

# Archived Information

## Interim Evaluation of the Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University

### Introduction

The Northeast and Islands Regional Education Laboratory At Brown, which is referred to as the LAB, is a consortium of Brown University and Hunter College at City University of New York (CUNY) serves a broad area which includes seven states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont), the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico and it is spread over some 2500 linear miles. Within the seven states, there are over 20 Native American reservations (The LAB Technical Proposal, p. 18). Being a part of Brown University provides excellent opportunity for the LAB researcher to benefit from resources at the different centers and departments at the Brown campus. The list of departments and centers that would be potentially beneficial include New England Desegregation Assistance Center, the New England Multifunctional Resource Center, the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform the Center for Language Studies, the Taulman Center for Public Policy, and the Education Alliance for Equity and Excellence in the Nation's Schools.

The LAB Proposal indicates that LAB's partners are drawn from:

- The institutional resources of Brown University, including the Department of Education, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the Coalition of Essential Schools, The Education Alliance, the Taubman Center for Public Policy, the Choices for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Project, the University library system, and the Scholarly Technology Group (STG).
- The institutional resources of Hunter College at CUNY, including the Department of Education, National Alliance of Black Superintendents, the National Science Foundation, Teacher Enhancement Program, the Accelerated Schools Project, and the NY Multifunctional Resource Center.
- The resources of key organizational partners including the Superintendents' leadership Council (SLC), BBN Systems and Technologies, the Center for Resource Management (CRM), the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), the New England

Association for Schools and Colleges, Jobs for the Future, RMC Research, Super Teams and its Northeast Regional Center, TERC, and University of Massachusetts Boston. (Technical Proposal p. 14).

"The emphasis on standards, assessment, and alignment that emerge from the national context clearly indicate that the LAB must take a proactive leadership role to ensure that *all* children are in fact served in practice, not just in theory" (Technical Proposal, p.16)

Based on the LAB proposal, the main objective of the LAB is to help raising achievement level of *all* students in the nation's school. Consequently there are two priorities that guide the work of the LAB: "(1) better put the pieces of educational change and improvement together in ways that will result in systemic education reform to promote the dual goals of educational excellence and equity for all students; and (2) 'scale up' systemic reform to encompass all schools, all levels of educational administration, all programmatic areas, and diverse social contexts." (The LAB Technical Proposal).

The proposal indicates that "this collaborative history positions the LAB to 'better put the pieces of educational changes and improvement together' and 'scale up systemic reform'." (Proposal Summary, p. 1).

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

The peer-evaluation for the Northeast and Island Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (LAB) was conducted at the Laboratory headquarter in Providence, Rhode Island from Monday May 24 to Friday May 28, 1999. I received the reading materials for the evaluation weeks prior to the meeting and reviewed all the materials that were selected for this review. I also visited the LAB's websites. LAB arranged several presentation sessions to help the review team to gain more knowledge about the LAB's activities and on the current status of the projects. Presentations were professionally conducted and were extremely informative. In

addition to reading the materials, I participated in the presentations and I asked questions and interacted with the LAB research team. I also met with the Chairman and some of the members of the Governing Board as well as with the Institutional Liaison, with the clients, and with the partners on several occasions. These meetings provided excellent opportunity to gain insight into the LAB's operation, service, and clients' level of satisfaction with LAB's performance. I have also had occasional opportunities to interact with the individual staff members of LAB to talk about their scope of work, their interests, and their background. The following report is based on what I have learned from the sources mentioned above. It must be indicated, however, that my report has several limitations. First, it is based on the limited reading materials that I have had a chance to review and does not reflect the broadness and the true range of the materials that LAB has produced and activities that LAB is currently undertaking. Second, the time for this review was limited. LAB has done extensive and quality works that deserves much more attention than what I can devote during this limited visit and on my limited amount of time on this evaluation.

