “Disagree” or “Uncertain” with an average of 2.75 and 2.67, respectively.

**Administrator** responses ranged from 1.60 to 4.40 on the five-point Likert scale with an average of 2.94. Rural administrators rated this category (2.96) similar to non-rural administrators (2.89). Male administrators rated this similar to females, with an average of 2.96 and 2.90 respectively. The lowest rated item by administrators in this category was, “Statewide tests will replace the use of criterion-referenced assessments in our schools” (2.46), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
*New Statewide Tests Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings*

|                     | Administrators   | Teachers   |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Highest Mean Rating | 3.66<br>“Teachers will modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on the statewide tests” | 3.83<br>“Teachers will modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on the statewide tests” |
| Lowest Mean Rating  | 2.46<br>“Statewide tests will replace the use of criterion-referenced assessments in our schools”                | 2.59<br>“The statewide tests accurately measure what students know and can do”                                   |

**Teachers** rated this category an average of 3.10. They rated the item “The statewide tests accurately measure what students know and can do” the lowest in the category of New Statewide Tests (2.59), as shown in Table 3. Another low-rated item was, “Administrators in my school/district have communicated a clear vision for how statewide test results will be used in the classroom (2.69).” Rural teachers rated the entire category an average of 3.10 and non-rural teachers as 3.09. Male teachers rated this category as 2.94 and females as 3.12.

The survey reliability statistic (Cronbach's Alpha) for the category, New Statewide Tests was 0.904 for administrators and for teachers was 0.828.

### **New Statewide Tests Discussion**

#### *Survey Items with Supporting Interview Quotes*

**Item 22: “Statewide tests will replace the use of criterion-referenced assessments in our school.” Teachers and administrators indicated that they disagreed with this item, which had an average rating of 2.71 for teachers and 2.46 for administrators. There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers for this item (p=.002).**

**Administrators** rated this item the lowest in the category of New Statewide Tests with an average rating of 2.46. Male administrators rated this item with an average of 2.41 while females rated it 2.54. Rural administrators rated the item higher (2.50) than did non-rural (2.35) administrators. The item mean was 2.56 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 2.44, elementary principals 2.36, and for middle/high school principals, the mean was 2.51.

**Teachers** rated this item low with an average mean of 2.71. Male and female teachers responded similarly at 2.79 and 2.70, respectively; rural teachers rated this higher (2.83) than did non-rural teachers (2.61). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses (p=.000). The item mean was 2.76 for language arts teachers, 2.72 for math teachers, 2.88 for science teachers, and 2.77 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 2.71, for middle school teachers was 2.70, and for high school teachers it was 2.71.

- A non rural elementary principal stated, “It will become one more piece of our data sources, same as we use our district assessments, our state writing, our NRTs. It will just be one more piece of that data puzzle as we look at programs for kids.”
- A rural male superintendent shared how the addition of a new statewide test will not necessarily change how assessments are used, “Ideally, we’re going to have our classroom assessments, our norm-referenced testing, and the statewide test. It goes back to the triangulation of data. It should come out the same. If we show a deficiency in an area, then we need to figure it out and address it.”
- A rural female language arts teacher suggested using statewide test data to substitute for CRTs, “I assume I’ll use them in the same way. I think it’s going to change the amount of time that’s taken during the year out of my day with my students. Before, I really spent a lot of time writing or rewriting assessments. I’m really hoping the way it changes is now I can actually teach the students and then they’ll have a quick assessment that’ll tell me how they did or how much they’ve learned.”

**Item 23: “Teachers will modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on the statewide tests.” This was one of the strongest-rated items in the category of New Statewide Tests by both teachers (3.83) and administrators (3.66). There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers for this item (p=.015).**

**Administrators** rated this item the highest of all items in the category New Statewide Tests with an average rating of 3.66. Male administrators rated this item 3.72 while females rated this as 3.57. Rural administrators rated this with an average rating of 3.69 and non-rural 3.63. The item mean was 3.70 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 3.64, elementary principals 3.61, and for middle/high school principals 3.70.

**Teachers** rated this item the highest of all items in the category New Statewide Tests with an average rating of 3.83. Rural teachers rated this item as 3.85 while non-rural teacher ratings averaged 3.80. Male teachers rated this item 3.62 and female 3.87. The item mean was 3.79 for language arts teachers, 3.90 for math teachers, 3.64 for science teachers, and 3.89 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.94, for middle school teachers was 3.81, and for high school teachers it was 3.71.

- A rural female assessment coordinator shared, “I’m hoping we can continue to take that state data and say ‘these kids were not successful. Let’s try to figure out, based on other data points that we have, what we can do as either an instructional strategy or some program materials, what we are going to do to help this student get better.’”
- A rural female middle school language arts teacher questioned how teachers will be able to use a state test to modify instructional strategies, “That’s the one thing I am slightly worried about. Our tests were written so they read an article and then they had to go back and actually find things from the article and formulate an idea and respond to it. That required them to do a lot of higher level thinking skills. We have the rubric and we can look at ‘did they have these certain things?’ But when it comes to a standardized test, I think the state test is going to be a lot more of those basic language arts skills, which I think we get from the Terra Nova test.”

**Item 24: “Teachers will use statewide test results to question, modify, and adjust their teaching.” This was an item with which both teachers (3.75) and administrators (3.57) agreed. There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers in this item (p=.009).**

**Administrators** agreed with this item and rated it 3.57. Male administrators (3.61) rated this item higher than did females (3.51), while the average ratings for rural (3.59) and non-rural (3.57) administrators was similar. The item mean was 3.48 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 3.46, elementary principals 3.54, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.77.

**Teachers** responded to this item with an average rating of 3.75. Male teachers rated this item with an average of 3.52 while females responded with a mean of 3.81. Rural (3.79) and non-rural (3.72) teachers rated this item similarly. The item mean was 3.75 for language arts teachers, 3.84 for math teachers, 3.61 for science teachers, and 3.76 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.87, for middle school teachers was 3.71, and for high school teachers it was 3.63.

- A rural female elementary principal stressed, “I think it’s different to have to prepare for a test that’s administered by the state than one that’s administered by our own district. There’s more apprehension because we haven’t really seen it yet. We don’t know how our students are going to do. It’s making us review our essential skills.”
- A rural male elementary principal challenged the possibility of any changes in teaching due to statewide test results, “I don’t think the results are going to change what we do. It’s just a different process. They’ll take the data, and we’ll adjust from there.”
- A rural female elementary principal emphasized that if it is important enough to be on the statewide test, it should be taught, “The things that are in the statewide test should be things that are taught in classrooms. Those kinds of assessments should be helping us decide what we need to teach more of, what we need to teach less of, and who needs what. That leads us into more differentiation.”

**Item 25: “Teachers will use statewide test data to develop interventions.” Teachers average rating was 3.58 and administrators’ average rating was 3.35. There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers for this item (p=.002).**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item the same as did non-rural administrators (3.35) while male administrators (3.45) rated this higher than did female administrators (3.20). The item mean was 2.81 for SPED, ELL and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 3.21, elementary principals 3.43, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.72.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated this item as 3.52 and non-rural teachers rated it as 3.64. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses (p=.016). Male teachers (3.47) rated this item lower than did female teachers (3.61). The item mean was 3.49 for language arts teachers, 3.56 for math teachers, 3.32 for science teachers, and 3.68 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.71, for middle school teachers was 3.57, and for high school teachers it was 3.44.

- A rural female assessment coordinator shared, “The beauty of the state test is we have a pretty good idea of what areas of vocabulary were tested. So although we won’t know that Joe missed number seven and that was a semantic relationship question, we do know that Joe didn’t do well on vocabulary, and it was assessed on semantic relationships, context clues, and word parts. We can begin to return to those students who are not proficient and build in some interventions.”

**Item 26: “Statewide tests will help students improve.” This item was rated an average of 2.85 by all teachers. Administrators rated the item 2.62. There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers in the category of New Statewide Tests (p=.002).**

**Administrators** rated this item with an average of 2.62. Male administrators rated this item with an average of 2.63 while female teachers’ average rating was 2.60. Rural teachers rated this item 2.65 and non-rural teachers rated it 2.59. The item mean was 2.37 for SPED, ELL,

and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 2.69, elementary principals 2.82, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 2.63.

**Teachers** in rural schools (2.86) rated this item similar to non-rural teachers (2.84), while males rated this item as 2.62 and females 2.89. The item mean was 2.77 for language arts teachers, 2.72 for math teachers, 2.64 for science teachers, and 2.89 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 2.98, for middle school teachers was 2.87, and for high school teachers it was 2.64.

- A rural female middle school language arts teacher shared, “It’s going to be very interesting to see what we get back from that (the statewide test). With the Terra Nova, we get sort of a holistic ‘this is the 8<sup>th</sup> grade’ kind of thing. I’ll be very interested to see how the state’s data from that test looks.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator shared the various needs for statewide test results, “I think the biggest question is, what is the level of our students’ reading and writing? For writing, it’s a minimum competency cut score. So when we look at it for programming purposes, or for diagnostic kinds of purposes, it doesn’t work because what it tells us is that 99% of our students at the high school level were proficient in state writing. We understand that is a minimum competency level of writing. That’s what the state needs.”
- A rural female secondary language arts teacher shared, “I don’t think they get as much as they got before. I think it’s more teaching to the test and not being able to grow, go from one thing to the next and experience the connection that they have.”

**Item 27: “The statewide tests accurately measure what students know and can do.” This was the lowest rated item in this category by teachers and administrators (2.59 and 2.49 respectively).**

**Administrators**, both rural (2.48) and non-rural (2.54), rated this item low. Male administrators rated this item with an average of 2.51 and females 2.46. The item mean was 2.22 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents, the item mean was 2.59, elementary principals 2.64, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 2.44.

**Teachers** rated this item as the lowest in the category New Statewide Tests with an average of 2.59. All male teachers (2.51) and female teachers (2.64), rural (2.58) and non-rural (2.60) teachers rated this item between “Disagree” and “Uncertain”. The item mean was 2.51 for language arts teachers, 2.62 for math teachers, 2.53 for science teachers, and 2.55 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 2.63, for middle school teachers was 2.63, and for high school teachers it was 2.46.

- A rural female middle school language arts teacher indicated, “I think the way our test was written and the way the state test is written, they’re going to be testing completely different skills. Our test was a massive writing test. They were writing paragraphs and actual essay responses to questions. I could see things that I don’t think I’ll necessarily be able to see on a multiple-choice test.”

- A rural female elementary principal stated, “I think that it’s a check. ‘Are we teaching kids what they need to know? Are we giving kids the opportunity to learn what they need to know?’ I don’t think that it’s going to be like State Writing – it doesn’t give a lot of individual student feedback for individual skills. But I think it’s an overall check.”
- A rural female elementary principal shared, “I think it (a statewide test) would be applicable across the state. A test is limiting in certain ways because you have to present it in a form that is possible to grade and correct. In some ways, it doesn’t allow for different kinds of demonstrations of learning.”

**Item 28: “The implementation of statewide tests will help our school improve.” This was another item rated low by teachers (2.82) and administrators (2.67) in the category New Statewide Tests.**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item (2.58) lower than did non-rural administrators (2.70). This item was rated with an average of 2.73 by male administrators and 2.59 by females (2.59). The item mean was 2.44 for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators. For superintendents the item mean was 2.82, elementary principals 2.82, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 2.63.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated this item slightly higher (2.83) than did non-rural teachers (2.81). Male administrators rated this item an average of 2.58 while females rated this item as 2.86. The item mean was 2.78 for language arts teachers, 2.75 for math teachers, 2.64 for science teachers, and 2.90 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 2.93, for middle school teachers was 2.84, and for high school teachers it was 2.65.

- A rural female assessment coordinator reflected, “I’ve been fortunate to be involved in the writing of the state reading test. That’s been positive for our district because I’ve been able to bring that back. I think the idea of the state test was scary to some people. I think what it’s done, though, has brought to light that we need to make sure we’re measuring students statewide on a common set of standards. We can also continue to do work in districts that provide formative information as well as summative information for our local curriculum.”
- A rural male superintendent shared, “To me, we should see how our kids scored locally on our curriculum. We’ll use it (new statewide test) just like Terra Nova, to see how our kids performed and where we need to improve.”
- A rural male superintendent stated, “Well the biggest things right now with the statewide tests are just to know that you’ve got to give it and how important it is for us to do well. I’m hoping it’s an indicator of how our students are doing. I’m not sure it’s going to be an indicator of that, but it’s supposed to be. I think our assessments were a lot better than what the statewide test is going to be.”

**Item 29: “Student achievement will improve in our school as a result of statewide tests.” Teachers rated this item with an average of 2.75 and administrators 2.67.**

**Administrators** in rural schools rated this item slightly lower (2.68) than did non-rural administrators (2.70). Male administrators rated this item an average of 2.72 while females rated this item as 2.60. For superintendents the item mean was 2.79, while for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators it was 2.52. For elementary principals the item mean was 2.79, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 2.77.

**Teachers** in rural schools rated this item lower (2.60) than did non-rural teachers (2.77). Male teachers rated this item an average of 2.55 while females rated it as 2.79. The item mean was 2.70 for language arts teachers, 2.68 for math teachers, 2.57 for science teachers, and 2.83 for SPED, and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 2.85, for middle school teachers was 2.77, and for high school teachers it was 2.59.

- A non-rural elementary principal shared advantages of the way data is now compiled for the state test, “They’re now pulling (out) mobility data. Mobility may not mean anything to some of the other buildings. But now I can disaggregate and say, ‘Okay, what is my proficiency level for my kids who are mobile?’ So now, we can compare to other Title I buildings.”

**Item 30: “Administrators in my school/district have communicated a clear vision for how statewide test results will be used in the classroom.” Teachers rated this item an average of 2.69 and administrators rated it 2.73.**

**Administrators** in rural districts (2.77) rated this item higher than did non-rural administrators (2.61). Male administrators rated this item the same as females (2.73). For superintendents the item mean was 2.69 and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators it was 2.41. For elementary principals the item mean was 2.75, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 2.91.

**Teachers** (2.69) rated this item lower than did administrators. Male teachers (2.63) rated this item slightly lower than did female teachers (2.69) while rural teachers rated it lower (2.60) than did non-rural (2.77) teachers. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.007$ ). The item mean was 2.59 for language arts teachers, 2.53 for math teachers, 2.52 for science teachers, and 2.89 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 2.72, for middle school teachers was 2.69, and for high school teachers it was 2.65.

- A rural female assessment coordinator pointed out, “The state test will be used in the same way. We’ll hopefully be able to do a little bit of analysis of which kids weren’t successful. ‘Does that triangulate with the success that they’re having on formative assessments and NRTs?’ Because if it does, then we know that this student is really low. But if we have kids who are not successful on the state assessment, but are on the NRT and our local formative assessment, that helps us hone in on this child. We know it’s (new statewide test) also very limited in what it can tell us.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator stated, “That’s part of what our curriculum writers are trying to figure out. One of the things that we see in our job is making sure that teachers are well informed so that they’re not nervous about it (the

statewide test). I think that the amount of emphasis that you put on something also communicates something to your teachers, so we don't want to over-emphasize."

- A rural male superintendent explained that curriculum alignment is one of the elements on administration evaluations, "I meet with my principals and one of the things on their evaluation is curriculum alignment. In the elementary, I am a little concerned that teachers use different phonics series, but we have one that is established for the school. They're used to doing things their own way. So I directed my elementary principals to report on what they're using in all subjects and make sure teachers are utilizing it (the school's established series) so we can align K-12."

**Item 31: "Test strategies are taught to prepare students for the new statewide tests." The average response for teachers on this item was 3.41 and for administrators 3.15. There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers in the category New Statewide Tests (p=.001).**

**Administrators** in rural districts (3.25) rated this item significantly higher than did non-rural administrators (2.89). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses (p=.021). Male administrators (3.10) rated this item lower than did female administrators (3.23). For superintendents the item mean was 3.23 and for SPED, ELL and ESU administrators, it was 3.19. For elementary principals the item mean was 3.00, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.14.

**Teachers** in rural districts (3.45) rated this item slightly higher than did non-rural teachers (3.38). Male teachers rated this item as 3.18 while female teachers rated it as 3.46. The item mean was 3.47 for language arts teachers, 3.37 for math teachers, 3.24 for science teachers, and 3.49 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.47, for middle school teachers was 3.40, and for high school teachers it was 3.33.

- A rural female assessment coordinator shared, "In other subject areas outside of reading, I would like building-wide assessment items that mimic the reading assessment since there is so much informational text on the state test. I would like to have test items that measure reading comprehension of subject area."
- A rural female secondary language arts teacher suggested, "It's (the statewide test) all objective. It's going to be multiple-choice and not essay. So it's difficult to come up with questions that are higher order thinking."
- A rural female assessment coordinator reflected upon the importance of understanding and following directions when taking an assessment, "One thing came down to just following directions better. That was an area that every single middle school teacher, no matter what they taught, could implement strategies to improve. I think we're going to see good results when they take any test again."

#### **Theme 4: Instructional Impact**

**In the category of Instructional Impact (Questions 32-41) for all teachers, the average mean response was 3.79. The average mean response for administrators was 3.94. There was a significant difference between administrators and teachers in the category Instructional Impact (p=.003).**

One of the strongest items rated by all teachers and administrators within the Instructional Impact category was “My district holds high achievement standards for all students” with teachers rating this item an average of 4.34 and administrators rating it an average of 4.43. Another high rated item was, “Teachers in my district/school are responsible for weaving assessment into instruction” with teachers rating this with an average of 4.21 and administrators 4.17.

In the category Instructional Impact, the largest discrepancy between teachers and administrators was, “Administrators in my school/district assist teachers in making instructional decisions based on multiple types of assessment data.” Teachers rated this item between “Uncertain” and “Agree” with an average response of 3.33, whereas administrators showed agreement with this item by rating it 4.00. Another discrepancy between teachers and administrators was on the item, “New teachers in my school/district are involved in curriculum review so they better understand how curriculum, assessment, and school improvement are aligned.” Teachers rated this item between “Uncertain” and “Agree” with an average response of 3.25, whereas administrators generally agreed with this item with an average response of 3.92.

**Administrators** rated items in the category Instructional Impact from 1.20 to 5.00 with an average of 3.94 on the five-point Likert scale. Male administrators rated this category an average of 3.89, while the mean for female administrators was 4.00. Rural administrators rated this category an average of 3.89, while non-rural administrators rated it as 4.05.

One of the items rated strongest by all administrators within the Instructional Impact category was “My district holds high achievement standards for all students” (4.43). The item rated lowest by administrators was, “Administrators and teachers focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences” (3.35), as shown in Table 4.

**Teachers** rated the category of Instructional Impact an average mean of 3.79. Male teachers rated this category with an average of 3.71, while female teachers rated it an average of 3.80. The mean for rural teachers was 3.79, and for non-rural teachers it was 3.85.

Table 4  
*Instructional Impact Highest and Lowest Mean Ratings*

|                     | Administrators   | Teachers   |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Highest Mean Rating | 4.43<br>“My district holds high achievement standards for all students”  | 4.34<br>“My district holds high achievement standards for all students”  |
| Lowest Mean Rating  | 3.35<br>“Administrators and teachers focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences” | 3.04<br>“Administrators and teachers focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences” |

One of the items rated strongest by all teachers within the Instructional Impact category was “My district holds high achievement standards for all students,” (4.34). Another highly rated item was, “Teachers in my district/school are responsible for weaving assessment into instruction” (4.21). The lowest rated item in this category was, “Administrators and teachers focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences” (3.04), as shown in Table 4.

The survey reliability statistic (Cronbach’s Alpha) for the category Instructional Impact was 0.860 for administrators and 0.853 for teachers.

### **Instructional Impact Discussion**

#### *Survey Items with Supporting Interview Quotes*

**Item 32: “My district holds high achievement standards for all students.” This item was the strongest rated item of the Instructional Impact category, with an average rating of 4.34 from teachers and 4.43 from administrators.**

**Administrators** rated this item the highest for all items in the category of Instructional Support with an average rating of 4.43. Male administrators rated this slightly lower (4.28) than did female administrators (4.66). Rural administrators rated this item 4.31, while non-rural administrators rated it 4.78. There was a significant difference between the ratings of rural and non-rural administrators ( $p=.000$ ) and male and female administrators ( $p=.000$ ). For superintendents the item mean was 4.31 and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administration the item mean was 4.44. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.75, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.53.

**Teachers** rated this item the highest of all items in Instructional Impact with an average rating of 4.34. Male teachers rated this item with an average of 4.22 while females rated this higher at 4.36. Rural teachers (4.21) rated this item lower than did non-rural teachers (4.46). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). The item mean was 4.21 for language arts teachers, 4.19 for math teachers, 4.16 for science teachers, and 4.37 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.50, for middle school teachers was 4.30, and for high school teachers it was 4.13.

- A rural female assessment coordinator explained how they use data to enhance student achievement, “We give data back to teachers to say, ‘In this quarter, we were going to teach these three skills. How have the kids done with those skills? What are we going to do with those kids who aren’t getting it? Do we have high enough expectations? Are they too high?’ We adjust instruction to be a good balance.”
- A rural female special education coordinator stated, “We want them to all be proficient or advanced. I look at the starting point and ending point a little bit differently because I’m special education. Of course we want all our kids to have the same goal: to be proficient or advanced. So if those kids aren’t progressing, you need to see why or what needs to be different.”

- A rural female middle school language arts teacher emphasized, “I look at the results, I look at how students do holistically and individually. We evaluate, revise – we ‘tweak’ the tests and instruction. We’ll go back if we realize that everyone didn’t get something or even a majority of the kids don’t get something. We’ll go back and hit that skill again to make sure that they get it.”

**Item 33: “Teachers in my district/school understand and apply the principles of sound grading practices.” Teachers provided an average rating of 3.98 for the item while administrators provided an average rating of 3.84. There was a significant difference between administrator and teacher responses to this item (p=.045).**

**Administrators** in rural districts (3.80) rated this item slightly lower than did non-rural administrators (3.93). Male administrators rated this item an average of 3.78 while female administrators rated this item as 3.91. For superintendents the item mean was 3.85 and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators, the item mean was 3.52. For elementary principals, the item mean was 3.82 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.07.

**Teachers**, both male and female, rated this item similarly (4.00 and 3.97 respectively). Rural teachers rated this item slightly lower (3.95) than did non-rural teachers (4.02). The item mean was 3.84 for language arts teachers, 3.96 for math teachers, 3.85 for science teachers, and 3.90 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.07, for middle school teachers was 3.97, and for high school teachers it was 3.85.

- A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “Some superintendents believed that it wasn’t the teachers who should worry about the six quality criteria. My perspective as a teacher is, I wanted to know all those things and I wanted to be responsible for making assessments that matched those things. There are assessments to be given and it’s not dependent on the teachers’ ability to grade it right, but on the items being appropriate and reliable.”
- A rural female middle school language arts teacher shared her grading philosophy, “I retest, retest, retest. I give them the higher grade. I don’t average because I want their grade to reflect what they know. So if they didn’t get it, sometimes even if they didn’t prepare because they’re 13 and that’s what they do, I want their grade to show what they know. So I give them the grade that they earn.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator shared, “I work a little bit with double-scoring. We have an after school session coming up where it’s double-scoring across the district, making sure that we’re scoring pretty consistently across the district.”

**Item 34: “Teachers in my district/school are responsible for weaving assessment into instruction.” This was the second-strongest item in the Instructional Impact category. The average rating for teachers was 4.21 and for administrators the average rating was 4.17.**

**Administrators** rated this item high with rural administrators rating the item at 4.11 and non-rural administrators at 4.33. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses (p=.032). Male administrators rated this item an average of 4.10 while female

administrators rated it as 4.27. For superintendents the item mean was 4.10 and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administration the item mean was 4.00. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.39, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.28.

**Teachers** rated this item as the second strongest item in the Instructional Impact category (4.21). Male teachers (4.16) rated this item slightly lower than did females (4.21), while rural teachers rated this item as 4.12 and non-rural teachers rated it as 4.29. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). The item mean was 4.18 for language arts teachers, 4.18 for math teachers, 4.15 for science teachers, and 4.13 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.25, for middle school teachers was 4.23, and for high school teachers it was 4.12.

- A rural female middle school language arts teacher shared an example of assessments impacting instruction, “I noticed that a majority of them were still messing up on how to use quotation marks. I went back and revisited how you use quotation marks. That was one of the benefits of grading the tests. In previous years, I noticed a lack of sentence fluency in their writing. So then you go back and you hit those skills.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator pointed out the advantages of weaving assessments into classroom instruction, “We take a look and see which kids are having a little bit of trouble. It’s very hard to fall through the cracks (in a small school). We see if the classroom teacher can give them individualized instruction. It really helps to see where their strengths are and play on those strengths.”
- A rural female elementary principal shared her hope for improving instruction, “My hope is that all teachers really begin to meld the assessment process more into the learning process.”

**Item 35: “Curriculum is aligned to the revised state standards.” This item had an average rating of 3.91 for teachers and 3.85 for administrators.**

**Administrators** in rural districts (3.81) and non-rural (3.93) districts rated this item similarly. Male administrators (3.90) rated this item higher than did female administrators (3.77). For superintendents the item mean was 3.92 and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the mean was 4.00. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.11, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.91.

**Teachers** in rural (3.92) and non-rural districts (3.89) rated this item similarly, as did male (3.92) and female (3.90) teachers. The item mean was 3.98 for language arts teachers, 3.72 for math teachers, 4.21 for science teachers, and 3.73 for SPED, and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.92, for middle school teachers was 3.89, and for high school teachers it was 3.92.

- A rural female elementary principal stated, “Having new state standards and a state test is causing us to take a good look at things. That’s a very positive thing about it: it’s causing us to make sure that we’re aligned with what kids need to know.”

- A rural elementary principal shared, “We want to be aligned with the state standards. We want to make sure that we are teaching what kids are going to be tested on. We don’t want kids to be tested on things that they haven’t had the opportunity to learn.”
- A rural female middle school language arts teacher shared, “As a department, we’ve looked at the new standards and asked, ‘Do we need to change curriculum?’ (We needed) a little bit more fine tuning of what we had, which I appreciate. Instead of having three standards, they’ve made it all one very specific standard. Thank you! It’s nicer and a lot more teacher friendly.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “We started our focus with the reading and English/Language Arts speaking and listening, because that’s the first one (statewide test) that’s coming out. That was the best place for us to begin our revision to our own local standards, to adopt the state standards, and revise our curriculum guides. We’ve had a team of elementary folks who’ve been involved in revising our local curriculum guide to reflect the state standards.”

**Item 36: “Teachers record the standards when teaching to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn.” This item had an average rating of 4.07 for teachers and 4.14 for administrators.**

**Administrators** rated this item high with an average rating of 4.14. Male administrators (4.06) rated this item lower than did female administrators (4.26) and rural administrators rated it lower (4.12) than did non-rural administrators (4.20). For superintendents the item mean was 4.18, and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators it was 3.93. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.25, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.16.

**Teachers** in rural districts rated this item higher (4.15) than did non-rural teachers (3.99). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.003$ ). Male teachers (3.98) rated this item lower than did female teachers (4.10). The item mean was 4.07 for language arts teachers, 4.18 for math teachers, 4.16 for science teachers, and 3.78 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.14, for middle school teachers was 4.10, and for high school teachers it was 3.96.

- A rural male elementary principal stated, “The teachers put right on their lesson plans what standard their lesson is going to cover. We require that so that they’re fully aware of what they’re doing and why they’re doing it!”
- A rural female special education coordinator shared the significance of curriculum and standards, “You know that you’ve got purpose of teaching and what you’re working towards. It used to be that what you taught was dictated by whatever reading or math series you bought. Now you’re more focused on getting to the standard and you all have the same goal. So it’s changed teaching a lot, I feel, for the better.”
- A rural male superintendent explained that teachers appear to know the standards for their lessons even though it may not be documented, “I observed a math teacher yesterday and she shared with me the fifty different concepts that they are going to cover and the different standards that they apply to. They’re not necessarily turning them in on a lesson plan, but she knew where she was at with it.”

- A rural female English teacher shared, “Each assignment, plan, or activity is tied to a standard number. We as teachers put the number with it. Every activity and assignment is tied to at least one, and usually more than one standard number. Teachers can say what they are doing tomorrow and what standard goes with that.”

**Item 37: “Students in my district/school are involved in understanding their own progress and achievement status,” was another item in the Instructional Impact category. Teachers had an average rating of 3.65 and administrators had an average of 3.71.**

**Administrators** in rural districts rated this item significantly lower (3.64) than did non-rural administrators (3.91). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses ( $p=.050$ ). Male administrators rated this item lower (3.65) than did female administrators (3.80). For superintendents the item mean was 3.69, for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the item mean was 3.44. For elementary principals, the item mean was 3.96, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.91.

**Teachers** in rural districts (3.58) rated this item significantly lower than did non-rural teachers (3.74). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.006$ ). Male teacher responses were lower (3.49) than were female teacher responses (3.69). The item mean was 3.53 for language arts teachers, 3.56 for math teachers, 3.36 for science teachers, and 3.59 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.81, for middle school teachers was 3.71, and for high school teachers it was 3.37.

- A rural female secondary language arts teacher explained, “I think you can learn a lot more about the way a kid understands if they have to write it down, if they have to get their thoughts sorted and give an explanation of why they believe something.”
- Not only are students involved in understanding their own progress, but parents and patrons receive reports on student progress as reported by a rural male superintendent, “We always put in our annual report how our students have scored, both (on) criterion and norm-referenced tests, and that goes out to every patron. At the parent teacher conferences, the teachers always review them with the parents.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “The goal was to expose them (teachers) to all the elements of effective collaboration and effective focus on results so that over time, we shift responsibility from the teacher to the student. Now we’re hoping we’ve given them (guidance for understanding) what the targets are and how to measure if they’ve got the targets and what do you do when they (students) don’t get the targets. We’re trying to provide that structure so they can apply that.”
- A rural male superintendent explained, “I don’t ever want a kid to go home and when he’s asked, ‘What did you learn today?’ say ‘Nothing’. I hope that they’ll say ‘Today I learned standard 1.1.1’.”

