



November 2002  
Volume 4, Issue 10

**Michael DiMaggio**  
Editor

November's Gaining Ground addresses high poverty schools from multiple perspectives.

First, Gitanjali Pande highlights the efforts of a state network group whose mission involves assisting states in developing and improving their systems of support toward low-performing schools.

In *Bay Area Service Learning*, Mark Emery and Michael DiMaggio share insights from a recent visit to two service-learning programs that have successfully engaged San Francisco's disadvantaged urban youth. Participants in these programs show improved academic, vocational, and social skills suggesting that involvement in non-traditional education settings may capture youth who have been otherwise underserved. Moreover, these programs may help fill the experiential and enrichment gaps that can typically elude disadvantaged and impoverished youth.

Jana Martella reinforces this notion in her review of *Inequality at the Starting Gate*. She cites research that shows that "lives of disadvantaged children are marked by a relative dearth of many of the learning experiences commonly associated with childhood." The author posits that to close the achievement gap, the poverty gap must also be closed.

Along this vein, Stephanie Yun summarizes a recent CDC document which avers that a coordinated school health program can lead to less student absences and increased student achievement. With numerous lost school days attributed to student illness, a coordinated school health and management plan particularly in high poverty schools can positively impact student performance.

Michael DiMaggio's article, the first in a series, addresses state support systems to low

performing schools. Drawing from an updated CCSSO publication, he describes two state support systems that provide policymakers with promising activities to help low-performing schools.

Finally, Ayeola Fortune announces the Council release of five extended learning program profiles. The profiles, based on extensive research conducted by CCSSO with data supplied by Ed Trust, showcase high poverty schools that are high-performing or demonstrating significant improvement in student achievement thereby undermining conventional wisdom toward low-performing schools.

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### **The State Support Team Network Report: Efforts Toward Implementing the NCLB Act**

**Gitanjali Pande, Project Assistant,  
Special Education**

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states are experiencing a greater sense of urgency to develop and expand statewide assessment measures and to provide effective systems of support to high-poverty, low-performing schools. At the same time, states face a greater degree of accountability for providing support to increasing numbers of low performing schools and districts.

To assist states in developing or strengthening their systems of support to turn around low performing Title I schools, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) launched the State Support Team Network (the Network or SSTN). Major work of the Network was accomplished in a series of meetings. This arti-

cle synthesizes major findings from these meetings.

The Network included representatives from the District of Columbia and six states: Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, South Dakota, and West Virginia. Members of this Network included both state and local education officials, assisted by expert consultants in two working meetings to explore various designs of support systems and processes for facilitating the use of data in school improvement efforts. Expert consultants provided assistance to the seven teams in the following identified areas:

*(Continued on page 2)*

#### Inside this issue . . .

The State Support Team Network Report: Efforts Toward Implementing the NCLB Act..... 1

Bay Area Service Learning Programs Teach Youth and Touch Community..... 3

CCSSO Releases Updated Report On State Support to Low-Performing Schools..... 4

CCSSO Releases Profiles of Five Extended Learning Programs..... 4

Research Shows Poverty as Greatest Indicator of Student Achievement..... 5

Six Strategies To Address Asthma In School Children..... 6

SSTA Division Staff News ..... 8

Institute Announces Second Annual Inclusive Week..... 9



Division of State Services and Technical Assistance

## The State Support Team Network Report: Efforts Toward Implementing the NCLB Act

(Continued from page 1)

- Analyzing the current support systems for low performing schools and districts;
- Devising processes that may be used to support teachers, principals, and district staff in using data for school improvement activities;
- Developing technical assistance aid on research-based approaches to changing classroom instruction, especially in reading instruction;
- Using a web-based tool for improving data-based decision making; and
- Reallocating fiscal resources to create more effective support systems.