To present a comprehensive picture in this section, I will start with the LAB's proposed activities. In response to OERI's RFP, LAB proposed to perform seven tasks. Following is a brief description of these tasks along with the proposed budget (see, the LAB Technical Proposal).

## **II. Implementation and Management**

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

#### **1. Strengths**

**Task 1 (\$2,220,772), Develop Effective Governance, Management and Planning Systems.** The focus of discussion on Task 1 will be on three major issues: (1) Operations/Management, (2) Evaluation of the LAB's Outcome, and (3) Needs Assessment.

#### Operations/Management

The LAB has a Governing/Advisory Board that supervises/oversees the LAB activities. The original proposal indicated that the number of the Board member was 34 and reported that the Board met three times between January to March 1995 (The LAB Technical Proposal, p. 64). Currently, the Board has 27 member from the nine regions (the seven states and the two territories). Based on the statistics that LAB provided to the Review Panel, there is sufficient representation of the members by the tasks and by the background of the Board members. Based on the materials that I reviewed and the presentations by the Chairman of the Board and meetings with the Chairman and a few other Board members, it can be indicated that the Advisory Board is strong and consists of knowledgeable members with the relevant background. The Executive Director of the LAB is very knowledgeable and is in control of the Laboratory. Staff members (research staff and assistants) seemed to be knowledgeable, interested, and involved.

#### Evaluation of the LAB's Outcome

The original proposal stated that "the LAB will conduct periodic in-dept evaluations of its processes, products, programs and services. Such evaluations address not only the quality of

products and services but also the impact of such efforts" (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 97). "Evaluation methods will match the content and purposes of the LAB's activities, and will include a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods."

Based on the proposal, the evaluation will be focused on the following five topics: (1) school change, (2) joint ventures with practitioners, (3) systemic reform, (4) technology, and (5) the LAB as a partner in the larger ED-funded context (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 99).

Following is an example of evaluation question on systemic reform: "To what extent are LAB efforts contributing to systemic reform within the region?" (p. 99).

Different presenters referred to some qualitative evaluation of the products, programs and services. It was indicated at the presentations that field notes have been collected to be used for several purposes including evaluation of the products and services. Some of the field notes were included in the package prepared for the Review Panel and I had a chance to read them. Occasionally, there were some Likert-type questions asked for evaluation purposes. I did not receive any document reporting analyses of the data just mentioned.

More objective evaluations are needed to help the LAB researchers/developers to understand problems and modify their works.

### Needs Assessment

The original proposal also suggested to conduct "Needs Assessment" to help LAB researchers/professional developers to adjust their research/ development works based on the consumers' need. For example, the proposal under Task 1 indicated that: "The LAB will conduct needs assessments only as required to support its planning. It is committed to employing ongoing needs assessment to ensure the cost-effective use of resources in support of addressing priority regional needs" (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 105). "The information gained

through informal needs assessment activities will be used across the LAB network and with other ED-funded technical assistance providers" (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 108). "The LAB will attend to the product use context in order to better understand the client's values and motivations in seeking a product or service" (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 106).

The two Signature Works that were selected as examples of major works at the LAB presented some evidence of qualitative needs assessments, however, more should be done in this area. It is important that the objectives for needs assessment be clearly defined in advance and that objective techniques be used in such assessments.

**Task 2. (\$5,104,813) Conduct Development and Applied Research.** The original proposal organizes the program of work under three program areas that are viewed as "Zones of Inquiry". Under this definition, three zones are proposed:

Zone One: Transforming Teaching and Learning (pp. 129-174)

Zone two: School Structures and Environments that Support High Levels of Learning (pp. 175-223).

Zone Three: Partnerships and Connections that Support Systemic Reform (pp. 225-254).