**Item 38: “When students do not master a standard, teachers re-teach it.” Teachers rated this item as 4.15 while administrators had an average rating of 3.94.**

**Administrators** in rural school districts rated this item slightly higher (3.95) than did non-rural administrators (3.91). Male and female administrators responded the same (3.94). For superintendents the item mean was 4.00 and for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the item mean was 3.78. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.11, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.93.

**Teachers** rated this item high with an average of 4.05. Rural teachers (4.14) and non-rural teachers (4.16) rated this item similarly. Male teacher responses averaged 3.93 while female teachers rated the item higher at 4.19. The item mean was 3.53 for language arts teachers, 4.02 for math teachers, 3.81 for science teachers, and 4.14 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 4.36, for middle school teachers was 4.15, and for high school teachers it was 3.88.

- A rural female middle school language arts teacher revealed, “It’s constantly evaluating our effectiveness as well as the kids’ learning. So we’re constantly looking at what they’re learning, what they don’t know, what they need, what they’re unsure of, and going back and re-evaluating and hitting that again.”
- A rural female special education coordinator shared, “To learn that re-teaching and re-assessing, all that juggling is hard. But I think we’re figuring it out better all the time. We are trained here to work more with the Title teacher and the SPED teacher.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator pointed out, “(I help) teachers figure out ‘How does that change my instruction when I get that information back.’ They get to the point where they know their strengths and their areas in need of improvement. ”
- A rural female elementary principal emphasized, “Re-teaching, and then another test is administered again. They have an opportunity to be re-taught, re-learn what they need to know, and then take another assessment.”

**Item 39: “Administrators in my school/district assist teachers in making instructional decisions based on multiple types of assessment data.” Teachers had an average rating of 3.33. Administrators rated the item significantly higher than teachers with an average rating of 4.00 (p=.000).**

**Administrators** in rural districts rated this item an average of 3.90 while non-rural administrators (4.26) rated this item higher. There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural responses (p=.005). The mean for male administrators was 3.98 while female administrators rated the item 4.03. For superintendents the item mean was 4.00, for SPED, ELL, and ESU administration the item mean was 3.63. For elementary principals the item mean was 4.14, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.16.

**Teachers** in rural districts (3.17) rated this item lower than did non-rural teachers (3.49). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses (p=.000). Male teachers rated this slightly lower (3.26) than did female teachers (3.34). The item mean was 3.05 for language arts teachers, 3.08 for math teachers, 3.17 for science teachers, and 3.46 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.52, for middle school teachers was 3.25, and for high school teachers was 3.09.

- A rural male superintendent explained, “I expect teachers to re-evaluate how they have delivered, taught, or otherwise presented different lessons and review their strategies. If necessary, they need to go back and re-teach. I want them to keep the success and achievement of the kids foremost.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator stated, “I think in the past, they’ve (teachers) been somewhat able to address, ‘This child hasn’t been successful here. What are some strategies I want to use?’ Let’s try to figure out based on other data points that we have, what are these child’s struggles and what can we do to help this student get better?”
- A rural female assessment coordinator stated, “What we usually do is take a look at the quartiles where we fall. Are we in the upper half? What we have done as a group is we take a look and see what we are lacking.”
- A rural male elementary principal declared, “They’re all intertwined. We use them all for the same purposes – developing our programs and our philosophies and what we want to do as a staff and as a school in curriculum.”

**Item 40: “Administrators and teachers focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences.” This item had an average rating of 3.04 for teachers and 3.35 for administrators.**

**Administrators** rated this item the lowest of all items in the category Instructional Impact (3.35). Responses for males (3.34), females (3.37), rural administrators (3.34) and non-rural administrators (3.37) were similar. For superintendents the item mean was 3.54, for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the item mean was 3.26. For elementary principals the item mean was 3.25 and for middle/high school principals the mean was 3.33.

**Teachers** rated this item the lowest in the category Instructional Impact (3.04). Male teachers rated this item with an average of 2.90 while females rated it as 3.07. Rural teachers rated the item lower (2.90) than did non-rural teachers (3.19). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses ( $p=.000$ ). The item mean was 2.76 for language arts teachers, 2.87 for math teachers, 2.84 for science teachers, and 3.18 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.22, for middle school teachers was 2.98, and for high school teachers it was 2.82.

- A non-rural male superintendent stated, “We used PLCs to look at some teacher evaluation pieces over the last three years. We asked them to bring in a sample of a summative evaluation prepared on a teacher who was one of their gunners – somebody who just does everything right. Then one of those that they’re maybe having some struggles and they’re trying to work on a growth objective. Black out the names, but bring it in and let the PLC teams read it and give you feedback because that feedback to teachers is much more valuable instructionally. Just in the last two years, the growth in the quality of year-end summative evaluations shows that our teachers are getting better information on what they can do to be better facilitators of learning.”

- A rural female assessment coordinator suggested that administrators need to emphasize teacher accountability, “We’ve done a little bit better with our response to intervention data to have building level meetings three times a year to talk about kids. But the focus isn’t really on ‘What are the child’s struggles with reading’? It tends to be more, ‘They have problems. Let’s send them to Title I.’ I think we really need to raise our own accountability and responsibility for what we want those results to be.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator shared how goal setting is tied to student achievement, “Through our evaluation system, we have goal setting and they’re self directed goals. But there was never any consistent way to approach the goal or get any support on the goal. So (now) we tie that process in together. Certainly, evaluation isn’t tied to how high your (achievement) results were. It’s ‘How did you respond to students. How did you work the process of school improvement? Did you analyze your results? Did you make changes based on those results? Did you reanalyze and reflect and talk with your peers about what’s next, what did you do, what works?’ It’s a district-wide process.”

**Item 41: “New teachers in my school/district are involved in curriculum review so they better understand how curriculum, assessment, and school improvement are aligned.” Teachers rated this item an average of 3.25. Administrators had an average response of 3.92, which was significantly different from the rating of teachers (p=.000).**

**Administrators** in rural districts rated this item higher (3.94) than did administrators in non-rural districts (3.85). Male administrators rated the item lower (3.86) than did female administrators (4.00). For superintendents the item mean was 3.97, for SPED, ELL, and ESU administrators the item mean was 3.81. For elementary principals the item mean was 3.96, and for middle/high school principals the mean was 4.02.

**Teachers** in rural districts (3.16) rated this item lower than did non-rural teachers (3.34). There was a significant difference between rural and non-rural teacher responses (p=.009). Male and female teachers rated this item similarly at 3.25 and 3.23, respectively. The item mean was 3.03 for language arts teachers, 3.20 for math teachers, 3.09 for science teachers, and 3.25 for SPED and ELL teachers. Furthermore, the item mean for elementary teachers was 3.33, for middle school teachers was 3.15, and for high school teachers it was 3.16.

- A rural secondary female language arts teacher shared this information, “(When) we choose our next focus for school improvement, we just pore over all that data as a school. *The whole school is in on that.*”
- A non-rural female elementary facilitator explained, “You can’t do staff development if every teacher is doing their own thing. Staff development can be more focused, and you can really train your teachers on what they need, when they’re all looking at and doing the same type of things. Teachers still have autonomy to teach the way they want, but maybe not always what they want.”
- A rural male superintendent explained, “We’re getting a handle on the assessment, so we can use that to drive classroom instruction as well as the curriculum that we need to have in place.”

## **Instructional Impact**

### *Additional Supporting Interview Quotes*

**During the interviews, conversations emerged in several other Instructional Impact areas that were not aligned with a survey question. These are offered as additional supportive, qualitative results.**

**Interview conversations revealed that schools differentiate their practices based on the needs of students.**

- A rural female assessment coordinator affirmed that her school used differentiated practices for students, “We’re such a small school that usually the student that may not have done well is on an IEP (Individualized Evaluations Program). Then the special education teacher will do some supplemental work. If they’re not (on an IEP), then (teachers) will go back and re-teach until everybody has gotten it.”
- A rural male superintendent shared a practice used to engage below-grade-level readers, “If I were going to have reading groups, it would be at least three groups and possibly four. I just looked at some things this morning that we are going to try and integrate into our schedule for next year to re-teach or review as needed for our junior high level in order to try and beef up their reading preparedness. I realize the odds are heavily against us from what the experts tell us. If they haven’t got this by the second or third grade, we have maybe a one-in-eight chance of recovering it.”
- A rural male elementary principal pointed out the importance of individualized instruction for both a struggling student and a successful student, “I think the majority of teachers, not all of them, have taken where a student is and individualized their instruction to try to reach the student. A student who is doing well on the assessments, they have them do something else and keep (them) moving on.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator shared, “We did a lot with teaming. We wanted data to be systematic so the response was definitely more of a teacher-to-teacher formative thing. You’re constantly working in small groups. Differentiated instruction obviously comes into that.”
- A rural female elementary principal talked about the importance of differentiating instruction, “That is an area that we need to improve in, the idea of differentiation inside the classroom. We need to work harder on getting ‘what are the strategies that you’re using in your classroom with this child to help him or her acquire the skills they need’. That is a focus that as administrators we have talked about.”

**Conversations exposed strategies leaders employ to ensure instructional success:**

- A rural male superintendent confirmed strong leadership skills when implementing new instructional strategies, “One of the practices I’ve had that has been good for me is when I’ve asked my teachers to take training, I went with them. When we did six-traits writing and some of the other items to enhance instruction in reading across the curriculum, I did the training with them. If I send them or encourage them to go, if at all possible I go with them so that I can at least keep up with the vocabulary. If I expect them to be using these programs or to find merit in them, I need to be able to talk intelligently with them about what they are doing. It’s indeed a challenge.”
- A rural female special education coordinator noted the need for transition programs, especially from middle school to high school, “Transitioning out, and transitioning

from middle school to high school, is a huge problem. We have a lot of regular and special education kids that fail their freshman year because of the set up of the high school or because they would have failed their eighth grade year.”

- A rural male superintendent explained his school district’s summer school strategy, “We have a summer school for reading that’s elective. It’s open to anyone – we send letters and make phone calls to kindergarten through sixth grade students that we see really need some extra help in reading. We focus on those that on the assessments hadn’t done as well.”

## **Theme 5: Norm-Referenced Tests**

### *Supporting Interview Quotes*

**“Norm-Referenced Tests” was a theme that emerged during the interviews. Educators shared the importance of using NRT information to measure and identify trends in student performance:**

- A rural middle school language arts teacher shared how their school utilizes norm-referenced test results, “We look at years of progress – we’re actually comparing the (same) kids – last year’s scores to this year’s scores. Before, we looked at ‘Eighth grade can’t do this. Could they do it last year? Could they not do it?’ So now, we’re actually looking at the kids, how they’ve progressed through school.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator explained, “The NRTs really become another piece of data and are used when you’re looking at your SIP (School Improvement Process) data and looking at trends.”
- A rural female elementary principal shared how NRT data supports student achievement, “We looked at data telling us that we needed to work on math. As we took the Terra Nova, we could really see there were certain skills that our kids did not know. They (teachers) need to re-look at that and see what we can do to get to where we need to be.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator explained, “We keep the frame of mind that we don’t want to completely shift all of our instruction and our curriculum to match the NRT, but also that we can look for some trends and patterns and use an item analysis of an NRT to say, ‘okay, our kids did horrible in fractions. But fractions that were asked on the test were things that we don’t even teach until eighth grade and they’re sixth graders.’ So being able to make those kinds of observations. I have termed them broad-based instructional decisions, not anything specific – just being able to get a better handle on the kinds of errors kids make.”
- A rural male superintendent explained, “We’re not scoring where we need to and I can look at my norm-referenced testing and more readily identify weaknesses that I see in our curriculum.”

**Some comments focused on the use of NRTs to determine how students compare to other students outside of their district:**

- A rural male superintendent emphasized the practice of using NRTs to see how their school compares, “We look at the NRTs to see how we compare. That’s primarily the main way we use it.”

- A rural female special education coordinator shared how NRTs benefit her school's special education program, "We still include the NRT for information on their IEP (Individualized Evaluation Program), (we) use them both (CRTs and NRTs)."
- Another rural male superintendent discussed the comparison between NRT data and CRT data, "The state test, I think, gives feedback to the teachers and falls specifically along the standards that are in place. Right now there's a disconnect between what we're seeing on our norm-referenced test and our criterion-referenced testing. That's a situation that we're going to have to work through."

**Comments were also focused on the importance of timely feedback when using NRTs:**

- A non-rural male superintendent emphasized the need for timely feedback stating, "Our NRTs, probably our biggest problem is that they're not timely enough to give us current information on students and what we can do immediately to meet their needs."

## **Theme 6: Data**

### *Supporting Interview Quotes*

**"Data" was a theme that emerged from the interviews. Educators revealed that data has been an important part of the assessment journey through the years. They shared various ways that assessment data is used in schools.**

- A non-rural elementary principal shared, "(We are) a Title I (school). I would like to be able to compare all of our information to our district, to our grade level, to our individual classrooms. But I would also like to be able to compare our information to other Title I schools."
- A secondary female special education coordinator echoed, "Data fuels your improvement goals and that makes you re-look at your curriculum."
- A rural female assessment coordinator shared the importance of being able to thoroughly use and understand data in order to support student growth, "Our staff is not very savvy with data. It has been easy to say our reading program is extremely effective, (yet on) our local and central skills test that has been the same test for the last eight years, the results have declined instead of improved. I'm not saying that students weren't getting better. However, the test we were using was a form that was over ten years old. I don't think they (teachers) understand it well enough. We'd like to continue to improve their data use."

**Schools are breaking data down to better understand specific needs of students.**

- A rural female assessment coordinator stated, "We found that when we went through all the data, our primary concern was the literacy of reading. We saw that there was a difference between standard lunch and (high Free/Reduced Lunch rate) and that there was a difference between girls and boys in reading. We found that a lot of them were falling in that lower quartile. So when we got the data analysis done, the elementary teachers (came) together and created a literacy council."
- A non-rural assessment coordinator stated, "At the end of the year they get all the data and determine how the student(s) did on each standard. They'll see the district average. They can see it by assessment and by standard, then compare the trend data from one year to the next."

## Theme 7: School Improvement

### *Supporting Interview Quotes*

**School improvement was identified numerous times by educators as the driving force for many of the activities in their school, and assessment data was mentioned as a vital part of this. Educators shared examples:**

- A rural female elementary principal shared, “We’ve done everything that technically we’re supposed to do. We’ve done it with a lot of heart and a lot of gusto. I think for the last couple years that we’ve had PLCs and teachers are going (participating), *that’s school improvement!* We have a focus on what we need to do.”
- A rural male elementary principal explained, “Well, our school improvement process is based on the data. That’s how teachers come up with the improvement goals that we make. It’s a big part of it.”
- A non-rural assessment coordinator further explained, “(Teachers) are able to access the reports immediately and they can look at how kids did across the district. So if I gave a writing assessment yesterday and I enter it, I can see my class average, the building average, and the district average. They get real time results back. *That’s our school improvement process.*”
- A non-rural elementary principal explained the integration of data and school improvement, “We have a very formalized school improvement process and we have for years. It starts with our data retreat, and we have a school improvement team at every building. It’s a very purposeful journey. But there’s enough flexibility in it that it allows for buildings to make their own fit.”
- A non-rural special education coordinator emphasized, “School improvement is very embedded. We have our team goals, classroom goals, and building goals. And what all of those are, whether teachers realize it or not, is they’re all going through the school improvement process at different levels. So I think school improvement is embedded in everything that we do.”

## Theme 8: Professional Learning Communities

### *Supporting Interview Quotes*

**Another theme that emerged in the interviews was “Professional Learning Communities” (PLCs). PLC(s) were identified as a school improvement tool used to positively enhance the curriculum-assessment-learning process. An interview question asked, “Do your teachers participate in learning teams and /or PLCs and what is the focus of the learning teams/PLC”? There was a strong response to this question that included:**

- A non-rural elementary principal shared, “We have our grade level PLCs which have classroom teachers, support staff, psychologist, and special education teachers. They meet once a week.”
- A rural female assessment coordinator shared how school improvement, student achievement, and PLCs are integrated: “We’re in a state of flux right now because we’ve had more of a traditional school improvement process, but now we’re moving more into using the PLCs as a way to improve kids’ learning. As the teachers learn to work more closely together, I want it to become theirs. They are taking more

ownership as they are seeing the benefits, and they're working more closely together. They are taking ownership of what needs to be done."

- A rural male superintendent described their PLC strategy, "It's formalized because they do have to meet, every two weeks. (They) sit down and look at the data, progress monitoring, they *have* to do that. They talk about instruction and they talk about the students and how things are going and they're trying to move students forward. It's totally different than what we've done (in the past)."
- A rural male superintendent revealed the effectiveness of their PLC(s), "Within our school improvement, technically we've met the requirements that we're supposed to do. I just don't know that we really made a whole lot of difference until the last few years as we've gotten more focused on the PLC(s)."
- A rural female elementary principal explained, "We have moved into teachers working in professional learning communities and they are in the process of creating common assessments (in the PLCs)."

## **Theme 9: Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment**

### *Supporting Interview Quotes*

**Theme nine emerged through discussions revolving around curriculum and standards. An earlier learning that occurred during the STARS journey was once again reiterated. This focused on the integration of standards, curriculum, and assessment.**

- A rural female special education coordinator explained the importance of alignment of curriculum, standards and assessments, "Trying to make sure more things are aligned. We're just looking more at things to make sure our assessments, our reading tests, everything is more aligned and to realize how important that is."
- A rural female English teacher explained how curriculum is changing because the standards have changed, "We changed our curriculum. Since the standards have changed now, we're rewriting our curriculum to meet those (new standards)."
- A rural female English teacher further explained the advantage that standards have brought for educators, "I'm very glad that we have standards because everyone might have been able to teach whatever they wanted or whatever their textbook company prescribed. I think it's good that we have standards. If students haven't done well on something, you re-teach it. You cover everything until it is taught (students learn)."
- A rural female elementary teacher echoed educators' conciseness to standards, "Well, we put the standard on each lesson plan, each objective. You never make lesson plans without being mindful of the standards. That's always in there."
- A non-rural female assessment coordinator shared, "In our curriculum process, in all content areas, through our curriculum committees, teachers write CRTs to match the curriculum. That's part of our district assessment system."

**School districts continually re-evaluate curriculum while aligning to standards.**

- A rural female assessment coordinator explained how a consortium would be useful in providing more curriculum resources for students, "If we could get a consortium, a learning community where we're working with a common schedule, we would have a common calendar. We would have basically a common curriculum because we share classes with long-distance learning online."

- A rural male elementary principal shared how leaders become familiar with curriculum in order to better provide information and support for their teachers when evaluating curriculum programs, “As principals, we attend ESU principal meetings. We talk about staff development and curriculum ideas. Currently we’re in a core reading workshop that meets several times a year. We talk about how to analyze a good reading program and what to look for when you’re evaluating a program and the teachers teaching it.”
- A rural male superintendent stated, “We use XXX (reading program), we use our DIBELS program to progress-monitor our reading program, and we have a reading coach who helps us implement this. It’s based on our curriculum. So, we made sure that this matched our curriculum or our curriculum matched standards.”

### **School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric Results**

A *School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric*, was designed by Ernst, Hoegh, and Boss (2008) (Appendix E). This rubric allows for educators to assess their school’s or district’s level of literacy and implementation of standards, curriculum, and assessment. The rubric used four defined levels of implementation to measure four separate components: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Use of Data.

The rubric was designed as a table and study participants were asked to circle the level that best described their perception of their district’s level of development for each of the rubric components. The rubric levels are described along with the ratings provided by study participants. Level I through Level IV was scored on a 1-4 scale, and the means are representative of the 1-4 scale. This is a combination of all school districts in the state.

#### **Rubric Curriculum Component**

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “the decisions about what to teach are left to chance by individual actors” and “a guaranteed and viable curriculum is not evident.”
- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “the school has drafted curriculum documents” and “the school has begun a process to provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “the school has a guaranteed and viable curriculum” and “the school has declared the important skills and content necessary for all students.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school routinely monitors the attainment of the guaranteed and viable curriculum” and “the curriculum is closely aligned to the mission of the school.”

In the Curriculum component, the average for all responses was 3.31. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.45 and for all non-rural respondents, 3.06. The mean for teachers was 3.35 and 3.27 for administrators. The overall mean for all male respondents was 3.20, while for all female respondents it was 3.36.

#### **Rubric Instruction Component**

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “decisions about instruction are left to chance by individual actors.”

- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “the school has begun a process to identify instructional strategies that will improve student learning. The extent to which strategies are used will vary.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “the school encourages the use of research-based instructional strategies. The school has created pockets of success.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school employs a research-based instructional program and the strategies are utilized by the staff to a large extent.”

In the Instruction component, the average for all responses was 3.00. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.03, and for all non-rural respondents the mean was 2.94. Analyzing the data by respondent category, the mean was 3.13 for teachers and 2.80 for administrators. The overall mean for all male respondents was 2.94 and for all female respondents, 3.03.

### **Rubric Assessment Component**

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “the assessment system and the subsequent data are left to chance by individual actors.”
- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “the school has begun the process of developing an assessment system. Some assessments are aligned to the curriculum.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “the school has an assessment system aligned to the curriculum” and “formative or summative assessments provide information about student learning.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school has an assessment system aligned to the curriculum” and “the school utilizes a comprehensive balanced system that provides timely feedback about teaching and learning.”

In the Assessment component, the average for all responses was 3.25. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.35, and for all non-rural respondents the mean was 3.06. Analyzing the data by respondent category, the mean for teachers was 3.22 and 3.13 for administrators. The overall mean for all male respondents was 3.07, and for all female respondents the mean was 3.33.

### **Rubric Use of Data Component**

- **Level I** (scored as 1.00) was defined as “data collection is left to chance by individual actors” and “data are rarely analyzed or leveraged for improvement efforts.”
- **Level II** (scored as 2.00) was defined as “a process for data collection has been drafted” and “data are occasionally analyzed by individuals and occasionally leveraged for improvement efforts.”
- **Level III** (scored as 3.00) was defined as “a systemic process for data collection is in place” and “data are routinely analyzed by groups to inform collective action and leveraged for improvement efforts.”
- **Level IV** (scored as 4.00) was defined as “the school utilizes data to routinely inform decisions about fulfilling the school mission, teaching and learning and to guide all improvement efforts.”

In the Use of Data component, the average for all responses was 3.23. The mean for all rural respondents was 3.29, and for all non-rural respondents it was 3.12. The mean for teachers was 3.30 and 2.93 for administrators. The overall mean was 3.20 for all male respondents and 3.24 for all female respondents.

## SUMMARY

Nebraska educators are beginning to embrace the change to a Balanced Assessment System, as illustrated through the survey results and interview comments shared in this study. Both administrators and teachers discussed the nature and purpose of the various types of assessments that will be available to them including the addition of a new statewide test. The greatest focus was upon the use of data yielded by each assessment and its value to teaching and learning.

All 171 administrators and all 1081 teachers confirmed on the survey that they planned to continue using locally-defined criterion-referenced assessments even after STARS had been concluded. This remarkable finding indicates the success that these locally-developed criterion-referenced assessments have had in Nebraska school districts over the past eight years.

Educators' comments were varied regarding the change towards the application of new statewide assessments. Some showed apprehension as illustrated by this rural secondary language arts teacher's comment, "I know there's some apprehension about the state test. But I'm not sure if that has anything to do with the assessment philosophy. But I guess we're being a little bit reactionary at this point. I'll probably try to be consistent until we see our scores and then maybe go from there." A rural male superintendent added, "I'm hoping they'll use assessments in the same way. But I'm really worried that they're going to try to teach to the test to make sure we do well. I think that will probably come into play, especially after the first year."

But others expressed optimism as they embraced balanced assessment by stating, "No Child Left Behind, the STARS . . . I was not necessarily really in favor of that when we got started because the teachers had enough to do. But I do think it's made every school look at the curriculum, look at where their students are and caused us to really focus on what students are learning. That has been positive."

Additionally, a special education coordinator shared a positive point of view of this new era of Balanced Assessment by emphasizing, "We need to have perspective and this is just one more piece - it's now a balanced approach! I mean, it's good to have lots of information. Really looking at what is meaningful information and making sure that all our information sources are telling us the same thing." Educators are realizing that maintaining the balance is critical as illustrated by this elementary teacher, "You talk about balance. This really is one more piece and we're not going to over emphasize it."



**TRANSITIONS:**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Section 3: Research Studies**

**Study II: Examination of Professional Development  
Practices in Nebraska Schools**



**Examination of Professional Development Practices  
In Nebraska Schools**

**Jackie Florendo, M.Ed., Graduate Research Assistant, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

**INTRODUCTION**

In 2008-2009, Nebraska school districts began another journey of assessment reform. The assessment process has been in constant transition since its inception in 2001. In 2000, Nebraska policy-makers passed Legislative Bill 812. This bill “established the requirements and general procedures for the implementation of standards, assessments, and accountability reporting for public school districts in Nebraska” (Roschewski, Gallagher, & Isernhagen, 2001). In compliance with this law, Nebraska school districts enacted the use of a balance of assessments including both NRTs and CRTs, from pencil-and-paper criterion-referenced tests to performance assessments, as suits the individual district (Gallagher, 2007). This system was entitled STARS: School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System. The

requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) have been integrated into the accountability requirements of Nebraska's system (Isernhagen & Mills, 2008).

Throughout the seven year process, Nebraska educators were engaged in professional development practices that contributed to the enhancement of their assessment literacy. These practices engaged the use of data from both CRTs and NRTs to inform teaching and learning. Nebraska educators believed these practices positively impacted student learning, "We learn to be better at assessment, we learn to be better at instruction" (Isernhagen & Mills, 2008, p. 32). "Educators learned to use data and information to impact student achievement" (p. 30).

In the spring of 2008, the Nebraska Legislature revised the accountability requirements for Nebraska educators. This new legislation, NeSA (Nebraska State Accountability), requires a statewide test in reading, math, and science. In 2008-09, the reading statewide test was piloted and will be fully implemented in the 2009-10 for all Nebraska school districts. In 2009-10, the math statewide test will be piloted and fully implemented in 2010-11, and science the following year. With the implementation of NeSA, the question arises: What impact will these changes have on current educational practices, policies, and procedures in Nebraska schools? Will professional development practices that largely contributed to the growth of assessment literacy change? How will educators best understand how to use the statewide test data to impact teaching and learning, as was witnessed with STARS?

To begin to address these questions, we must first address quality professional development and its effect on day-to-day practices in schools. According to Sparks' *Designing Powerful Professional Development for Teachers and Principals* (2002), there are several factors of quality professional development "that produce high levels of learning and performance for all students and staff members" (p. i-iv). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) in partnership with Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has developed 12 professional development standards. These standards have been integrated into a survey, the SAI (Standards Assessment Inventory) (Appendix I), developed by the NSDC to determine quality professional development practices.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the degree to which professional development practices of K-12 teachers in Nebraska schools align with the twelve National Staff Development Council's standards at the elementary and secondary levels.

### *Primary Question:*

1. To what degree do professional development practices in Nebraska schools align with the twelve national staff development standards at the elementary and secondary levels?

### *Secondary Questions:*

2. Do professional development practices in Nebraska schools differ between core curriculum content areas: Language Arts, Math and Science?
3. Do professional development practices differ as the needs of students differ?
4. Do professional development practices differ between geographic areas in Nebraska?

5. Do professional development practices differ between elementary and secondary schools?

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

With the implementation of NeSA, the question arises: What impact will these changes have on current educational practices, policies, and procedures in Nebraska schools? Guskey (2000) emphasizes for every new education reform movement and plan for school improvement, the need exists for quality professional development. This was evident during the STARS era in Nebraska when educators' knowledge and confidence grew in the use of assessments to positively impact student learning. "I think our staff is light-years ahead of where they used to be in developing assessments. I think they're more concerned with what they're assessing and how students are progressing" (Isernhagen & Mills, 2008, p. 30). Through training and practice, educators demonstrated the ability to effectively use data from their CRT and NRT assessments to impact student achievement (Isernhagen & Mills, 2008).

The implementation of a new state test will present yet another incentive for professional development for Nebraska educators. According to Roger Breed, the Nebraska Commissioner of Education, the needs within a balanced assessment system in Nebraska schools include leadership providing professional growth opportunities for teachers (Breed, 2009). The new preparation and training for Nebraska educators involves understanding the use of new state test data and adding this new tool to existing assessments and the current data bank.

With any new practice, professional development is one key to its success. The question is, will this new test provide the continued impact that was evident during the STARS era? The notion is that all professional development should positively impact teaching and learning. Leaders must have knowledge and skills to implement high quality staff development in their schools and districts (Watkins & Sheng, 2008). In order for all students to achieve, students must be teamed with competent teachers who receive the quality professional development they require to be effective, which in turn requires principals who are strong instructional leaders. These leaders must in turn support teachers' sustained development as instructional leaders (Sparks, 2002).

Quality teaching does not just happen. This requires "the design and implementation of the most powerful forms of professional development" (Sparks, 2002, p. 1-1). Joyce and Showers (2002) reported that "the leaders of the high-achieving schools... brought their faculties to a greater focus on student learning and fewer, more intensively pursued initiatives, and generated more effective staff development" (p. 176). However, research shows that many of these learning opportunities are lacking (Sparks, 2002).

What does quality professional development look like? The National Staff Development Council's standards for professional development (revised, 2001) address this issue. "Through the familiarity of these standards, quality professional development can be planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated yielding more effective professional development, resulting in higher student achievement" (Watkins & Sheng, 2008, p. 2). In addition, NSDC in partnership with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

developed the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) survey to help evaluate and assess professional development practices that align with these standards. There are 5 questions on the survey for each of the 12 standards. These standards fall under 3 categories: context, process, and content.