Following the identification of state teams and consultants, a questionnaire provided to state team leaders identified the needs of each state. The completed questionnaires were shared with consultants to provide a deeper understanding of each state's systems of support and the challenges they faced. Over the course of the meetings, state team members and expert consultants collaborated on the areas listed above, exploring state designs of effective support systems, on the processes for facilitating the efficient use of data, on strategies to assist schools in implementing research based practices in reading and resource reallocation for school improvement efforts.

During the first SSTN conference, held in May 2002, state teams participated in three sessions, most of which included three or more concurrent session presenters. Some key issues covered in each session are briefly mentioned below with a more detailed discussion of these sessions available in a proceedings document on the CCSSO website.

State and district support to low performing schools. In this session, presenters identified effective strategies in the implementation of successful school support systems. Some key strategies involved teamwork and collaboration across personnel at all levels to design systems of support that cut across levels

and divisions. In addition, it was argued that capacity building at all levels (state, district, and school) and a built-in evaluation system can sustain continuous improvement.

Use of data to impact instruction and for continuous improvement. The presenter discussed the importance of linking data to standards and the importance of a teachers' role in understanding these standards in relation to student achievement as essential ingredients in any process of school improvement. In addition, systematic processes for gathering, analyzing, and utilizing data, and training teachers on the use of data, are important components of continuous improvement.

Enabling schools to implement research-based reading programs. These sessions focused on the importance of the teacher's role as reading instructors that utilize approaches which respond to individual students' needs. The presenters stressed that reading assessments must be used to screen, diagnose, monitor progress, determine student mastery, and design interventions, with equal regard to appropriate assessment measures for English language learners.

CCSSO sponsored its second working conference in July 2002. This conference held in Washington, D.C., built on recommendations of SSTN teams from the first meeting, with several additional sessions. A brief description of the sessions is presented below.

A framework for creating a comprehensive system of school support. A speaker from the Delaware Department of Education outlined some key strategies for the success of their states' systems of school support. Such strategies should include at the core, a data based decision-making philosophy, with measurable objectives to implement programs.

Creative use of funds to better serve students in low performing schools. An independent consultant focused on sources of funds available to SEAs and local education agencies (LEAs) in addition to Title I. She stressed that a major

ity of federal money for school improvement is allocated to districts, not to SEAs, such that several funding streams could be utilized to support low performing schools.

Data based decision-making web as a tool for using data to guide school improvement. SSTN teams participated in a hands-on experience with a web-based tool. The tool's ultimate goal involves providing job-embedded assistance that is key in institutionalizing the practice of data based decision-making and school improvement.

Facilitating the use of data at the school level to improve student learning. In this interactive session participants engaged in activities similar to those that school teams would use to apply data to improving instruction such as collecting and analyzing student learning data, setting measurable student learning goals, taking appropriate action, and monitoring results.

Teaching that works. A Maryland teacher of the year shared what worked for her in turning around a previously low-performing school. Some best practices she discussed included working collaboratively to understand standards and alignment, individualizing [math] instruction based upon specific students needs, and the availability of extended learning opportunities. She also mentioned the success of looping, a scheduling strategy that enabled students to remain with teachers beyond one year to strengthen student-teacher relationships, that took into account individual constraints and flexible needs of each student. She stressed that a major factor in turning around this school was belief system that all students can succeed at high levels, if teachers know what to teach, how to teach, and are attuned to the individual needs of students.

Rethinking the role of assessment in program planning and instructional delivery. The presenter emphasized that assessments must be valid and reliable. This can be achieved if teachers can identify children who need additional instructional interventions, if teachers can determine what specific reading skills have or have not been mastered, and if teachers can determine whether students are meeting expectations for reading proficiency on the state assessment.