Several different research projects are completed or underway under the three zones of inquiry. Among the highlights of these works, two major research projects, which have been selected as Signature Works can be mentioned. These projects are: (1) *Implementing Standards with English Language Learners* (Signature Work 1); and (2) *Secondary School Restructuring* (Signature Work 2). Under the general heading of Secondary School Restructuring, several studies have been conducted or are underway. Among these projects are: (a) *Growing Systemic Change in High Schools*; (b) *Strengthening the Regional Accreditation process*; (c) *School-to-Career as a Strategy for School Reform*; and (d) *Maine Commission on Secondary Education*.

These studies were all conducted with the help and cooperation with the clients (school teachers and school principals). The studies seemed to be very useful for the clients. Testimonial evidence (interview with teachers, meetings with the Education Commissioner, school officials and teachers indicated that school benefited a great deal from these studies. The studies were client-initiated and they have been proposed to the LAB based on the real needs of the schools and districts.

There are however, some limitations in the studies done by the LAB. One of the major limitation of these studies was the site selection and selection of samples. The samples were mainly convenient samples; thus generalization of the results of the studies may be limited. This issue of generalization may particularly be an issue in terms of scaling-up the efforts. These studies were all qualitative and there were not plans for quantitative data analyses and reporting and discussing the results of quantitative analyses. Some of these studies did not include assessments of the impact of the interventions that are used in the studies. In some cases there were some qualitative assessments of the impact of the intervention. These qualitative assessments of intervention were not sufficient to inform researchers of possible limitations and problems in the studies.

**Task 3. (\$8,100,538) Provide Services to the Field.** Under this task, the LAB conducted R & D and provided services that are helpful to SEAs and LEAs to scale-up systemic reform in the region. There was several major undertaking in this area. Among the most important works that the LAB conducted are: (1) *Toolkit 98-Improving Classroom Assessment: A Toolkit for Professional Developers*. This is a two-volume resource that was prepared for trainers who lead or coordinate professional development. (2) *Educating Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. This professional inquiry kit provides information to help

educating diverse student populations.

In addition to providing materials that help schools to serve their special needs students, the LAB help schools with professional training and with their other academic needs. The testimonial evidence suggested that these services have a great positive impact on schools. However, there was not much objective evidence to support the qualitative data that were provided by some of the users through their testimonies.

**Task 4. (\$409,255) Participate in the Formation of the Nationwide System of Education Information and Assistance.** The proposal presents a list of partners and alliances to build a nationwide system of education information and to share R & D results (see the LAB Technical Proposal for a list a partners and alliances, pp. 258-262). The proposal suggests five Levels of collaboration in the nationwide information and assistance system. These levels are: Level One: state and local customers; Level Two: The formal LAB organizational partnership; Level Three: Other Ed-Funded assistance providers; Level Four: ED-Funded Research centers, institutes and clearinghouses; and Level Five: OERI . (LAB Technical Proposal, pp. 262-264).

Based on the Proposal, the LAB hosts an Annual Meeting of regional technical assistance providers (NDN State Facilitators CCs, Star Schools, State Literacy Centers, Eisenhower Consortia members, and the regional Technology Consortia). (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 266). This Annual Meeting which are organized by the LAB are very helpful and have received support and encouragement from the clients of the LAB.

The proposal also indicated that the LAB will develop, in consultation with OERI and the assistance system partners, a plan for the structure and phased implementation of the assistance system, including a set of benchmarks and timelines for assessing progress and accomplishments. (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 267). Examples of Collaborative Activities are

listed in the proposal (LAB Technical Proposal, pp. 272-277).

Formation of a national system of education information is among the most important mission of the Laboratories. Through this channel, the Labs throughout the nation can share information and researchers and others can benefit from such service. The LAB at Brown has created a good system. A summary description of the LAB's websites is presented by the LAB (see Profiles of the Regional educational Laboratories, 1998). Some of the LAB's publications are available through the LAB's websites. The LAB also offers a Spanish language site (Nanduti). This is an important part of Task 4 for the LAB since a relatively large portion of the population covered under the LAB is Spanish speaking.

It is imperative that LAB conducts objective evaluation of the users of its websites to determine what possible changes/improvement may be needed.