Context Standards: Staff development that improves the learning of all students:

- Learning Communities: Organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.
- Leadership: Requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.
- Resources: Requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration.

Process Standards: Staff development that improves the learning of all students:

- Data-Driven: Uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.
- Evaluation: Uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact.
- Research-Based: Prepares educators to apply research to decision making.
- Design: Uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.
- Learning: Applies knowledge about human learning and change.
- Collaboration: Provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.

Content Standards: Staff development that improves the learning of all students:

- Equity: Prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.
- Quality Teaching: Deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.
- Family Involvement: Provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately.

(National Staff Development Council, 2001)

This study examined professional development practices in Nebraska schools and the degree of the alignment to the National Staff Development Council standards.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Instrument**

The quantitative study was conducted using an online survey, the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) (Appendix F). The SAI was developed by the NSDC “based on research and best practices to assess the alignment of schools’ professional development practices with the NSDC standards” (Watkins & Sheng, 2008, p. 3).

The survey was administered online. Educators gained access through a website. The survey was rated on a Likert scale from “4-0” with “4” representing “Always,” “3” “Frequently,”

“2” “Sometimes,” “1” “Seldom,” and “0” “Never.” The survey collected demographic information about participants.

To address the secondary questions, the data was further disaggregated by the Nebraska Education Assessment Research (NEAR) Center. The disaggregated data included district categories of Free/Reduced Lunch rates, regions within the state of Nebraska, elementary and secondary teachers, and secondary curriculum content areas. In addition, all statistical significance tests were conducted by the NEAR Center.

### **Survey Sample**

For this study, 13 school districts from the state were selected to participate. Of the 13 school districts identified for participation in the study, one declined and two other school districts did not respond to the survey.

Both rural and non-rural school districts were asked to participate. Non-rural school districts are defined as metro-area districts in large and mid-sized cities, large towns, and the urban fringe. All other districts are classified as rural. Of the 254 public school districts operating in 2007-08, 17 districts (6.7%) were classified as non-rural and 237 districts (93.3%) were classified as rural. Of the schools participating in this study, one school district was non-rural and nine were rural.

Data was collected from three geographic regions that divided the state: the western, central, and eastern parts of the state. The school districts chosen to participate from the three geographic regions had similar student population sizes. From each region, data from an average of three school districts was used. School districts from each of the different levels of free/reduced lunch (FRL) rate were represented in each region. The three levels were based on Nebraska’s FRL average (34%): below average (below 25%), approximate average (26% to 40%), and above average (41% or above). This selected group of schools was then asked to participate by opening the online survey to their teachers.

## **RESULTS**

### **Demographics**

Of the ten school districts participating, 125 educators from 23 schools responded to the online survey. One hundred twenty-four (124) participants were teachers. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents were currently based at their school district. One respondent was not currently teaching. Figure 3 shows the respondents’ years of experience at their current school.

Ninety-five per cent of the educators teach full time. Eighty-two (82) teachers (62%) are assigned to grades preschool through fifth, while 51 responses (38%) were from secondary teachers. It should be noted that some educators teach more than one grade or subject area.

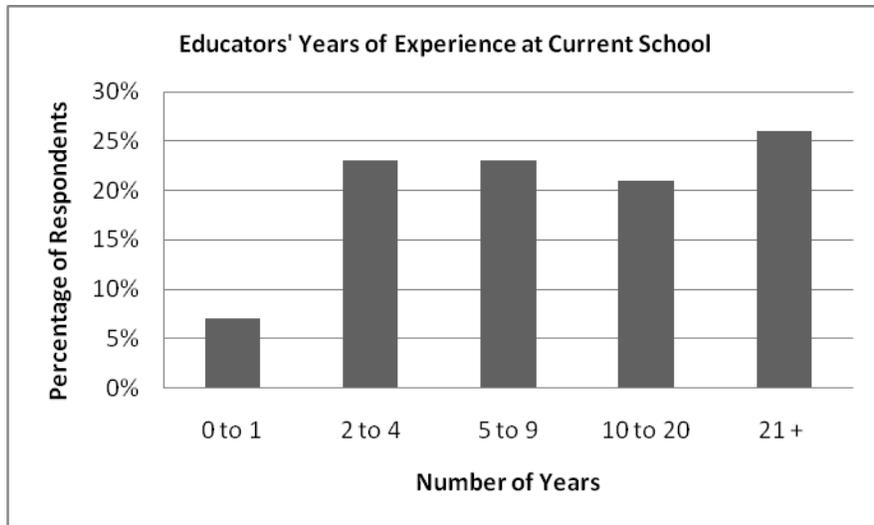


Figure 3. Educators' years of experience at current school.

For the purposes of this study, participants were selected from three geographic regions. Forty-seven participants were from Region A, 52 were from Region B, and 25 were from Region C. The number of responses per region is displayed in Figure 4.

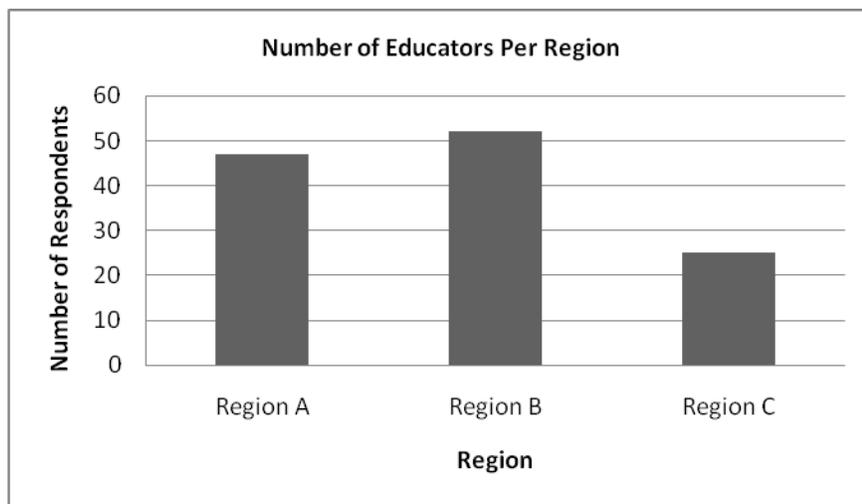


Figure 4. Number of educators per region.

**Primary Research Question: To What Degree do the Professional Development Practices of K-12 Teachers in Schools in Nebraska Align with the 12 National Staff Development Standards at the Elementary and Secondary Levels?**

Of the ten school districts participating, one hundred twenty-five (125) educators from twenty-three schools responded to the online survey. All one hundred and twenty-five responses were used to address this question. Only 1 of the 12 NSDC standards of professional development practices had a mean rating slightly above “Frequently”: the “Equity” standard (defined by NSDC as “preparing educators to understand and appreciate all students, as well as hold high expectations for their academic achievement”). The

“Equity” mean rating was 3.1. Table 5 shows the mean response for each professional development standard.

Table 5  
*Professional Development Practices’ Alignment to NSDC Standards*

| Standard | Context              |            |                | Content |                  |                    |
|----------|----------------------|------------|----------------|---------|------------------|--------------------|
|          | Learning Communities | Leadership | Resources      | Equity  | Quality Teaching | Family Involvement |
| Average  | 2.2                  | 2.9        | 2.5            | 3.1     | 2.7              | 2.5                |
| Standard | Process              |            |                |         |                  |                    |
|          | Data Driven          | Evaluation | Research Based | Design  | Learning         | Collaboration      |
| Average  | 2.5                  | 2.2        | 2.7            | 2.7     | 2.5              | 2.7                |

The lowest rated professional development standards were: “Learning Communities,” organizing adults into groups whose goals are aligned with the school and district (2.2); “Evaluation,” using multiple sources of information to guide improvement (2.2); “Data Driven,” using disaggregated student data to determine teacher training priorities (2.5); “Learning,” applying knowledge about student learning (2.5); and “Family Involvement,” providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders (2.5). The results are shown in Figure 5.

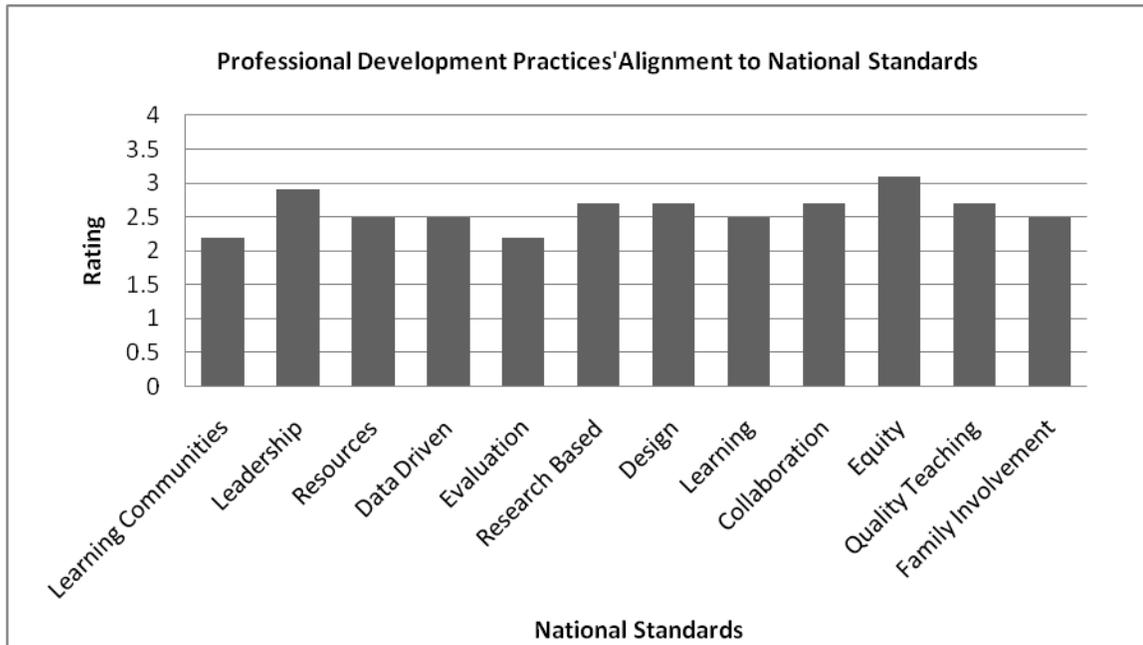


Figure 5. Professional development practices’ alignment to NSDC standards.

**Research Question 2: Do professional development practices in Nebraska schools differ between the core curriculum content areas of Language Arts, Math, and Science?**

Thirty-seven (37) secondary teachers responded to the survey. Twelve teachers taught in the subject area of math, 16 in language arts, and 9 taught science.

Only three standards of professional development practices showed any sizable difference between the core curriculum content areas – “Design” (effect size (d) =.79), “Quality Teaching” (d=.81), and “Data Driven” (d=.90) – but these differences were not significant, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6  
*NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Core Curriculum Area*

|              | Quality Teaching | Design      | Collaboration        | Family Involvement | Research Based | Resources   |
|--------------|------------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Math         | 2.39             | 2.47        | 2.46                 | 2.32               | <b>2.52</b>    | 2.39        |
| LA           | <b>2.54</b>      | <b>2.68</b> | <b>2.57</b>          | <b>2.43</b>        | 2.50           | <b>2.56</b> |
| Science      | 2.07             | 2.18        | 2.24                 | 2.11               | 2.20           | 2.27        |
| Significance | .07              | .08         | .34                  | .37                | .40            | .41         |
| Effect Size  | .81              | .79         | .41                  | .19                | .45            | .09         |
|              | Leadership       | Equity      | Learning Communities | Data Driven        | Evaluation     | Learning    |
| Math         | 2.26             | 2.95        | 1.87                 | 2.13               | 1.87           | <b>2.28</b> |
| LA           | <b>2.69</b>      | <b>3.10</b> | <b>2.09</b>          | <b>2.28</b>        | <b>2.01</b>    | 2.20        |
| Science      | 2.27             | 2.84        | 2.09                 | 2.04               | 1.98           | 2.18        |
| Significance | .42              | .47         | .50                  | .74                | .80            | .93         |
| Effect Size  | .38              | .49         | .35                  | .90                | .13            | .32         |

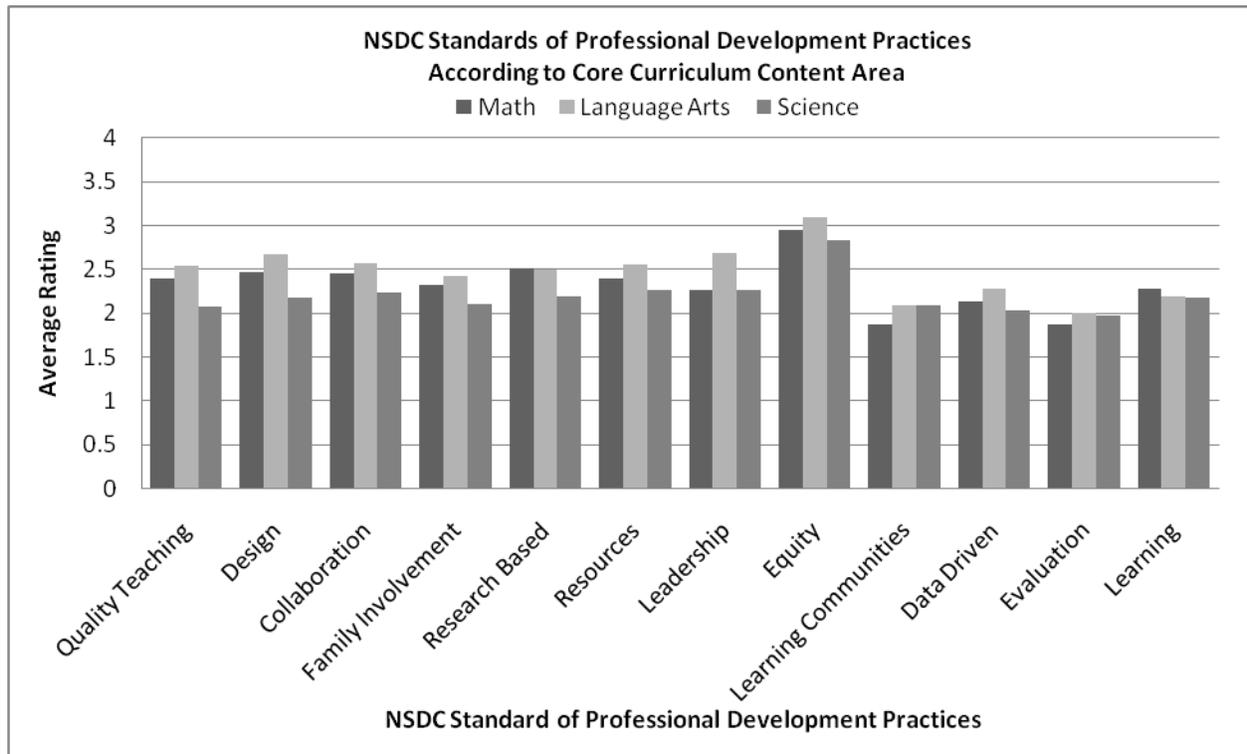


Figure 6. NSDC standards of professional development practices by core curriculum area.

Language arts teachers rated the highest in all standards of professional development practices except for two: “Research Based” and “Learning,” which were led by math

teachers. In the “Learning Communities” category, language arts teacher responses tied for highest with those of science teachers. It is interesting to note that “Learning Communities” and “Evaluation” were two of the lower-rated standards of professional development practices by teachers across all three curriculum content areas. Figure 6 is arranged in ascending order of significance.

**Research Question 3: Do professional development practices differ as the needs of students differ?**

One hundred and twenty-four (124) responses were used to address this question, as one respondent was not affiliated with a school. 80 teachers taught in schools within the low category of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rates; 33 teachers taught in schools with an average level of FRL rates; and 11 teachers were in schools with a high average FRL rate.

For all standards, the High Average FRL category rated the highest mean, as shown in Table 7. It should be noted that there was a difference in the number of responses for each FRL category, which may have affected the results. Five of the 12 NSDC standards of professional development practices indicated a large effect size (d) between the highest and lowest mean-rated standards and significant difference (p): “Learning Communities” (d=1.55; p=.00); “Equity” (d=1.08; p=.00); “Family Involvement” (d=1.37; p=.00); “Design” (d=.99; p=.01); “Learning” (d=.87; p=.01). “Quality Teaching” showed a moderate effect size (d=.63; p=.01), as shown in Table 7.

Table 7  
*NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices According to Free/Reduced Lunch Rates (FRL)*

|                | Learning Communities | Equity        | Family Involvement | Design      | Learning    | Quality Teaching |
|----------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| Low FRL        | 2.30                 | 3.16          | 2.49               | 2.59        | 2.31        | 2.48             |
| -- SD          | .634                 | .439          | .654               | .578        | .611        | .543             |
| State Ave. FRL | 1.83                 | 2.78          | 2.18               | 2.60        | 2.40        | 2.67             |
| -- SD          | .549                 | .557          | .689               | .564        | .654        | .574             |
| High Ave. FRL  | <b>2.60</b>          | <b>3.36</b>   | <b>3.05</b>        | <b>3.15</b> | <b>2.96</b> | <b>3.04</b>      |
| -- SD          | .390                 | .488          | .515               | .482        | .625        | .619             |
| Significance   | .00                  | .00           | .00                | .01         | .01         | .01              |
| Effect Size    | 1.51                 | 1.07          | 1.34               | .99         | 1.06        | 1.02             |
|                | Research Based       | Collaboration | Resources          | Leadership  | Data Driven | Evaluation       |
| Low FRL        | 2.53                 | 2.64          | 2.60               | 2.84        | 2.39        | 2.14             |
| -- SD          | .629                 | .574          | .584               | .742        | .722        | .637             |
| State Ave. FRL | 2.63                 | 2.62          | 2.46               | 2.93        | 2.40        | 2.14             |
| -- SD          | .519                 | .531          | .536               | .645        | .714        | .420             |
| High Ave. FRL  | <b>2.95</b>          | <b>2.93</b>   | <b>2.75</b>        | <b>3.15</b> | <b>2.65</b> | <b>2.31</b>      |
| -- SD          | .336                 | .539          | .474               | .391        | .620        | .635             |
| Significance   | .09                  | .26           | .37                | .4          | .53         | .66              |
| Effect Size    | .70                  | .58           | .56                | .44         | .37         | .27              |

The NSDC standards of professional development practices with the highest mean for schools of all categories of Free/Reduced Lunch were “Equity” and “Leadership” standards. The “Evaluation” standard was rated the lowest.

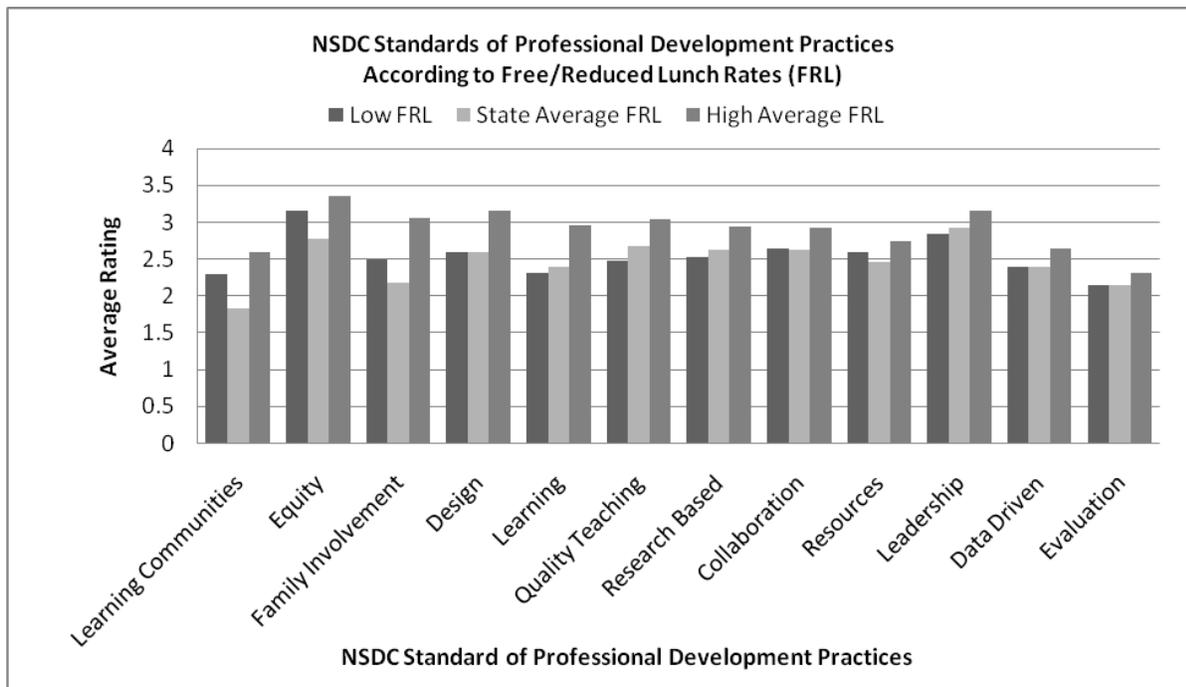


Figure 7. NSDC standards of professional development practices according to free/reduced lunch rates (FRL).

**Research Question 4: Do professional development practices differ between geographic locations?**

One hundred and twenty-four (124) responses were used to address this question as one respondent was not affiliated with a school. Forty-seven (47) survey respondents were from Region A; 52 were from Region B; and 25 were from Region C.

Five NSDC standards of professional development practices revealed a large or moderate effect size (d) between the highest and lowest mean-rated standards and significant difference (p) between the regions: “Collaboration” (d=.70; p=.00); “Learning Communities” (d=.74; p=.00); “Data Driven” (d=.71; p=.01); “Equity” (d=.62; p=.02); and “Family Involvement” (d=.57; p=.05).

Region C had the highest mean rating in six of the 12 NSDC standards of professional development practices, while Region B had the highest mean rating in four standards, and Region C had the highest mean rating in two standards. The standards “Quality Teaching” and “Design” rated the most similarly, as shown in Table 8.

“Evaluation” rated the lowest for all regions and “Learning Communities” rated the lowest in regions A and B. “Equity” rated the highest in all regions, as shown in Figure 8.

Table 8  
*NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Region*

|              | Collaboration | Learning Communities | Data Driven | Equity      | Family Involvement | Leadership  |
|--------------|---------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Region A     | 2.51          | 2.07                 | 2.50        | 2.98        | 2.29               | 2.74        |
| -- SD        | .75           | .662                 | .608        | .610        | .712               | .737        |
| Region B     | <b>2.93</b>   | 2.22                 | <b>2.74</b> | 3.18        | 2.52               | <b>3.02</b> |
| -- SD        | .46           | .549                 | .666        | 4.13        | .624               | .545        |
| Region C     | 2.52          | <b>2.55</b>          | 2.22        | <b>3.32</b> | <b>2.69</b>        | 2.80        |
| -- SD        | .64           | .624                 | .872        | .432        | .649               | .961        |
| Significance | .00           | .01                  | .01         | .02         | .05                | .14         |
| Effect Size  | .70           | .74                  | .71         | .62         | .57                | .44         |
|              | Resources     | Research Based       | Learning    | Evaluation  | Quality Teaching   | Design      |
| Region A     | 2.43          | <b>2.70</b>          | 2.45        | 2.04        | <b>2.64</b>        | 2.63        |
| -- SD        | .588          | .647                 | .762        | .590        | .642               | .687        |
| Region B     | <b>2.62</b>   | 2.52                 | 2.33        | 2.11        | 2.55               | <b>2.69</b> |
| -- SD        | .499          | .543                 | .63         | .734        | .524               | .511        |
| Region C     | 2.59          | 2.61                 | <b>2.51</b> | <b>2.21</b> | 2.56               | <b>2.69</b> |
| -- SD        | .690          | .725                 | .621        | .740        | .618               | .621        |
| Significance | .24           | .35                  | .54         | .62         | .73                | .86         |
| Effect Size  | .35           | .30                  | .29         | .27         | .16                | .09         |

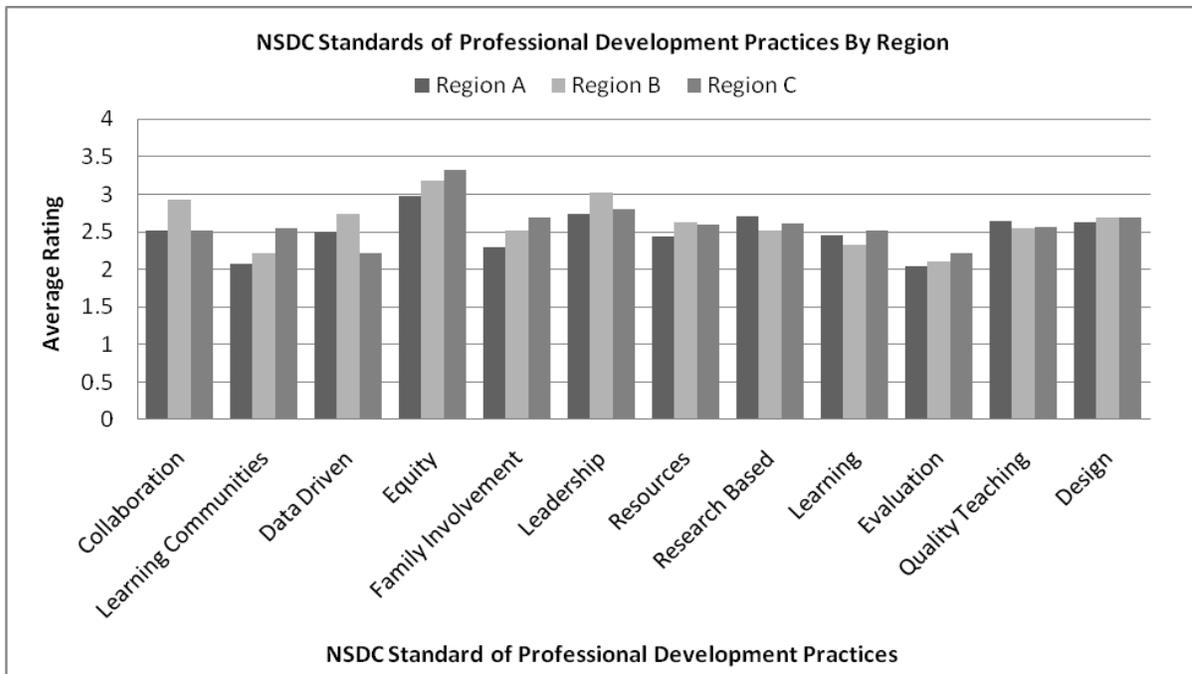


Figure 8. NSDC standards of professional development practices by region.

**Research Question 5: Do professional development practices differ between elementary and secondary schools?**

One hundred and seventeen (117) responses were used to address this question, as some teachers who responded to the survey were specialist teachers and not specific to elementary or secondary schools. Sixty-five (65) respondents to the survey taught elementary school, while 52 respondents taught secondary school. For all standards, elementary school teachers’ mean ratings were higher than secondary school teachers, as shown in Table 9 and Figure 10.

Table 9

*NSDC Standards of Professional Development Practices by Elementary and Secondary Levels*

| Standard    | Data Driven | Quality Teaching     | Equity      | Research Based     | Collaboration | Design      |
|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Elementary  | <b>2.82</b> | <b>2.74</b>          | <b>3.23</b> | <b>2.74</b>        | <b>2.80</b>   | <b>2.77</b> |
| -- SD       | .586        | .576                 | .506        | .628               | .690          | .599        |
| Secondary   | 2.24        | 2.40                 | 2.98        | 2.46               | 2.54          | 2.53        |
| -- SD       | .717        | .566                 | .508        | .598               | .575          | .607        |
| Effect Size | .90         | .59                  | .49         | .45                | .41           | .40         |
| Standard    | Leadership  | Learning Communities | Learning    | Family Involvement | Evaluation    | Resources   |
| Elementary  | <b>3.00</b> | <b>2.33</b>          | <b>2.52</b> | <b>2.53</b>        | <b>2.15</b>   | <b>2.57</b> |
| -- SD       | .717        | .645                 | .707        | .742               | .769          | .588        |
| Secondary   | 2.72        | 2.11                 | 2.30        | 2.40               | 2.06          | 2.52        |
| -- SD       | .700        | .605                 | .656        | .609               | .575          | .556        |
| Effect Size | .38         | .35                  | .32         | .19                | .13           | .09         |

The strongest difference between elementary and secondary school teachers was in the “Data Driven” standard, as revealed by an overall large effect size (d) of d=.90. The next highest difference between elementary and secondary school teachers was in the standard of “Quality Teaching,” which had a moderate effect size (d=.59), as shown in Figure 9.

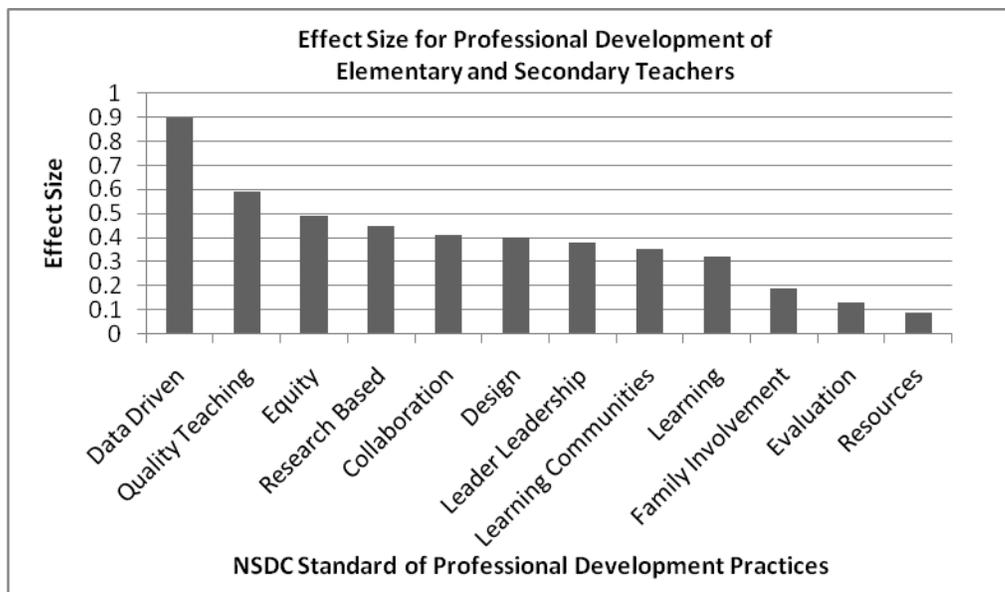


Figure 9. Effect size of NSDC standards of professional development practices on elementary and secondary teachers.

