Urban Perspectives

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In this Issue:

Collaborative Forges Partnerships with New National Projects

The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative is helping to launch two new projects funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education. An announcement of the successful efforts of the University of Maryland and the University of South Florida in competing for the awards was made at the Collaborative's Fall meeting in Denver, Colorado.

The grants call upon the Collaborative to perform critical planning, networking, and dissemination functions to support the work of the policy research and capacity building efforts of the projects. In his announcement, the Collaborative's Director Dr. David Riley stated:

"These new partnerships will afford Collaborative members unique and important opportunities to contribute to shaping the future of special education policy and research. We are proud to have been included in the EPRRI and LASER project proposals and look forward to working with Drs. Maggie McLaughlin at the University of Maryland, Martha Thurlow at the National Center for Educational Outcomes, and Brenda Townsend at the University of South Florida in meeting the ambitious goals they have set for their respective projects.

The fact that the Collaborative was sought out as a partner to these efforts is recognition of the national reputation we are developing as the leadership development and networking organization for urban special education administrators. It is also a reflection of an understanding that the needs and interests of students with disabilities in urban schools have become a national priority.

The Collaborative's work over the past few years with the National Institute for Urban School Improvement at the University of Colorado-Denver and the ILIAD Partnership at CEC have offered opportunities for member districts to benefit from the energies, talents, and resources national projects bring. We are confident that, as these new initiatives become operational, members will both contribute and benefit from their efforts."

Linking Academic Scholars to Educational Resources (LASER)

Linking Academic Scholars to Educational Resources (LASER), at the University of South Florida, will specifically focus on the development and implementation of a definitive research agenda on urban special education. With the ultimate goal of improving schooling for urban children and

How to Calculate Accurate Urban School Completion Rates

Tom Hehir

Tom Hehir, Senior Policy Advisor

One of the most significant changes to the IDEA 1997 Amendments is the requirement that states establish performance goals for their IDEA programs. At a minimum, states must establish goals to improve the performance, reduce the drop-out rates, and increase graduation rates of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum. A difficulty that school districts and states are struggling with is setting up the data systems needed to meet these requirements.

In the area of school completion, the data are already being collected in the form of "exit data federal reporting requirements." However, these data include students who have moved, transferred to another district, or returned to regular education – none of which is relevant to calculating an accurate school completion rate. Further, most urban school districts contend with high mobility rates of students and their families. This reality complicates the utility of this data source for assessing drop-out and school completion rates.

A Sample Methodology: Baltimore Public Schools

The Baltimore Public Schools has recently entered into a consent agreement relative to a long-standing court case in special education that establishes measurable outcomes on which an accurate school completion rate can be based. I served as a consultant in that case, along with Doug Fuchs of Vanderbilt University and Sandra Warren of the Research Triangle Institute, and helped develop a methodology to utilize special education exit data in a way that school completion rates could be more accurately and fairly determined. This determination was accomplished by combining certain "exit data" reported by Baltimore to the Maryland Department of Education as part of its federal reporting requirements and by eliminating those data that are irrelevant to school completion or not within the control of the Baltimore Public Schools (e.g., students who transferred out of the district). Only those data elements that were relevant were used. Specifically, those elements are students who (1) graduated, (2) reached maximum age, (3) left school with a certificate, or (4) dropped out.

> *"I believe this methodology would be helpful in establishing performance indicators for other urban districts."*

In order to get a fair measure of both school completion and drop-out rates, we constructed a model for looking at exit data that eliminated irrelevant or unfair data. For instance, we felt that Baltimore Public Schools should not be held accountable for students who transferred to other districts. Had we included such data – that is all students who exited special education – and compared that number with the number of students who received a diploma, Baltimore would appear to have very few students graduating; only 14 percent (rounded) exited with a diploma. This would have been deceptive and unfair to Baltimore in that more students transferred to other districts than graduated, thus greatly inflating the denominator. We constructed our model using only the above four data elements, which are relevant to the analysis of school completion. Therefore, the denominator used to express relationships is the total of the four categories. We then combined the first three categories to arrive at a composite completion score. Using this methodology (comparing those students completing with the revised exit total), we calculated that approximately 50 percent of Baltimore students completed school as compared with those who dropped out. We also looked

Inclusive Schools: Good for Kids, Families & Communities
National Institute to Launch Marketing Campaign

The National Institute for Urban School Improvement, co-directed by Collaborative Director David Riley as part of a subcontract with the University of Colorado, Denver, will be promoting its newly adopted message in its five partner sites and nationally during the next several months. The message – **Inclusive Schools: Good for Kids, Families & Communities** – is intended to stimulate a dialogue among urban educators, administrators, policy makers, and families about the benefits of inclusive practices to improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

The campaign is grounded in three years of market research activities conducted by the National Institute. The research included analyses of:

- a year's worth of news articles written on issues relating to the education of students with disabilities in the 10 major media markets;

- public polling data published over the past few years on education reform and educating diverse learners; and,

- six focus groups comprised of parents of students with and without disabilities in urban school districts (Denver and Washington, D.C.)

