

# TEXAS COMPREHENSIVE CENTER Briefing Paper



## Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners

### Introduction

A recent survey of middle and high school teachers, students, parents, and business executives from Fortune 1000 companies provided insight into their perceptions of what is necessary to ensure that all students graduate ready for college and a career (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company [MetLife], 2011). Individuals completing the survey responded to specific questions about diverse learners (i.e., children with disabilities, living in poverty, or learning English as a second language), as well as to queries regarding instructional approaches aimed at meeting the needs of individual learners (e.g., differentiated instruction, collaborative teaching, use of technology to support personalized learning). Key findings from the MetLife survey include the following:

- Teachers and parents place a high priority on strengthening programs to improve outcomes for diverse learners in attaining college and career readiness, with teachers in high-poverty schools and schools serving large populations of students of color being most likely to state this as the highest priority.
- Although a majority of teachers feel they are able to differentiate instruction effectively to meet individual students' learning needs, mathematics teachers were less likely to report being able to do so; students from low-income families and those who had learning difficulties were more likely than other students to rate their teachers as weak in this area.

Although this MetLife report does not represent scientifically based research, it does present a broad picture of existing attitudes among important groups of stakeholders with regard to preparing students for success after high school. There is little doubt that graduating **all** students college and career ready poses a challenge unparalleled in the history of American public education; however, this task appears even more colossal when one considers the widely diverse student population. Since 1989, the percentage of White students enrolled in prekindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade has decreased from 68% to 55%, while that of Hispanic children has doubled from 11% to 22% (Aud et al., 2011). Currently, one out of every five school-age children speaks a language other than English at home, and approximately one in eight children have an identified disability necessitating the provision of special education services (Aud et al.). Under the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), many schools and districts have struggled to advance the achievement of English language learners (ELs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) who receive special education services. The ESEA was instrumental in bringing attention to these historically underserved groups of children. However, of the U.S. public schools required to calculate adequate yearly progress (AYP) during the 2005–2006 school year, 43% did not make AYP for the SWD subgroup and 30% also missed AYP due, at least in part, to the performance of ELs (U.S. Department of Education [USED], 2010b).

The Obama administration's *A Blueprint for Reform* (U.S. Department of Education [USED], 2010a) presents a framework for the reauthorization of ESEA. It expands upon four areas of education reform encouraged through the American Recovery and

### Summary

Effectively meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students presents challenges for educators across the United States, including the Texas and Southeast Comprehensive Center regions. Increasingly rigorous achievement expectations must be supported with flexible, accessible curricula, offering multiple pathways to success in order to secure opportunities for all children.

### Key Points

- Multi-tier systems of support offer a research-based approach to addressing the myriad needs of youth struggling with school success.
- Application of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can make curriculum and instruction both accessible and engaging for all learners, resulting in increased opportunities for learning success.



Reinvestment Act of 2009—preparing college- and career-ready students, improving the effectiveness of leaders and teachers, providing information for families and educators, and turning around the lowest-performing schools. Given the challenges school districts encounter relative to their accountability for the achievement of diverse learners such as SWDs and ELs, it is reasonable to assume that work under a reauthorized ESEA might focus heavily on diverse learners.

## Limitations

Although diverse learners are the focus of this briefing paper, we do not provide information on all diverse learner groups, nor do we address the efforts of all states to meet the myriad needs of children identified as diverse learners. Instead, this paper focuses on strategies to support the needs of students who comprise the majority of diverse learners in the states served by SEDL's Texas and Southeast Comprehensive Centers (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas). The various strategies, programs, practices, processes, and models discussed in this paper are examples only, and in no way does their inclusion imply endorsement by SEDL.

## Who are diverse learners?

This briefing paper concerns the education of diverse learners, particularly with regard to two of the four areas of proposed reform mentioned above: college and career readiness and improved student learning and achievement. While the diverse learner group largely includes SWDs and ELs, the blueprint also identifies diverse learners as those students who live in rural areas; are homeless, migrant, neglected, or delinquent; are American Indian, Native Hawaiian, or Alaska Natives; or attend schools in districts that receive impact aid for diverse learners.

This brief will focus primarily on children who have disabilities, are homeless or migrant, or have been identified as neglected and delinquent. A review of demographic data for Texas and the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) states revealed that American Indian and Alaska Native populations constituted less than 1% of the student populations in these states. Table 1, Identification of Diverse Learners (at end of document), provides an overview of available demographic and other information related to the education of diverse learners in Texas and the states served by the SECC.

## Multi-Tier Systems of Support

A review of department of education Web sites for the states served by the TXCC and SECC indicated that the needs of diverse learners are often addressed within a response to intervention (RtI) framework. RtI is one form of a multi-tier system of support (MTSS), a research-based, systemic approach to addressing the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of youth struggling with school success (Averill & Rinaldi, 2011). While an MTSS approach includes tiered interventions common to RtI, as well as positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) frameworks, it also places the multi-tier system at the center of whole-school reform and school improvement. Thus, it addresses the academic and behavioral needs of **all** students, not just those who face challenges (Averill & Rinaldi; Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). For example, universal screening of mathematics problem-solving skills can serve to identify students who are at risk of future difficulty in mathematics. At the same time, however, it can identify children who may benefit from experiences to expand and enrich their learning, possibly affording them greater access to specialized programs and activities for high-achieving students.