The smallest margin of difference between the teachers were in the “Family Involvement” ( $d=.19$ ), “Evaluation” ( $d=.13$ ), and “Resources” ( $d=.09$ ) standards of professional development practices, as shown in Figure 9.

Elementary school teachers’ mean rating for the “Data Driven” standard was 2.82, while secondary school teachers rated this standard 2.24. Elementary school teachers’ mean rating of the “Quality Teaching” standard was 2.74, while secondary teachers rated it 2.40, as shown in Figure 10.

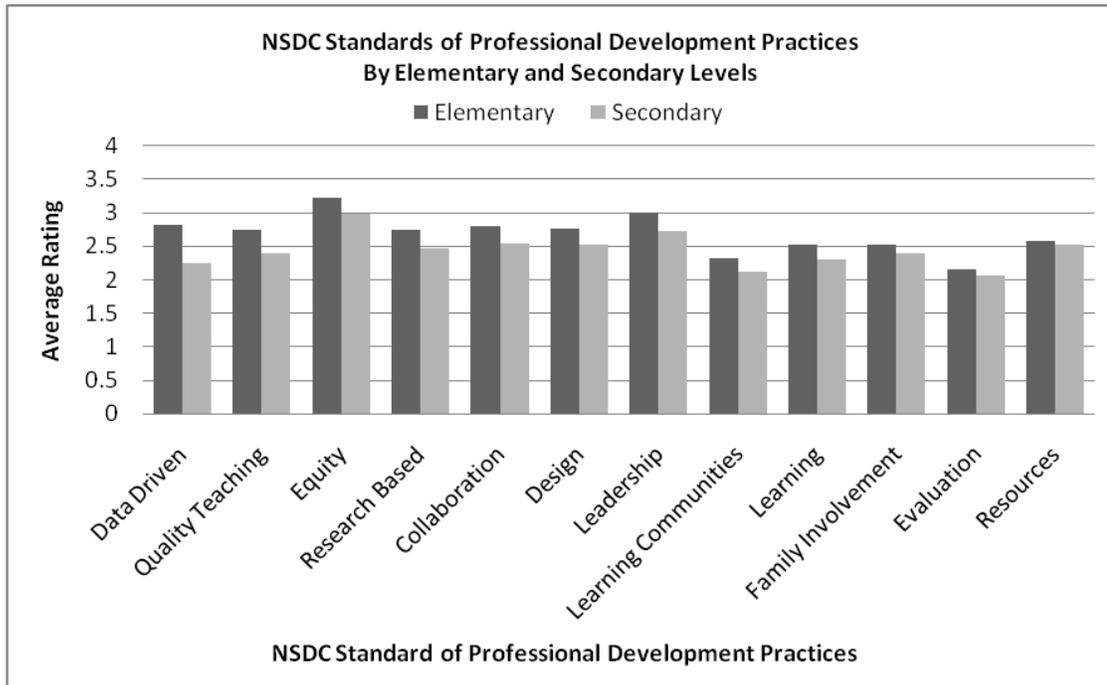


Figure 10. NSDC standards of professional development practices by elementary and secondary levels.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the degree to which professional development practices of K-12 teachers in Nebraska schools align with the 12 national staff development standards at the elementary and secondary levels. The study revealed that there were slight differences between the standards for all teachers, but no significant difference between any of the 12 standards when all teachers were surveyed. However, only one standard, “Equity,” rated “frequently” or higher. The five lowest rated standards (and thus professional development practices that are presently occurring in K-12 schools) include “Learning Communities” (2.2); “Evaluation” (2.2); “Data Driven” (2.5); “Learning” (2.5); and “Family Involvement” (2.5). This is consistent with the literature that shows that powerful forms of professional development are lacking (Sparks, 2002).

There has been a national focus on professional learning communities and collaborative learning as a powerful and effective professional development strategy to “drive” school improvement. According to Newmann and Wehlage (1995), “If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and

collective responsibility among staff” (p. 37). It is interesting to note that for all research questions addressed, “Learning Communities” scored lower than most of the other standards.

The implementation of the NSDC standards of professional development practices varies as the needs of students differ. Results revealed that the schools with the highest Free/Reduced Lunch Rates rated the highest for **all** standards surveyed. This may imply that there is a connection between professional development practices and the needs of students. Leaders of these schools seemed to be following the direction of best practices in professional development. It should be noted that there were discrepancies in the number of respondents for each category. Whereas there were 80 respondents in the low FRL category, there were only 11 in the high average FRL category. This may have altered the overall results.

In examining whether the implementation of the NSDC standards of professional development practices differs between elementary and secondary teachers, research found that elementary teachers rated higher in **all** standards compared with secondary teachers. This may imply that there is a difference between elementary and secondary professional development practices.

### **Recommendations**

This was the first year that this study was conducted. A baseline of professional development in Nebraska schools has now been established. It is recommended that this study be repeated consecutively for the next two to three years as schools prepare and administer the new statewide test. Future studies with similar results would support initial findings. Changes in professional development practices would be noted as schools change to the new NeSA balanced assessment system. Further studies might also address whether professional development practices differ for schools with various achievement scores.

## **REFERENCES**

- Breed, R. (2009 July). *Leaders of Learning*. Presented to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln TEAC 993L class. Lincoln, NE.
- Gallagher, C. W. (2007). *Reclaiming assessment: A better alternative to the accountability agenda*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Isernhagen, J., & Mills, S. (2008). *Charting STARS: Engaging conversations. Year-seven report. Comprehensive evaluation of Nebraska's School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Joyce, B., and Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- National Staff Development Council. (2001). *Standards for Staff Development* (revised). Retrieved on September 4, 2009, from <http://www.nsd.org/standards/>.
- Newmann, F., & Wehlage, G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators by the Center or Restructuring Schools*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (2002). *An Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind* (Pub. No. 0757). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Roschewski, P., Gallagher, C. W., & Isernhagen, J. (April, 2001). Nebraskans reach for the STARS. *Phi Delta Kappan* 82(8), 611-615.
- Sparks, D. (2002). *Designing powerful professional development for teachers and principals*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.
- Watkins, S., & Sheng, Z. (2008, 30 July). *Professional development practices in rural schools: Implications for educational leadership program*. San Diego, CA: National Council of Professors of Educational Administration.



**TRANSITIONS:**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Section 3: Research Studies**

**Study III: 2006-2008 Reading, Math, and Science  
Achievement  
Grades 4, 8, and 11**



**2006-2008 Reading, Math, and Science Achievement  
Grades 4, 8, and 11**

**Shirley J. Mills, Ph.D., University of Texas-Pan American  
Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

**INTRODUCTION**

No Child Left Behind requires that states adopt challenging academic content standards for mathematics, reading/language arts, and science. The standards reflect what students should know and do at each grade level as well as establishing curriculum that promotes rigorous content and the teaching of advanced skills. These standards are measured at grades three through eight and once in high school. Districts began reporting criterion-referenced reading scores in 2001 for grades four, eight, and eleven. Criterion-referenced math scores for grades four, eight, and eleven were reported starting in 2002. With the 2008 testing year, science was added to that spectrum.

Dr. Roger Breed, the Nebraska Commissioner of Education, stated that student achievement results for the state are improving. In the 2009 State of the Schools Report he stated, “Our

students are doing better than ever and have consistently and incrementally improved over the years” (Breed, 2009). Those high expectations for Nebraska educators serve notice that Nebraska will not lose that momentum as they transition into a statewide assessment model.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to examine Comprehensive Evaluation assessment data for reading, math, and science for all students from 2006 to 2008. Due to the change in the way that scores have been reported, only three years of data will be included in this study (2006 to 2008). From 2001 to 2007, scores reported by NDE were a statewide average of district-reported scores for all students in Nebraska demonstrating proficiency in reading and math. In the year 2008, a new baseline score was created by averaging individual student scores demonstrating proficiency on criterion-referenced assessments in reading, math, and science statewide. Norm-referenced scores, the district average percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles on the nationally standardized test used by each school district, were also reported from 2006 to 2008.

The questions for this study were:

1. What were the average percentages of students rated as proficient or better in reading for 2006 through 2008 on their locally developed criterion-referenced tests?
2. What were the average percentages of students rated as proficient or better in math for 2006 through 2008 on their locally developed criterion-referenced tests?
3. What were the average percentages of individual student scores rated as proficient or better in science for 2008 on the statewide assessment for science?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Sample**

Data for the years 2006 through 2008 in this study were included for Class III, IV, and V school districts. Class III school districts are represented by any school district with territory having a population of more than 1000 but less than 150,000 inhabitants; Class IV school districts (Lincoln only) with a territory having a population of 100,000 or more with a city of the primary class; and Class V school districts (Omaha only) within a territory having a population of 200,000 or more inhabitants with a city of the metropolitan class within the territory (Nebraska Education Directory, 2008). The districts in this study represented all public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

### **Score Definitions**

Criterion-referenced individual student data was aggregated statewide and reported for fourth, eighth and eleventh grades for the first time in 2008. With the new changes in state legislation, the academic achievement of students became easier to track on a long-term basis. Thus for 2008, the criterion-referenced scores used in this study will reflect individual scores of students meeting the proficiency level or better defined by the local districts for their locally developed measure averaged across the state. From 2001-07, data was aggregated within each school district and only then aggregated statewide. For the years 2006 to 2007, the criterion-referenced scores for reading, math, and science were the average percentage of students meeting the proficiency level or better defined by the local districts for

their locally developed measure. No individual student data was ever reported. Therefore, an analysis between the years could not be made.

The norm-referenced score was the district average percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles on the nationally standardized test used by that district (e.g., California Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and Terra Nova). While the norm-referenced measure used will vary, the data reported (percent of students in the top two quartiles) was constant for all districts from 2006-2008.

In 2006-2008, tests used to measure standards were a mix of locally developed criterion-referenced measures and may include sections of district specific norm-referenced tests. There are few measures common to all districts. It must be remembered that Nebraska's assessment system was designed to support instruction in local classrooms, not facilitate ranking of schools during this time. This strong reliance on district-developed criterion-referenced measures challenged traditional validity and reliability views.

The unit of analysis for this study was the composite of class III, IV, and V school district average scores in Nebraska. The data for this study were described as unconventional. Traditional inferential statistics, therefore, were not appropriate measures to use. Instead, the researchers conducted a study of descriptive data.

## RESULTS

### Reading Achievement

As shown in Table 10, the district average percent of students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced reading assessments at the fourth-grade level was 91% in 2006 and increased to 92% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the fourth-grade level was 91% based on individual student scores.

Table 10  
*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading*

| Grade | Average District<br>Percent Proficient |      |     | Total Change from<br>2006 to 2007 | Average Individual<br>Percent Proficient<br><b>2008</b> |
|-------|--|------|-----|-----------------------------------|---|
|       | 2006                                   | 2007 |     |                                   |   |
| 4     | 91%                                    | 92%  | +1% | 91%                               |   |
| 8     | 88%                                    | 90%  | +2% | 92%                               |   |
| 11    | 86%                                    | 87%  | +1% | 89%                               |   |

The district average percent reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced tests at the eighth-grade level increased from 88% in 2006 to 90% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the

NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced tests at the eighth-grade level was 92% based on individual student scores.

The district average percent of students reported by districts as proficient on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level increased from 86% in 2006 to 87% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level was 89% based on individual student scores.

Table 11 reports the district average percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles on the norm-referenced reading test used by districts at the fourth grade. The fourth grade scores decreased slightly from 69.42% in 2006 to 69.25% in 2007, and decreased again to 67.69% in 2008. The eighth grade scores increased from 63.24% in 2006 to 63.61% in 2007, and increased again to 64.23% in 2008. The eleventh grade scores decreased from 63.59% in 2006 to 62.05% in 2007, and decreased again to 61.58% in 2008.

Proficiency, as determined by the percent of students in districts in the top two quartiles on norm-referenced measures, decreased from 2006 to 2008 by 1.73% at fourth grade. Proficiency increased by 0.99% at eighth grade, and decreased by 2.01% at eleventh grade. The percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles was calculated for each district and then averaged for all districts across the state for the years 2006-2008.

Table 11  
*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Norm-Referenced Tests in Reading*

| Grade | Average District Percent Proficient |        |        | Total Change from 2006-2008 |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|-----------------------------|
|       | 2006                                | 2007   | 2008   |                             |
| 4     | 69.42%                              | 69.25% | 67.69% | -1.73%                      |
| 8     | 63.24%                              | 63.61% | 64.23% | +0.99%                      |
| 11    | 63.59%                              | 62.05% | 61.58% | -2.01%                      |

### **Math Achievement**

The district average percent of students reported by districts as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced math assessments at the fourth-grade level was 91% in 2006 and increased to 93% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the fourth-grade level was 94% for 2008.

The district average percent of students reported by districts as proficient or better at the eighth-grade level on locally defined criterion-referenced math assessments increased from 83% in 2006 to 86% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of individual students

reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eighth-grade level was 90% using individual student scores.

The district average percent of students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced math assessments at the eleventh-grade level increased from 80% in 2006 to 84% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level was 86% in 2008 using individual student scores. Math criterion-referenced assessment achievement data are shown in Table 12.

Table 12  
*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Math*

| Grade | Average District<br>Percent Proficient |      |                                   | Average Individual<br>Percent Proficient<br><b>2008</b> |
|-------|--|------|-----------------------------------|---|
|       | 2006                                   | 2007 | Total Change from<br>2006 to 2007 |   |
| 4     | 91%                                    | 93%  | +2%                               | 94%   |
| 8     | 83%                                    | 86%  | +3%                               | 90%   |
| 11    | 80%                                    | 84%  | +4%                               | 86%   |

Table 13 reports the district average percent of students scoring in the top two quartiles on the norm-referenced math test used by districts at the fourth grade. The fourth grade scores decreased from 73.83% in 2006 to 70.48% in 2007 and decreased again to 68.26 in 2008. The eighth grade scores increased from 67.83% in 2006 to 68.60% in 2007. Scores for 2008 declined slightly to 68.40%. The eleventh grade scores decreased from 67.62% in 2006 to 66.49% in 2007, and decreased again to 64.88% in 2008.

Proficiency, as determined by the percent of students in districts in the top two quartiles on norm-referenced measures, decreased by 5.57% at fourth grade, increased by 0.57% at eighth grade, and decreased by 2.74% at eleventh grade.

Table 13  
*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Norm-Referenced Tests in Math*

| Grade | Average District<br>Percent Proficient |        |        | Total Change from<br>2006–2008 |
|-------|--|--------|--------|--------------------------------|
|       | 2006                                   | 2007   | 2008   |                                |
| 4     | 73.83%                                 | 70.48% | 68.26% | -5.57%                         |
| 8     | 67.83%                                 | 68.60% | 68.40% | +0.57%                         |
| 11    | 67.62%                                 | 66.49% | 64.88% | -2.74%                         |

## Science Achievement

The average percent of individual student scores reported by the districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced tests at the fourth-grade level was 88% for 2008. The average percent of individual student scores reported as proficient or better was 86% at the eighth-grade level and 83% at the eleventh-grade level. Table 14 shows the percent of students who are proficient or better using individual student scores of criterion-referenced tests in science for the first testing year.

Table 14  
*Percent Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Science*

| Grade | Average Individual Percent Proficient<br>2008 |
|-------|---|
| 4     | 88%   |
| 8     | 86%   |
| 11    | 83%   |

## SUMMARY

For the first time in 2008, individual student scores were reported on criterion-referenced tests. Prior to this year, districts were reporting the averages of their student scores and that was used to yield a statewide average. When examining scores that used district averages from 2001-2005, gains in reading were made from approximately 75% in 2001 to 87% in 2005 at the fourth-grade level. Eighth grade also showed gains, with 2001 scores at approximately 74% and 2005 scores at 85%. Eleventh grade also began with approximately 74% and increased to 82% by 2005. Math scores improved over the same period from 2002 to 2005 – in fourth grade, math scores increased from approximately 78% in 2002 to 89% in 2005. In eighth grade, math scores increased from approximately 69% in 2002 to 80% in 2005. Eleventh-grade math scores improved, from approximately 66% to 76% between 2002 and 2005. This year's report comes on the heels of a history of continuous improvement.

This study includes 2006-2008 scores in reading, math, and science. Average criterion-referenced reading scores for fourth grade from 2006 to 2008 remained fairly consistent even though the method for collecting the data changed from district-averaged scores to individual student scores. There was a slight increase in fourth-grade reading from 91% in 2006 to 92% in 2007, and a slight decrease to 91% in 2008. Grade eight showed a slight increase from 88% in 2006 to 90% in 2007 and another slight increase to 92% in 2008. Likewise, grade eleven scores also showed a slight increase in proficiency from 86% in 2006 to 87% in 2007, and a further increase to 89% in 2008. Norm-referenced reading scores for the period 2006-2008 increased for eighth and eleventh grades, though they decreased at fourth grade. Overall, reading scores continue to be a strength for Nebraska students.

Average criterion-referenced math scores for fourth grade from 2006 to 2007 increased slightly by 2%, then increased slightly again to 94% for 2008 when the method for collecting the data was changed. Grade eight scores increased from 83% to 86% in 2006-07, and showed further increase in 2008 to 90%. Likewise, grade eleven scores increased from 80% in 2006 to 84% in 2007 and further increased to 86% in 2008. Therefore, criterion-

referenced math scores improved for every grade level reported. Norm-referenced math scores increased slightly for eighth grade, but decreased at fourth and eleventh grades for the period 2006-2008.

Science was assessed for the first time in the year 2008. Scores across all grade levels were fairly consistent, ranging from 83% in grade eleven to 86% in grade eight and 88% for grade four. This created baseline scores for further examination in the 2009-10 school year.

District criterion-referenced measures for grades four, eight, and eleven for the year of 2008 were similar to the 2007 scores even though the percentages derived from the scores reflected individual student averages across the state, rather than district averages.

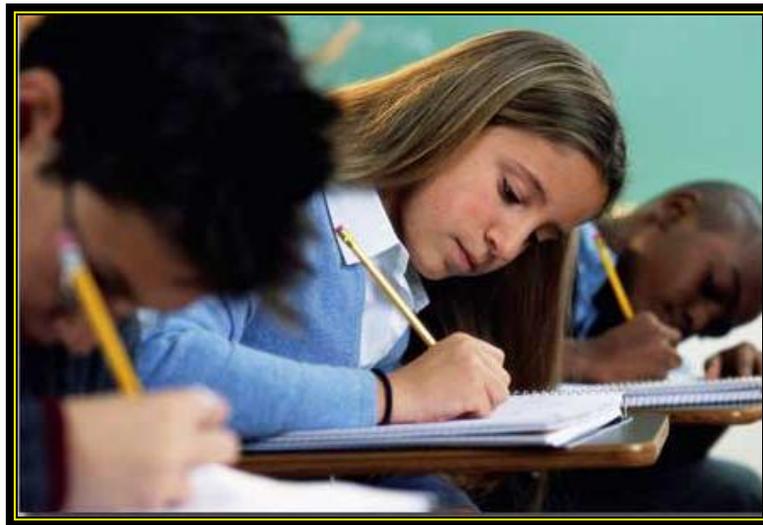
## **REFERENCES**

- Breed, R. (2009). *State of the school report*. Retrieved on July 27, 2009, from <http://reportcard.nde.state.ne.us/>
- Nebraska Education Directory 2007-2008*. (2008). Retrieved on July 27, 2009, from <http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/epubs/E2200/D001-200708.pdf>



**TRANSITIONS:**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Section 3: Research Studies**

**Study IV: 2006-2008 Statewide Writing Achievement  
Grades 4, 8, and 11**



**2006-2008 Statewide Writing Achievement  
Grades 4, 8, and 11**

**Shirley J. Mills, Ph.D., University of Texas-Pan American  
Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

**INTRODUCTION**

This year's writing results continued the upward trend that we have come to expect from Nebraska students and their teachers. At the beginning of the writing journey, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) recommended that districts adopt the Six Trait Writing Model developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL, 2008). These traits were defined as ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, convention, and presentation.

The Six Trait Writing Model emphasized teaching writing as a process and provided a common language among educators (NWREL, 2008). The process created a vehicle of universal instruction to help teachers improve teaching and student writing and was supported by a statewide network of Educational Service Units trained by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to provide professional development and support.

Nebraskans felt that using statewide assessments to inform teaching and learning was critical to the improvement of writing instruction.

Nebraska's statewide writing test is conducted at fourth, eighth and eleventh grades. Students respond to an annual writing prompt that is scored by Nebraska's teachers using a six trait writing rubric. A panel of teachers develops, refines, and pilots the prompts used at the fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades. Trained teachers using rubrics developed for that grade level, holistically score the writing assessments. Nebraska teachers gave themselves an education both in how to write and how to assess by participating in the writing scoring process annually.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to examine the district achievement data available for the Statewide Writing Assessment for the Nebraska Comprehensive Evaluation Project. The research questions for this study were:

1. What was the district average percent of students rated proficient or better in grades four, eight, and eleven for years 2006-2008 on the Nebraska Statewide Writing Assessment?
2. What were the changes over the years 2006-2008 in the district average percent of students rated as proficient or better in district writing scores at grades four, eight, and eleven?

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Sample**

Data for this study were included for Class III, IV, and V school districts. Class III school districts are represented by any school district with territory having a population of more than 1000 but less than 150,000 inhabitants; Class IV school districts (Lincoln only) with a territory having a population of 100,000 or more with a city of the primary class; and Class V school districts (Omaha only) within a territory having a population of 200,000 or more inhabitants with a city of the metropolitan class within the territory (Nebraska Education Directory, 2008). The districts in this study represented all public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

#### **Statewide Writing Assessment Prompt Development**

The process of the development of writing prompts for use in the Statewide Writing Assessment relied on the involvement of Nebraska classroom teachers. Participating teachers were recommended by their district superintendent or assessment contact person and selected by the NDE each year to take part in a writing development task force. The task force consisted of three panels, each consisting of 10-15 teachers representing grades four, eight, and eleven from a variety of school sizes and geographic regions. The task force was convened for a one-day workshop facilitated by the NDE for the purpose of:

- Reviewing the characteristics of mode-specific writing.
- Learning the criteria for effective writing prompts.
- Reviewing and examining areas of bias to be avoided.
- Creating writing prompts for field testing.

During the workshop, participants read and discussed examples of current research related to best practices in the teaching and assessment of student writing. In addition, they read about and discuss criteria for effective writing prompts as well as issues related to bias that should be avoided when creating writing prompts. A number of examples of writing prompts including those that had been used in previous Nebraska statewide writing assessments were also reviewed.

### **Statewide Writing Assessment Prompts Field Testing Process**

From information gathered at the Writing Prompt Development workshop, school districts representing various sizes and geographic locations were selected to field test the writing prompts with students in grades four, eight, and eleven before the end of the current school year.

Participants in the field-testing were at the appropriate grade level and completed assessments according to standard administration procedures. The size of the student sample selected for the field-testing was adequate to provide responses sufficient for scoring and anchoring purposes. At the conclusion of the field-testing, the NDE conducted a review to “fine-tune” the Statewide Writing Assessment scoring process.

### **Statewide Writing Assessment Assessors**

Nebraska teachers are recruited by the NDE to score the writing assessment each year. The scorer qualifications included:

- The teacher was currently teaching or had taught at or near the grade-level being assessed.
- The teacher was familiar with student writing at the grade-level being assessed.
- The teacher had basic knowledge of the Six Trait writing assessment model.

### **Statewide Writing Assessment Scoring Process**

Scoring of the state assessment was held at a central location in the state and scorers came to the site for three days during which training and the scoring occurred. The scoring process of Nebraska’s Statewide Writing Assessment required each sample of student writing to be read and scored by two trained teacher raters who assigned a single holistic score within allowable ranges as prescribed by the rubric. The rubric criteria were identified as ideas and content, organization, voice or tone, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions as identified in the Nebraska Content Standards (NDE, 2008). Raters assigned a score based on how the writing met these criteria overall. If there was more than a two-point difference, a third scoring was done. The scoring range was from one to four in + and – intervals resulting in a ten-point scale. The final score was the composite of the two individual scores. The NDE contracted with the Buros Center for Testing to establish the statewide cut-score.

In the first three years, scoring was done at three sites across the state. To improve reliability, scoring is now done at one site. A sample was sent out of state for scoring by an independent contracted testing company. The NDE releases results for the statewide writing assessment and all Nebraska Comprehensive Evaluation Project assessments on their website

each fall. Local district and individual school data shared included the district average percent of students meeting proficiency or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment.

**Data Analysis**

The unit of analysis for this study was the district average percent of students rated as proficient or better in Class III, IV, and V school districts for the State of Nebraska on the Statewide Writing Assessment at grades four, eight, and eleven.

While this statewide assessment took on some formal technical assessment characteristics that would more characterize norm-referenced tests (statewide common administration and scoring, common cut-score) than many criterion-referenced assessments, it was clearly not a comparison with a separate norm group. Descriptive data was, therefore, reported and discussed. However, because the assessment was a common measure across districts and was an equal interval scale, inferential statistics were also used to examine statistical significance between pre/post scores from inception to last scoring. All significance tests were two-tailed.

**RESULTS**

**Ratings of Writing Proficiency**

Table 15 indicates that gains were made at all grade levels between 2006 and 2008. The district average percent of students reported by districts as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased from 83% in 2006 to 85% in 2007. In 2008, scores increased to 91% using individual student scores. This increase was significant (p<.005). Fourth-grade writing scores increased by 8% from 2006 to 2008.

In eighth grade, the district average percent of student reported by districts as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment increased from 87% in 2006 to 91% in 2007. This was a significant increase (p<.001). In 2008, scores increased to 93% using individual student scores. This increase was also significant (p<.005). Thus, eighth-grade writing scores increased 6% from 2006 to 2008.

Table 15  
*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on the Statewide Writing Assessment*

| Grade | Average District Percent Proficient |      |       | Total Change from 2006 to 2008 |
|-------|-------------------------------------|------|-------|--------------------------------|
|       | 2006                                | 2007 | 2008  |                                |
| 4     | 83%                                 | 85%  | 91%** | +8%                            |
| 8     | 87%                                 | 91%* | 93%** | +6%                            |
| 11    | 92%                                 | 92%  | 94%** | +2%                            |

\*p<.001 compared to the previous year  
\*\*p<.005 compared to the previous year

In eleventh grade, the district average percent of students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment stayed consistent between 2006 and 2007 at 92%. Scores increased to 94% in 2008 using individual student scores. This increase was significant ( $p < .005$ ). Eleventh-grade writing scores increased 3% from 2006 to 2008.

## SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to examine district achievement data available on the Statewide Writing Assessment. Even though this study only examined 2006-2008 scores, it is worth noting the achievement gains that have been made in writing since 2002. When comparing scores that used district averages from 2002-2005, gains in statewide writing achievement were made across all grade levels. Fourth-grade writing scores increased from approximately 76% in 2002 to 85% in 2005. Eighth-grade writing scores also increased between 2003 and 2005, from approximately 80% to 86%. Eleventh-grade scores were only reported starting from 2004, but still increased from 89% in 2004 to 91% in 2005. This year's study includes 2006-2008 scores on the Statewide Writing Assessment.

Results indicated that students across all grades continued to make gains in the pre/post comparisons between 2006 and 2008 in writing. Fourth-graders made an 8% improvement from 2006 to 2008 and eighth-graders made a 6% increase. Eleventh-graders' scores increased by 2% on the Statewide Writing Assessment between 2006 and 2008.

Overall, Nebraska's writing results show positive student gains and indicate that the statewide writing assessment component of STARS has been beneficial for student achievement. The Nebraska Statewide Writing Assessment is a relatively new model and while it has undergone improvements and has been receiving good responses over the years of implementation, evaluative comments will remain guarded until replications of this model by other states are made and further longitudinal evaluations are completed.

While this writing assessment has characteristics that enable inferential statistical analysis to be used, there may be some questions from the traditional measurement community concerning this practice. It must be remembered that the philosophy of the Statewide Writing Assessment is to support teaching and learning and not to focus on the development of assessments for technical strengths in ranking results.

## REFERENCES

- Nebraska Department of Education. (2008). *Academic Standards*. Retrieved on September 4, 2009, from <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ndestandards/AcademicStandards.htm>
- Nebraska Education Directory 2007-2008*. (2008). Retrieved on July 27, 2009, from <http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/epubs/E2200/D001-200708.pdf>
- Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. (2008). *6 + 1 Writing Traits*. Retrieved on June 8, 2008, from <http://www.thetraits.org/about.php>



**TRANSITIONS**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Section 3: Research Studies**

**Study V: 2006-2008 Achievement for  
Special Populations  
Grades 4, 8, and 11**



**2006-2008 Achievement for Special Populations  
Grades 4, 8, and 11**

**Shirley J. Mills, Ph.D., University of Texas-Pan American  
Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

**INTRODUCTION**

A key element of No Child Left Behind was increased academic achievement for *all* students – including special populations of students. This study defines special populations as English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students. The diversity of student enrollment is a factor that requires special consideration due to the importance of the Annual Yearly Progress Report requiring all student subgroups to show growth in student achievement.