(Continued on page 8)

## Bay Area Service Learning Programs Teach Youth and Touch Community

**Michael DiMaggio, Senior Project Associate, High Poverty Schools Initiative**

**Mark Emery, Director, Extended Learning Opportunities**

According to the American Association for Higher Education, for students to learn effectively, they first need to be engaged. The notion of service learning helps promote both intellectual and civic engagement by connecting the work students do in the classroom to real-world problems and real-world needs. Service-learning programs that are frequently integrated into the academic program and are related closely to the student's academic work support what is taught in the classroom. When closely linked to the classroom, they reinforce learning by providing opportunities to use acquired information and skills. Without sacrificing academic rigor or discipline-specific objectives, service learning presents students concrete reasons for doing their personal best.

These programs provide activities, many coordinated through the schools, in which students, kindergarten through high school levels, perform needed services in their communities as part of their learning experience. Through participation in community service/service-learning programs, students learn by doing. Opportunities for learning through doing and active involvement in addressing community needs and providing services are instructional strategies which reinforce other types of learning and provide a foundation for student success in school and out.

In California's Bay Area, two non-profit organizations have adapted this approach with positive results. By combining environmental stewardship and community service with academic enrichment, the San Francisco Conservation Corps (SFCC) and the East Bay Conservation Corps (EBCC) have implemented service-learning concepts to engage young people aged 18-24 from all walks of life in their education and development while addressing social and environmental issues.

Since their inception in 1983 as among the first urban youth corps in the nation, thousands of Bay Area young adults (corpsmembers) have participated as corpsmembers contributing millions of hours of community service. Corpsmembers develop job and academic skills, leadership abilities and environmental awareness by completing outreach, conservation and community service projects throughout the city. Simultaneously, many corpsmembers participate in academic programs such as high school diploma preparation, study halls, environmental and restoration classes, personal and professional development coaching and computer literacy training.

As a testament to the recognition the programs have received, the SFCC and EBCC have cultivated contracts with the cities of San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley, the East Bay Regional Park District, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the Alameda County Public Works Agency, and the port of Oakland in providing fee-for-service work. Crews of corpsmembers travel around the Bay Area in corps vehicles to work-sites. Once in the "field" a supervisor (usually a more experienced corpsmember) instructs the crew and oversees the job performance. Corpsmembers learn valuable job skills while being imbued with a sense of their role in the community.

Though open to everyone, both the SFCC and EBCC typically serve disadvantaged young adults who have fallen through the cracks of conventional public education. After experiencing little success in school, these individuals have either dropped-out or left the public school system. Many are impassive about learning and face academic and linguistic challenges. Most lack the tools and skills to find gainful employment.

The SFCC and EBCC offer a reprieve. Site visits to these organizations last month by a team of Washington educators, policy makers, and association

staff showed young adults engaged in learning though working. The visitors observed corpsmembers involved in environmental efforts such as maintaining firebreaks, restoring historical landmarks, and operating a citywide recycling program. Fueled by a sense of leadership, responsibility and purpose, these youth were animated and committed in their role in the community. Upon interviewing them, many stated that before coming to the corps they relieved their ennui by engaging in reckless or dangerous behavior.

This enthusiasm gets transferred to the classroom. In addition to working 32 hours a week, corpsmembers at the EBCC attend school 3 hours a night and all day on Friday (at SFCC students may take classes during the day). Student classes are small with a 10:1 student-teacher ratio. Lessons learned in the field supplement the lessons in the classroom.

The results are exciting. For many in the corps, traditional public school proved challenging with low or sporadic attendance and diminished academic performance. Yet, most corpsmembers at EBCC remained in the program on average for nine months demonstrating a 3.0 – 3.5 grade level increase for every fifty hours of instruction they received as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education. As a result some eventually attained their diplomas or GED.

Those attaining diplomas achieved something noteworthy for the academic curriculum at EBCC contains rigor. Indeed, diploma graduates must demonstrate a 12.9 grade level proficiency of academic skills on nationally normed tests, a number that exceeds state required levels. Ironically, most of the same students who earlier had failed or dropped out of high school have upon attaining their diploma from the corps enrolled in post-secondary schools.

