



November 15, 2004

New ICI Center to Improve Reading Assessments for Students with Disabilities

Learning to read and demonstrating reading proficiency are cornerstones of educational success. Test results in recent years have shown that an alarming number of students with disabilities have difficulty mastering the reading skills tested. The accommodations that students receive to compensate for problems reading print are complex and controversial, with little consensus in research or across state policies about what to measure or how best to assess reading constructs in a way that accurately reflect the skills of all students. Defining reading proficiency and how to best assess it for students with disabilities is more important now than ever before because of statewide assessments that are used for school accountability. Yet there are questions about whether current large-scale reading assessments—commonly known as standardized reading tests—result in a valid demonstration of reading proficiency for the increasingly diverse population of students who make up our public schools, particularly those students who have disabilities that affect reading.

The new Partnership for Accessible Reading Assessment, housed at the Institute on Community Integration (ICI) and co-directed by Martha Thurlow (National Center on Educational Outcomes) and Deborah Dillon (Curriculum and Instruction), is creating a program of development and research designed to: a) define reading proficiency, b) use that definition as a basis for research on factors that affect achievement on large-scale reading assessments, c) develop principles and guidelines based on the definition and on its research, and d) develop and field test accessible reading assessments that reflect those principles and guidelines. The Partnership, which is funded by a five-year \$6.6 million award from the U.S. Department of Education, is a consortium of the National Center on Educational Outcomes at ICI; the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST); and Westat, a research corporation. It is supported by research partnerships with 10 states and school districts; 24 national organizations that focus on reading, teaching, disabilities; and assessment, and 25 nationally-recognized experts in reading, assessment, special education, and other areas. Through bringing together these leaders in the field and individuals with disabilities and their parents, the Partnership seeks to build an innovative foundation of principles and guidelines for research and development of reading assessments.

According to Partnership director Martha Thurlow, this project has already made many advances: “For the first time we are talking openly about the need to create better assessments for those students whose disabilities affect their ability to read. We are doing this with curriculum experts and with organizations and states that think about reading all the time.”

The Partnership began its work October 1, 2004 and is currently setting up meetings of its General Advisory Committee in December and its Definition Panel in January. For further information about the Partnership, contact Martha at (612) 624-4826 or thurl001@umn.edu.

Staff Update

- **Staff Arrivals:** **Elizabeth Mizerek**, RA, RIPM; and **Deanna Spanjers**, RA, RIPM. Staff Departures: **Mary Hayden**, Senior Research Associate, Adult Services.
- **Cammy Lehr** presented a session, “Increasing Rates of School Completion,” at the National Special Education Forum on Dropout for Students with Disabilities, November 2-4 in Orlando.
- **Joe Timmons** attended a two-day study group sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) on October 19-20. The group was assembled to develop strategies to get and keep high school students with disabilities more involved in science, technology, mathematics, and engineering. The AAAS is very involved in arranging internships and mentorships for college students with disabilities.
- **Matt Ziegler** staffed the ICI exhibit at the Arc Minnesota Conference, October 8-9 in Walker.

Dates to Remember...

- **November 18: Community Advisory Council**, Radisson Hotel
- **November 19: Pizza Forum**, 12-1, 118 Pattee
- **November 25-26: Thanksgiving Holiday**
- **December 6: ICI Council Special Session**, 8:30-1, McNamara Center
- **December 10: ICI Winter Gathering**, 11:30-1:30, Pattee Hall Lobby