## ***English Language Learners***

Nebraska's ELL population has risen from 6 to 7% from 2004 to 2008 (Nebraska State Report Card, 2008). Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act concerns Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. It adjusts previous federal policies (specifically, Title VII of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994) and is designed to address the needs of students in the U.S. public school system who are not proficient in English. Title III of NCLB consolidates the bilingual education program and the immigrant education program into a single formula-driven program, with funding being awarded at the state level. Title III also creates new requirements for ELL populations: they must be tested at least once a year using an English proficiency test; if they have been in U.S. schools for three consecutive years they must be tested in reading/language arts using a test written in English, and they must meet specific annual targets of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Local Education Agencies and State Education Agencies would be held responsible for ensuring they meet these targets. State Education Agencies must also submit an education plan to the U.S. Department of Education listing the requirements they have implemented to serve ELL students in order to receive Title III funding. In turn, Local Education Agencies must submit their own education plan to the State Education Agencies (NWREL, 2003).

## **Special Education Students**

The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 1997, led states and districts to identify increasing numbers of students that required accommodations in state assessments in order to fairly and accurately indicate what special population students know and can do to show their academic abilities (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). IDEA's accountability system was intended to assist schools in creating and implementing high quality learning opportunities for all students and to provide a quality assessment that would accurately measure these special populations' mastery of core knowledge and skills. A special education student, defined as a student with a disability may need specially designed instruction to meet his or her learning goals. A student with a disability will usually have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), which is a written report for each individual with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with Title 42 U.S.C. Section 1414(d) (Nation's Report Card, 2009). This IEP guides his or her special education instruction. Students with disabilities are often referred to as special education students and may be classified by their school as learning disabled (LD) or emotionally disturbed (ED). SPED student populations held steady at 15% from 2004 to 2008 (Nebraska State Report Card, 2008).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to examine academic change of special populations, defined as English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students, from 2006 to 2008. Due to the change in the way that scores have been reported, only three years of data will be included in this study (2006 to 2008).

*The questions for this study were:*

1. What were the average percentages of ELL and SPED students rated as proficient or better in reading for 2006-2008 on their locally developed criterion-referenced tests?

2. What were the average percentages of ELL and SPED students rated as proficient or better in math for 2006-2008 on their locally developed criterion-referenced tests?
3. What were the average percentages of ELL and SPED students rated as proficient or better in writing for 2006-2008 on their locally developed criterion-referenced tests?
4. What were the average percentages of ELL and SPED students rated as proficient or better in science for 2008 on their locally developed criterion-referenced tests?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Sample**

Data for this study were included for Class III, IV, and V school districts. Class III school districts are represented by any school district with territory having a population of more than 1000 but less than 150,000 inhabitants; Class IV school districts (Lincoln only) with a territory having a population of 100,000 or more with a city of the primary class; and Class V school districts (Omaha only) within a territory having a population of 200,000 or more inhabitants with a city of the metropolitan class within the territory (Nebraska Education Directory, 2008). The 2006 and 2007 district scores for special populations that included Special Education Students (SPED) and English Language Learners (ELL) used district average percents submitted by each school district that were averaged statewide. The districts in this study represented all public school students in Nebraska. The district data for this study were included on the state website and use of the data was facilitated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

### **Score Definitions**

From 2001-07, data was aggregated within each school district and only then aggregated statewide. Thus for the years 2006 and 2007, the criterion-referenced scores for reading and math were the district average percentage of ELL and SPED students meeting the proficiency level or better defined by the local districts for their locally developed measure. Criterion-referenced individual student data was aggregated statewide and reported for fourth, eighth and eleventh grades for the first time in 2008. With this system, the academic achievement of students became easier to track on a long-term basis. Thus for 2008, the criterion-referenced scores used in this study will reflect individual scores of SPED and ELL students averaged across the state.

### **Data Analysis**

The data for this study were described as unconventional. Traditional inferential statistics, therefore, were not appropriate measures to use. Instead, the researchers conducted a study of descriptive data. For the years of 2006 and 2007, researchers averaged the district averages statewide and reported the change from year to year. For 2008, the individual student scores were reported to NDE and averaged across the state to achieve a baseline score for reading, math, and science.

The unit of analysis for writing achievement was the district average percent of students rated as proficient or better in Class III, IV, and V school districts on the Statewide Writing Assessment. The writing assessment was a common measure across districts and utilized an equal interval scale. Therefore, inferential statistics were used to examine statistical significance between pre/post scores in writing for the years 2006-2008. All statistical

significance tests were conducted by the Nebraska Education Assessment Research (NEAR) Center and were based on the average of district scores.

## RESULTS

### ELL Reading Achievement

As shown in Table 16, the district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the fourth-grade level increased from 72% in 2006 to 79% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the fourth-grade level was also 79% for 2008 using individual student scores.

The district average percent of ELL reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the eighth-grade level increased from 60% in 2006 to 65% in 2007. For 2008, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the eighth-grade level was 75% using individual student scores.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally developed criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the eleventh-grade level increased from 53% in 2006 to 57% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the eleventh-grade level was 68% in 2008 using individual student scores.

Table 16

*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading for English Language Learners (ELL)*

| Grade | Average District Percent Proficient |      |                                | Average Individual Percent Proficient |
|-------|-------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|       | 2006                                | 2007 | Total Change from 2006 to 2007 | 2008                                  |
| 4     | 72%                                 | 79%  | +7%                            | 79%                                   |
| 8     | 60%                                 | 65%  | +5%                            | 75%                                   |
| 11    | 53%                                 | 57%  | +4%                            | 68%                                   |

### ELL Math Achievement

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the fourth-grade level increased from 80% in 2006 to 83% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced

assessments for math at the fourth-grade level was 87% for 2008 using individual student scores.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eighth-grade level increased from 61% in 2006 to 62% in 2007. In 2008, the state average percent of students reported by districts to NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eighth-grade level was 76% using individual student scores.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eleventh-grade level increased from 48% in 2006 to 61% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eleventh-grade level was 68% in 2008 using individual student scores. ELL student proficiency data are shown in Table 17.

Table 17  
*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Math for English Language Learners (ELL)*

| Grade | Average District Percent Proficient |      | Total Change from 2006 to 2007 | Average Individual Percent Proficient 2008 |
|-------|-------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|--|
|       | 2006                                | 2007 |                                |  |
| 4     | 80%                                 | 83%  | +3%                            | 87%  |
| 8     | 61%                                 | 62%  | +1%                            | 76%  |
| 11    | 48%                                 | 61%  | +13%                           | 68%  |

***ELL Science Achievement***

Table 18 indicates the state average percent of individual students reported by districts to NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments in science in 2008. Individual students scores were reported and then averaged across the state. These scores ranged from 76% in fourth grade to 66% in eighth grade and 61% in eleventh grade. Because this is the first reporting year, no other scores are available for comparison for ELL science achievement.

Table 18  
*Percent Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Science for English Language Learners (ELL)*

| Grade | Average Individual Percent Proficient 2008 |
|-------|--|
| 4     | 76%  |
| 8     | 66%  |
| 11    | 61%  |

### **ELL Writing Achievement**

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased from 66% in 2006 to 69% in 2007, then further increased in 2008 to 85% using individual student scores.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eighth-grade level increased from 56% in 2006 to 62% in 2007. This increased again to 79% in 2008 using individual student scores.

The district average percent of ELL students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eleventh-grade level increased from 53% in 2006 to 56% in 2007. Scores increased again to 75% in 2008 using individual student scores. ELL student writing data are shown in Table 19.

Table 19

*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on the Statewide Writing Assessment for English Language Learners (ELL)*

| Grade | Average District Percent Proficient |      |      | Total Change from 2006 to 2008 |
|-------|-------------------------------------|------|------|--------------------------------|
|       | 2006                                | 2007 | 2008 |                                |
| 4     | 66%                                 | 69%  | 85%  | +19%                           |
| 8     | 56%                                 | 62%  | 79%  | +23%                           |
| 11    | 53%                                 | 56%  | 75%  | +22%                           |

### ***SPED Reading Achievement***

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the fourth-grade level increased from 74% in 2006 to 81% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments in reading at the fourth-grade level was 79% for 2008 using individual student scores.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments at the eighth-grade level increased from 66% in 2006 to 72% in 2007. For 2008, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the eighth-grade level was 78% using individual student scores.

Table 20

*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading for Special Education Students (SPED)*

| Grade | Average District<br>Percent Proficient |      | Total Change from<br>2006 to 2007 | Average Individual<br>Percent Proficient<br>2008 |
|-------|--|------|-----------------------------------|--|
|       | 2006                                   | 2007 |                                   |  |
| 4     | 74%                                    | 81%  | +7%                               | 79%  |
| 8     | 66%                                    | 72%  | +6%                               | 78%  |
| 11    | 61%                                    | 65%  | +4%                               | 71%  |

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for reading at the eleventh-grade level increased from 61% in 2006 to 65% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced tests for reading at the eleventh-grade level was 71% in 2008 using individual student scores. SPED student reading data are shown in Table 20.

#### **SPED Math Achievement**

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the fourth-grade level increased from 75% in 2006 to 82% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the fourth-grade level was 85% for 2008 using individual student scores.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eighth-grade level increased from 56% in 2006 to 64% in 2007. For 2008, the state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eighth-grade level was 73% using individual student scores.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on locally developed criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eleventh-grade level increased from 46% in 2006 to 55% in 2007. The state average percent of individual students reported by districts to the NDE as proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced assessments for math at the eleventh-grade level was 62% in 2008 using individual student scores. SPED student math data are shown in Table 21.

Table 21

*District Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on Criterion-Referenced Tests in Math for Special Education Students (SPED)*

| Grade | Average District Percent Proficient |      | Total Change from 2006 to 2007 | Average Individual Percent Proficient 2008 |
|-------|-------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|--|
|       | 2006                                | 2007 |                                |  |
| 4     | 75%                                 | 82%  | +7%                            | 85%  |
| 8     | 56%                                 | 64%  | +8%                            | 73%  |
| 11    | 46%                                 | 55%  | +9%                            | 62%  |

***SPED Science Achievement***

Table 22 illustrates the percentage of individual SPED students who were reported as scoring proficient or better on locally defined criterion-referenced science assessments. The percent of students scoring proficient or better for year 2008 was calculated for each individual and then averaged across the state. Because this is the first year for reporting science achievement scores, only one scoring year for individual student scores averaged across the state was reported. The scores ranged from 65% proficient or better at the eleventh-grade level to 68% proficient or better at the eighth-grade level and 79% proficient or better at the fourth-grade level.

Table 22

*Percent Proficient or Better for Criterion-Referenced Tests in Science for Special Education Students (SPED)*

| Grade | Average Individual Percent Proficient 2008 |
|-------|--|
| 4     | 79%  |
| 8     | 68%  |
| 11    | 65%  |

***SPED Writing Achievement***

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the fourth-grade level increased from 64% in 2006 to 69% in 2007, then further increased to 77% in 2008 using individual student scores.

The district average percent of SPED students reported as proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eighth-grade level increased from 63% in 2006 to 67% in 2007. The percentage increased to 76% in 2008 using individual student scores.

The district average percent of SPED students reported proficient or better on the Statewide Writing Assessment at the eleventh-grade level remained constant at 65% from 2006-07, and

increased to 76% in 2008 using individual student scores. SPED student writing data are shown in Table 23.

Table 23  
*Percent Proficient or Better (Change) on the Statewide Writing Assessment for Special Education Students (SPED)*

| Grade | District Average Percent Proficient |      |      | Total Change from 2006-2008 |
|-------|-------------------------------------|------|------|-----------------------------|
|       | 2006                                | 2007 | 2008 |                             |
| 4     | 64%                                 | 69%  | 77%  | +13%                        |
| 8     | 63%                                 | 67%  | 76%  | +13%                        |
| 11    | 65%                                 | 65%  | 76%  | +11%                        |

### SUMMARY

For the first time in 2008, individual student scores on criterion-referenced tests were reported. Prior to this year, districts were reporting their averages of their student scores and which yielded a statewide average.

When examining scores that used district averages from 2001-2005, gains were made in both ELL and SPED students at all grade levels in both reading and math. From 2001 to 2005, ELL reading scores increased from 50% to 67% at the fourth-grade level, from 47% to 57% at eighth grade, and from 45% to 47% at eleventh grade. Over the 2002-2005 period, ELL math scores increased from 53% to 72% at fourth grade, from 40% to 59% in eighth grade, and from 39% to 51% for the eleventh-grade level. SPED reading scores over the 2001-2005 period increased from 44% to 67% at the fourth-grade level, from 43% to 59% at eighth grade, and from 42% to 54% at eleventh grade. SPED math scores also increased from 2002 to 2005, from 51% to 72% at fourth grade, from 34% to 54% at eighth grade, and from 28% to 43% at eleventh grade. The 2001-2005 achievement scores of special populations set a precedent of progress that set the standard for the years to follow.

This study includes 2006-2008 scores in reading, math, writing, and science. Average ELL reading criterion-referenced scores for grade four from 2006 to 2008 remained consistent even though the method for collecting the data was changed from district averaged scores to individual student scores. Fourth grade ELL reading scores increased from 72% in 2006 to 79% in 2007. In 2008, scores remained at 79%. Eighth-grade ELL reading scores increased from 60% in 2006 to 65% in 2007, then further increased to 75% in 2008. Eleventh-grade ELL reading scores increased from 53% to 57% from 2006-07, then further increased to 68% in 2008.

ELL mathematics scores indicate a substantial increase from 2006 to 2008 for all grades. Fourth-grade scores increased from 80% in 2006 to 83% in 2007 and further increased to 87% in 2008. Eighth-grade scores increased from 61% in 2006 to 62% in 2007, then

increased dramatically to 76% in 2008. Eleventh-grade scores increased from 48% in 2006 to 61% in 2007, then increased to 68% in 2008.

ELL science scores in 2008 ranged from 76% at the fourth-grade level to 66% at the eighth-grade level and 61% at the eleventh-grade level. These first-year results create a baseline score for future studies.

ELL writing scores showed a particularly noteworthy increase across all grade levels from 2006 to 2008 – from 66% to 85% for fourth-graders, from 56% to 79% for eighth-graders, and from 53% to 75% for eleventh-graders.

SPED fourth-grade reading scores increased from 74% in 2006 to 81% in 2007, but decreased slightly to 79% in 2008. Contrastingly, in eighth-grade, scores increased from 66% in 2006 to 72% in 2007, and increased to 78% in 2008. Likewise, eleventh-grade scores increased from 61% in 2006 to 65% in 2007, and further increased to 71% in 2008.

SPED mathematics scores increased at all grade levels. At the fourth-grade level, they increased from 75% in 2006 to 82% in 2007, and then increased to 85% in 2008. Eighth-grade scores increased from 56% in 2006 to 64% in 2007, and increased further to 73% in 2008. Likewise, eleventh-grade scores increased from 46% in 2006 to 55% in 2007, then increased to 62% in 2008.

SPED science scores ranged from 79% at the fourth-grade level to 68% at the eighth-grade level and 65% at the eleventh-grade level. These results create a baseline score for further examination in the 2009-10 school year.

SPED writing scores also improved across all grade levels. From 2006 to 2008, fourth-grade scores increased from 64% to 77%, eighth-grade scores increased from 63% to 76%, and eleventh-grade scores increased from 65% to 76%.

Special population students are making progress in reading, mathematics, and writing achievement. The achievement gap is narrowing, indicating that the emphasis on academic progress for all students is having a positive effect.

## REFERENCES

- Nation's Report Card: Glossary*. (2009). Retrieved on September 4, 2009, from <http://nationsreportcard.gov/glossary.asp>
- National Center for Educational Statistics (2009). *IES Newsflash: Findings from the condition of education 2009: Student educational progress shows modest gains*. Retrieved on July 27, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/inclusion.asp>
- Nebraska Education Directory 2007-2008*. (2008). Retrieved on July 27, 2009, from <http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/epubs/E2200/D001-200708.pdf>
- Nebraska State Report Card*. (2008). Retrieved on July 27, 2009, from <http://reportcard.nde.state.ne.us/Main/Home.aspx>

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. (2003). *In context: English language learners and No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved on August 28, 2009, from <http://www.nwrel.org/request/2003may/incontext.html>



**TRANSITIONS:**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Section 3: Research Studies**

**Study VI: The Impact of Student Mobility  
On Student Performance and Teacher Practice**



**The Impact of Student Mobility  
On Student Performance and Teacher Practice**

**Jody Isernhagen, Ed.D., University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Nino Zhvania, M.A., University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Nadia Bulkin, B.A., University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

**INTRODUCTION**

Nearly 12 million children under the age of 19 changed residence in 1999-2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). This occurrence often leads to a child making a “non-promotional school change” (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999, p. vi), defined as student mobility. An eighth grade math teacher explained the challenges caused by high mobility:

*You’re constantly trying to track where they’ve been. We have a student that moved earlier this year and had been to seven schools in the last four years. We track where they’re at, when the student was verified SPED, and at the same time, you’ve got to look at all the gaps. Transitions are challenging for these students.*

This trend of “student mobility” is known to be a contributing factor to “academic achievement gaps” historically attributed to race, ethnicity, gender, and social/economic status (Paik & Phillips, 2002).

A 1994 General Accounting Office report regarding mobility and elementary school children indicates that approximately 17% of the nation’s third-graders (more than 500,000 children) have attended at least three different schools since starting first grade (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1994). In a study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1998 Math Assessment, “34% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders, 21% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and 10% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders changed schools at least once in the previous two years” (Rumberger, 2003, p. 6-7). Mobility patterns observed across grades create an even graver picture. Nationally, 14% of school-age children moved between 2006 and 2007 (Rhode Island *KIDS COUNT*, 2009, p. 130). Examining student transience in an elementary school in Los Angeles, Bruno and Isken (1996) projected that only 38% of the initially enrolled students would be able to “survive from year one to year six and receive the full instructional program offered by the school site” (p. 245).

There is a perception that student mobility is more likely to impact urban schools in the United States. However, student mobility is an increasingly common issue that impacts education in many areas! Students in rural areas have an approximate mobility rate of 15 percent – comparable to the national average (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1994). Mobility that results in school change may be the greatest threat to academic achievement and the school environment (Biernat & Jax, 2000). There is a strong correlation between poverty and the risk of academic failure, and a strong correlation between poverty and frequent mobility (Wright, 1999). Recent reports have found that “nearly half a million children in the rural Midwest are living in poverty, and thousands more are living just above the poverty line,” leading to the conclusion that “the risk of frequent mobility and academic failure is heightened” (Paik & Phillips, 2002, p. 6).

Though yielding controversial results, research has well-documented the impact of mobility on student achievement. A large number of studies have found the effect of mobility on student performance to be negative (Brent & Diobilda 1993; Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1998; Reynolds, 1991, U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1994). Mobility was also found to have a negative impact on teachers and classrooms. Research indicates that teachers perceive mobility as a major barrier that prevents students from succeeding (Bruno & Isken, 1996; Kerbow, 1996; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Teachers in highly mobile classes also blamed mobility for their inability to effectively preserve the learning environment and deliver quality instruction (Bruno & Isken, 1996; Kerbow, 1996; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Offenber (2004) theorizes that any given level of school performance might not necessarily be attributed to school characteristics (e.g., highly qualified teachers, well developed teaching and learning programs, school policies, etc.), but to student mobility. However, other studies have found that mobility had no significant independent effect on students’ academic performance (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the impact of student mobility on student performance and teacher practice in the state of Nebraska.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Mobility Impact on Students and Their Achievement**

Reports and research on samples of students nationwide have long been alerting parents, educators, and policy makers to the problem of student mobility in the education arena. Student mobility is defined by Rumberger as a measure of how often a child makes non-promotional school changes (2003). It is often seen as disruptive to both students and schools. Sanderson reports that these students are largely disengaged, with little or no vested interest in the school or the educational process (2003).

Research reports on the effect of mobility on student achievement, mostly measured in math and reading test scores, are most controversial. Some of them testify that the impact is negative. Others reveal that it is either insignificant or positive. Adding to the controversy, some other studies show that whether the effect of mobility is positive or negative depends on various interfering factors.

Most notably, some research reports testify that an achievement gap between mobile and non-mobile students is irreparable (Texas Education Agency, 1997). It was found that the cause of this problem lies in the fact that mobile students make academic progress slower and lose knowledge quicker than their non-mobile peers (Mao et al., 1998; Texas Education Agency, 1997). Studies have also revealed that students are highly unlikely to compensate for their knowledge gap because their knowledge deficiency increases every consecutive year (Reynolds, 1991).

Contradicting these findings, other studies have failed to find any negative impact of mobility on student achievement. They argue that highly mobile students fail academically not because of their mobility but because of other factors. Some found students' IQ, socio-economic and minority status to be the main culprits (Alexander et al., 1996; Morris, Pestaner, & Nelson, 1967), while others maintain that mobile students' underperformance was caused by pre-existing underachievement (Blane, 1985; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Temple & Reynolds, 1999).

Forty-one percent of highly mobile students are low achievers, compared with 26% of non-highly mobile students (Paik & Phillips, 2002). The more frequent changes to schools, the greater the threat to academic achievement. The U.S. Government Accounting Office (1994) reveals that students "who change schools more than three times before eighth grade are at least four times more likely to drop out of school" (Paik & Phillips, p. 7). Other studies have corroborated this finding that mobility negatively effects school achievement (Audette, Algozzine, & Warden, 1993; Texas Education Agency, 1997).

### **Mobility Impact on Schools, Teachers and Classrooms**

Students are not the only ones impacted by mobility. Teachers experience the negative impact as well. Often teachers demonstrate frustration and hopelessness while teaching mobile students. They say there are "no benefits of working with children who move" (Lash

& Kirkpatrick, 1990, p. 185). Studies have found that teachers rarely know in advance how many new students will enter their classrooms during a school year and how many more will exit before the last day of school (Bruno & Isken, 1996; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Such unexpected classroom changes make it difficult for teachers to adjust and deliver quality instruction. Given its dire effect on students and teachers, student mobility clearly has a considerable effect on schools.

### **Context of the Problem**

Today the average rates of student mobility in Nebraska public schools have slowly decreased from 13.89% in 2003-2004 to 13.82% in 2005-2006 to 12.38% in 2007-2008 (Nebraska Department of Education, 2009). These statistics reveal that the average mobility rate from 2003-2008 within the state is 13.35%. However, a large number of Nebraska schools report mobility at a higher percentage than the state average (Nebraska Department of Education, 2009). According to the 2007-2008 Nebraska school data, some rural schools in Nebraska have a mobility rate as high as 35.56%. The present research study was undertaken in order to identify evidence of the impact of mobility on student academic performance and teacher practice.

### **Definitions**

- *Student Mobility*  
Student mobility is a “non-promotional school change” (Rumberger et al., 1999, p. vi) or an “inconsistency or interruption in the educational experience” (Fisher, Matthews, Stafford, Nakagawa, & Durante, 2002, p. 319). In essence, however, the phenomenon can be defined as an unscheduled classroom entrance or exit made by students within or between academic years (Texas Educational Agency, 1997).
- *Student Mobility Rates*  
The research uses the formula applied by the Nebraska Department of Education. Specifically, the rates are calculated according to the following definition: “Any child who enters or leaves school between the last Friday in September and the last day of school is counted in the mobility rate. An individual child is counted only once. This number is divided by the K-12 enrollment taken the last Friday in September” (Nebraska Department of Education, 2009).
- *School/District Performance*  
According to the Nebraska Department of Education, school district overall performance is measured by student achievement on both standards-based criterion-referenced assessment (STARS Assessment) from 2001-2009 and a norm-referenced instrument. School performance is rated on a five-point scale of Excellent, Very Good, Good, Needs Improvement, or Unacceptable according to the demonstrated student proficiency standards of schools/districts. Schools and districts are rated as Excellent, Very Good, or Good if they meet the standard performance expectations set by the state. Schools and districts are rated as Needs Improvement or Unacceptable if demonstrated student achievement is below the state standards.
- *Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRT)*  
An achievement test is regarded to be criterion-referenced if it measures students’ knowledge of subject matter. Performance on these tests demonstrates how well students have mastered content. Scores from grades four, eight, and eleven in the

subjects of reading, writing, math, and science are reported. As an assessment tool, the state of Nebraska adopted STARS – criterion-referenced tests developed by Nebraska teachers – during the years 2001-2009. From 2001 to 2007, the criterion-referenced score was the district average percent of students who met the proficiency level or better as defined by the local district for their locally developed measure. Criterion-referenced individual student data was aggregated statewide for the first time in 2008.

- *Norm-Referenced Tests (NRT)*

An achievement test is regarded to be norm-referenced if it measures how students compare with other students across a norm group. Performance on these tests aims to rank students according to their achievement scores. In the state of Nebraska, schools administer one of five tests (e.g., Terra Nova, Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT), etc.). While the norm-referenced measure used will vary, the data reported (percent of students in the top two quartiles) was constant for all districts.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative data was gathered by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and provided to the researchers for this study. Data from 212 out of 254 school districts in Nebraska was used. During this study, both the definition of mobility and the method for collecting data were changed by the NDE. The new definition of mobility rate in Nebraska states that “any child who enters or leaves school between the last Friday in September and the last day of school is counted in the mobility rate. An individual child is counted only once. This number is divided by the K-12 enrollment taken the last Friday in September” (Nebraska Department of Education, 2009). Additionally, criterion-referenced individual student data was aggregated statewide and reported for fourth, eighth and eleventh grades for the first time in 2008. With this system, the academic achievement of students – especially mobile students – will be easier to track on a long-term basis. In the past, data was aggregated within each school district and only then aggregated statewide. No individual student data was ever reported. Therefore, only one year of data will be shared regarding the achievement of mobility students within the state as past data is not comparable.

Since tests used to measure standards are a mix of locally developed criterion-referenced measures and may include sections of district specific norm-referenced tests, there are few common measures to all districts.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

Qualitative data was collected through interviews conducted at schools with high mobility rates and high student performance, and at schools with high mobility and low student performance (Appendix G). Classroom teachers, specialized teachers, and principals were interviewed. Mobility was divided into three levels: districts with a mobility rate of 14% or higher were placed in the high mobility group, districts with a mobility rate between 9% and 13.99% were placed into the average mobility group, and districts with a mobility rate below 9% were placed in the low mobility group.

## QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

A smaller percentage of highly mobile students scored proficient or better on all the locally defined criterion-referenced assessments in 2007-2008 than non-highly mobile students.

As shown in Table 24, the fourth-grade criterion-referenced assessment in math showed the largest percentage of highly mobile students scoring proficient or better, at 90%. On this test, 95% of non-highly mobile students scored proficient or better, and the state average was 94%. The eighth-grade science test showed the smallest percentage of highly mobile students scoring proficient or better, at 67%. By contrast, 88% of non-highly mobile students scored proficient or better on this test, and the state average was 86%.

Table 24

*Students Scoring Proficient or Better on Criterion-Referenced Assessments*

| Criterion-Referenced Assessment | Grade Level | Total Students Scoring Proficient or Better (%) | Non-Highly Mobile Students Scoring Proficient or Better (%) | Highly Mobile Students Scoring Proficient or Better (%) |
|---------------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|
| Reading                         | 4th         | 91  | 94  | 86  |
|                                 | 8th         | 92  | 94  | 79  |
|                                 | 11th        | 89  | 92  | 76  |
| Math                            | 4th         | 94  | 95  | 90  |
|                                 | 8th         | 90  | 92  | 76  |
|                                 | 11th        | 86  | 89  | 72  |
| Science                         | 4th         | 88  | 89  | 79  |
|                                 | 8th         | 86  | 88  | 67  |
|                                 | 11th        | 83  | 87  | 70  |
| Writing                         | 4th         | 91  | 91  | 83  |
|                                 | 8th         | 93  | 94  | 84  |
|                                 | 11th        | 94  | 95  | 85  |

As shown in Figure 2, the largest discrepancy between highly mobile and non-highly mobile students was in eighth-grade science, where 88% of non-highly mobile students scored proficient or better and 67% of highly mobile students scored proficient or better. The smallest discrepancy was in fourth-grade math, where 95% of non-highly mobile students scored proficient or better and 90% of highly mobile students scored proficient or better.

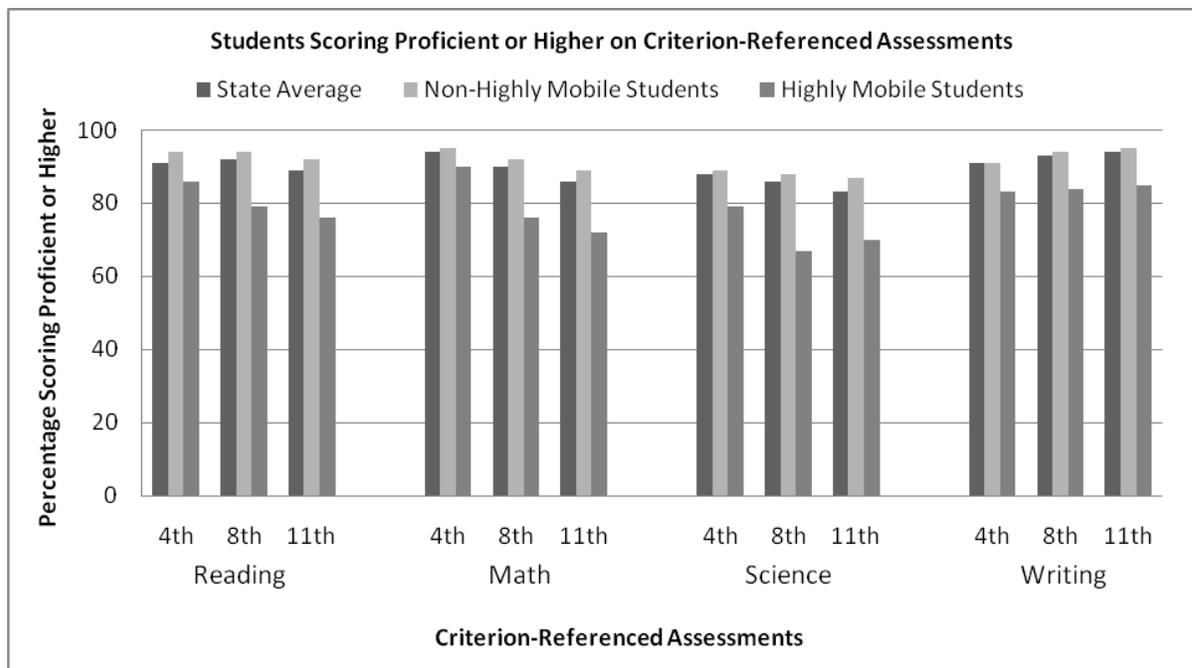


Figure 2. Students scoring proficient or better on criterion-referenced assessments.