Last year the EBCC, applied the service as a way of learning concept to young students in opening a charter K-4 ele-

(Continued on page 6)

## CCSSO Releases Updated Report on State Support to Low-Performing Schools

Michael DiMaggio  
Senior Project Associate

The reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also called the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), maintains that states establish statewide systems of intensive and sustained support and improvement for local education agencies (LEAs) to low-performing schools. Although research demonstrates what effective, high-performing schools and districts look like, policy-makers and researchers experience difficulties concerning the scalability and sustaining of those improvements. Moreover, while high-performing schools and districts share many of the same characteristics, the paths they follow to reach high performance often vary or remain specific to each school or district suggesting that reform efforts need to be appropriate for each school context. Complicating matters is that few low-performing schools and districts possess the knowledge, resources and capacity to undertake and sustain reform efforts on their own. As a result, states must play an increased role in building district support to low-performing schools.

To provide state and district policymakers with information on promising practices and activities that help low-performing schools and districts, CCSSO studied five state systems of support. This study, originally released in April 2002, provides a snapshot of implementation efforts undertaken at that time. The participating states (Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New York and Texas), selected from among the 11 states at the time of the study who required all schools identified as low-performing to receive assistance, have built and are operating systems to assist districts and schools most in need of improvement.

Each chosen state has developed a process by which low-performing schools receive assistance in identifying their assessment needs and goals setting. Although the five states vary in their types, levels, and methods of assistance provided to schools, all states attempt to provide long-term, sustained assistance and support aimed at building school and district capacity to support continuous improvement efforts. Further, all five offer both assistance and sanctions depending on the degree of progress schools demonstrate toward achieving state standards with the lowest performing schools (including those not making sufficient progress) receiving more support and facing stiffer sanctions than those schools performing just below standards.

This month the Council released an updated version of the report based on recent state feedback. This article, representing the first in a two-part series, will touch upon the efforts begun in Illinois and Maryland. Discussion of each state system includes: 1) the process for identifying low-performing schools; 2) the assistance provided; 3) the assistance provider; and 4) resources available to support that assistance. Next month's article will address the efforts of the other participating states.

### Illinois

Illinois places schools not meeting the 50% passing rate for all students within five years on its Academic Early Warning List (AEWL) with schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) on the Academic Watch List (AWL). To meet AYP, schools must improve student scores enough each year (over a five-year period) to reach the 50 percent of students meeting or exceeding standards. A school can make AYP but if half of its students do not meet standards, it remains on the AEWL. If it does not make AYP, it is eligible for placement on the AWL. Illinois has indicated that it will adapt its identification criteria to adhere to the AYP requirements of NCLB.

(Continued on page 7)

## CCSSO Releases Profiles of Five Extended Learning Programs

Ayeola Fortune, Senior Project Associate,  
Extended Learning Opportunities

The Council of Chief State School Officers is pleased to announce the release of five profiles of extended learning programs in high-poverty schools that are either high-performing or have shown significant improvement in raising student academic achievement. The profiles developed out of the Council's extensive research on extended learning programs in high-performing, high poverty schools. Individual school information is based on survey data, school performance reports, site visits, and academic achievement data from the Education Trust report, **Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations**. The profiles examine program origins and goals, linking the extended learning program to the school day, funding and sustainability, challenges to implementation, and successes. Each school is different in the challenges they faced and the approaches they took to meet those challenges; however, there are common elements of success evident in all of the schools including: visionary leadership, high expectation for all students, strong community support, clear goals and objectives, integrated in-school and afterschool activities, additional time on task and an environment where extended learning is an integral part of school life.

The profiles are available in pdf form on the Council website at <http://www.ccsso.org/elo/Publications.html>. For additional information contact Mark H. Emery at [marke@ccsso.org](mailto:marke@ccsso.org) or Ayeola Fortune at [ayeolaf@ccsso.org](mailto:ayeolaf@ccsso.org).