In an MTSS, attention is provided to the entire school system by continuously gathering and analyzing data regarding performance at the classroom, school, and system levels. These data are then used as the basis for decision making, promoting proactive, preventive support for students. When core programs and supports that are available to all students prove to be inadequate for some, a systemwide continuum of supports is implemented. This process aids in “removing systemic challenges and barriers that hinder students’ success” (Averill & Rinaldi, 2011, p. 2). This continuum of supports is provided in graduated levels of intensity that increase in response to student needs. Thus, rather than automatically attributing academic or behavioral difficulties to some inherent student factor, individuals implementing an MTSS recognize the possibility that contextual issues—including instruction—may be at the root of these struggles. Identifying root causes allows administrators and staff to provide research-based supports aimed at mitigating these issues.



## College and Career Readiness Supports

A recent article by Howard and Madison-Harris (2011) pointed to the challenges in raising graduation rates for all students, especially among groups that have been historically underserved. Data presented by Howard and Madison-Harris for the states served by the SECC showed that graduation rates for students with disabilities lagged far behind other groups. In order to improve on the goal of college and career readiness for all students, specific attention must be given to those most likely to leave our public school before graduation. Educators can embed proactive structures within an MTSS to improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable students. This can include applying knowledge gleaned from trend data and early warning systems data in identifying students with school-related behaviors predictive of non-completion. Once these students are identified, educators can work to address their individual needs through additional guidance, planning, and support.

## Students with Disabilities

The blueprint for reform encourages states, districts, and schools to ensure college and career readiness of all students graduating from high school by 2020. Although the prevalence of engagement in postsecondary education and employment for youth with disabilities has increased in recent years, “far too many youth with disabilities continue to experience difficulties in [successfully participating in postsecondary education, entering meaningful employment, and living independently in their communities]” (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition [NCSET], 2005a, p. 1). For example, in 2005, while 46% of youth with disabilities reported having enrolled in postsecondary education within 4 years of leaving high school (compared to 26% in 1990), individuals reporting **employment** at the time of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) interview **decreased** from 62.2% in 1990 to 56.3% in 2005 (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010).

A recent study analyzing differences in youth with and without disabilities with respect to their aspirations to attend postsecondary education programs sheds light on several approaches to policy and practice that have the potential to increase readiness for and enrollment in postsecondary education (Wilson, Hoffman, & McLaughlin, 2009). Examining data from a sample of youth who were enrolled in grade 10 in 2002, Wilson et al. found that the majority of youth with disabilities who indicated during their sophomore year of high school that they planned to pursue postsecondary education reaffirmed that desire during their senior year. Further, students experiencing academic success in high school were even more likely to express a desire to attend college. The authors propose that these findings emphasize the need to ensure a solid plan for a course of study in high school that will prepare students with disabilities for transitioning to postsecondary education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires that by age 16, the individual education plan (IEP) for a student receiving special education services include a statement of transition services, with a course of study that will assist the student in reaching his or her post-high school goals. Planning for this course of study, however, would likely need to begin earlier than age 16, because most students would be well into their high school years by that time. As further justification for the need to conduct transition planning earlier than currently required, Wilson et al. (2009) point to an additional finding of their study—that opportunities, especially in mathematics coursework, were limited for students with disabilities when compared to their nondisabled peers. The authors propose that expectations for rigorous mathematics study are shaped, in part, by course offerings for students with disabilities, and that raising expectations by requiring students to take more rigorous mathematics courses may well impact their ability to access postsecondary education settings. Accordingly, earlier transition planning, in middle school, could serve to document a student’s desire to attend college, establish a goal to take algebra by grade 9, and outline plans for academic remediation, if necessary, to build a pathway to college through appropriate preparation in high school (Wilson et al.).

Notwithstanding improvements in education planning, access to and support for rigorous course completion, and higher expectations for achievement, not all students with disabilities will transition to postsecondary education. Many students will move from high school into the workplace with varying degrees of success. In fact, for all working-age people with disabilities, the employment rate is approximately one-half that of those without disabilities—38% versus 78%, respectively (National Council on Disability, 2005). In addition to earlier transition planning and a focus on ensuring that students with disabilities have access to a rigorous academic program, connecting students to the communities in which they live can serve to strengthen natural supports for their transition goals (NCSET, 2005b). Community mapping, one way to build such connections, is a collaborative process through which teachers and students develop awareness and knowledge of the culture, resources, assets and needs of the communities in which they live (NCSET). Although community mapping may take several forms (see the [NCSET research](#)



[brief](http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=2128) <<http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=2128>> for additional information), the process is reciprocal: there are benefits afforded not only to students who learn, for example, about the businesses and services within their communities, but also for local business leaders who gain familiarity with potential future employees.

## Homeless Youth

While few states currently report graduation rates for students identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2002, estimates of graduation rates among homeless youth range between 25% and 60% (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009; Tars, 2009). The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) has developed a series of [best practice briefs](http://center.serve.org/nche/briefs.php) <<http://center.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>>, some describing strategies for helping homeless youth graduate from high school and transition to postsecondary education. One of these briefs addresses credit accrual, which is often a significant barrier to academic progress and graduation for adolescents experiencing homelessness due to frequent relocation and school changes. With high mobility, homeless youth may not meet attendance requirements for earning academic credits, especially if they arrive at a new school late or leave school early in a semester (NCHE, 2010).

Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, schools have an obligation to provide immediate enrollment for students identified as homeless. Enrollment, as defined in the act, includes class attendance and full participation in school activities. The NCHE (2010) brief points out that when students attend school without an opportunity to earn credits due to, for example, local seat-time or credit policies, they are effectively denied full participation in school. In addition to revising policies that create potential barriers to credit accrual, the paper presents several strategies school districts and schools may employ to boost credit accrual and recovery (see chart on Credit Accrual and Recovery Strategies).

Collaboration with community agencies and volunteers is instrumental in ensuring positive outcomes associated with implementation of many strategies. Consistent school attendance can be promoted by agencies helping to meet the basic needs of homeless youth, such as food, clothing, and shelter, as well as addressing any underlying medical or health concerns. Similarly, community agencies can help facilitate access to innovative/alternative programs that focus on college and career readiness by assisting with application and registration requirements (NCHE, 2010). These include programs such as Upward Bound, GEAR-UP, middle-college high schools, and work-experience programs. Further, while peer mentors can work to connect homeless youth to the school community and positive peer influences, community agencies can provide adult mentors who have knowledge of at-risk youth and can guide and support their postsecondary and career goals.

Given current economic conditions, it is reasonable to expect that more children are experiencing homelessness. In fact, across Texas and the SECC states, the percentage of children identified as homeless increased an average of approximately 26% between the 2007–2008 and 2009–2010 school years (NCHE, 2011). With this increase comes the possibility of even more youth dropping out of school. Unfortunately, leaving school only seems to exacerbate the problems of homeless youth, worsening their situations and further damaging their lives through, for instance, increases in drug and alcohol abuse and gang affiliation (Lindsey & Williams, 2002; Williams, Lindsey, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 2001).

## Neglected and Delinquent Youth

Youth in child welfare and juvenile delinquency systems need and deserve high-quality services and supports to foster their successful transition to postsecondary education, employment, and adulthood. Although public opinion favors the rehabilitation and treatment of these youth (Krisberg & Marchionna, 2007), education services are abysmal in many states (Leone & Weinberg, 2010). Myriad risk factors for poor academic achievement include poverty, emotional and behavioral disorders, substance abuse,

### Credit Accrual and Recovery Strategies

- Arrange to maintain students in their schools of origin to eliminate challenges associated with school mobility.
- Support consistent school attendance and academic progress.
- Award partial credit for prior work completed in another school system.
- Expand course possibilities to include independent study, online learning, and computer-based course modules.
- Facilitate access to innovative and alternative programs, including those administered by other agencies.

*Source: NCHE, 2010.*



antisocial peer models, high mobility, and negative childhood experiences. These factors compound the difficulties schools face in addressing the needs of children who are neglected and/or delinquent (Leone & Weinberg). Leone and Weinberg point to six principles as important in reforming education services for the neglected and delinquent: (a) early education, (b) quality education services, (c) a focus on measuring outcomes, (d) support services, (e) interagency collaboration and communication, and (f) within-agency and cross-agency leadership (p. 3).

Early intervention and education for children in the welfare or delinquency system, as well as their caregivers, may serve to lessen the prevalence of severe behavior problems as the children grow older. At the same time, a focus on academic interventions could begin to address poor educational outcomes and place more children on a road to greater educational success (Leone & Weinberg, 2010). For example, therapeutic preschool programs such as the Hand in Hand program in Portland, Oregon, have shown success in targeting the needs of young children in foster care who had been subjected to abuse or neglect and had severe behavior problems. Four years after finishing the Hand in Hand program, 69% of the 129 children served were enrolled in general education elementary school classroom and demonstrated significantly improved behavior, language, and development (Leone & Weinberg). For school-aged youth, Leone and Weinberg identify evidence-based literacy programs, including Read 180 and Corrective Reading, and out-of-school programs as showing promise in remediating reading deficits and increasing the potential for greater school success. Lauer et al. (2006) found that out-of-school programs providing a minimum of 45 hours of service yielded significant positive effects in both reading and mathematics. Although reading effects were greater for students receiving one-on-one tutoring, mathematics outcomes were stronger when support was provided to small groups of students, and, contrary to reading outcomes, favored middle and high school students (Lauer et al.).

Leone and Weinberg (2010) signal the need for stronger interagency collaboration and leadership as essential in moving closer to the goal of successfully transitioning all youth into adulthood. Efforts to reform the existing inadequacies of systems for neglected and delinquent youth through legislation, policy revision, and collaborative work alone will be insufficient unless strong leadership within and among agencies prevails. Leaders who model robust collaboration and coordination of agency efforts; establish and communicate clear, unfaltering expectations for how youth are served; and move their agencies to challenge and redesign existing practices both individually and collaboratively will help pave the way for neglected and delinquent children and youth to receive the kind of quality education services and support that are necessary for all children (Leone & Weinberg).

## Migrant Students

In 2004, Salinas and Franquiz reported that there were about 800,000 migrant students at the national level, and a large number of students in this population were ELs of Hispanic origin. Thus, some of their needs are similar to those of other ELs (Instructional strategies for ELs will be the focus of a subsequent briefing paper from the TXCC.). Typically, educators are most concerned with issues that directly impact EL students' educational achievement; however, teachers and educational staff should not ignore the most basic needs that are fundamental for learning. Unfortunately, some of the urgent needs of migrant children are beyond the typical scope of most schools; thus, it becomes necessary to collaborate with social service agencies to improve overall outcomes for these children and their families.