The data clearly suggests a correlation between highly mobile students and low student achievement. Highly mobile students consistently score lower than non-highly mobile students in regards to the state average. Thus, based on the data, there is a relationship between high mobility and low academic achievement. The testimonials in the qualitative section demonstrate what some Nebraska teachers are doing to help remedy this problem.

## QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Causal links between mobility and decreased academic achievement are difficult to prove, given the multiple factors involved when students change schools. Mobility may only be a symptom rather than a cause of poor school performance (Rumberger, 2003). Qualitative data was collected through interviews conducted at selected Nebraska schools: those with high mobility and high student performance, and those with high mobility and low student performance. The purpose of these selections was to gain information on what schools are doing to support highly mobile students. Classroom teachers, specialized teachers and administrators were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted in an effort to gather information regarding classroom strategies, interventions, and practices, as well as school or district policies that have successfully addressed student learning and achievement issues caused by student mobility. Questions focused on the impact of mobility on classroom practices, individual student learning, teacher perceptions, and school/district policies. Five themes emerged from the interviews: Transitioning Mobile Students; Needs for Mobile and Non-Mobile Students; Administrative Support and School Procedures; Teacher Perceptions and Support; and Classroom Strategies and Systems. Each of these themes will be presented, highlighting quotes from interview participants.

## **Theme 1: Transitioning Mobile Students**

### **Initial Contact**

Many schools interviewed that had high mobility rates also had transition programs in place in order to better support highly-mobile students. A middle school principal shared that at the outset, “The counselor interviews the student and the parents about their school and past experiences.” A teacher shared that additionally, “Sometimes we will have our translator, depending upon their language of origin.”

Many schools offered support services to new students upon entering, as shared by a special education/resource teacher who indicated, “My expectations would be to help the family get services that the school can’t provide.” A middle school principal relayed the importance of these additional services: “The student that moves in here and has that family support, they’re adjusting so much better.” At times, it is difficult regardless of the support available: “They have that support at home but students will come in when the family has been evicted, from this house and this house, and I mean, it’s tough for those kids. So there’s a lot of factors outside of the school that also impact the students and we just have to provide a safe and secure environment.” This need is reinforced by the finding that children who are most likely to be highly-mobile are either homeless or from migrant families (Paik & Phillips, 2002).

### **Obtaining Records**

While the student is being oriented to the school, the staff tries to obtain some history and previous school records; a middle school principal explained that “part of the frustration with mobile kids is getting their data together, and these kids can have records all over the place, and gaps here and there because of that. ‘We didn’t realize that this student has been on medication,’ and ‘this was in their records that came from the third school back.’” The principal noted that “a centralized records system for the state would be a huge help.” The difficulty in obtaining records also means that highly mobile students are likely to be inappropriately placed “in programs for the gifted and talented or in remedial classes when neither is appropriate” (Biernat & Jax, 2000).

When asked if there were any similarities or differences in supporting mobility students, a middle school math teacher stated, “there’s not a huge difference, especially if a student comes from another Nebraska school. We have a pretty good idea of where they’re at. I think the state standards are a big help.” Another principal echoed the advantage of a more local transition: “if they’re from inside the district it’s easier to find out where they are and if it’s from outside the district there has to be many phone calls to find out what’s been done and what hasn’t been done.”

The challenge is greater when mobility students are also special education students. A middle school principal emphasized, “Often times they’re coming with no grades or records, just trying to get a feel if there is any kind of special needs. If they indicate anything that might be special needs, then we do a temporary placement, so the student can receive special education services until we actually get the paperwork, which can be a month away. We don’t really know.” Personnel from another school shared that they often have to wait for special education placement due to the need for access to records, “In our district, we have

access to information; if they come from someplace else we don't really have access, we have to wait for their records to come."

### **Connecting to the New Environment**

While a student is transitioning, many schools provide a variety of ways for the student to adapt to their new environment. A study by Fisher et al. (2002) indicated that 89% of the participants believed that program components supporting mobility students need to be focused on providing a consistent but caring educational environment as it is essential for establishing quality relationships with students.

A middle school math teacher indicated the need to orient new students to the new environment, "When trying to help them transition, we put together a packet. They can just look at this packet and it tells them what each one of their core classes or expectations are or various things like that." A middle school math teacher shared that students are encouraged to connect to their new environment at all levels, "Just getting them in to see our counselor, our principal, are other ways to help them transition."

A middle school math teacher shared that the new student's comfort level and security is also important, "I think it's important that you make sure that the new student is comfortable, make sure that they are feeling positive about their experience here." Another eighth grade math teacher explained, "Because once they're comfortable with that, you're going to be able to make that next step to the academic piece."

### **The Role of Peers**

One method used by schools to try to orient the new student to their new environment was shared by an eighth grade math teacher: "We have what we call 'first friends' when a student is new. On the first morning that they're here, the counselors pick students that they know are pretty friendly and outgoing. They will show them around the school, take them to their teachers and get them to their lockers, make sure they can do the combinations."

A middle school math teacher referred to her use of peer partners to help with the transition of new students to her school, "I do something in my classroom that I call peer partners, and they can work with their peer partners at anytime. If they have a question and they don't want to raise their hand, they can turn to their partner and work with them. So they're immediately connected with somebody in my classroom."

### **Academic Gaps**

An eighth grade math teacher shared that "if a student is gone for an extended amount of time, and, there's a big gap" then the school has to spend time trying to identify what skills, knowledge and information the student possesses and the gaps that exist. This leads to schools that experience high mobility spending "a great deal of time on activities that impede instruction" (Paik & Phillips, 2002, p. 8). Many quotes echoed this concern and a few will be shared to highlight this problem:

"They have huge gaps. These last two years reading has been the huge focus." (A middle school principal)

“I just feel the adjustment to a new social group and the curriculum is laid out in a nice way that helps us, but there is always [a question of] what did they miss, how much did they move before, I think that’s a big concern.” (A seventh/eighth grade math teacher)

“We have this chunk of time when they have no grades, they have no grades because they weren’t in school. They may have enrolled, but they never attended, so how do you measure that? They may have missed the STARS assessment, so then the classroom teachers do try to back up and re-teach and assess.” (A high school principal)

“There are huge holes in the whole sequencing of skill development. Do you try to catch that up? You can’t! You try to pick up where you left off, so then there’s that gap for the student. But when you look at the whole, you have to know A before you can know B before you know C. They missed A and B.” (A high school principal)

“Sometimes it depends on when they’re coming in, if it’s in the middle of the unit, it’s really hard for them to pick up. We kind of say, let’s not worry about this, let’s pick up what we can, what you’ve learned from this unit. Then the next unit we can start fresh. They’re usually much more successful.” (A middle school math teacher)

“I can see a definite gap where they’re at and I try to give special attention to that student, but in a class of 24 it’s tough to give individual attention when you’re still trying to keep the rest of the group moving forward.” (A seventh/eighth grade math teacher)

### **Difficulties Faced By Mobile Students**

Not only do schools see academic gaps when students transition from one school to another but gaps appear from temporary absences, too. An eighth grade math teacher stated that this was true in the case of “even just a two week vacation, where they’ll be gone and then come back. That’s a challenge in itself, because you’re trying to fill those two week gaps while still moving forward. That can be a challenge.”

In addition to frustrating teachers and slowing down classroom progress, these academic gaps can also reduce student motivation. A seventh/eighth grade math teacher indicated, “I think a lot of my students who are mobile have the mentality, ‘well I won’t be here very long, so I don’t have to try very hard because then I’ll be someplace else’. I think they feel that way because they do move a lot and they do have gaps.”

A special education/language arts teacher stressed the difficulty faced by mobile students in the classroom: “I mean they’ve got to come here, they’ve got to understand friendships (make friends), they’ve got to get online with what we’re learning, it’s not easy for those students coming here. Really learn each teacher’s teaching style, it’s not like this just comes easy for the kids.”

## **Theme 2: Needs of Mobile and Non-Mobile Students**

### **Mobile Student Social Concerns**

Current research has found that “students can suffer psychologically, socially, and academically from mobility” (Rumberger, 2003, p. 8). Mobile students must not only cope with a new school environment, but also make the social adjustment to new peers and social expectations (Schaller, 1975). When mobile students have difficulty making the social transition, this can be reflected in a variety of ways. This was echoed throughout the myriad of interviews conducted in Nebraska schools.

“Well, it’s a challenge to get the students a rapport with the other students in the classroom.” (An eighth grade math teacher)

“Social is huge in middle school. Just being able to be comfortable, you might be here a week and, barely talk to anybody. That social tease is going to be the number one thing for these kids. They want to be accepted into their classroom.” (An eighth grade teacher)

“Some of the mobile students come in and just fit right in and things go well. Then other kids just have this intense need, beyond being mobile, and maybe tied with being mobile.” (A middle school principal)

“There’s behavior issues that we’ve had this year. There’s just been a whole variety of different concerns when kids come in.” (A sixth grade teacher)

“I think gang activity is a major problem all over the United States and I truly believe that people want to feel like they belong. When you get kids of high mobility and probably high poverty, their parents work a lot in all probability. If they (students) want to find something to belong to, the gangs are there and gangs will give them some of the things that they’re looking for.” (A secondary principal)

### **Mobile Students Out-of-School Concerns**

Many mobile students must also face complications stemming from out-of-school factors, such as their home environment and legal issues. Research has shown that “poor school functioning and mobility may both be related to a third factor, at-risk family traits” (Sanderson, 2003a). In many cases, these problems are outside the control of the school but may affect the mobile student’s ability to successfully adjust to their new environment. Language barriers can also impede the progress of mobile students, as shared by a special education teacher, “A lot of them are shy and the language is hard for them (to use) to communicate what they’re thinking. Just letting them know that you care and you want them to do their best. You’re not expecting them to be the top student, but that they’re trying and that they’re getting their best effort, that’s huge.”

“Because of the new immigration changes, the family has to go back (report back) in order to try and get back on track with citizenship, but they have no control over this. They’re trying to do the things the right way with the government, but this child is just being bounced all over the place.” (A middle school principal)

“Before school, after school, to try and catch them up there and so that takes time away from other things they’d like to be doing.” (A middle school principal)

“I think sometimes when students have been so mobile, school’s not always been their top priority.” (An eighth grade math teacher)

“It’s a high mobility rate... many of our students live with an aunty or grandmother, then they’ll leave and go live with mom or dad. They may not be in school the entire time that they are gone.” (A high school principal)

“It’s tough to spend time after school with a student. There’s a lot of other issues that mobility students are dealing with. We have an after school program that some of them are involved with, but the transportation issue is a big deal; a lot of them have to catch the bus.” (A middle school math teacher)

### **Non-Mobile Concerns**

Mobility affects not only the students in transition but the “classrooms and schools that must deal with mobile students” (Rumberger, 2003, p. 11). In some cases, non-mobile students adjust well to their highly-mobile peers. A middle school principal shared, “I see kids in our school being very accepting, I really do, and I think it’s because it’s just so much a part of a routine.” Another principal shared, “I think they accept them because it’s so common. It isn’t anything that you see just once in a while, they also have to accept them because it happens so often.” An eighth grade algebra teacher shared, “Overall, I think our kids do really well with students, they come in and they accept them and there’s always someone that takes them under. I mean, I haven’t seen a lot of loners, so I think they do very well with that.”

However, high mobility “can also adversely impact non-mobile students” (Rumberger, 2003, p. 11). A seventh/eighth grade teacher shared, “I feel that some of our students who aren’t mobile sometimes get stuck repeating things or going over material that they may have already mastered because, you know, if I have five or six different kids who are new, and haven’t covered that topic, it’s not often that I can get them all in after school so we do have to do some of that stuff during the day and it repeats.” By contrast, a special education/language arts teacher indicated, “I don’t know that they impact them that much. I think it’s... more (of a) social impact than academic.”

In a California study, test scores of non-mobile students were significantly lower in high schools that had high student mobility rates (Rumberger et al., 1999). A high school principal shared, “I can tell you with the high mobility, the amount of material that is presented even to our best students has been minimized because they’re playing so much catch up every day that your non-mobile students are not challenged to the degree that they should be.” A middle school math teacher indicated,

I’m not sure, maybe some of the students who are here all year see maybe a little extra attention to the mobile student, you know as you try to get them caught up. Re-teaching them, working with them, at times, a little bit more than the more stable student. Sometimes I think it’s frustrating to them too because they’ve already gotten this and they might just have the attitude, ‘*Why do I need to be here?*’ They’ve already done it, they’ve already met the goals, so I think it is frustrating for them.

### **Theme 3: Administrative Support and School Procedures**

#### **Administrative Support**

A study by Rumburger et al. (1999), “characterized the effects of student mobility at the school level as a ‘chaos’ factor that impacts classroom learning activities, teacher morale and administrative burdens – all of which can impact the learning and achievement of all students in the school” (Rumburger, 2003, p. 11). Sometimes, the impact of mobile students on the school administration is indirect, as stated by a middle school principal, “I think it impacts me indirectly because I think it places a lot of stress on our teachers. It’s stressful to have kids going in and out all the time. Our teachers want to do the job and they care about kids.”

But another principal disclosed how mobile students directly impact administrative positions: “I think it impacts my role a lot because of the way our school ultimately ends up and what we did or did not achieve. Our special education numbers are high here as well and then you add special education plus mobility, it really hinders academic performance.” This problem is compounded because not long after mobile students are registered, they must move again. “The frustration is, we’ll barely get this student right where they need to be in school, or that student may move again,” revealed a middle school principal.

Funding is also a problem encountered by administrators when providing for mobility students, as illustrated by this principal who shared his frustration by stating, “What best practice says is best for this population is to make sure we provide adequate funding to reach out to students, especially when it’s not the student’s fault. There is no consideration made at the state level for mobility and how you’re accountable in the school. You get held accountable for kids that you had enrolled at the end of September; you might not have them anymore for the rest of the year, but for a quarter at the state level, you’re accountable for those students.”

Another principal shared how a lack of funding and perception of what is truly evident in today’s schools limits the support and services that are needed:

*Population-wise, the needs of the students have changed and so many people get into molds and don’t get out and view what’s out in the state. You can’t walk through a school and see what their needs are, you’ve gotta spend some time there. They don’t have the time or are not willing to spend the time to do things. I think, if they did, to me, it would be a lot easier to train kids to be supportive of themselves rather than half-train them and pick them up on the other end, usually through the correction system or the welfare system. My thing is make students self-supportive.*

According to Rumburger (2003), the most effective strategy to reduce mobility is to increase the overall quality of the school. A high school principal shared what he believed to be the ideal learning environment for mobile students: “The ideal – and I don’t know that I could ever pull it off – is a mastery learning setting... individualized where you could set up everyone on packet learning. Then the teachers would become facilitators, and you would have certain benchmarks where they could only go this far according to their age, and then they could do the extended studies and enrichment.”

## **School Procedures**

A variety of initiatives have been introduced at schools throughout the state to diminish the negative impact of student mobility, but the ultimate policy – as stated by this middle school principal – is “to work out what’s best for the kids and just use that as our gauge.”

A middle school math teacher expressed appreciation for supportive procedures that their administration had put in place: “Mobility is probably the biggest issue that we do deal with. The school district does a very good job letting us work together and giving us the opportunity to give each other feedback and ideas on how to deal with mobility. We have the opportunity to access our ESU, to go to workshops or seminars on how to deal with mobility.” Other policies and procedures initiated by the school that were shared in the interviews included:

### *Counselor Support*

“Our counselors do a great job trying to follow up, finding out what kind of history the students have, what kind of a school background they come from.” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“The things that happen with the everyday kid that arrives, the counselor is very involved in pairing the student up with buddies and working with the teachers on getting the student in the right classes and looking at what’s the best fit. I mean (for example), ‘this kid has already missed four weeks of this class, is this a better class to go into, instead of that class?’ ‘What classes are going to be easier for the student to adapt to and not be behind?’ Those decisions are made everyday just because that’s the way it is in our building.” (A middle school principal)

“The counselor buddies them up with some other student, or possibly two or three students, depending on what their schedules look like. The counselor introduces the student to the teachers as they do the tour...walks through the lunch procedures and all those kind of things, too, and from that point on the student is pretty much part of the school.” (A middle school principal)

“When we get new students, the counseling department will try to get as many records if they can from the previous school. If they come within our district, it (the records) comes really quickly. If it comes from outside the district, it kind of depends on the previous school district. Sometimes they’ll come right away, sometimes they’ll be faxed over, sometimes it’s hard to get them.” (A special education/resource teacher)

“When they come, as soon as they are enrolled, they meet with the counselors, the counselor will take a student into their team area and then once they give them a tour of the building, they will walk the schedule with them and show them exactly where they are to enter each day and where everything is that they have to know.” (A seventh/eighth-grade teacher)

### *Social Support*

“We’re proactive with discipline in the halls, we’re proactive with socializing in the halls.” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“We try to pull them in right away from the minute they come in. I don’t want them to feel they’re so different from everybody else.” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“I wanted the students to develop a sense of belonging and so whether it’s called home rooms or learning communities, we have developed that and it is a check and balance of attendance and academics. They can go in and build a relationship with one staff member. Staff members can address their downfall in academics with them as they meet once a week for a full period. That has been quite favorable as far as the staff is concerned.” (A high school principal)

### *Teaching Teams*

“We meet as a team on a daily basis, which is very beneficial for stuff like this because then we can talk about these (new mobile) students. What are the things we are seeing in the classroom as this person first comes in?” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“I think that in our school we’re so lucky to have the teaming approach that teachers can share those stresses together and share their concerns but then also work together on how to resolve it.” (A middle school principal)

“We (the grade level team) try to brainstorm what we see them doing, their patterns, or if they miss school a lot or if they are sick a lot. Then we try to work with those issues, get them here, work one on one with them, provide peer tutoring and as much help and assistance as we can. Then we try different strategies and after about 2 or 3 weeks, if that doesn’t work, we look at other strategies and we make parent contact.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“Our core teams have math, science, reading, language arts, social studies and a rotating special class that all need to be on our team plan every day. Our math department has really open communication, so I could call on another teacher and say, ‘In this math class I have a new kid. They’re working on this, they’re not understanding it, what have you done in the past?’” (A seventh/eighth-grade math teacher)

“We have a very close math department and we work together to share ideas, to help students catch up or get the help that they need to be where everybody else is at.” (An eighth-grade math/algebra teacher)

“We have learning communities that meet once a week that really help us touch base with the students and make sure that they’re at grade level and where they need to be. We’ll do a lot of teaching and re-teaching, and testing and retesting.” (A middle school math teacher)

### *Extra Programming*

“Students that come in that are non-English speaking students are put in what’s called a newcomer class so some of their instruction is done directly through our ELL program, which is known as the English Language Learner program.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“After school study sessions, maybe lunch time study sessions so that we can reach as many students as possible.” (An eighth grade math/algebra teacher)

“I do pull-outs for the students that I teach and I’m the primary teacher for their Individual Education Plan (IEP). I will do that during plan time, advisory time, any time that I have access to them.” (A special education/resource teacher)

“There are a lot of us here at 6:30 and there are a lot of students waiting outside to get in at 6:30. The access works both ways for students and teachers. When we’re here, I don’t know any teachers that aren’t available for tutoring after school or during their planning time.” (A special education/resource teacher)

“We looked at kids that were two grade levels behind and then we looked for a program that would be very individualized, where they’d look at where the gaps are in the assessment test that go with the program. The kids are placed in those classes and work on those skills. At least half of the kids have already gotten to the level and are ready to go back to their regular classrooms.” (A middle school principal)

### **Theme 4: Teacher Perceptions and Support**

Out of necessity, teachers who have mobile students must review material often, and reviewing carries a heavy cost (Sanderson, 2003b). Also, a revolving door of mobile students compels teachers to devote attention to remedial work rather than new lessons (Stover, 2000). Kerbow (1996) says students in mobile schools, even those students who do not move frequently, are “getting instruction and content that is approximately a year behind that of students in more stable schools” (p. 16).

At the beginning of the school year, teachers establish rules and procedures for students to guide learning and behavior. For each new child that enters the classroom after the year has begun, the teacher must review the norms that have been established for the classroom. Furthermore, educators spend precious time building a community within their classrooms and understanding the learning styles of students. Teachers need to employ selected strategies to match the needs of mobile students, as reflected by this middle school special education teacher: “It’s just us getting them caught up. You’ve got to really use your judgment on what you want them to do. Hopefully, they’ve already learned that (some of the prior material).” Each move to and from the classroom disrupts the ebb and flow of classroom routines, as evidenced by these Nebraska educators:

“I know I get frustrated with it. I know that I see kids that aren’t getting what they need to get. They have 6 different schools and they’re in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, it gets very frustrating and I feel like I’m always trying to help that child play catch up. I would like to think that I was helping them catch up, but I don’t feel that’s very successful at times.” (A seventh/eighth-grade math teacher)

“It is definitely time consuming because you have to go back and teach them because everything grows upon the previous instruction. In math, if you teach this concept, and they weren’t there for it, you can’t teach the next concept.” (A special education language arts teacher)

“They keep me on my toes. I have to continuously revise things that I’m doing. I include a lot of review in my lessons daily. Constant revision of my lesson plans. When I find out what they haven’t had (something) or what they’re not very good at, then I have to include that for everybody in my lesson, rather than single them out.” (An eighth-grade math/algebra teacher)

“I have to decide, ‘what is the most important thing that she missed that I have to give to her in order for her to understand where we are now?’ So doing that, making sure that they’re getting that skill practice and the one-on-one support and time to work on things they’ve missed or things they don’t understand. That extended time factor. Those are probably the most important things that I can do for them.” (A special education/language arts teacher)

“I think I’m just always very conscious of what they’re wanting and how they want it. Not that I ignore the others, but I pay specific attention to my mobility kids because I know that I have so much that I have to cover with them, especially when they come like in February or March.” (An eighth-grade math/ algebra teacher)

“It’s a little bit stressful, but you know, you just kind of got to do what you’ve got to do.” (A seventh/eighth-grade special education teacher)

In addition to this frustration, teachers also expressed a need for understanding and empathy when working with highly-mobile students.

“I understand their level of learning. I just read a book about how students of mobility can develop conversational language within two to three years, but yet it takes them four to five years to actually start building the skills and vocabulary they need to understand and comprehend the language even if you have conversational language. I think there’s a lot of misunderstanding among staff. Sometimes they think that because students can speak English they can automatically understand everything and that doesn’t happen.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“Probably the number one challenge is dealing with students who are in and out of your system. It’s a big problem, but you can overcome that. They’re not any different than any other student; they’re just as deserving of an education. But it is very challenging and I think as educators we just need to understand that. It’s not their fault that they’re going from district to district to district. It’s a cultural issue for some, it’s an economic issue for some, and as educators we just need to do the best we can.” (A middle school math teacher)

### **Resources for Teachers**

Many teachers have additional resources to help them accommodate mobile students. A special education/resource teacher shared her contribution to classrooms with highly-mobile

students, “Well, I think teachers have to work a little harder. Since I’m a special education teacher, I would be a second teacher in the classroom so I could take that student and help them and get caught up if there are essential things they have to know to move on from there.” Another special education/resource teacher explained, “Since there’s two of us, the teacher would probably be giving instructions to the kids who already have the system down. I’d probably go over and help the new person and kind of explain what the teachers saying.” Many Nebraska teachers emphasized the importance of their colleagues when dealing with high mobility:

“If an ELL student is struggling, we will contact the ELL teacher and they’ll get testing just to make sure they are at the spot where they need to be. They need to get back into ELL services otherwise. I have a paraprofessional for ELL as well in the classroom so she can work with them one-on-one in the classroom.” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“I have a paraprofessional that I can rely on.” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“My students of language abilities that struggle a little have a para that follows them around in class and after the class.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“I can always communicate with the ELL teachers as far as getting support that way, or telling them ‘they’re struggling with this’ or ‘you need to work with that.’” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“I have the assistance of other teachers, math department-wise, even non-departmentalized on my teams. We often talk about our kids who are new to our teams and discuss what’s working with them and what’s not working with them.” (A seventh/eighth-grade math teacher)

“I’m lucky enough to work with two co-teachers who are very open to me being out of the classroom. I have to work with another student. I also take students out of their classrooms to get that done.” (A special education language arts teacher)

“You can go to seminars or workshops on certain topics. Mobility is one of those big topics they do cover.” (A middle school math teacher)

### **Theme 5: Classroom Strategies and Systems**

Rumberger (2003) indicated that, “schools, like students and parents, can work to reduce unnecessary mobility and to mitigate its harmful effects” (p. 14). Furthermore, he emphasized “that schools can undertake some specific strategies to help address problems associated with mobility” (p. 15). The principals and teachers in the schools where we interviewed provided insight into some of the strategies that are being used in Nebraska to reduce the negative impact of mobility on student learning.

## **Building Classroom Community**

Teachers cited the importance of introducing the new student to a healthy and supportive classroom environment. Doing so ensures that the new student will be comfortable in his or her new setting and therefore more able to succeed academically. A sixth-grade math teacher explained, “It’s all about relationships; developing personal relationships with them. The community building that I do at the beginning of the year, and knowing that they have a comfort level with me, that they can come in and talk to me whenever they want.” Classroom community also guarantees that the new student will have multiple sources of support in the classroom, both from peers and from the teacher.

“My survey asks them whether or not they feel like they could be a team leader or team participant. Based on that survey, I regroup my students according to a team leader and then, an average kind of student, a low student, and I work hard at developing a community of learners so that they have to work together.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“My strategy is to develop peer tutors that work together with all kids. So the kids that are not as proficient in grade level math have the ability to work with their peers versus just me. My goal through the course of the year is to develop confidence and (help them) become better math students.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“Help them hook up with somebody, like other students, that would be helpful.” (A middle school math teacher)

“I had them fill out a peer buddy survey that asked ‘who would you be willing to go to, or who would you like to go to for help’.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“I use a buddy system. I usually try to partner them up with a successful student in my classroom who has the routines down and expectations down. I try to stick them near them (successful students) and I even tell them that if they have any questions right away and if they don’t feel they can get my attention, then that’s the person to ask. Then, I ask that student to go over how we do beginning class procedures, how we hand in assignments.” (A seventh/eighth-grade math teacher)

“We try to set up our classrooms where they’re working in groups and the kids will often be working on the same problem. You’ll see kids talking to him (mobile student) more in that kind of environment than if they were all in rows. So, we’re almost always in groups and they feel a little more comfortable saying, ‘she said to get this out,’ ‘that’s what she means,’ or if there is something that I forgot to explain. They lean over and do it for me.” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“It kind of depends on how the teacher sets up the room, the environment. If it’s not okay to talk to other kids during math class then you are isolating that kid even more. It depends on which group you put them in. You have to know all your students by then to know, ‘I could put a new student here and I know these kids are going to help them. I know that they’re more outgoing, than if I put them over here and these kids don’t talk to each other already.’” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“It’s laying that community-building, I feel like I give them the confidence to know it’s okay to make mistakes and that you should learn from your mistakes and so I trust them to grade their paper correctly because that’s an issue at the beginning.” (A sixth-grade teacher)

### **Student Placement and Assessment**

One of the most challenging aspects of high mobility for schools is placing new students in a classroom and at a level that is appropriate for them. Usually, this must be accomplished quickly and without the help of standard classroom assessments. An eighth-grade math teacher explained, “Based on that information, prior to grades or testing, we try to place them in the right courses.” In some cases, information is easily transferred, as a seventh/eighth grade teacher shared: “If they move within the district, we do have information available online, so criterion-referenced assessments that they’ve taken in previous schools transfer over into my class.” But even when this information is not available, schools have developed other methods of placing incoming students.

“We were just impressed with direct instruction. It just works well with mobile students. Because when they come into the district (you can) test them, see where they’re at and then just start them off.” (A seventh /eighth-grade special education teacher)

“In most cases for reading, we’ll do a short reading assessment to try and place them. We try and see if we need a reading group for them.” (A middle school principal)

“There are not a lot of pre-assessments. There’s a lot of questioning in class when we’re working on anything. I’m walking around the room and monitoring what the groups are doing and looking to see if students are involved or not involved. ‘What did you do here?’ The math intervention, I pull them out for that. That really gives me a lot of information, then I can work with them one on one.” (An eighth-grade math teacher)

“When they come in, I try and sit down with them one on one before school or after school. I try to get them alone, maybe during class and just kind of find out what they know, what they don’t know. Things that they’ve covered, I just get out a book and I point some things out and see if they look familiar. I make a running list of things that I need to cover with the student and then I try and put it in on a daily basis at some point.” (An eighth-grade math/algebra teacher)

“When the kids come in, I have them fill out a little circle for me (about) where they’ve been, what they remember talking about previously. I try to pull the kid in after school right away for a couple of days, just to see where they’ve been. I can get a better feel for if they’ve missed pieces of information that our class has already covered.” (A seventh/eighth-grade math teacher)

### **Teacher Flexibility**

Teachers need to be aware of mobile students’ special circumstances and make an effort to be more flexible with these new students. A seventh/eighth grade special education teacher explained their approach to new students: “You’ve got new people coming in. What is that

person's learning style? How can they learn best? That also impacts how a teacher can teach." This flexibility helps the highly-mobile students adjust to their new environment as easily as possible and also offers them the guidance they need to catch up with their peers.