## Research Shows Poverty as Greatest Indicator of Student Achievement

**Jana Martella**  
**Director, Early Childhood and Family Development**

Although kids enter school on average at about the same age (e.g., kindergarten at age 5), research shows they come with great differences that affect their early learning. This variation places a significant number of young children at the beginning of schooling several paces back from their peers, establishing the achievement gap at the “starting gate” that sets the pace for the rest of their race through schooling and into adulthood.

A recent research release, *Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School* took a look at more than 16,000 kindergartners, centering its inquiry on their “social differentiation in cognitive status at the point where they arrive at the schoolhouse door.” Within the report, published by the Economic Policy Institute, authors Valerie E. Lee and David T. Burkam from the University of Michigan, give a detailed picture of how children’s “vastly disparate lives and family resources directly affect their test scores when they enter school.”

The authors base their conclusions on an in-depth survey analysis of the large-scale Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. They looked specifically at differences in achievement scores on literacy and mathematics noted by race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (as measured by income, parent occupation and education level.) Lee and Burkam also explored differences in activities and home conditions that influence a child’s early learning. Their findings, perhaps not surprising, demonstrated that the “lives of disadvantaged children are marked by a relative dearth of many of the learning and enriching experiences that are commonly associated with childhood.” For example, they found that the kindergarten whose family falls in the lowest fifth of socioeconomic status:

- Spent the most hours per week watching television (18 versus 11 hours)
- Owned just 38 books, compared to the 108 owned by the top fifth
- Was read to much less often (63% versus 94% who were read to 3 or more times a week)
- Was far less likely to have a computer in the home (20% versus 85%)
- Was less likely to have been taken to a museum, a public library, a play, or to have participated in dance, art, music, or craft classes
- Was far more likely to have only one parent (48% versus 10%) and to have moved more (48% of impoverished children have lived in at least three different homes by the time they enter kindergarten, compared to the 80% of children from the top quintile who have lived in no more than two homes)

The authors’ findings reiterate socioeconomic status as the strongest related factor to the cognitive skills (test scores in mathematics and literacy) of kindergartners. That is, of the many categories of factors considered—race and ethnicity, family make-up, home educational expectations—socioeconomic status accounts for more variation in scores than any other factor by far. Unfortunately, the inequality at the starting gate is not ameliorated once the gates are opened.

Children of low socioeconomic status begin school at kindergarten in systematically lower-quality elementary schools than their more advantaged counterparts. . . . School quality defined in terms of higher student achievement, more school resources, more qualified teachers, more positive teacher attitudes, better neighborhood or school conditions (Lee and Burkam, 2002)

The report confirms that the least advantaged U.S. children begin their formal schooling in consistently lower-quality schools, and this reinforces the inequalities that develop even before children reach school age. During the

report’s release, Professor Lee noted, “Disparities in children’s academic skills are substantial on their first day of formal schooling, so solutions that focus only on the school setting come too late to have as much impact as we would hope to achieve.”

In a concluding chapter of the report, the author’s highlight significant evidence to reduce these initial inequalities. Findings show that children from lower socioeconomic status who attended high-quality center-based pre-school arrive at school with higher academic achievement. But the report notes that less than half of the nation’s least advantaged kindergartners had been enrolled in either center-based preschool or Head Start. By contrast, nearly two-thirds of the most affluent children had been enrolled in center-based preschool. The reports stresses, “It seems quite obvious that a major way to reduce social inequalities in children’s cognitive status (and social competence) as they begin kindergarten is through disadvantaged children’s participation in well-designed preschool preparation programs with some academic content.”

At the release of *Inequality at the Starting Gate*, Economic Policy Institute President Lee Mishel aptly summarized, “For everyone who cares about giving every child a fair chance to succeed, this study is very important. It shows us tangible evidence of the gap that poverty creates for children. If we are serious about closing the achievement gap and leaving no child behind, we must do more and we must do it earlier.”