Scientific research on the effectiveness of services for migrant students is scarce, but there are numerous case studies that offer potentially valuable recommendations (Ward, 2002; Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009), as well as information on identifying the many needs of these students (Salinas & Franquiz, 2004; Melecio & Hanley, 2002). Research findings and case studies have shown that migrant students face multiple challenges for learning: they often live in uninhabitable conditions, face health risks, and have little or no sociocultural stability. Each of these factors aggravates the risk to psychological and social well-being independently, and when combined they make academic achievement extremely challenging for these children.

Similar to children who are homeless, migratory youth face struggles with accruing high school credit for graduation. According to the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education [NASDME] (n.d.) migrant education programs experience challenges in locating and enrolling migratory children, obtaining academic and health information, and transferring high school credits across systems. However, as longitudinal databases have emerged and other technologies have improved, some of the challenges in these areas have been mitigated. Distance learning programs, online courses, and the provision of laptops to facilitate communication with home school systems have resulted in improved outcomes for many migratory youth (NASDME).





## Student Learning and Achievement Supports

### Accessible, Engaging Education for All

In its 1954 landmark decision involving racial segregation of public school students, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the right of all children to equal educational opportunities. Now, more than 50 years later, one could argue that the notion of a public education available to all students “on equal terms” has broadened to include considerations for an increasingly diverse population of school children. Instructional accommodations, modifications, and differentiation all center on addressing the individual learning needs of students, supporting their mastery of content standards and indicators. Educators drawing on these supports consider information and data regarding students’ disabilities, language dominance, learning profiles, interests, and academic readiness when planning instruction and learning tasks for students, all of whom have unique learning needs. Indeed, in a recent poll commissioned by the Tremaine Foundation (Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications, 2010) that sought to measure public and parental understanding of learning disabilities, 99% of educators surveyed agreed that children learn in different ways.

In addition to the supports previously mentioned and the research-based instructional strategies and techniques identified in Table 2, another option may increase opportunities for learning success. Incorporating the set of principles embodied within a framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has the potential to make curriculum and instruction both accessible and engaging for all learners (National Universal Design for Learning Task Force, n.d.).

UDL is an adaptation of the concept of universal design that originated in the field of architecture. Architects using principles of universal design incorporate considerations for accessibility and use of a building or structure from the initial planning stages (Meo, 2008; Müller & Tschantz, 2003). Examples of such considerations include curb cuts, ramps, and elevators that, although made with the needs of individuals with disabilities in mind, ultimately benefit all users. With respect to student learning, UDL promotes attention to the needs of individual learners through upfront consideration of these needs during curriculum development (Meo). This forethought helps cultivate the success of all students through the intentional consideration and removal of potential barriers to curriculum access, while providing scaffolds and supports to foster improved learning outcomes for all (Meo; Meyer & Rose, 2005; Rose & Meyer, 2002). In designing curricular materials that foster equal opportunities for all students to learn, the National Center on Universal Design for Learning (n.d.) advocates the application of three principles of UDL:

1. Provide multiple representations of information (e.g., printed or spoken text, vocabulary support, strategies and devices to support memory and transfer).
2. Provide for multiple forms of expressing and acting on learning (e.g., written and voice responses, word processing, word prediction software, and other assistive technology).
3. Provide for multiple ways to engage students (e.g., individual choices, collaborative work tasks, setting of personal goals and expectations).

Meo (2008) chronicles the experiences of two teachers working collaboratively to support the learning of all students in a high school world history class. Using a [four-step process](http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/toolkits/tk_procedures.cfm?tk_id=21) <[http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/toolkits/tk\\_procedures.cfm?tk\\_id=21](http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/toolkits/tk_procedures.cfm?tk_id=21)> for designing and delivering curricula based on UDL, the teachers

- established learning goals aligned to state and local standards,
- analyzed the existing curriculum and classroom composition for potential barriers to student learning,
- applied the three principles of UDL to develop lessons and instructional units, and
- implemented the lessons.

Through this approach, the teacher team was able to determine the effectiveness of their instruction, identify additional barriers inherent to the curriculum, work to eliminate these, and, as a result of these actions, strengthen learning for all students (Meo).

Where a state has undertaken to provide an opportunity for an education in its public schools, such an opportunity is a right, which must be made available to all on equal terms.

*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*



The recent release and subsequent adoption of the Common Core State Standards by 40 states and the District of Columbia offer an unforeseen opportunity for states and districts to develop and revise curricula in alignment with these new standards. Effort and time spent now considering the educational needs of a broad base of diverse learners can help states, school districts, and schools lay the foundation for curricula that is tied to rigorous expectations—yet is flexible and accessible—and helps secure the opportunity for all students to learn.

## State Highlights

The following highlights were provided by the respective state education agencies.