"I have to be flexible, I have to be able to work with the student. I pop to the side and say, 'do you know where you are at? Does this seem like where you're at?' If it's not, then I need to start going through my resources and say, 'What are we going to do to either A, get this student caught up, or B, look at the other services that we could get for this student.'" (An eighth-grade math teacher)

"Making sure those issues are addressed in the classroom, we just continue that cycle. We teach, test, re-teach, retest, then make any accommodations that we need. Some students need more time, some need more quiet (time). Making the mobility issue as less intrusive as possible." (A middle school math teacher)

"Lots of extra work. If you truly want to do the best you can to reach all students, you have to be constantly monitoring their progress and different ways to teach them. For example, think of different words, different ways, repetition, making sure that they are paired up with somebody that they feel comfortable with, making sure that you touch base with them after school." (A sixth-grade math teacher)

"I teach according to the needs of the kids. I found out at the beginning of the year that this group had lacked a lot of numbers sense, as far as place value. (So) we just spent a lot of time on place value." (A sixth-grade teacher)

"There are strategies that help all kids, but I think particularly for kids that are mobile, making sure you have intentional strategies in every classroom. Repetition, practice, and organized structure. Those are important for all kids and kids that are moving around a lot and going in and out. Structure is real important, but also flexibility." (A middle school principal)

### **Grading and Revision**

Just as teachers should exercise flexibility when teaching mobile students, some flexibility is also commonly used in teachers' grading and revision practices. The overall goal, however, remains helping highly mobile students (and their non-highly mobile classmates) achieve.

"I teach with PowerPoint and make a lot of my assignments. I use other material but a lot of times, I make my own stuff. It's all saved and it should be easy for me so I can give them (new students) a PowerPoint presentation hard copy. Then give them the assignment and they can read through everything." (A seventh /eighth grade special education teacher)

"I pick up the work anyway and see if a paper has a lot of corrections on it. They're not penalized. I compare it to sports. You have to practice shooting basketballs or free throws before you actually play the game. When you're introduced to a new concept, I'm not going to dock them for making one mistake instantly. Instead of counting them wrong, it's like 'okay, now I need to practice simplifying,' so I look

for patterns of errors for each student whether it be the mobility, etcetera. I pretty much treat all the kids the same, and it works.” (A sixth-grade math teacher)

“I would probably send a copy of my notes with them, plus the adapted worksheet notes. So they have an opportunity before they see me again to try to do it on their own, to get the information to go through the notes. There is always someone who’s available in the research room to go over those notes with them so that they have the information. These notes are put in portfolios in my room. I have a portfolio for every student, so when I give a test, those notes are always available to them.” (A special education/language arts teacher)

“I will occasionally pull a child out and have them work on their own, or give them something totally off-topic from what we’re doing, as I hear they’re missing this piece that they have to have to be able to work on the standards that we’re working on.” (A seventh/eighth-grade math teacher)

### **Accommodation of Students’ Home Lives**

Due to the stress and challenges that many mobile students face in their personal or home life, teachers must be prepared to be flexible in this area as well. Not putting an undue burden on mobile students’ families helps ensure that the student will more easily achieve in school. Teachers shared their personal and schoolwide strategies for accommodating mobile students’ home lives:

“A lot of my students’ parents are not at home at night because they’re working another job. They are trying to support their children, trying to raise their children and this is how they have to do it. It’s a different life. So we try to do everything in my classroom. I don’t send homework home. Homework in my room is down time so if they have any questions they can come to me.” (A special education/language arts teacher)

“I send a letter home with them to their parents, with my expectations for them.” (A seventh/eighth grade math teacher)

“I don’t expect the parents to sit down and do homework with the kids because that’s just not possible for most parents. Things are taught so much differently now than they were when they were in school. But I expect them to get the kids here and if they have to stay after school, enforce that they stay after school. I have a daily sheet signed by their teachers to monitor that. Just parent responsibilities, basic ones.” (A special education/resource teacher)

“We have an after school tutoring program that if they choose to be a part of it, the parent just has to sign a permission slip. They’ll (the program) work with them and they talk to the teachers in the building about what the students need to be working on that they can help with.” (A special education language arts teacher)

## **DISCUSSION**

Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the impact of mobility on academic achievement in elementary and secondary schools. There are limitations to all of these

studies: data based on local districts may not apply to other districts; other factors besides mobility, such as personal and family problems, may affect some highly mobile students' academic success. The research, however, suggests that mobility negatively impacts academic achievement in some situations but not others (Rumberger, 2003).

The purpose of this research study was to determine the impact of student mobility on student performance and teacher practice. In examining student performance results for the state of Nebraska, this study found mobility to have a significant impact on student academic performance for Reading, Math, Science and Writing for the eighth and eleventh grades.

The data results indicate that eighth- and eleventh-grade highly mobile students in Nebraska are performing on average 10 to 15 percentile points below their non-highly mobile peers statewide in Reading, Math and Science. Writing data at eighth and eleventh grades revealed an average gap of 10 percentile points between highly mobile and non-highly mobile students. The data for fourth-grade highly mobile students in Reading revealed that they scored on average 10 percentile points below their non-highly mobile peers, while math scores showed a 5 percentile point discrepancy between highly mobile and non-highly mobile students. Writing showed an 8 percentile point discrepancy between highly mobile and their non-highly mobile peers.

Of the schools interviewed in this study, the presence of other mitigating factors, such as a high ELL population and a high Free/Reduced Lunch rate, made it impossible to prove a causal relationship between high mobility and low achievement. However, researchers noted that when districts provided more support services to account for high mobility, all students benefited.

Teachers and principals shared strategies that were currently being used in classrooms on a daily basis to meet the social and academic needs of students. One principal emphasized the importance of identifying at initial entry the academic needs of mobile students by stating, "It depends on where they enter, and with the No Child Left Behind initiative and the criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) that we are responsible for, we're spending a lot of time trying to find out where they are and what we need to give the student to get them caught up to where they need to be."

In order for students to be more successful academically, schools have identified the need for a variety of services for families transferring into a new school district. As initial contact was made with families with emphasis on providing a safe, nurturing and secure environment for students, strategies were found. These strategies included: the involvement of counselors in obtaining records, providing schoolwide tours, and identifying buddy systems for new students. Students must first be comfortable with their environment before the student's skills, knowledge, and information – as well as any academic gaps – can be identified.

Researchers found a wide array of administrative services supporting teachers, students and programming. Teachers shared the procedures for guiding the learning and behavior

of mobile students. In Theme Five, “Classroom Strategies and Systems,” teachers demonstrated their focus on building classroom communities, placing students at the appropriate academic level for success, and developing a plethora of classroom strategies. Both individualized and group processes were employed to instruct mobile students. Empathy for families in situations beyond their control was reflected in educators’ motivation to share stories of what they were doing to positively impact students and make their school a great place to learn.

### **SUMMARY**

Research has produced controversial results about the impact of mobility on student achievement. A large number of studies have found that mobility has a negative effect on student performance (Brent & Diobilda 1993; Mao et al., 1998; Reynolds, 1991; U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1994). This study shares this conclusion. A principal in Nebraska revealed, “I don’t care if it’s in the city or wherever it is. We’re comfortable in trying to make sure that we have everything in place that we need to make teachers successful. Often times with mobility students, teachers have to start back at square one depending on the needs of the student. It does hinder performance!” As discouraging as this issue of student mobility can sometimes seem, it is encouraging to find that schools in our state are working on this problem daily with a lot of heart!

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Dauber, S. L. (1996). Children in motion: School transfers and elementary school performance. *The Journal of Educational Research, 90*(1), 3-12.
- Audette, R., Algozzine, R., & Warden, M. (1993). Mobility and school achievement. *Psychological Reports, 72*(2), 701-702.
- Biernat, L., & Jax, C. (2000). Limiting mobility and improving student achievement. *Hamline Law Review, 23*(1), 1-37.
- Blane, D. (1985). A longitudinal study of children's school mobility and attainment in mathematics. *Educational Studies in Mathematics, 16*(2), 127-142.
- Brent, G., & Diobilda, N. (1993). Effects of curriculum alignment versus direct instruction on urban children. *Journal of Educational Research, 86*(6), 333-338.
- Bruno, J. E., & Isken, J. A. (1996). Inter and intraschool site student transience: Practical and theoretical implications for instructional continuity at inner city schools. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 29*(4), 139-252.
- Fisher, T. A., Matthews, L., Stafford, M. E., Nakagawa, K., & Durante, K. (2002). School personnel's perceptions of effective programs for working with mobile student and families. *The Elementary School Journal, 102*(4), 317-333.
- Heinlein, L. M., & Shinn, M. (2000). School mobility and student achievement in an urban setting. *Psychology in the Schools, 37*(4), 349-357.
- Kerbow, D. (1996). Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 1*(2), 147-169.
- Lash, A. A., & Kirkpatrick, S. L. (1990). A classroom perspective on student mobility. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(2), 176-191.
- Mao, M. X., Whitsett, M. D., & Mellor, L. T. (1998). Student mobility, academic performance, and school accountability. *ERS Spectrum, 16*(1), 3-15.
- Morris, J. L., Pestaner, M., & Nelson, A. (1967). Mobility and achievement. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 35*(4), 74-80.
- Nebraska Department of Education. (2009). *2007-2008 State of the Schools Report: A Report on Nebraska Public Schools*. Retrieved from July 22, 2009 from <http://reportcard.nde.state.ne.us/Page/DemoMobility.aspx?Level=st>
- Offenberg, R. M. (2004). Inferring adequate yearly progress of schools from student achievement in highly mobile communities. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 9*(4), 337-355.
- Paik, S., & Phillips, R. (2002). *Student mobility in rural communities: What are the implications for student achievement?* Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Reynolds, A. J. (1991). Early schooling for children at risk. *American Educational Research Journal, 28*(2), 392-422.
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. (2009) *2009 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*. Retrieved July 23, 2009 from [http://www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/documents/09\\_RIKC\\_Factbook\\_Web.pdf](http://www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/documents/09_RIKC_Factbook_Web.pdf)
- Rumberger, R. W. (2003). The causes and consequences of student mobility. *The Journal of Negro Education, 72*(1), 6-21.
- Rumberger, R. W., Larson, K. A., Ream, R. K., & Palardy, G. J. (1999). *The educational consequences for California students and schools. Research Series*. (Report No. PACE-

- 99-2). Berkeley, CA; Stuart Foundation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED441040).
- Sanderson, D. R. (2003a). Engaging highly transient students. *Education*, 123, 600-605.
- Sanderson, D. R. (2003b). *Veteran teachers' perspectives on student mobility*. Retrieved on 5/28/09 from <http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol42003/sanderson.pdf>
- Schaller, J. (1975). The relation between geographic mobility and school behavior. *Man-Environment Systems*, 5, 185-187.
- Stover, D. (2000, June 13). Schools grapple with high student mobility rates. *School Board News*, 11, 1-8.
- Temple, J. A., & Reynolds, A. J. (1999). Mobility and achievement: Longitudinal findings from an urban cohort. *Journal of School Psychology*, 37(4), 355-377.
- Texas Education Agency. (1997). *A study of student mobility in Texas public schools: Statewide Texas educational progress study report No 3*. (Report No. RE7-601-03). Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency Publications Distribution. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED424664).
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2001). *Annual geographical mobility rates, by type of movement: 1947-2000*. Retrieved July 22, 2009 from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-538.pdf>
- U.S. Government Accounting Office. (1994). *Elementary school children: Many change schools frequently, harming their education*. (GAO/HEHS Publication No. 94-45). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Wright, D. (1999). Student mobility: A negligible and confounded influence on student achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 92(6), 347-353.

**TRANSITIONS:**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Section 3: Research Studies**

**Study VII: Systematic Practices Implemented to  
Address the Needs of Highly Mobile Students**



**Systematic Practices Implemented to  
Address the Needs of Highly Mobile Students**

**Jane Stavem, Superintendent  
Blair Public Schools**

Student mobility has long been seen as a problem removed from rural areas and communities with seemingly stable populations. However, data indicates that a high percentage of student mobility is now found in many settings, including small towns as well as in the urban setting (Rumberger, 2003). Student mobility factors arise from a variety of issues, ranging from socio-economic constraints to migrant employment for families (Paik & Phillips, 2002). The result for a highly mobile student is that he or she may enter school at varying points throughout the school year, from the first week right up to the last days of school. The educational impact of a high mobility population affects the incoming student as well as the students in the new classroom (Addressing the Causes and Consequences, 2002).

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify practices implemented in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools to address the needs of highly mobile students. Schools identified for the study were analyzed in terms of mitigating factors that caused the practices to be implemented, the primary causes of student mobility, and district support for practices that lead to successful transitions for highly mobile students.

For the 2007-2008 school year, there were 220 Schoolwide Title I programs identified in Nebraska, and of those 220 schools, 211 were at the elementary level (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2007). A Schoolwide program permits a school to use funds from Title I, Part A and other federal education program funds and resources to upgrade the entire educational program of the school in order to raise academic achievement for all the students (Archived Information, 1996). Opportunities provided by Schoolwide programs are designed to assist schools, districts, and states in raising the achievement level of all children, but particularly those who have always been the intended beneficiaries of Title I--poor children, low-achieving children, migrant children, children who are neglected or at risk of dropping out, and limited-English-proficient children. Title I focuses on a results-based accountability approach for reinforcing this commitment. This approach is designed to provide the public with information on how schools and districts are doing in raising the achievement of different groups of students (Archived Information, 1996).

A comprehensive plan, required for Schoolwide Title I schools, must be developed within a one-year period of a school obtaining Schoolwide status (Archived Information, 1996). Comprehensive plans must address the needs of all children in the school, but particularly the needs of children who are members of the target population of any federal education program whose funds are included in the Schoolwide program (Archived Information, 1996). A *Schoolwide Plan Peer Review Rating Rubric and Annual Review of Schoolwide Effectiveness* rubric is used in the review process to determine if all required components are in place (Appendix H). Section 7 of the rubric focuses on a required transition plan and indicates practices must be put in place to help mobile students transition between grade levels and between buildings.

Little research is available in terms of the relationship between rates of student mobility and procedures that are put in place to address those specific needs in order to provide for a child's academic, social, and emotional needs as they make the transition to a new school. Guidelines exist for best practices in helping schools assimilate mobile students into a new school. However, a strong connection does not necessarily exist between high numbers of mobile students and the number of specific components that should be in place.

There are schools that have realized the needs of mobile students and as a result, have made specific changes to accommodate those needs. This study sought to find those schools that existed in Nebraska and examine the practices that had been implemented.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

When determining the type of methodology to use for this particular study, it was necessary to consider both the trends in addressing mobility that could be identified across the state of

Nebraska in addition to using that information to look at exemplary practices in specific locations. For the purpose of this study, the intention was not to focus on causative factors of mobility or on measures that would reduce or limit student mobility. Rather the focus of this study was to identify ways schools could minimize the negative effects of high student mobility as the students enter school. Two research questions guided this study: What practices and procedures are used to transition mobile students into Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools, with the intention of connecting students academically, socially, and emotionally as systematically as possible as defined by current best practices? What are Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools doing to systematically transition highly mobile students?

The specific type of mixed methods design used for this study was the explanatory mixed methods design, which consisted of collecting quantitative data first followed by collecting qualitative data that was used to explain or elaborate on the quantitative results (Creswell, 2005). Quantitative data was obtained through online surveys (Appendix H) in order to provide a general picture of the research problem while follow-up interviews (Appendix I) were added to gain additional information that further explained the results and defined the original results of the data (Creswell, 2005).

A non-probability method was utilized to select the homogenous sample for this study. A non-probability method uses a subjective judgment in the sample selection. Subjects are purposefully selected for a specific characteristic they possess (Salant & Dillman, 1994). For this study Schoolwide Title I elementary schools in Nebraska (N = 211) were identified through the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Title I web site, then checked for current status with the local Title I office and NDE officials. School administrators were identified as the subjects to be interviewed. The NDE web site list of Schoolwide Title I schools is regularly updated and all elementary schools on that list were included in the study. These schools were located across the state of Nebraska in a wide range of settings including both rural and urban locations.

Inquiries for basic information were made at each site to check for current administrator names in order to verify correct email addresses that were gained from web sites, searches, and from the Nebraska School Directory (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2007). The email addresses were used for online survey distribution.

Student mobility is not a new phenomenon, but percentages of mobile students are on the rise in many places. Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1996) noted rising patterns of student mobility across grade levels. In order to address the needs of this population, exemplary practices have been identified for schools to use to assist students as they make transitions into and out of schools (Popp, Strange, & Hindman, 2003). From the literature review, best practices were identified and broken down into the eight main sections that provided the framework for the online survey (Appendix H). These sections were as follows:

1. enrollment,
2. academic placement,
3. student placement,
4. classroom connections,
5. family connections,

6. unique needs,
7. school/community connections, and
8. exit transitions.

Within these eight sections, sub-questions were designed to determine to what extent current practices are being implemented that follow established best practices.

Table 25  
*Survey Section Descriptions and Questions*

| Section                             | Question Numbers | Possible Total Scale Value |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| One: Enrollment                     | 1-7 (7)          | 35                         |
| Two: Academic Placement             | 8-11 (4)         | 20                         |
| Three: Student Placement            | 12-15 (4)        | 20                         |
| Four: Classroom Connections         | 16-24 (8)        | 40                         |
| Five: Family Connection             | 25-30 (6)        | 30                         |
| Six: Unique Needs                   | 31-35 (5)        | 25                         |
| Seven: School/Community Connections | 36-40 (5)        | 25                         |
| Eight: Exit Transitions             | 41-48 (8)        | 40                         |
| Nine: Demographic Information       | 49-57            | 0                          |

These items were based on current research that addresses both academic needs as well as social and emotional needs of highly mobile students.

The content of the survey instrument was based on findings from the literature review, and was a synthesis of information gathered regarding best practices for meeting the needs of highly mobile students. The survey instrument collected numeric descriptions of attitudes and opinions of a population.

Phase II of the study, which used qualitative research, focused on expanding and enriching the results of Phase I, which used a quantitative approach. Case selection of schools to be interviewed was based on responses from schools that indicated a high level of implementation of best practices for highly mobile students. The researcher identified exemplary ratings in at least four out of the eight survey categories. Exemplary was defined as the top 10% of scores in each survey category. Using the survey results after descriptive quantitative data had been analyzed, respondents from four sites were selected for follow-up interviews (Appendix I). The selected qualitative participants were sent an email reminding them of the informed consent that they were provided when they took the survey, which allowed the researcher to pursue a qualitative interview. Only participants that completed the survey were considered for the qualitative on-site interviews.

## RESULTS

The words that came to mind after reviewing the information from the interview participants were **commitment, community, connections, communication, care, and concern.**

Procedures can be implemented and put into place, but unless a committed staff creates a climate of care and concern, follows through with involving the community through partnerships and support, and communicates effectively with families, the results will be minimal, even if a written transition plan exists.

During each interview the same threads emerged, a climate of care that existed within each school and among staff members. There was an ongoing effort of cultivation and putting into practice the art of doing whatever it takes. It was the actual doing, not talking about doing, but digging in one's heels in terms of time, resources, creativity, volunteering, partnering, and getting things done for children. This was evident at all schools and it was rewarding as a researcher to see this emerge not only on paper, but in reality as well.

Best practices were supported throughout the interviews with the following components:

- Solid practices and procedures for transitions that were consistently followed.
- Office staff or other staff members designated to assist with registrations and who do so as a calling, not a requirement or part of a job description.
- Availability of quality programs before, during, and after school that support student learning by meeting multiple needs – academic, social, physical, and emotional.
- Continuous improvement was a mindset in all areas of meeting the needs of students.
- Staff members were willing to do whatever it takes to do what's best for students, including classroom placements, academic interventions, and basic human needs.
- Administrators who created a culture of caring in their buildings and had zero-tolerance for anything less from staff members.
- Strong community partnerships that resulted in effective programs and opportunities for students.
- Specific, ongoing training for staff members that focused on meeting the needs of highly mobile students who often came from a poverty culture.
- Connecting students with caring adults and fellow students for the purpose of helping them acclimate to the new school.
- Consistent communication with families, letting them know about opportunities, services, and programs available to address parenting needs, student academic needs, and provide family support.

There is also a change in the overall framework of a school that makes it an inclusive place for students to attend. Pollock (2007) emphasized that, "The curriculum of today has expanded to suit the needs of a more varied student population and school improvement efforts are now largely driven by a commitment to help all students in a classroom to learn and make progress" (p. 16). This was evident in the four schools interviewed, and there was great care given to ongoing continuous improvement as a system to meet the needs of students.

In all of the schools there had been solid planning that led to smooth procedures for students. Planning included both transitional factors as well as instructional and academic considerations. This key was supported in a recent article in *Educational Leadership*. “The key to effectiveness of both of these strategies is preplanning” (Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2008, p. 60). The writers stated that the people involved in the enrollment plan need to have familiarity with the process so that transitions can occur smoothly and quickly. The importance of effective training was stressed in order to screen students academically and for other types of needs. The article went on to highlight the need for a “multi-tiered instructional support plan” (p. 61) that assists teachers in meeting their academic needs from placement to actual differentiated instructional interventions. The schools in this study had taken steps as districts as well as individual schools to ensure academic success through such measures as creating district aligned curriculum and developing pacing guides to make sure the timelines were adhered to.

Finally, as this same article pointed out, the bottom line for making any interventions effective was the belief that it could be done. “Believing that we can make a difference in all students’ academic development, regardless of how long they might be with us, brings out the best in educators” (Smith et al., 2008, p. 62). Schools have to quit bemoaning the problem and begin taking steps to solve the problem. This begins from the inside out and requires both a shift in the climate and culture of the school as well as effective implementation of steps in multiple areas that address the needs of highly mobile students. Students are not in control of their mobility, but we, as educators, are in control of how needs are met for any student who walks through the doors, regardless of the reasons why.

## **DISCUSSION**

This type of study served to open the doors into real schools that are doing real things for students with specific types of needs. The researcher believes that research in schools provides insights into ways that actually affect growth and change in other schools that have similar populations of students. Most people like to see examples of what is working and then tend to become true believers more quickly. The goal of this study was to provide an overall “snapshot” of conditions in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I schools as they related to meeting the needs of highly mobile students by having specific practices and procedures in place that are designed to do so. From that data, exemplary models were chosen for follow-up interviews that served to enrich the study by providing a look into the real world of schools that are getting the job done, such that researchers could glean specific ideas and insights from those examples.

Schools know that limited time is available for targeted interventions with students who have already experienced high mobility. For mobile students there is a sense of urgency to provide instruction in the most critical skill areas as quickly as possible, knowing they may not have the same amount of learning time in the classroom as other more stable students. They have limited time for practice and mastery of skills and content. We need to respond with quick, focused, and proven strategies if highly mobile students are going to attend school for only a fraction of the time as other students. Their needs must be addressed as urgent and schools need to seek ways to maximize student learning in a smaller, more condensed amount of

time. This type of information is critical knowledge for schools that place a high level of importance on meeting the needs of all students.

Through the online survey and follow-up interviews, multiple practices were identified that can be replicated by Nebraska schools. Specific practices can be purposefully identified and used in a written transition plan that assures all mobile students make effective transitions into and out of Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools. Transition plans can be carried out most effectively by staff members and administrators who are committed to helping mobile students make effective connections to their schools, classrooms, and communities.

## REFERENCES

- Addressing the Causes and Consequences of High Student Mobility: The Role of School Systems and Communities.* (2002). A forum brief. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.
- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Dauber, S. L. (1996). Children in motion: School transfers and elementary school performance. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 90(1), 3-12.
- Archived Information: Schoolwide Programs – Title I, Part A Policy Guidance. U.S. Department of Education. (1996). *Electronic preference formats recommended by the American Psychological Association.* Retrieved on March 30, 2005, from [http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA?Title\\_I/swpguid1.html](http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA?Title_I/swpguid1.html), 3.
- Creswell, J. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Nebraska State Department of Education. (2007). *2007-2008 Schoolwide Project List.* Retrieved on January 30, 2008, from <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/federalprograms/TITLEI/schoolwide.htm>
- Paik, S., & Phillips, R. (2002). *Student mobility in rural communities: What are the implications for student achievement?* Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved on March 10, 2005, from <http://www.ncrel.org>
- Pollock, J. E. (2007). *Improving student learning one teacher at a time.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Popp, P. A., Stronge, J. H., & Hindman, J. L. (2003). *Students on the move: Reaching and teaching highly mobile children and youth.* Greensboro, NC: National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE, & ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.
- Rumberger, R. W. (2003). *Student mobility and academic achievement.* Champaign, IL: ERIC Digest.
- Salant, P., & Dillman, A. (1994). *How to conduct your own survey.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Smith, J. M., Fien, H., & Paine, S. C. (2008). When mobility disrupts learning. *Educational Leadership*, 65(7), 59-62.



**TRANSITIONS:**  
***A Journey to a Balanced Assessment System***

**Section 4: Appendices**



**Appendix A**  
**IRB Approval Letter**



January 6, 2009

Jody Isernhagen  
Department of Educational Administration  
132 TEAC UNL 68588-0360

IRB Number: 2009019227EP  
Project ID: 9227  
Project Title: Comprehensive Evaluation of School-based Teacher-led Assesmsnet and Reporting System

Dear Jody:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Your stamped and approved informed consent forms have been uploaded to NUgrant (Informed\_Consent\_Form-Approved.pdf file). Please use these forms to make copies to distribute to participants. If changes need to be made, please submit the revised informed consent forms to the IRB for approval prior to using them.

Date of EP Review: 01/03/2009

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 01/06/2009. This approval is Valid Until: 01/05/2010.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,  
Mario Scalora, Ph.D.  
Chair for the IRB





**Appendix B**  
**Researchers for the Project**



## **Researchers for the Primary Eighth Year Project 2008-2009**

### ***Principal Investigator***

**Dr. Jody C. Isernhagen** is an Associate Professor in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She received her doctoral degree from Virginia Tech and has been a teacher, assistant principal, principal, supervisor of elementary education, and superintendent in pre-K through 12 schools. Dr. Isernhagen serves as the primary investigator for the STARS Process and is the primary instructor for the School Improvement Specialist Program. She serves as the State Accreditation and North Central Accreditation External Leader for four school districts in Nebraska. Dr. Isernhagen was awarded the College of Education and Human Sciences Distinguished Teaching Award and the Charman Outstanding Professor Award.

### ***Secondary Investigators***

**Shirley J. Mills, Ph.D.**, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas-Pan American and served as a secondary investigator for the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation. She taught in Nebraska for 38 years prior to receiving her Doctorate in Leadership and Higher Education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2005.

**Jackie Florendo, M.Ed.**, received her Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Doane College and is currently a doctoral student in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Nino Zhvania, M.A.**, a Muskie Scholar, completed her Masters degree in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is currently working for the Ministry of Education in the Republic of Georgia and has been accepted to the Doctoral Program in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Chelsie Guerrero, B.A.**, is currently a graduate assistant in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Jane Stavem, Ed.D.**, is the Superintendent of Blair Public Schools in Blair, Nebraska. She received her doctoral degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2008 and has nineteen years of educational experience. Her dissertation was a mixed methods study of Schoolwide Title I schools and the practices they implemented to address the needs of highly mobile students.

### ***Project Administrative Coordinator***

**Susan Wilson** is on the staff at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and holds an Associate of Science degree in Business Administration from the College of St. Mary, Omaha.

### ***Project Assistant***

**Nadia Bulkin** is on the staff at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Barnard College, New York City.



**Appendix C**  
**2008-2009 Study I: *Administrator and Teacher***  
***Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Survey**



**Study I: K-12 STARS Transition Year One – Teacher Survey**  
**STARS Comprehensive Evaluation Project**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please provide the following demographic information by responding to the questions or marking the appropriate category for each area.