**Task 5. (\$661,109). Laboratory Networking Program.** The LAB Technical proposal explains the LAB's plan for development of a Laboratory Networking Program. In doing this, the LAB indicates that:

The LAB will plan joint activities with other laboratories across the nation to serve multiple regions (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 282). The LAB will participate in Laboratory Networking Meetings (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 283). The LAB will work collaboratively with other Laboratories to optimize the use of resources, to establish nationwide strategies for systemic reform, in creating nationwide resource collections, in applying collective expertise and experience across the LNP to specific problems, in applying lessons learned from collaborative structure (LAB Technical Proposal, pp. 284-288).

The LAB will collaboratively develop and maintain a standards-based, practice-grounded telecommunications network and set of interactive data and document databases in close cooperation with OERI, other regional laboratories, and other members collaborating on the design and

maintenance of the Nationwide Education Information and Assistance System (LAB Technical Proposal, p. 294).

The Laboratory Networking Program (LNP) helps the LAB to share R & D information on the topics that are of interest to other Laboratories and Centers. For example, some of the other Laboratories have specialty areas that are similar with those of the LAB. My impression from the materials I read and from the contact I had with the technical staff of the LAB is that the LAB has limited networking with other Laboratories. It is highly recommended that the LAB directs more efforts toward development of a full LNP capacity with other OERI Laboratory and Centers.

**Task 6. (\$365,921). Assistance to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement** in the areas of support of educational reform, attainment of the National Goals, enhancement of OERI's research, development, demonstration and dissemination system and the capacities of the laboratories.

The relationship and interaction of the LAB with OERI was discussed with the OERI representatives who had participated in this review. The LAB has conducted research and activities in consultation with the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). OERI project officers have been in contact regularly with the LAB's directors and project staff.

Further, the LAB, in reference to OERI interests has sponsored conferences and meetings, has convened expert panels, and has conducted briefings.

**Task 7. (575,876). Specialty Area Development.** In this section, five subtasks are proposed: (1) Conduct development, applied research, and dissemination for language and cultural diversity; (2) Conduct development, applied research and dissemination for urban education; (3) National Leadership; (4) Provide resources expertise to the LNP; (5) Establish Partnerships with ED-Funded Institutions. Under each of the five subtasks, there are several

strategies or tasks. For example, under Subtask 1, the following five strategies/tasks are proposed: (1) Increasing knowledge of, and promoting ways of using, alternative assessment procedures with language minority students; (2) Developing new approaches for better communication with language minority families in order to assist students in accessing higher levels of the curriculum; (3) Connections: Promoting collaborative, proactive, and participant-centered professional development to reduce the current fragmentation that exists between bilingual/ESL teachers and their counterparts in the mainstream; (4) Creating networks for collaboration and inquiry: promoting the commonalities among geographically separated schools that are providing appropriate and effective intervention to language minority students and their families with current program designs, such as dual language programs, bilingual education, structured immersion and sheltered initiatives; (5) Using Superintendents' Network to support and enhance integrating language and cultural diversity issues in ongoing district-wide systemic reform efforts (see the LAB Technical Proposal, pp. 309-363).

Under this task, the LAB has focused its R&D in two major areas: *Language and Cultural Diversity*, and *Urban Education*. In the area of language and cultural development, projects that are presented as *Signature Work 1* can be mentioned. Based on the document included in the *Signature Work 1*, and other publications and based on the staff presentation during the review process, it can be indicated that the LAB has paid a great deal of attention to this area. This type of work is consistent with the LAB's mission and with the needs of the regions. This project is a collaborated work between the LAB and two centers: Center for Resource Management (CRM) and Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL).

In this project, the LAB staff and teachers (mainly teachers who are working with the English language learners) have worked closely together and have had extensive interactions.