For further information on the report see the Economic Policy Institute’s website at <http://www.epinet.org>. For further information on Early Childhood and Family Education at the Council, contact Jana Martella, Project Director, at [janam@ccsso.org](mailto:janam@ccsso.org).

## SIX STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ASTHMA IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

**Stephanie Yun**  
Project Assistant, School Health Project

Asthma is the leading cause of lost school days for students accounting for 14 million lost days of school missed annually and the third-ranking cause of hospitalization among children, 15 years of age and younger. The prevalence of asthma has increased 74% among children aged 5 to 14 years. Low-income populations, minorities, and children living in inner cities demonstrate rates disproportionately higher in both morbidity (incidence of disease) and mortality (deaths).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently published a document, “Strategies for Addressing Asthma Within a Coordinated School Health Program”, to address this issue. The document attempts to assist state and local education, health agencies and schools in supporting students with asthma. In it, the CDC presents six strategies for schools to consider when addressing asthma within a coordinated school health program.

1. Establish management and support systems for asthma-friendly schools.
2. Provide appropriate school health and mental health services for students with asthma.
3. Provide asthma education and awareness programs for students and school staff.
4. Provide a safe and healthy school environment to reduce asthma triggers.
5. Provide safe, enjoyable physical education and activity opportunities for students with asthma.
6. Coordinate school, family, and community efforts to better manage asthma symptoms and reduce school absences among students with asthma.

Students suffering from frequent asthma attacks that require lost school

days will fall behind in their studies. These six strategies identified by CDC would help reduce the number of lost school days and improve the school environment for students who suffer from asthma attacks.

CCSSO’s School Health Project provides information resources regarding the role that school health program plays in supporting improved education outcomes for all students. Using a coordinated school health approach: all schools, districts and states can address challenges such as asthma in a holistic manner.

For more information on “Strategies for Addressing Asthma Within a Coordinated School Health Program” please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/healthtopics/asthma>. For more information about the School Health Project please visit <http://www.ccsso.org/hlth.html> or contact Nora Howley, Project Director, School Health Project, at [norah@ccsso.org](mailto:norah@ccsso.org).

### Bay Area Service Learning Programs Teach Youth and Touch Community

*(Continued from page 3)*

mentary school. Guiding principles tied to educational outcomes emphasize leadership, citizenship, and environmental stewardship. School administrators advocate applying academic study in direct and meaningful ways toward addressing community needs. Early results appear promising. As part of the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), students in the EBCC-Charter School scored higher in reading than their OUSD counterparts based on SAT-9 results. Unsurprisingly, there is a wait list to get into the school with plans afoot to expand the school to K-12 in the next few years.

Service learning has been an important element of the Council of Chief State School Officers’ focus on assuring school success for students at risk since 1987. CCSSO has learned that when service-learning programs are thoughtfully designed and integrate academics with out-of-school learning, they provide strong links between schools and community and productive ways for youth to connect with careers, adults, and peers. The benefits to students include: intellectual development and academic learning; personal growth and development; skill building and career development; and, social growth and development.

Although the concept of service-learning is not a new one, the move by some states and school districts to require service for graduation or at least offer community service/service-learning as a credit course toward graduation has given it new momentum. The term “service-learning” was defined in legislation in the National and Community Service Act of 1990. Service-learning programs can provide all students, regardless of academic accomplishments, socio-economic background or ethnicity, opportunities to observe, question, analyze, synthesize, and to develop the intellectual skills necessary to learn. Through participation in these programs, students also develop problem solving and critical thinking skills and have exposure to a variety of job settings, professions, role models, and individuals in the community.

The American Youth Policy Forum has recently published a report on the compatibility between service learning and comprehensive school reform. It reviews 28 school reform models and examines the efforts to develop a unified approach to linking classroom academics to service in school or the community. Portions of the report *Finding Common Ground: Service Learning and Education Reform* and ordering information can be found at [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org).