1. **District Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Primary Position: Please make the primary position you hold in your school**

Teacher:  Elementary/Grade  Middle School  High School  
 SPED  Language Arts  Language Arts  
 ELL  SPED  SPED  
 ELL  ELL  
 Other  Other

3. **My Gender:**  Male  Female

4. **Total Years of Experience in Education:** \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Directions:</b><br>Please circle the number that best describes your response to each statement.<br><b>Hint: Criterion-referenced assessments are your STARS assessments.</b><br><b>Statewide tests are the new reading, math, and science tests approved by the Legislature in 2008.</b> | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| <b>DISTRICT SUPPORT</b>  |                   |          |           |       |                |
| 1. My district has identified an assessment philosophy regarding criterion-referenced assessment since the new state tests were approved.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 2. My district encourages a culture of continuous school improvement   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 3. My district requires teachers to be assessment competent.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 4. My district has provided an adequate opportunity for me to learn about the new statewide reading test.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 5. My district continues to provide criterion-referenced assessment training.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 6. My district plans to continue administering criterion-referenced assessments in my school.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 7. My district involves all teachers in changes made to the assessment process.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 8. My district provides adequate time to work collaboratively to review assessment results.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 9. My district defines how statewide test data fits into effective teaching and learning.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 10. My district defines how criterion-referenced assessment data fits into effective teaching and learning.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| <b>COMMENTS:</b>   |                   |          |           |       |                |
| <b>CRITERION-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT</b>   |                   |          |           |       |                |
| 11. I participate in a learning team to discuss criterion-referenced assessment in my school.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 12. Criterion-referenced assessment will continue to be a part of my classroom instruction in combination with the new statewide test.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 13. I modify my instructional strategies when students do not perform well on my criterion-referenced assessments.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 14. I use criterion-referenced assessment results to question, modify, and adjust my own teaching.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 15. Teachers in my school use criterion-referenced assessment data to develop interventions.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |

|   |                   |          |           |       |                |
|---|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 16. My teaching has improved as a result of the use of criterion-referenced assessments.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 17. My criterion-referenced assessments are helping my students improve.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 18. My criterion-referenced assessments are integrated into instruction and used to inform teaching and learning.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 19. Student achievement has improved in my school as a result of the use of criterion-referenced assessments.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 20. In my school, my principal communicates a clear vision for how to use criterion-referenced assessment results in my classroom.                        | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 21. I teach test strategies to prepare my students for criterion-referenced assessments.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| <b>COMMENTS:</b>  |                   |          |           |       |                |
| <b>Directions:</b><br>Please circle the number that best describes your response to each statement.   |                   |          |           |       |                |
|   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <b>NEW STATEWIDE TESTS</b>  |                   |          |           |       |                |
| 22. Statewide tests will replace the use of criterion-referenced assessments in my classroom.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 23. I will modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on the statewide tests.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 24. I will use statewide test results to question, modify, and adjust my own teaching.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 25. Teachers in my school will use statewide test data to develop interventions.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 26. The statewide tests will help my students improve.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 27. The statewide tests accurately measure what my students know and can do.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 28. The implementation of statewide tests will help my school to improve.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 29. Student achievement will improve in my school as a result of statewide tests.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 30. In my school, my principal has communicated a clear vision for how to use statewide test results in my classroom.                                     | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 31. I teach test strategies to prepare my students for the new statewide tests.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| <b>COMMENTS:</b>  |                   |          |           |       |                |
| <b>INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT</b>   |                   |          |           |       |                |
| 32. My district holds high achievement standards for all students.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 33. Teachers in my school district understand and apply the principles of sound grading practices   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 34. Teachers in my school/district are responsible for weaving assessment into instruction.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 35. My curriculum is aligned to the revised state standards.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 36. I record the standards that I teach to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 37. Students in my school/district are involved in understanding their own progress and achievement status.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 38. When students do not master a standard, I reteach it.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 39. The principal in my school assists teachers in making instructional decisions based on multiple types of assessment data.                             | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 40. My principal and I focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences.                                      | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 41. New teachers in my school are involved in curriculum review so they better understand how curriculum, assessment, and school improvement are aligned. | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |

COMMENTS:

**SCHOOL/DISTRICT ASSESSMENT MODEL**

**Directions:**

**Please circle the word that best describes your response to Question 42 and then use the area provided to add your comments. For Question 43, please use the area provided to respond to the question. Additional comments may be written on the back of the survey.**

|  |            |           |              |
|--|------------|-----------|--------------|
| 42. Will you continue to use criterion-referenced assessments in your classroom to support student learning once statewide tests are fully implemented?<br><br>Why or why not? | <b>YES</b> | <b>NO</b> | <b>MAYBE</b> |
|--|------------|-----------|--------------|

43. Please explain your district's philosophy/model for the use of both criterion-referenced assessments and statewide tests.

On behalf of the Comprehensive Evaluation Project, thank you for sharing your knowledge and thoughts.



**Study I: K-12 STARS Transition Year One Survey – Administrator Survey**  
**STARS Comprehensive Evaluation Project**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please provide the following demographic information by responding to the questions or marking the appropriate category for each area.

1. **District Name:** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Mark all the position(s) below that you hold in your school district:**  
 Superintendent     Asst Superintendent     Curriculum/Assessment Coordinator  
 SPED Coordinator/Director     ELL Coordinator/Director    Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Principal     Asst Principal     ELEM     MS/HS
3. **My Gender:**     Male     Female
4. **Total Years of Experience in Education:** \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Directions:</b><br>Please circle the number that best describes your response to each statement.<br><b>Hint: Criterion-referenced assessments are your STARS assessments.</b><br><b>Statewide tests are the new reading, math, and science tests approved by the Legislature in 2008.</b> | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| <b>DISTRICT SUPPORT</b>  |                   |          |           |       |                |
| 1. My district has identified an assessment philosophy regarding criterion-referenced assessment since the new state tests were approved.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 2. My district encourages a culture of continuous school improvement   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 3. My district requires teachers to be assessment competent.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 4. My district provided adequate opportunities for educators to learn about the new statewide reading test.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 5. My district continues to provide criterion-referenced assessment training.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 6. My district plans to continue administering criterion-referenced assessments in my school.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 7. My district involves all teachers in changes made to the assessment process.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 8. My district provides adequate time to work collaboratively to review assessment results.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 9. My district defines how statewide test data fits into effective teaching and learning.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 10. My district defines how criterion-referenced assessment data fits into effective teaching and learning.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| <b>COMMENTS:</b>   |                   |          |           |       |                |
| <b>CRITERION-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT</b>   |                   |          |           |       |                |
| 11. Teachers participate in learning teams to discuss criterion-referenced assessment in my school.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 12. Criterion-referenced assessment will continue to be a part of classroom instruction in combination with the new statewide test.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 13. Teachers modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on their criterion-referenced assessments.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 14. Teachers use criterion-referenced assessment results to question, modify, and adjust their own teaching.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |

|  |                   |          |           |       |                |
|--|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 15. Teachers in my school use criterion-referenced assessment data to develop interventions.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 16. Teaching has improved as a result of the use of criterion-referenced assessments.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 17. Criterion-referenced assessments are helping students improve.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 18. Criterion-referenced assessments are integrated into instruction and used to inform teaching and learning.                               | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 19. Student achievement has improved at our school as a result of criterion-referenced assessments.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 20. Administrators in my school/district communicate a clear vision for how to use criterion-referenced assessment results in the classroom. | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 21. Test strategies are taught to prepare students for criterion-referenced assessments.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| <b>COMMENTS:</b>   |                   |          |           |       |                |
| <b>Directions:</b><br>Please circle the number that best describes your response to each statement.  |                   |          |           |       |                |
|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <b>NEW STATEWIDE TESTS</b>   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 22. Statewide tests will replace the use of criterion-referenced assessments in our school.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 23. Teachers will modify instructional strategies when students do not perform well on the statewide tests.                                  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 24. Teachers will use statewide test results to question, modify, and adjust their teaching.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 25. Teachers will use statewide test data to develop interventions.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 26. Statewide tests will help students improve.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 27. The statewide tests accurately measure what students know and can do.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 28. The implementation of statewide tests will help our school improve.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 29. Student achievement will improve in our school as a result of statewide tests.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 30. Administrators in my school/district have communicated a clear vision for how statewide test results will be used in the classroom.      | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 31. Test strategies are taught to prepare students for the new statewide tests.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| <b>COMMENTS:</b>   |                   |          |           |       |                |
| <b>INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT</b>  |                   |          |           |       |                |
| 32. My district holds high achievement standards for all students.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 33. Teachers in my district/school understand and apply the principles of sound grading practices.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 34. Teachers in my district/school are responsible for weaving assessment into instruction.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 35. Curriculum is aligned to the revised state standards.  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 36. Teachers record the standards when teaching to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn.                                    | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 37. Students in my district/school are involved in understanding their own progress and achievement status.                                  | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 38. When students do not master a standard, teachers reteach it.   | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 39. Administrators in my school/district assist teachers in making instructional decisions based on multiple types of assessment data.       | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |
| 40. Administrators and teachers focus upon standards-based student achievement results during teacher evaluation conferences.                | 1                 | 2        | 3         | 4     | 5              |

|  |            |           |              |   |   |
|--|------------|-----------|--------------|---|---|
| 41. New teachers in my school/district are involved in curriculum review so they better understand how curriculum, assessment, and school improvement are aligned.   | 1          | 2         | 3            | 4 | 5 |
| <b>COMMENTS:</b>   |            |           |              |   |   |
| <b>SCHOOL/DISTRICT ASSESSMENT MODEL</b>  |            |           |              |   |   |
| <b>Directions:</b><br>Please circle the word that best describes your response to Question 42 and then use the area provided to add your comments. For Question 43, please use the area provided to respond to the question. Additional comments may be written on the back of the survey. |            |           |              |   |   |
| 42. Will you continue to use criterion-referenced assessments in your school/district to support student learning once statewide tests are fully implemented?<br><br>Why or why not?   | <b>YES</b> | <b>NO</b> | <b>MAYBE</b> |   |   |
| 43. Please explain your district's philosophy/model for the use of criterion-referenced assessments, statewide tests, and norm-referenced tests.   |            |           |              |   |   |

On behalf of the Comprehensive Evaluation Project, thank you for sharing your knowledge and thoughts.



**Appendix D**  
**2008-2009 Study I: *Administrator and Teacher***  
***Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System***  
**Interview Protocol**



**STUDY I INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—Teachers  
2008-2009**

**Qualitative Research Purpose:** *Explore and understand the impact of the transition from criterion-referenced assessments to statewide test on educators and school districts.*

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Profile**

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Position:    \_\_\_ Teacher    ELEM   MS    HS            Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

Years at present position and site: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Years in Education: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction:**

1. Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today.
2. I am serving as an interviewer for the Comprehensive Evaluation conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This research is being conducted so that the Nebraska Department of Education has a better understanding of how the implementation of statewide testing will impact educators and school districts across the state.
3. First, I want to assure you that this interview is strictly confidential. Information provided by school and district staff is reported or released in aggregated form only. Districts, schools, and individuals are not identified.
4. I have an Informed Consent form outlining your rights as a research participant. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw from the study at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Contact persons for the project and the Institutional Review Board are provided on the Informed Consent Form in case you have questions or concerns. I have a copy for you to sign and one for you to keep for your use.
5. It is important that educators participating in this research be willing participants. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from the interview at any time without harming your relationship with your district, this project, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Should you decide not to participate you may either return to your normal activities or sit with me for the interview period. Are you willing to participate in this interview?
6. I am going to record this interview so that the interview can be transcribed (a typed copy of the interview will be made) and we have an accurate rendering of your responses.
7. It is important that I maintain the integrity of your words and intentions; therefore, I may ask you to review the transcription if I have any difficulties with the interpretation.
8. We are interested in finding out about the perceptions that you hold regarding the implementation of statewide testing and its impact on district support, the use of criterion-referenced assessments, the use of the new statewide tests, instructional impact, and school/district assessment models.
9. Please feel free to discuss your views openly. From time to time, I may have additional questions to further understand a concept that you have shared.
10. Let's begin. Please state your name, school, district and verbally give permission to record this interview by repeating this statement, "I (your name) at (school/district name) willingly give my permission to record this interview."

## Interview Questions

**DIRECTIONS:** Place a check when the participant mentions each probe so that you do not repeat the probe.

1. How has your school's assessment philosophy changed since the adoption of the new state reading tests?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. In what ways are you using your CRTs to measure student performance?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. In what ways are you using your NRTs to measure student performance?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. In what ways are you using the state test to measure student performance?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

2. In what ways are you planning to use criterion-referenced assessments and report CRT results at the school and district level?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. In what ways will you use your CRT data results?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. In what ways will you use state test data results?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

3. What is your school doing to support your readiness for a balanced assessment system, using criterion-referenced assessments, norm-referenced tests, and the statewide test?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. What do you know about the statewide test? How will you prepare students?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. How are you involved in discussing changes to your school's assessment system to accommodate the state test?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

4. In your classroom, what type of assessments do you use and why?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. What is the purpose of each type of assessment/test?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Are you a member of a learning team and/or PLC and what is the focus of your learning team/PLC?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. With the implementation of the new statewide test, will you use assessments in the same way? Why or why not?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

5. How have you integrated assessment results into instruction to inform teaching and learning?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. How are your lesson plans aligned to assessment data and state standards?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. How do you modify your instruction in cases where students did not perform well on an assessment?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

6. What changes have you made within your classroom to ensure all students experience academic growth?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. How do you track student success with standards?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. What do you do for students who are unsuccessful?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. What are the problems with student academic growth?
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Other? \_\_\_\_\_

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

7. How do you incorporate assessment results within your school improvement process?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. In what ways do you participate in conversations with others about improvement of curriculum and instruction?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. How are you involved in the school improvement process in your building? In your district?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |

8. What comments, recommendations, or final observations would you like to make about curriculum, instruction, and assessment that we have not discussed?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |



**STUDY I INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—Administrators  
2008-2009**

**Qualitative Research Purpose:** *Explore and understand the impact of the transition from criterion-referenced assessments to statewide test on educators and school districts.*

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Profile**

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Position:    \_\_\_ Superintendent    \_\_\_ Assessment Coordinator    \_\_\_ Principal @    HS    MS    ELEM

Years at present position and site:    \_\_\_\_\_                      Total Years in Education:    \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction:**

1. Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today.
2. I am serving as an interviewer for the Comprehensive Evaluation conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This research is being conducted so that the Nebraska Department of Education has a better understanding of how the implementation of statewide testing will impact educators and school districts across the state.
3. First, I want to assure you that this interview is strictly confidential. Information provided by school and district staff is reported or released in aggregated form only. Districts, schools, and individuals are not identified.
4. I have an Informed Consent form outlining your rights as a research participant. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw from the study at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Contact persons for the project and the Institutional Review Board are provided on the Informed Consent Form in case you have questions or concerns. I have a copy for you to sign and one for you to keep for your use.
5. It is important that educators participating in this research be willing participants. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from the interview at any time without harming your relationship with your district, this project, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Should you decide not to participate you may either return to your normal activities or sit with me for the interview period. Are you willing to participate in this interview?
6. I am going to record this interview so that the interview can be transcribed (a typed copy of the interview will be made) and we have an accurate rendering of your responses.
7. It is important that I maintain the integrity of your words and intentions; therefore, I may ask you to review the transcription if I have any difficulties with the interpretation.
8. We are interested in finding out about the perceptions that you hold regarding the implementation of statewide testing and its impact on district support, use of criterion-referenced assessments, use of the new statewide tests, instructional impact, and school/district assessment models.
9. Please feel free to discuss your views openly. From time to time, I may have additional questions to further understand a concept that you have shared.
10. Let's begin. Please state your name, school, district, and give verbal permission to record this interview by repeating this statement, "I (your name) at (school/district name) willingly give my permission to record this interview."

## Interview Questions

*DIRECTIONS: Place a check when the participant mentions each probe so that you do not repeat the probe.*

1. How has your district's assessment philosophy changed since the adoption of the new state reading tests?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. In what ways is your district/school using your CRTs to measure student performance?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. In what ways is your district/school using your NRTs to measure student performance?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. In what ways is your district/school using the state test to measure student performance?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

2. In what ways is your district/school planning to use criterion-referenced assessments and report CRT results at the district and school level?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. In what way will your district/school use CRT district results
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. In what way will your district/school use state test data?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

3. What is your district/school doing to support teacher readiness for a balanced assessment system, using criterion-referenced assessments, norm-referenced tests, and statewide tests?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. What do you know about the statewide test? What do your teachers know about the statewide test?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Are your district's/school's teachers involved in discussing changes to your district's/school's assessment system to accommodate the statewide test?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

4. What types of assessments do your district's/school's teachers use in their classrooms?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. What is the purpose for each type of assessment/test?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Do your teachers participate in learning teams and/or PLCs and what is the focus of the learning teams/PLCs?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. With the implementation of the new statewide test, will you district's/school's teachers use assessments in the same way? Why or why not?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

5. How have your district's/school's teachers integrated assessment results into instruction to inform teaching and learning?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. How are your district's/school's lesson plans aligned to assessment data and state standards?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. How are your district's/school's teachers modifying their instruction in cases where students did not perform well on an assessment?

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

6. What changes has your district/school made to ensure all students experience academic growth?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. How do you track student success with standards?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. What do you do for students who are unsuccessful?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. What are the problems with student academic growth?
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Other? \_\_\_\_\_

| Descriptive Notes: | Reflective Notes |
|--------------------|------------------|
|                    |                  |

7. How does your district/school incorporate assessment results within your school improvement process?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. In what ways do you participate in conversations with others about improvement of curriculum and instruction?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. How are you involved in the school improvement process in your building? In your district?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |

8. What comments, recommendations, or final observations would you like to make about curriculum, instruction, and assessment that we have not discussed?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |



**Appendix E**  
**2008-2009 Study I: *Administrator and Teacher***  
***Perceptions of a Balanced Assessment System***  
**School Assessment Self-Analysis Rubric**



Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

## SCHOOL ASSESSMENT SELF-ANALYSIS RUBRIC

**Directions:** Please read the level definitions for each component and circle the appropriate level for your district’s current level of implementation.

| Component   | Level I  | Level II   | Level III  | Level IV   |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|
| Curriculum  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decisions about what to teach are left to chance by individual actors.</li> <li>• A guaranteed and viable curriculum is not evident.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has drafted curriculum documents.</li> <li>• The school has begun a process to provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum.</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has a guaranteed and viable curriculum.</li> <li>• The school has declared the important skills and content necessary for all students.</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school routinely monitors the attainment of the guaranteed and viable curriculum.</li> <li>• The curriculum is closely aligned to the mission of the school.</li> </ul>                         |
| Instruction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decisions about instruction are left to chance by individual actors.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has begun a process to identify instructional strategies that will improve student learning. The extent to which strategies are used will vary.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school encourages the use of research-based instructional strategies. The school has created pockets of success.</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school employs a research-based instructional program. The strategies are utilized by the staff to a large extent.</li> </ul>   |
| Assessment  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The assessment system and the subsequent data are left to chance by individual actors.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has begun the process of developing an assessment system. Some assessments are aligned to the curriculum.</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has an assessment system aligned to the curriculum.</li> <li>• Formative or summative assessments provide information about student learning.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has an assessment system aligned to the curriculum.</li> <li>• The school utilizes a comprehensive balanced system that provides timely feedback about teaching and learning.</li> </ul> |

|             |   |  |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|---|--|
| Use of Data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection is left to chance by individual actors.</li> <li>• Data are rarely analyzed or leveraged for improvement efforts.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A process for data collection has been drafted.</li> <li>• Data are occasionally analyzed by individuals and occasionally leveraged for improvement efforts.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A systemic process for data collection is in place.</li> <li>• Data are routinely analyzed by groups to inform collective action and leveraged for improvement efforts.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school utilizes data to routinely inform decisions about fulfilling the school mission, teaching and learning, and to guide all improvement efforts.</li> </ul> |
|-------------|---|--|---|--|

Ernst, D., Hoegh, J., & Boss, T. (2008). The Nebraska Leadership Initiative Training Materials. Lincoln, NE. Nebraska Council of School Administrators.

**Appendix F**  
**2008-2009 Study II: *Examination of Professional  
Development Practices in Nebraska Schools***  
**Research Survey**



*Note: This is a complimentary sample of the SAI survey. Access to the survey is contracted for a fee.*

## NSDC Standards Assessment Inventory

Directions: Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. It is best to complete this survey alone.

When marking your responses, please fill in bubbles completely. You may use either a pen or pencil.

Completing this survey will take about 15-20 minutes.

Please mark the responses that most accurately reflect your experiences at your school.

|   | <b>Never</b> | <b>Seldom</b> | <b>Sometimes</b> | <b>Frequently</b> | <b>Always</b> |
|---|--------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. Our principal believes teacher learning is essential for achieving our school goals.   | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 2. Fellow teachers, trainers, facilitators, and/or consultants are available to help us implement new instructional practices at our school.  | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 3. We design evaluations of our professional development activities prior to the professional development program or set of activities.   | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 4. Our school uses educational research to select programs.   | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 5. We have opportunities to practice new skills gained during staff development.  | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 6. Our faculty learns about effective ways to work together.  | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 7. Teachers are provided opportunities to gain deep understanding of the subjects they teach.   | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 8. Teachers are provided opportunities to learn how to involve families in their children's education.  | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 9. The teachers in my school meet as a whole staff to discuss ways to improve teaching and learning.  | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 10. Our principal's decisions on schoolwide issues and practices are influenced by faculty input.   | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 11. Teachers at our school have opportunities to learn how to use technology to enhance instruction.  | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 12. Teachers at our school learn how to use data to assess student learning needs.  | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |
| 13. We use several sources to evaluate the effectiveness of our professional development on student learning (e.g., classroom observations, teacher surveys, conversations with principals or coaches). | 0            | 1             | 2                | 3                 | 4             |



**Appendix G**  
**2008-2009 Study VI: *The Impact of Student***  
***Mobility on Student Performance and Teacher***  
***Practice Interview Protocol***



**STARS STUDY VIII—MOBILITY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
2007-2008**

**Qualitative Research Purpose:** *Explore and understand the impact of student mobility on student learning and school performance*

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Profile**

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

District and School: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher/Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Years at present position and site: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Years in Education: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction:**

1. Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today.
2. I am serving as an interviewer for the STARS Comprehensive Evaluation conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This study is being conducted to determine what classroom teachers in schools/districts with high student mobility do differently to address the effects of mobility of student learning. The results of this research study will be used to suggest possible improvements in school and district approaches to mobility
3. First, I want to assure you that this interview is strictly confidential. Information provided by school and district staff is reported or released in aggregated form only. Districts, schools and individuals are not identified.
4. I have an Informed Consent form outlining your rights as a research participant. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw from the study at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Contact persons for the project and the Institutional Review Board are provided on the Informed Consent Form in case you have questions or concerns. I have a copy for you to sign and one for you to keep for your use.
5. It is important that educators participating in this research be willing participants. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from this interview at any time without harming your relationship with your district, this project, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Nebraska Department of Education. Should you decide not to participate you may either return to your normal activities or sit with me for the interview period. Are you willing to participate in this interview?
6. I am going to record this interview so that the interview can be transcribed (a typed copy of the interview will be made) and we have an accurate rendering of your responses.
7. It is important that I maintain the integrity of your words and intentions; therefore, I may ask you to review the transcription if I have any difficulties with the interpretation.
8. We are interested in learning about different classroom strategies, interventions, or practices and school or district policies that have successfully addressed student learning and achievement issues caused by student mobility. Questions on the impact of mobility on classroom practices, individual student learning, teacher perceptions, and school/district policies will be asked.
9. Please feel free to discuss your views openly. From time to time, I may have additional questions to further understand a concept that you have shared.

10. Let's begin. Please state your name, school, district and indicate permission to record this interview by repeating this statement, "I (your name) at (school/district name) willingly give my permission to record this interview."

**Interview Questions**

*DIRECTIONS: Place a check when the participant mentions each probe so that you do not repeat the probe.*

- 1. In what ways does your school or district help students of mobility?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Systems/procedures/interventions for students of mobility?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Assistance provided to classroom teachers?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |

- 2. How do students of mobility impact you as a teacher?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. What do you see as the impact of mobility upon non-mobile students?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |

3. What types of systems/procedures do you have in place in your classroom to help students of mobility?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Pre-assessment?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Buddy system?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Pullouts for special help?
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Connections to parents?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |

4. How do you think mobility influences your behavior as a teacher?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Identification of skill deficits?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Extra attention?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Time after school?
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Connection to parents?
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. Learning concerns?

| <b>Descriptive Notes:</b> | <b>Reflective Notes</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|                           |                         |

5. In what ways do you currently try to improve the achievement of mobility students in your classroom?

**Probes**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Strategies?  
\_\_\_\_\_ b. Outside help?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Descriptive Notes:**

**Reflective Notes**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|



**Appendix H**  
**2008-2009 Study VII: *Systematic Practices***  
***Implemented to Address the Needs of Highly Mobile***  
***Students Survey***



### Title 1 Peer Review Rubric, Section 7

The following questions address perceptions about the **enrollment practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **enrollment practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| <b>1. ENROLLMENT PRACTICES</b>   | <b>ASSESSMENT</b>        |                 |                                   |              |                       |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
|  | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
| 1. Consistent procedures are followed for enrolling new students...                            | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 2. Families are given a written list of materials students need to begin school...             | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 3. Families are given a tour of the school...  | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 4. Families receive written and verbal information about school procedures...                  | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 5. Families are given written information about how to contact the school office...            | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 6. A system is in place for notifying staff members and students when new students arrive...   | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 7. The classroom or homeroom teacher is personally introduced to the new student and family... | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |

The following questions address perceptions about the **academic placement practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **academic placement practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| 2. ACADEMIC PLACEMENT PRACTICES  | ASSESSMENT        |          |                            |       |                |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 8. Student records are easily obtained from other school districts...        | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 9. A placement assessment is given to determine a student's reading level... | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 10. A placement assessment is given to determine a student's math level...   | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 11. Students are placed in classrooms based on assessment results...         | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |

The following questions address perceptions about the **student placement practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **student placement practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| 3. STUDENT PLACEMENT PRACTICES   | ASSESSMENT        |          |                            |       |                |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 12. When more than one classroom exists at a grade level, students are placed in classrooms to maintain gender balance...                                      | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 13. When more than one classroom exists at a grade level, students are placed in classrooms to maintain racial balance...                                      | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 14. When more than one classroom exists at a grade level, students are placed in classrooms based on academic proficiency level...                             | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 15. When more than one classroom exists at a grade level, students are placed in classrooms based on other needs such as special education, ESL, or Title I... | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |

The following questions address perceptions about the **classroom connection practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **classroom connection practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| 4. CLASSROOM CONNECTION PRACTICES   | ASSESSMENT        |          |                            |       |                |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
|   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 16. Students are assigned an adult mentor other than the classroom teacher...                 | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 17. Students are assigned a peer buddy...   | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 18. Non-English speaking students are assigned a peer buddy who speaks their home language... | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 19. Classroom teachers are trained in strategies to receive new students...                   | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 20. Students are introduced to other teachers they may have...                                | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 21. Students are given a tour of the school when they arrive...                               | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 22. Students have a classroom orientation to learn classroom procedures...                    | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 23. Students have a school orientation to learn school procedures...                          | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 24. The student has an opportunity to share personal information with the teacher...          | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |

The following questions address perceptions about the **family connection practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **family connection practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| 5. FAMILY CONNECTION PRACTICES  | ASSESSMENT        |          |                            |       |                |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
|   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 25. Someone from the school's parent group contacts new families...   | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 26. The school counselor contacts new families...   | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 27. The school administration contacts new families to help with the transition...                              | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 28. The school encourages new families to be involved by providing a written list of volunteer opportunities... | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 29. New families are invited to attend school events...   | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 30. Orientation is given to new families for academic and non-academic information...                           | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |

The following questions address perceptions about the **unique needs practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **unique needs practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| 6. UNIQUE NEEDS PRACTICES  | ASSESSMENT        |          |                            |       |                |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 31. All forms and written information are translated into home languages when needed...  | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 32. Interpreters are available to assist non-English speaking new families and school personnel when enrolling new students... | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 33. Student IEP needs are communicated to the classroom and special education teachers...                                      | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 34. Student health needs are communicated to the school health office and classroom teacher upon enrollment...                 | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 35. Parents know how to reach the school office and what plan is in place to address health needs...                           | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |

The following questions address perceptions about the **school/community connections practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **school/community connections practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| <b>7. SCHOOL/COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS PRACTICES</b>  | <b>ASSESSMENT</b>        |                 |                                   |              |                       |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
|   | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
| 36. Materials about the community are made available to new families...                             | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 37. Families are given information about local service agencies...                                  | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 38. Families are given information about local volunteer opportunities...                           | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 39. Families are told what radio and television stations carry school information...                | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |
| 40. There is collaboration between the school district and community agencies to reduce mobility... | 1                        | 2               | 3                                 | 4            | 5                     |

The following questions address perceptions about the **exit transition practices** at your school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the **exit transition practices** in your school?

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements by clicking on the corresponding number.

| 8. EXIT TRANSITION PRACTICES  | ASSESSMENT        |          |                            |       |                |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
|   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 41. The school allows students to stay in the same school if still living in the district ...   | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 42. The school has specific practices for exiting students to other districts...                | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 43. The school has an efficient method for transferring student records...                      | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 44. The school has forms to assist in the efficient transfer of basic student information...    | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 45. Staff members are notified when a student leaves the school...                              | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 46. Students have an opportunity to say goodbye to their classmates...                          | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 47. Information is shared with families about the effects of mobility on student achievement... | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
| 48. Information is shared with families about helping their child adjust to a new school...     | 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |

**It is essential to my study to know about you and your school district. Please answer the following questions by marking the best answer.**

49. The mobility rate for our school has increased or decreased over the past five years?
- Increased
  - Decreased
50. The percentage of student mobility in my school as of September 30, 2006 would be best described as the following:
- 0-5%
  - 6-10%
  - 11-15%
  - 16-20%
  - 21-25%
  - 26-30%
  - 31-35%
  - 36%-50%
  - 51% - 75%
  - Over 75%
51. Our school has a written transition plan.
- Yes
  - No
52. What do you believe is the biggest cause of student mobility in your area?
- Poverty
  - Job changes
  - Lack of affordable housing
  - Moves due to military placements
  - Migrant employment
  - Change in family structure
53. I am a:
- Male
  - Female
54. Today, my age falls into the following range:
- 21-30
  - 31-40
  - 41-50
  - 50 or more

55. The current size of my school district population qualifies as:
- 0-499
  - 500-999
  - 1,000-1,499
  - 1,500-1,999
  - 2,000-2,499
  - 2,500-4,999
  - 5,000-7,499
  - 7,500-9,999
  - 10,000-24,999
  - 25,000-99,999
  - 100,000 or Greater
56. I am currently a:
- Principal
  - Superintendent
  - Other district administrator
57. The number of years I have been a school administrator can best be described as:
- Less than one year
  - 1-2 years
  - 3-5 years
  - 6-10 years
  - 11-15 years
  - 16-20 years
  - More than 20 years

**Appendix I**  
**2008-2009 Study VII: *Systematic Practices***  
***Implemented to Address the Needs of Highly Mobile***  
***Students Interview Protocol***



## Interview Questions

Please state this sentence when I turn on the tape recorder:

I \_\_\_\_\_ give my permission to tape-record this interview.

Questions:

1. What conditions caused you to put additional practices into place for helping mobile students transition effectively into your school?
2. How do you involve other students in helping new students when they arrive?
3. How do you get feedback from new families as to whether or not you're achieving your goals of making effective transitions for all students?
4. What do you do in your school office to make all families feel welcomed when they come to enroll their child?
5. Do you believe student mobility impacts your school achievement scores?
6. Do you have a written transition plan that is followed for mobile students?
7. What do you think is the biggest cause of student mobility in your area?
8. Has your district done anything to reduce the effects of student mobility?
9. Does your school or district have any after school programs?
10. Does your district coordinate curriculum to ensure similar timelines are followed for instruction?
11. What do you think is the overall attitude of your teachers regarding mobile students?
12. What information do you think is most critical to share with other schools that have highly mobile students throughout the year?