The project is in the process of developing a videotape with footage from meetings with classroom teachers and students activities in the classrooms. The analyses of qualitative data of this study indicated that: (1) teachers of ELL students need long-term professional development to understand standards' implications for ELL students; (2) to be a successful teacher for ELLs, a building knowledge and trusting relationships among teacher and with the researchers are needed, and (3) schools need coherent and flexible policies to support ELL teachers (see *Signature Work 1* and the *Project Abstract*).

There are several issues and concerns regarding this area of work as explained earlier. Among these issues is the concern over generalizability of the results and scaling-up issues. The sample selected for this study was not a representative sample; therefore, the generalization of the results of this study to other areas may be limited. As indicated in the plan for this study (explained in *Signature Work 1* document), the site for this study was Lowell, MA. This site was selected partly because of site readiness and collaborative of teaming structure in place between the ESL/bilingual and other content teachers.

Another major work by the LAB that can be mentioned here, is the works entitled *Secondary School Restructuring*. Several different studies were conducted under this title and are summarized in the *Signature Work 2* documents.

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

In the area of language and cultural diversity, which is one of the main focuses of the LAB, more work needs to be done. The work needs to be conducted in larger areas with more representation of the regions. It is imperative to build in an objective evaluation to assess students' progress as the result of the impact of the intervention introduced by the LAB researchers.

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

Issues concerning instruction and assessment of linguistically and culturally diverse students are important and must be properly addressed. Research is needed to examine factors affecting instruction and assessment of such students. The use of accommodation in assessment of English language learners (ELLs) is widespread. However, research must determine the validity of such accommodation. It is imperative to examine the validity of such accommodation to make sure students not receiving accommodations are not negatively impacted.

Another issue related to assessment and instruction of English language learners is measurement of students' level of language proficiency. Most of the commonly used language proficiency tests suffer from technical problems. Research is needed to examine the content and psychometric characteristics of such test and to suggest ways to improve the content and psychometric quality of these tests.

The use of standardized achievement tests on English language learners, particularly students with limited English proficiency, is another area of concern for this population. Standard achievement tests are prepared and normed, based on native English speaker population. Thus, validity of scores of standardized achievement tests for English language learners is questionable. Research is needed to shed light into such issues.

The LAB should conduct more scientifically designed studies to address such issues concerning the effects of students' language background on their performance, particularly in the content-based areas such as math and science.

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

**1. Strengths**

As explained in the previous sections, members of the LAB's Governing Board are committed and knowledgeable. They oversee the LAB's plans and activities. The Governing Board has a very close relationship with the administrative body of the LAB and they have interactions with each other. This interaction results in effective strategies for dealing with the important issues.

**2. and 3. Areas of needed improvement and Recommendations**

It is necessary to reexamine the structure of the Governing Board to make sure that a balanced representation of members with relevant background exists. Having done that, then the LAB must try to establish a new system or modify the existing systems to have a more objective self-monitoring system. This objective self-monitoring system must be built based on the LAB's organizational foundation. There may be two ways of self-monitoring, internal and external. The LAB may establish a self-monitoring system by training the research staff and by asking them to do peer review regularly. There is some evidence of external monitoring by the LAB (for example, a report by Abt Associates), however; the current activities can be expanded.

**III. Quality**

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

**1. Strengths**

The LAB has conducted R & D and has provided services that are helpful to SEAs and LEAs to scale-up systemic reform in the region. As examples of high quality products and

services by the LAB *Toolkit 98-Improving Classroom Assessment, and Educating Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* and the *Lowell middle school professional development project* can be mentioned.

In addition to providing materials that help schools to serve their special needs students, the LAB helps schools with professional training and with their other needs. Teachers, school principals and state liaisons clearly indicated that these services have a great positive impact on schools.

## **2. and 3. Areas of needed improvement and Recommendations**

The psychometric characteristics of assessment systems regarding works that are directly or indirectly related to students must be improved. The LAB has done excellent works in schools. However, the positive impact of such works and interventions may not be known until a good system of assessment of students' academic progress due to such interventions are devised. Particular attention must be paid to performance indicators. Assessment systems that are not psychometrically sound may not produce valid results. Results of such evaluation may differ across groups of students.