From the Front Office

News from ICI's Administrative Staff

- **Reflection Groups.** Reflection Groups, which are part of the Certificate in Disability Policy and Services, are being held for certificate students, GRAs and interested others. On December 1 Christopher Watson presents "Early Intervention" from 3-4 p.m. in 118 Pattee Hall. FFI contact Marijo McBride at 4-6830 or mcbri001@umn.edu.
- **CEHD 2004 Community Fund Drive.** Thanks to all who donated to the Community Fund Drive. This year, ICI's coordinator was Beth Nelson, with assistance from Amy Kurowski. ICI's participation rate was 25.7%.
- **P&A Vacation Records.** P&A staff vacation records for September and October are overdue. Please return them to Beth in 107 Pattee Hall. Questions? Call Beth at 6-8042.
- **Academic Search Audit.** The College of Education and Human Development has informed college units that there will be an audit on academic searches. It will take place this year, but no firm date has been set. ICI's HR rep, Beth Nelson, is working to ensure that ICI complies with the academic search process and record-keeping practices. Anyone who conducted academic searches in the past and has applicant files and other search materials should forward them to Beth in 107 Pattee Hall or Amy Kurowski in 102 Pattee Hall. Questions? Call Beth at 6-8042.
- **Online Courses.** The College of Education and Human Development and ICI are partnering to offer two self-paced, online courses throughout the fall, spring, and summer semesters. They are EdHD 3301 Supporting Persons with Developmental and Related Disabilities in Community Human Services (4 credits), and EdHD 4301 Personnel Supervision and Management in Community Human Services (3 credits). Questions? Contact Marijo McBride at mcbri001@umn.edu or 4-6830.
- **Next CAC Meeting.** Jean Ness will present an interactive overview of the Expanding the Circle curriculum at the Community Advisory Council meeting, November 18, at the Radisson Hotel. FFI or to attend contact Julia Socha at wash004@umn.edu or 4-2008.

Miscellaneous

- **Economics Conference.** On December 1, ICI is co-hosting a half-day conference, The Economics of Disability, which is intended to bring faculty and community representatives together to explore economic issues facing people with disabilities. There is no registration fee, but registration is required by November 26. Questions? Contact Jake Priester at the Center on Aging at 6-3549 or pries001@umn.edu.
- **Call for Proposals.** The 2005 Self-Advocacy Conference "Deciding Our Future" is soliciting presentation proposals from organizations and individuals working with and for people with disabilities. The conference, which will be held in St. Paul next April, will highlight direct involvement of self-advocates and address issues related to self-advocacy and disability. The deadline for workshop proposals is December 17. FFI call Mark at (952) 915-3617 or Mary Kay at (651) 641-0297.
- **Birthdays.** Maureen Hawes (11/20), Sheryl Larson (11/26), Kathie Coucouvanis (12/5), Anna Kruchowski (12/7), Cammy Lehr (12/13), and Tom Bartholomay (12/15). Did we miss your birthday? Let us know! Call 4-2380 or e-mail kuro0008@umn.edu.

Bits & Pieces

Information from the Institute's Web

Development Team (11 Pattee, 6-8649) and Publications Office (109 Pattee, 4-4512)

- **New Publications.** The following new Institute publications are available through the Publications Office and/or online:
 - *Rapid Changes, Repeated Challenges: States' Out-of-Level Testing Policies for 2003-2004* (Out-of-Level Testing Report 13). Published by the Institute's National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and available at <http://education.umn.edu/nceo/>.
 - *Understanding Out-of-Level Testing in Local Schools: A First Case Study of Policy Implementation and Effects* (Out-of-Level Testing Report 11). Published by NCEO and available at <http://education.umn.edu/nceo/>.
 - *1999-2000 Participation and Performance of English Language Learners with Disabilities on Minnesota's Standards-based Assessments* (ELLS with Disabilities Report 1). Published by NCEO and available at <http://education.umn.edu/nceo/>.
- **Looking for a New Home.** The following publications currently live in large quantities in a Publications Office storeroom and are looking for new homes where they'll be used. Please keep them in mind for classes, conferences, and training events:
 - *Impact: Feature Issue on Violence Against Women with Developmental or Other Disabilities*
 - *Impact: Feature Issue on Volunteerism by Persons with Developmental Disabilities*
 - *Impact: Feature Issue on Postsecondary Education Supports for Students with Disabilities.*
- **FYI Deadline.** Items for the next FYI should be submitted to Tom in 109 Pattee Hall or e-mailed to donag003@umn.edu by Monday, December 13.