### Alabama

A brief overview of Alabama's three-tiered approach to Response to Instruction (Rti) can be accessed at the following link <https://docs.alsde.edu/documents/54/brochure-rti.pdf>. Through implementation of Rti, schools identify and monitor students who are at risk, use problem-solving and data-based decision making to provide research-based interventions, and adjust the intensity of interventions based on the student's response. When the approach is implemented effectively it results in high-quality decisions regarding individualized instructional needs of students. This approach has a great deal in common with most states.

As with many states, Alabama has, until very recently, based what its professional learning needs are upon word-of-mouth input and the outcomes of standardized tests. This approach was additionally undergirded by input from SDE field staff and coordinators of our regional inservice centers; however, it remained only marginally effective in meeting the individual needs of our teachers. That has changed with the implementation of our new, formative teacher assessment system, EDUCATEAlabama (EA). Because EA is a web-based system it provides the SDE with the ability to consolidate all identified areas of need from over 50,000 teachers statewide and disaggregate them by state, region, system, and school. Since the self-assessment—which is the first step in EDUCATEAlabama and utilizes the Alabama Continuum for Teacher Development (<http://alex.state.al.us/leadership/Alabama%20Continuum%20for%20Teacher%20Development.pdf>)—includes assessment of one's ability to address multiple types of student diversity, the SDE can react to needs identified by the teachers themselves. This provides the SDE and LEAs with unprecedented access to educator needs and the ability to choose professional learning opportunities necessary to meet the identified needs of teachers and, by extension, the diverse needs of their students.

### Louisiana

In Louisiana, Response to Intervention (RTI) is a general education initiative supported by the Louisiana RTI Implementation Plan and the Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan. All state literacy initiatives are based on this model. Even though RTI is a general education initiative, it has been designed to support ALL children, and a very positive result has been the reduction in the number of students being referred for special education services due to reading difficulties.

The Louisiana Department of Education advocates preventing very early developmental delays that later may become learning difficulties. Providing information on the appropriate progression of language and literacy development to parents, caregivers, early childhood providers, and teachers is critical to supporting intervention efforts that lead to increased child outcomes. The Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan provides this information, as well as links to a number of external resources that offer even more detailed guidance.

RTI in preschool is known as "Recognition and Response" and allows for a tiered approach to meeting the individual needs of children. Screening data provide baseline information that determines need for additional support and becomes a yardstick by which to measure developmental growth.

Beginning in kindergarten, as children are developing and extending their literacy skills, RTI is a systematic system of supports that helps to ensure success in school from the outset. Louisiana's *Ensuring Literacy for All* (ELFA) is a K-3 initiative currently serving approximately 114 schools in its 7th year of implementation. RTI in these schools begins with a strong research-based core reading program for instruction with all students. Universal screening of all students with *DIBELS Next* provides data used to modify



instruction and vary supplemental instructional intervention within three tiers of support. Student progress toward specific goals is monitored frequently to allow for fluid movement through the instructional tiers of support as needed.

The *Adolescent Literacy Partnership Project* (ALPP) is an initiative that provides a proven and practical method of implementing the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. This project includes 65 middle schools across the state, focusing particularly on grades 6-8. ALPP schools, as well as many others across the state, implement a 3-tiered model with a simple assessment process (STEEP Standard Protocol). This process has been shown to be effective with Louisiana students by quickly providing educators with critical information about students' literacy levels and matching each student with the appropriate intervention at the right time.

Another Louisiana Department of Education effort that provides direct and indirect forms of support to Response to Intervention (RTI) efforts is the *Speech and Language Support for All* (SALSA) Initiative. New and evolving roles for Speech-Language Professionals include supporting students with literacy, numeracy, and/or behavior deficits. Language-literacy skills, preventive services, and effective collaboration are emphasized, with student needs addressed in the most integrated setting. Educationally and curriculum-relevant services/skills are targeted within a variety of service delivery models.

All state literacy efforts will continue to align with Louisiana's Comprehensive Literacy Plan and Louisiana's Response to Intervention (RTI) Implementation Plan. A large component of the Comprehensive Literacy Plan is Instruction and Intervention (RTI), which is interrelated with and interwoven into all other components. As a result of this coordination among initiatives and concerted focus, educators recognize that children's literacy development is a continuous developmental progression from birth through high school.

Documents addressed in this article can be found at <http://www.louisianaschools.net>

## South Carolina

South Carolina provides supports for diverse learners through various offices in the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). The Offices are Exceptional Children, Student Intervention Services, and Special Populations.

The Office of Student Intervention Services provides funding to schools and districts to serve at-risk learners through a number of initiatives, including the following:

- At-Risk Innovative and Supplement Grants allow schools to implement and/or continue evidence-based interventions for students at risk of dropping out. Funds for these grants are made available through the Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA), a program designed to better prepare South Carolina students for the workforce and post-high school education through early career planning and an individualized curriculum.
- Alternative Schools are designed to provide appropriate services to students who, for behavioral or academic reasons, are not benefiting from the regular school program or may be interfering with the learning of others.
- The Palmetto Mentoring Network is a group of school- and community-based programs that pair students with mentors, one-to-one.