The LAB should also try to disseminate the results of research through refereed journals. By doing this, the LAB increases the pool of its audience and receives constructive feedback from the article reviewers.

#### **IV. Utility**

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

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

Teachers, state school officials, and others clients indicated that the LAB's products were applicable and useful. Testimonial evidence indicated that programs such as the professional development for teachers of ELLs and works under Secondary School Restructuring are very productive and very useful for their students. Clients also believe that the materials on the LAB's website are very useful. The Abt telephone study also suggested that the clients were very satisfied with the LAB's works.

###### **2. and 3. Areas of needed improvement and Recommendations**

It is extremely important to know how the end-users feel about the efficiency, applicability, and usefulness of the LAB's products. Therefore, it would be very helpful to establish an objective evaluation system to get the end-users' feedback and suggestions. It is also imperative to establish more psychometrically sound methods of measuring students' achievement using multiple indicators and more comprehensive measures such as performance-based measures.

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

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

The Board members and the LAB researchers are very sensitive to clients' need and clients' needs are among their highest priority. The clients' testimony and their level of support of the LAB clearly indicated that clients' are an important part in the LAB's program. The two signature works are indicative of level of responsiveness of the LAB to clients' needs.

## **2. and 3. Areas of needed improvement Recommendations**

An objective evaluation system of clients' needs must be established. A more representative range of clients must be contacted and must be asked for their input to the level of usefulness of the LAB's program and products. This evaluation should be done systematically and the results should be made available to the clients and to the LAB's researchers and partners.

## **V. Outcomes and Impact**

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

#### **1. Strengths**

In both signature works (*Implementing Standards with English Language Learners*, and *Secondary School Restructuring*) and in other documents that I reviewed, there is evidence of LAB's attention to students' academic performance in school. It is important for the LAB researchers to see changes and improvements in students' performance in school. The importance of using multiple indicators for valid assessment of students' academic progress is recognized.

## **2. and 3. Areas of needed improvement and Recommendations**

In both signature works and in other studies that are currently in progress or completed, there is not much evidence of direct attention to students' performance in school. As indicated earlier, the LAB researchers acknowledged the importance of measuring the impact of the interventions used by the researchers on students' outcome in the school. However, a direct, objective, and comprehensive measurement of students' performance is needed. Thus, special attention must be given to measurement and to psychometrics issues concerning the

measurement of students, particularly students with limited English proficiency.

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

**1. Strengths**

The testimonial data are all indicative of an excellent relationship with the state, district, and schools. Further, both signature works and other LAB's projects have been very successful in term of relationship with the states and localities that are under the LAB's responsibility. LAB has helped school district to focus on the issues of English language learners and to introduce innovative changes on their instructions for the ELL students.

**2. and 3. Areas of needed improvement Recommendations**

In order to plan for future programs in the seven states and the other two regions, LAB needs to have knowledge of the level of impact of its programs. This would help to modify the programs that are not as effective as others. This will also help to identify programs that are effective and can be recommended for other places, that is scaling –up the efforts.

**C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?**

**1. Strengths**

The testimonial evidence suggests that LAB has excellent reputation in the regions that it is involved. Contact from other regions that are not under the LAB's responsibility and request for the LAB's help is a good indication of the LAB's good reputation in the nation. Some of the R&D by LAB are gaining national recognition. Examples are: the work with ELL students, the Nanduti and other electronic dissemination efforts.

## **2. and 3. Areas of needed improvement and Recommendations**

There are some areas that LAB needs to devote more resources and more effort to. Issues concerning linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD) students are among them. LAB should become a leader in this area since one of its major focus is on English language learner students.

Another area that needs improvement is publication in refereed journals. That would definitely add to the visibility aspect of the LAB.