For more information about the San Francisco and East Bay Conservation Corps, please visit their websites at [www.sfcc.org](http://www.sfcc.org) or [www.ebcc-school.org](http://www.ebcc-school.org). For more information about the Council’s Extended Learning Opportunities project, please contact Mark Emery at [marke@ccsso.org](mailto:marke@ccsso.org). For more information about CCSSO’s Alternative High School project, please contact Michael DiMaggio at [michaeld@ccsso.org](mailto:michaeld@ccsso.org).

## CCSSO Releases Updated Report on State Support to Low-Performing Schools

*(Continued from page 4)*

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) holds responsibility for implementing technical assistance for the state’s support system. Housed in the Student and School Progress Division, the System of Support Division’s three main goals (Academic Intervention, Educator Quality, and Resources), follows a four-step process in working with districts to realize these goals:

- Step 1—Analysis of District and School Operation
- Step 2—Develop Improvement Plans and Performance Agreement
- Step 3—Implement Continuous Improvement Plan and Agreement
- Step 4—Monitor Continuous Improvement and Agreement

Each district has a SEA consultant as its point of contact. This person works with a team from across the agency, education services centers, and external partners to identify and coordinate programs and resources for which the district may be eligible. The consultant also monitors the progress of the district’s continuous improvement plan and performance agreement.

Illinois has identified organizations to provide technical assistance services to districts with low-performing schools. To be selected, ISBE has designated that these organizations meet NCLB demonstrated knowledge and scientifically based research competencies and requirements. For example, Illinois has created Educators in Residence (EiRs) who are assigned to districts in teams. EiRs are experienced teachers and administrators who are knowledgeable about scientific based research and practice on teaching and learning, successful school reform, and improving educational opportunities for students who do not meet state learning requirements. The services provided may vary from district to district and from school to school based on the district’s ability to achieve the goal and implement strategies.

ISBE notes numerous resources available to support technical assistance activities to low-performing schools. Federal funding may be accessed through the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration projects (Title I Part F), Title I Part A, Title II Part A, Title II Part D, Title V Part D, and the Reading Excellent Act. The state also allocates funding to these districts through its System of Support for AEWL and Summer Bridges programs. Both federal and state funding will be available to districts based on their approved school improvement plan and specified in the district performance agreement.

### Maryland

In Maryland, schools and districts are targeted for assistance based on their School Performance Index (SPI). Schools with 70 percent of their students scoring at proficiency level 3 or above receive a Satisfactory rating while schools that meet the Satisfactory rating coupled with 25 percent of their students at level 2 or above earn an Excellent rating. Schools not meeting these requirements face local reconstitution, state reconstitution, or being labeled as a critical mass system. Local reconstitution occurs either when school test results fall below Satisfactory and declining or below Satisfactory and not making “substantial and sustained” improvement. State reconstitution occurs when schools fail to make “substantial and sustained” improvement after the implementation of a school improvement plan and results in direct state intervention. Local school systems with over 25 percent of their schools under state or local reconstitution are labeled as Critical Mass Systems. Critical Mass Districts must develop a master plan outlining a long-range, coordinated four-year plan for improving student achievement in the district. This plan must be updated annually.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) supports low-performing schools through the awarding and monitoring of funds creating a tiered system of support. A school performing at the lowest levels

receives more intensive support and resources than one just below the standard. The MSDE provides on-site reviews of the school and their master plans and helps monitors the implementation of the plan. Districts share responsibility as well in developing district-level plans for supporting and working with low-performing schools and working with state technical assistants to provide assistance to the schools.

Federal and state-funded programs also support low-performing schools. The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program (CSRSD) provides the least intensive support. Targeted schools participate in application/technical assistance workshops that focus on preparation to implement a comprehensive school reform model. These workshops include assistance with completing a needs assessment, matching identified school needs with a comprehensive school reform model, and completing the CSRSD application. The Challenge School Initiative program offers the next level of support. MSDE awards Challenge grants to eligible schools with low SPI scores (or schools meeting other criteria such a high student mobility or high concentration of limited English proficient students) who apply and submit an approved school improvement plan. Each Challenge school receives approximately \$100,000 annually.