The SCDE views Response to Intervention (RTI) as an opportunity to integrate assessment and intervention within a school-wide, multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement. The implementation of an RTI system can identify and address the learning and behavioral needs of all students. It is preventative and provides immediate support to students who are at risk for poor learning outcomes. A successful RTI program requires the implementation of five essential components:

- a school-wide, multi-level instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure
- universal screening to identify students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes
- progress monitoring to gather the data necessary to adjust and improve instruction as it is occurring to obtain better responses to instruction
- data-based decision making for instruction and movement within the multi-level system
- collaboration and communication among students, families, teachers, and administrators to ensure that every student receives the best possible instruction





The RTI SC framework is built upon the following principles or beliefs:

- We believe we can effectively teach all students and that quality classroom instruction is the key to student success.
- We believe early intervention is the key to success.
- We believe implementing research-based instruction and interventions benefits students.
- We believe monitoring student progress informs instruction.
- We believe using multiple sources of data aids decision-making about student performance.
- We believe working in partnership with parents maximizes student performance.

From this framework the SCDE has developed a support document to aid schools and districts in their implementation of RTI. The SECC provided a review of the support document and made recommendations to assist the agency.

In support of the South Carolina ELA Academic Standards and the Response to Intervention South Carolina (RTI SC) framework, five elementary schools in South Carolina are hosting one-day visits to demonstrate the process of implementing Response to Intervention. All five schools will share the process of RTI in the area of reading, with one school highlighting Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and reading. Another of the five schools will highlight implementation of RTI in the areas of reading and math. Teams of educators from 27 middle, elementary, and primary schools plus two district teams have presently been identified to visit the designated schools. Visits will be conducted throughout the months of October, November (2011), January, February and March (2012). Applications will continue to be accepted until each demonstration site has had 6-10 district and school teams visit.

In November 2010 the National RTI Center provided an initial training for middle and high schools on the overall framework and developing a model; 250 persons participated. The SCDE is currently working with Winthrop University on the development of taped sessions on the implementation of RTI at the secondary level, to include classroom lessons along with teacher and leader interviews on the practice of RTI. The SCDE will also work with SC ETV to provide support to elementary and primary schools through taped sessions at the demonstration sites on essential components of RTI.

The Special Populations Office in the Division of Accountability houses the programs that support Homeless students and Title III. The state, through the provision of McKinney-Vento funds, provides competitive grants to districts to expand services to homeless children and helps to create greater awareness and sensitivity of district and school staff about the ways to identify students who may be homeless. It provides for additional services to these children to increase their chances for academic success and monitors district compliance and student academic outcomes.

The office also supports Migrant, Neglected and Delinquent students. The purpose of the South Carolina Department of Education Migrant Education Program (MEP) is to ensure that migrant students have the opportunity to meet the same challenging state content and student performance standards that all children are expected to meet. School districts provide educational and support services that assist migrant students to overcome educational disruption, cultural and language barriers, and other problems that result from repeated moves. Successful transition to employment or postsecondary education is the goal for every student. Funds that support the migrant program are provided through a federal grant to qualifying states.

The purpose of the state's support to schools and districts, through Federal funding, is to improve educational services for children and youth in local and State institutions for neglected or delinquent children and youth so that such children and youth have the opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic content standards and challenging State student academic achievement standards that all children in the State are expected to meet; To provide such children and youth with the services needed to make a successful transition from institutionalization to further schooling or employment; To prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school; and To provide dropouts and children and youth returning from correctional facilities or institutions for neglected or delinquent children and youth with a support system to ensure their continued education.



## Conclusion

The success of any public education reform effort will be tied, at least in part, to the ability to address appropriately the academic and social-behavior needs of diverse learners. Unfortunately, many diverse learners have historically been marginalized by the education system and may well have been recipients of practices that served to alienate, segregate, and reject them (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1995; Riele, 2005). By redefining the focus from one of “fixing students” to one of providing high-quality education that is responsive to individual needs (Riele, p. 141) the system will invariably improve experiences and outcomes for all students. Rose and Meyer (2000) illustrate this phenomenon in discussing the benefits of technology innovations:

When new technologies move beyond their initial stage of development, innovations in curriculum design, teaching strategies, and policies will be driven by the needs of students “at the margin,” those for whom present technologies are least effective—most prominently, students with disabilities. The beneficiaries of these innovations will be ALL students. (p. 1)

Consequently, whether through efforts such as targeting college and career or using student performance data to measure the effectiveness of classroom teachers, implementers of school reform initiatives aimed at improving the life chances for all students would be wise to consider first the needs of children in the margins, because it is only with them that one can ever hope to approach meeting the needs of all.

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**Table 1. Identification of Diverse Learners (School Year 2009–2010, unless otherwise noted)**

