



Greetings from the REL Southwest Director

Welcome to the inaugural e-newsletter for REL Southwest's 2017–22 contract. We look forward to sharing our work with you on a regular basis over the next five years. As part of the REL program, our mission is to collaborate with educators, policymakers, and researchers to conduct and promote the use of research to address high-priority education needs in our region. To carry out this work, we have formed six new collaborative research partnerships which we are excited to introduce to you below.



We have also published 10 new research reports from studies that we conducted under our previous contract. We hope that these reports will provide insights you can use in your practice or policy decisionmaking. In addition, we share highlights from the first meeting with our new Governing Board, which includes key stakeholders from across our five-state region.

We are also revamping the **REL Southwest website** as part of our new contract. We will be building out this site over the next few months and invite you to check back often for new developments. We hope to announce the new website's official launch soon!

Thank you for your interest in our work to improve education outcomes for all children in our region.

Michael Vaden-Kiernan, Ph.D.

Our Work

Introducing Our New Research Partnerships

To support the use of research in education practice and policy, REL Southwest works with educators, policymakers, and others through six collaborative research partnerships in **Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas**. These partnerships focus on issues that are field initiated and directly related to student achievement or educator effectiveness.



Our **Southwest College and Career Readiness Research Partnership** with the Arkansas Department of Education and other partners is supporting the development and refinement of college and career readiness indicators and the improvement and use of data systems and data visualization.



Our **Southwest Teacher Preparation and Professional Development Research Partnership** with the Louisiana Department of Education and other partners is supporting continuous improvement of the statewide **Believe and Prepare program** and examining its relationship to teacher outcomes, such as mobility and effectiveness.

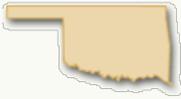
Our **Southwest English Learners Research Partnership** with the New Mexico Public Education Department and other partners seeks to support English learner students in meeting state targets for growth and attainment



through the implementation of evidence-based services and programs.



Our **Southwest Early Childhood Education Research Partnership** with the Oklahoma State Department of Education and other partners seeks to examine and address issues of equity in early childhood education and assess and reduce gaps in children's knowledge and skills at kindergarten entry.



Our **Southwest Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) Research Partnership** with the Oklahoma State Department of Education is building state and district capacity to use data for improvement and to implement NICs to help districts identify and scale up effective and innovative practices. This approach is part of Oklahoma's Every Student Succeeds Act state plan and supports the Oklahoma **Champions of Excellence** Program.



Our **Southwest School Improvement Research Partnership** with the Texas Education Agency and other partners is examining the state system of support for district and campus improvement initiatives and the degree to which the initiatives improve district, school, and student outcomes.

Each partnership also connects with education agency staff focused on similar issues in other states through a **regional community of practice (CoP)**. CoP and partnership members will meet quarterly to share challenges, lessons learned, best practices, and research findings.

REL Southwest Welcomes New Governing Board Members

In February, we enjoyed hosting the first REL Southwest Governing Board meeting under our new contract. Fifteen new board members attended the meeting at the offices of American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Austin, Texas. We value the insights the board members shared and their dedication to guide our work and serve as champions of improving student and teacher outcomes in their states.



Chris Boccanfuso, REL Southwest's contracting officer's representative at the Institute of Education Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education, presented an overview of the REL program, including its emphasis on addressing high-leverage problems and field-initiated needs. Guest speaker **Vivian Tseng**, from the W.T. Grant Foundation, provided an overview and discussion of research-practice partnerships (RPPs), the primary way in which the RELs work with education stakeholders. REL Southwest staff then shared the work planned for the first 18 months, after which Governing Board members gave presentations about their states' priorities, needs, and accomplishments.

The meeting closed with the election of the board chair and vice-chair. **Patricia Jiménez-Latham, Ed.D.**, director of the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations at New Mexico Highlands University, was elected chair and **Linda Roska**, executive director of the Division of Research and Analysis at the Texas Education Agency, was elected vice-chair. Thank you to all who attended for your good questions, discussion, and participation. The Governing Board will next meet in fall 2018.