Next month, the state systems of support for Louisiana, New York and Texas will be discussed. For more information about the CCSSO study, please contact Michael DiMaggio at [michaeld@ccsso.org](mailto:michaeld@ccsso.org).

## SSTA Division STAFF NEWS

**Steven Kellert** Steven Kellert has joined the CCSSO staff as the new Project Assistant to the ARD (Administrative Records Development) and EQED (Establishing Quality Education Data) projects in the SSTA Division. Steven comes to CCSSO from the American Association of Community Colleges, where he was a staff assistant for three years. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland, where he earned bachelor's degrees in English and Dance. In addition to his work in the association world, Steven is involved in community theatre, dance instruction, and volunteer work.

**Tara McLarnon** joined our staff in October as a new project associate working on the State Student Assessment Program Annual Survey. In addition to the survey, she will work on the Education Information Advisory Committee meetings. Tara recently completed a Masters in Education Policy from the University of Virginia. Prior to that she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from Florida State University. Before coming to CCSSO, Tara spent two years teaching at a high poverty elementary school in Los Angeles.

**Shelley Spaulding** recently joined CCSSO as a research assistant, working on the Limited English Proficient SCASS and Immigrant Students and Secondary School Reform Projects. Currently, she is earning her teaching certification and M.Ed. in TESOL at the University of Maryland, College Park. Previously, she served as the assistant director of The Bretton Woods Committee where she worked on issues involving trade and investment in developing countries. She studied French at the University of Florida and at the Institut Americain Universitaire in Avignon, France.

## The SSTN Network Report

*(Continued from page 2)*

Using scientifically based reading research to select reading programs, strategies, and materials. The presenter discussed some key strategies of an effective research-based reading program, including a comprehensive program aligned with standards, measurable goals, parent and community involvement, in-built evaluation strategies, and effective coordination of resources.

Providing high quality professional development in reading. A reading expert argued that some key guidelines for effective and sustainable professional development in reading should include focusing staff development on student involvement, continuous teacher involvement in the learning process, and collaborative teacher training to solve problems.

Recommendations from state team leaders, observations from school improvement experts, information from participants' discussions, and evaluations during the two meetings, form the bases of findings and recommendations for state education agencies, some of which are highlighted below:

- Align assessments to clear standards;
- Ensure readily available assessment data to teachers;
- Build effective support systems that facilitate sustained assistance to low performing schools and districts;
- Extend improvement efforts across personnel, departments, or divisions of the state agency;
- Join forces with external facilitators to strengthen their efforts to improve the statewide support systems; and
- Find ways to infuse into low performing schools research-based programs and professional development training that improve reading instruction.

More information about the SSTN conferences can be found in the proceedings document. The proceedings document from these meetings will be available on the CCSSO website by December, 2002.

## High Poverty Schools Initiative Staff

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### **Institute Announces Second Annual Inclusive Week**

The National Institute for Urban School Improvement (Institute) whose mission is to facilitate special education reform efforts in urban school districts will celebrate the second annual National Inclusive Schools Week during the week of December 2-6, 2002. This weeklong celebration highlights the progress of our nation's schools in providing support and quality education to students with disabilities. It also provides an opportunity for educators, students, and parents to discuss what else needs to be done to ensure that their schools continue to improve their ability to successfully educate all children.

Participants in National Inclusive Schools Week hope to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of teachers, administrators, students and families in making their schools more inclusive. According to the Institute which receives its funding from the Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education, inclusive schools ensure that every student feels welcome and is learning; embrace that every student learns differently; understand that *all* children learn better with individualized instruction tailored to their abilities and interests; and hold high expectations for student success.

For more information about National Inclusive Schools Week and the National Institute for Urban School Improvement please visit [www.edc.org/urban](http://www.edc.org/urban).