Descriptors	Homeless Youth	Migrant Youth	Neglected and Delinquent Youth	Students with Disabilities
Prevalence of student populations	Nationally, 939,903 students identified as homeless were enrolled during the 2009–2010 school year.  The number of students enrolled, and percent change (increase or decrease) in enrollment from 2008–2009 for each state appear below.  AL – 16,287 (+27%) GA – 26,428 (+10%) LA – 25,223 (-1%) MS – 7,499 (-12%) SC – 10,820 (+24%) TX – 76,095 (-6%)  Source: (NCHE, 2011)	Salinas and Franquiz (2004) estimated that 800,000 children in the U.S. could be classified as migratory children.  # Eligible Students (K–12)  AL – 1,901 GA – 5,859 LA – 2,719 MS – 397 SC – 384 (approx.)* TX – 47,606  Source: (USED, 2011)  * Approximate number of students because counts at grades 11 and 12 were each reported as <10 due to state masking rules.	During the 2009–2010 school year, 109,146 students were served by state agency programs.  AL – 1,479 GA – 2,506 LA – 4,790 MS – 1,430 SC – 6,641 TX – 4,088  Note: Number of students served under Title I, Part D (NDTAC, n.d.)	School Year 2008–2009 (Ages 3–21) (Percentage of Total Student Population)  AL – 11.1% GA – 10.9% LA – 12.6% MS – 13.1% SC – 14.2% TX – 9.5%  Source: (USED, 2010c)
Identification criteria	The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act < <a href="http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html">http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html</a> > defines homeless children and youth as, "... individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" [Sec. 725(2)(A)]. Included in this definition are children who share housing with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or other reasons; are awaiting placement in foster care; living in cars, abandoned buildings, bus stations, etc.; and children of migrant families who are living in such environments. For a complete description of living situations constituting homelessness see Section 725 (2)(B) < <a href="http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html#sec725">http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html#sec725</a> >	A child is a "migratory child" and is eligible for migrant education program services if all of the following conditions are met:  1. The child is not older than 21 years of age; and  2. The child is entitled to a free public education (through grade 12) under State law or is below the age of compulsory school attendance; and  3. The child is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher, or the child has a parent, spouse, or guardian who is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher; and  4. The child moved within the preceding 36 months in order to seek or obtain qualifying work, or to accompany or join the migratory agricultural worker or migratory fisher identified in paragraph 3, above, in order to seek or obtain qualifying work; and  5. With regard to the move identified in paragraph 4, above, the child: a. Has moved from one school district to another; or b. In a State that is comprised of a single school district, has moved from one administrative area to another within such district.  (USED, 2010b)	Delinquent: Residential facility-adjudicated  Neglected: Residential facility-abandoned or placed by state agency	To be eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act < <a href="http://www.nichcy.org/laws/idea/documents/pl108-446.pdf">http://www.nichcy.org/laws/idea/documents/pl108-446.pdf</a> > (IDEA) a child aged 3 through 21 must receive a full and individual initial evaluation to determine: (a) if the child has a disability, and (b) if the child needs special education and related services. Children may be found eligible in at least 1 of 13 disability categories: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment (including blindness). States may also choose to include "developmental disability" as an eligibility category, defining this term consistent with the IDEA, and determine whether this category applies to children aged 3 to 9 or a subset of that age range.
Academic Supports/ Screening Tools	Immediate enrollment and transportation services to support school attendance are typically the first steps in addressing academic needs of homeless youth (Cunningham, Harwood, & Hall, 2010; Tars, 2009). Collaboration with other agencies to help ensure stability in living environments, referrals for medical and other health care services, and assistance with school supplies form additional levels of support for academic readiness. Beyond these foundational components for learning, a majority of school districts also report providing tutoring and programs outside the typical school day to improve academic success and social/emotional well-being (Cunningham et al.; NCHE, 2010).	Migrant education funds are used to provide a broad range of instructional and support services to supplement regular classroom instruction and help overcome barriers migrant youth face arising from mobility and educational disruption. Typical services include before- and after-school programs, summer programs, at-home support/ services, credit-accrual services, and counseling services.	No information available	As general education students first, students with disabilities are entitled to access and instruction in the general education, core curriculum. Considering this access to the core curriculum, students who receive special education services should also be included in any universal screening measures the school or district administers as part of a response to interventions framework. Screening tools, such as those reviewed on the National Center for Response to Intervention < <a href="http://www.rti4success.org/screeningTools">http://www.rti4success.org/screeningTools</a> > Web site, can help identify students needing additional targeted or intensive interventions to support core curriculum success.