New Reports and Resources

Initial Spanish Proficiency and English Language Development Among Spanish-Speaking English Learner Students in New Mexico

To better understand and track Spanish-speaking English learner (EL) students' growth in English proficiency and academic outcomes, this study followed two cohorts in New Mexico from kindergarten through grade 4 or 5.

[➔ Read the report](#)

Teacher Certification and Academic Growth Among English Learner Students in the Houston Independent School District

To better understand the relationship between teacher certification and English learner (EL) students' growth in academic achievement and English proficiency, this study examined EL students in grades 4 and 5 in the Houston Independent School District.

[➔ Read the report](#)

Understanding the Role of Noncognitive Skills and School Environments in Students' Transitions to High School

New Mexico has one of the nation's lowest high school graduation rates, with grade 9 marking a critical transition point. This study examined how New Mexico high school students' perceptions of their noncognitive skills and school climates related to the students' grade 9 outcomes.

[➔ Read the report](#)

Scientific Evidence for the Validity of the New Mexico Kindergarten Observation Tool

Many states are using entry assessments to measure students' kindergarten readiness. But how valid are these assessments? This study assessed the validity and reliability of New Mexico's new Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT), with positive results overall.

[➔ Read the report](#)

[➔ Watch a video of the key findings](#)

Trends in Algebra II Completion and Failure Rates for Students Entering Texas Public High Schools

This study examined Algebra II completion and failure rates in Texas public high schools before and after the state made Algebra II optional to graduate. Tracking students who entered grade 9 from 2007/08 through 2014/15, the study reveals Algebra II completion and failure rates for the first student class to graduate under the new requirements.

[➔ Read the report](#)

[➔ Read an *Education Week* blog post about the study](#)

Impact of Providing Information to Parents in Texas About the Role of Algebra II in College Admission

This study examined whether providing parents in Texas with an informational brochure about the role of Algebra II in college admission had an impact on students' Algebra II completion rates in grade 11. The study related to the passage of Texas House Bill 5, which made Algebra II optional to graduate.

[➔ Read the report](#)

Special Education Enrollment and Classification in Louisiana Charter Schools and Traditional Schools

Charter schools tend to lag behind traditional schools in enrolling students who require special education services. This study examined the special education enrollment gap between

charter and traditional public schools in four Louisiana regions from 2010/11 to 2013/14.

[➔ Read the report](#)

An Exploratory Analysis of Features of New Orleans Charter Schools Associated with Student Achievement Growth

This study found that student achievement growth in New Orleans open-enrollment public charter schools in 2012/13 was positively associated with having an extended school year, more experienced teachers, and kindergarten as an entry grade.

[➔ Read the report](#)

[➔ Read an *Education Week* blog post about the study](#)

Trends in Teacher Mobility in Texas and Associations with Teacher, Student, and School Characteristics

To better understand annual teacher mobility in Texas, this study examined the movement of teachers within Texas during the 2011/12–2015/16 school years.

[➔ Read the report](#)

Impact of a Checklist on Principal-Teacher Feedback Conferences Following Classroom Observations

This study examined whether a checklist could help principals in New Mexico public schools provide better feedback to teachers after formal classroom observations. The study found mixed results after one school year.

[➔ Read the report](#)

What's New at the REL Program

Learn what else is new across the 10 RELs, including the latest publications and events.

[➔ Read more](#)



If you live in **Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, or Texas**, we're here to answer your research-based questions about education policies, programs, and practices.

[ASK US!](#)

About REL Southwest

REL Southwest is one of 10 **Regional Educational Laboratories** funded by the Institute of Education Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education. These labs provide applied research and evaluation, analytic technical support, and services and products to address pressing regional education needs, inform policy and practice, and improve student outcomes.

Our Partners

- Decision Information Resources Inc.
- Empirical Education Inc.
- Gibson Consulting Group
- RAND Corporation
- Safal Partners Inc.
- WestEd

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