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

The ongoing research and development activities are consistent with both the LAB's missions and the OERI's objectives. There are sufficient interactions between the LAB's staff and the members of the Governing Board. Members of the Governing Board are knowledgeable and they have the appropriate background to deal with the issues that are the main focus of LAB's mission. The Governing Board oversees the activities and provides helpful guidance and suggestions for the LAB's staff. The physical environment is good and staff is knowledgeable and seems to be very interested in their work.

Research reports and papers and products that are produced by the LAB are of high quality and are useful for the clients. Testimonial evidence suggested that the clients are pleased with the LAB's products and performance. The evidence also suggests that the clients are enthusiastically looking for a long-term relationship with the LAB.

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

Quality of products and clients' satisfaction are among the highlights of strengths of the LAB. As indicated earlier in this report, the state education authorities from the regions that are served by the LAB praised LAB for helping them to achieve a higher quality education for *all* children. However, there are still some needs for improvements. In this part of the report, I focus my comments/recommendation in three areas: (1) improvements toward having more objective and more psychometrically sound assessment and evaluation system of students' performance, (2) more research and development in the area of instruction and assessment for linguistically and culturally diverse students, (3) more in-dept and more objective evaluation of end-users' needs, and (4) more objective needs assessment for modifying and improving the design of the studies and the reports and products.

**Objective and Psychometrically Sound Student Evaluation System.** A more comprehensive and more valid assessment system usually includes multiple indicators and a combination of traditional paper-and-pencil multiple choice tests along with performance-based measures. To evaluate the success of the projects that are currently underway, such as projects dealing with the implementation of standards for English language learners and school restructuring projects, students' performance must be measured and must be compared with other comparable schools in which students are not receiving such treatment/interventions. Otherwise, the success/impact of the projects may be questionable. I believe that the LAB has done excellent and innovative works particularly in the area of instructions for English language learners. There must be some mechanism to objectively indicate the effectiveness of these innovative efforts.

As indicated earlier, a more comprehensive system of measurement for assessing the improvement in the performance of English language learners must be utilized. However, due to the complex nature of the comprehensive assessment systems, the technical quality of these assessments has been of concern for measurement specialists. Therefore, special attention should be paid on the reliability, validity, and objectivity of such assessments. Measurement theories and statistical approaches that have been created and have been used in traditional multiple-choice testing may not apply for the complex performance-based assessments. It is therefore imperative to use appropriate measurement theories and statistical techniques when developing such assessments.

**Research and development in the area of instruction and assessment for linguistically and culturally diverse students.** Recent federal and state legislation, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), through the enactment of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, now state that *all* children including students with limited English proficiency should be given educational experiences to assist them in achieving high standards.

To increase inclusion of LEP students, these students are usually provided with some forms of accommodations. However, there are many important issues involved in accommodations for these students. Among the most important issues on the use of accommodation for LEP students are: (1) Feasibility (i.e., how practical and feasible are the accommodation), (2) Validity, (i.e., do accommodations impact the construct under measurement), and (3) the impact of students background factors including their language background on the effectiveness of accommodations. These are all very important issues in the assessment and instructions of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Unfortunately, the

literature is scarce in these important areas. LAB should, at the extent possible, provide leadership in the research that deals with these issues.

Issues concerning validity of existing language proficiency tests for LEP students and bilingual instructions are among the issues that LAB should focus its efforts.

**More in-dept and more objective evaluation of end-users' needs.** The ultimate goal for any organization dealing with education is to reach the actual clients, the end-users. This group consists of students, teachers, parents, and school officials. The most straightforward approach in assessing the effectiveness of the efforts/products is to ask the end-users for their direct and objective input. This type of evaluation is complex and could be influenced by many different factors. These factors should be controlled. A well-designed evaluation system may provide useful feedback for researchers who are responsible for research and development in this area. First, the end-user population must be identified, confounding factors and limitations must be specified, and then an evaluation system must be developed. My observation indicates that the end-user has high priority for the LAB, but an objective system of evaluation may not be in place yet.