**Table 1. Identification of Diverse Learners (continued)  
(School Year 2009–2010, unless otherwise noted)**

Descriptors	Homeless Youth	Migrant Youth	Neglected and Delinquent Youth	Students with Disabilities
Graduation Rate/Estimates	No specific state data were located on the graduation rate for homeless youth. Tars (2009), citing a study of student mobility, reported a national graduation rate of about 86%, while students who changed high schools at least twice had a graduation rate of 60%. The National Center on Family Homelessness (NCFH, 2009) provided a bleaker estimate of graduation rates in its report card on homelessness < <a href="http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/pdf/rc_full_report.pdf">http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/pdf/rc_full_report.pdf</a> > for each of the 50 states. Using data for disadvantaged populations similar to homeless children and proficiency data from NAEP, NCFH estimated a graduation rate of less than 25% for homeless youth.	Graduation Rates (School Year 2008–2009) AL – 92% GA – 49% LA – 45% MS – Not Reported SC – 63% TX – 69%  (Source: USED, 2011)	Completion/Achievement Data (School Year 2009–2010)  Earned GED or High School Diploma (ages 16–21) U.S. – 11% AL – 16% GA – 11% LA – 9% MS – 11% SC – 11% TX – 4%  Earned High School Course Credits (ages 13–21) U.S. – 52% AL – 49% GA – 34% LA – 9% MS – 9% SC – 13% TX – 0%  Source (NDTAC, n.d.)	Graduation rate data reported are for the 2008–2009 school year as presented in each state’s School year 2009–10 Consolidated State Performance Report, except as noted.  AL – 61% GA – 41% LA – 34% MS – 19%* SC – 43% TX – 72% (Source: USED, 2011)  *Mississippi Department of Education, Annual Performance Report, 2011.
Achievement	Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient on the state’s assessment, 2009–2010 school year  Reading/LA; Math AL – 76.8%; 71.2% GA – 84.8%; 68.3% LA – 54.4%; 50.2% MS – 40.2%; 49.8% SC – 58.2%; 50.9% TX – 78.8%; 69.8%  (Source: USED, 2011)	Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient on the state’s assessment, 2009–2010 school year  Reading/LA; Math AL – 71.6%; 73.3% GA – 83.1%; 74.3% LA – 54.6%; 56.7%* MS – 31.7%**; 41.4% SC – 75.3%***; 72.3%*** TX – 76.2%; 74.1%  (Source: USED, 2011) *Grades 3–8 only, due to small sample size at high school **Grade 5 omitted, due to small sample size. ***Grades 3–6 only, due to small sample sizes in other grades	Performance on reading and mathematics pretests for students placed for 90 or more days, 2009–2010 school year.  Below Grade Level Upon Entry  Reading/LA; Math U.S. – 71.0%; 70.8% AL – 57.7%; 57.9% GA – 78.8%; 81.8% LA – 77.6%; 80.3% MS – 70.8%; 69.6% SC – 82.6%; 80.0% TX – 93.0%; 93.4%  (Source: NDTAC, n.d.)	Data reported are for the 2009–2010 school year as presented in each state’s FFY 2009 Annual Performance Report, Indicator 3c: Proficiency rate for children with IEPs against grade level, modified and alternate academic achievement standards  Reading/LA; Math AL – 40.9%; 38.8% GA – 69.0%; 52.4% LA – 35.2%; 38.4% MS – 19.8%; 28.5% SC – 53.1%; 47.0% TX – 77.0%; 70.0%  (Source: Individual state education agency office of special education/exceptional children Web pages)

**Table 2. Instructional Strategies for Diverse Learners**

Strategies (“Y” in learner category indicates evidence of effectiveness)	Migrant Youth	Students with Disabilities
Reading: Provide direct, explicit instruction in comprehension strategies instruction (e.g., activating prior knowledge, summarizing, content enhancement routines, cognitive strategy instruction).  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kindergarten–Grade 3 &lt;<a href="http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=14">http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=14</a>&gt;</li> <li>Grades 4–12 &lt;<a href="http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=8">http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=8</a>&gt;</li> <li>Students with learning disabilities &lt;<a href="http://centeroninstruction.org/files/synopsis_improving_comprehension.pdf">http://centeroninstruction.org/files/synopsis_improving_comprehension.pdf</a>&gt;</li> </ul>	Y  Ortiz (2001)	Y  Gajria, Jitendra, Sood, & Sacks (2007) Shanahan et al. (2010)
Reading: Provide intensive and systematic small group instruction in foundational reading skills.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kindergarten–Grade 3 &lt;<a href="http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=3">http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=3</a>&gt;</li> <li>English learners &lt;<a href="http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=6">http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=6</a>&gt;</li> </ul>	Y  Ortiz (2001) Gersten et al. (2008)	
Reading: Provide explicit vocabulary instruction.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grades 4–12 e &lt;<a href="http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=8">http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=8</a>&gt;</li> <li>English learners &lt;<a href="http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=6">http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=6</a>&gt;</li> <li>Students with learning disabilities &lt;<a href="http://centeroninstruction.org/files/adol_struggling_readers_practice_brief.pdf">http://centeroninstruction.org/files/adol_struggling_readers_practice_brief.pdf</a>&gt;</li> </ul>	Y  Ortiz (2001) Boardman et al. (2008)	Y  Boardman et al. (2008)



**Table 2. Instructional Strategies for Diverse Learners (continued)**

Strategies ("Y" in learner category indicates evidence of effectiveness)	Migrant Youth	Students with Disabilities
Mathematics: Provide explicit, systematic instruction including models of problem solving, "think-alouds," guided practice, corrective feedback, and frequent review. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grades K–8 &lt;<a href="http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=2">http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=2</a>&gt;</li> <li>Students with learning disabilities &lt;<a href="http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf">http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf</a>&gt;</li> </ul>		Y Jayanthi, Gersten, & Baker (2008) Baker, Gersten, & Lee (2002)
Mathematics: Encourage student verbalization of decisions and solutions in math problem solving. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students with learning disabilities &lt;<a href="http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf">http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf</a>&gt;</li> </ul>		Y Jayanthi, Gersten, & Baker (2008) Baker, Gersten, & Lee (2002)
Mathematics: Teach students to solve problems using multiple/heuristic strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students with learning disabilities &lt;<a href="http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf">http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf</a>&gt;</li> </ul>		Y Jayanthi, Gersten, & Baker (2008) Baker, Gersten, & Lee (2002)
Mathematics: Provide cross-age, peer-assisted instruction/tutoring. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students with learning disabilities &lt;<a href="http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf">http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Mathematics%20Instruction%20LD%20Guide%20for%20Teachers.pdf</a>&gt;</li> </ul>		Y Jayanthi, Gersten, & Baker (2008) Baker, Gersten, & Lee (2002)

Note. Click hyperlink to access resources. No specific information was available for the categories of Homeless Youth and Neglected and Delinquent Youth.

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