Collaborative member districts who serve as National Institute partner sites – Boston, Chicago, Denver, Soccorro ISD (El Paso, TX), and Washington, D.C. – as well as all other members will be recipients of publications and informational materials supporting the campaign.

Collaborative Members Contribute to National Institute's Mission
The campaign follows the production and dissemination of a number of print products and Web-based discussion opportunities sponsored by the National Institute to which Collaborative members

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
URBAN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Collaborative Staff Changes:
Jeri Muoio Joins Collaborative

After more than 20 years as a local special education director, assistant superintendent, and director of pupil services in school districts across New York state, Dr. Geraldine (Jeri) Muoio has joined the Collaborative as its new Assistant Director. As a school administrator, her work had been dedicated to building inclusive school environments for students with disabilities. In addition, her leadership work has focused on school reform issues, especially those instructional and curricular reforms driven by the needs of students with disabilities.

Dr. Muoio has been an active participant at both the national and state level in developing, disseminating, and implementing an agenda for unified schools. She has presented at numerous conferences and

served as a keynote speaker on education reform and the restructuring of special education. She was also instrumental in establishing the Summer Institute on Inclusion and Collaboration, held at Manhattan College in New York City.

Dr. Muoio earned her Ph.D. from Syracuse University, where she was an adjunct professor teaching courses in Education Leadership. She has also taught at LeMoyne College in Syracuse and at Manhattan College in New York City.

As Assistant Director, Dr. Muoio will be developing the Collaborative's new leadership development series – scheduled to begin in March with a three-day conference on Systems Unification – as well as
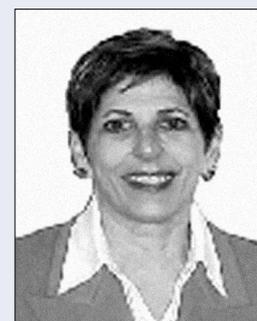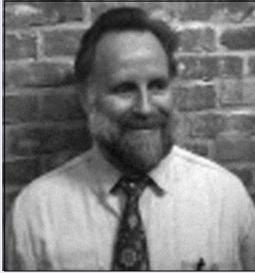
Jeri Muoio

Speech Recognition Technology in Schools

Bob Follansbee, Ed.D.
Education Development Center

Bob Follansbee

"Speech recognition can be a very successful avenue for some students to begin to participate more effectively and more independently in age-appropriate work."

You probably have students in your schools who seem capable but have struggled year after year to keep up with their peers in writing. Maybe they have gotten as far as middle school or beyond and are still performing far below expectations as writers. These students are probably at higher risk for behavior problems and even dropping out of school at some point. Whether or not these students have been identified as having learning disabilities, you still want to find ways to help such students succeed. Chances are that your staff have considered and even tried various assistive technologies to help these students. Increasingly, speech recognition is a technology that is considered for students who struggle with various aspects of writing. You've probably had parents who see speech recognition as the "magic bullet" for their children, and you may also have heard stories about how speech recognition simply "doesn't work" in schools. What do we really know about speech recognition in schools and how it works or doesn't?

This article was based on work done by **Speaking to Write**, a Department of Education/NIDRR-funded project, which was designed to provide schools and other interested parties with information leading to greater understanding and more effective use of speech recognition by students with written language difficulties. Much of the information here is elaborated in the Speaking to Write website (www.edc.org/spk2wrt). In addition, a Speaking to Write listserv is an active source of information about speech recognition from many people who are supporting its use in schools and elsewhere.

The current situation

Speech recognition (speech recognition, also called voice recognition) software has in the last couple of years experienced a remarkable upswing in visibility through advertising, "bundling" with other technology products, and improving the operation of the technology. Generally, when people in today's market speak of "speech recognition" they are referring to *continuous speech recognition*, so named because of its ability to interpret continuous speech. Continuous speech recognition first appeared commercially in 1997 and the primary products now available are various versions of **Dragon Naturally Speaking** (now owned by Lernout & Hauspie, who used to produce their own product) and **IBM ViaVoice**, which is the only speech recognition product with a version for Macintosh computers. There are important differences for individuals and especially children and students with disabilities in the operation of the various continuous speech products, so knowledge of these can be important.

Does it work?

Continuous speech recognition is very appealing because, based on its claims, one can speak to the computer in a natural voice and at a normal rate of speech. This is a fine example of marketing hyperbole that glosses over important aspects of how one learns to use the software (and often leads to unsuccessful experiences with this technology). However, with the proper introduction to and training on the technology, and with reasonable expectations, speech recognition software can operate with remarkable ease and accuracy, and can be a tremendous boon to some students.

Speech recognition can be a very successful avenue for some students to begin to participate more effectively and more independently in age-appropriate work.

Students who use speech recognition do not automatically become better writers, but they are almost always able to produce more work, more easily, which then permits them to engage in writing instruction and composition at an entirely different level. Instead of recopying a few sentences to make them more legible, and to correct spelling and grammar mistakes, all relatively low level editing decisions, students can produce several paragraphs of ideas that require revision and reorganization, and when every word is such an effort to produce, even pruning. Students can begin to write at a level that matches their grade level and, in fact, the level at which they could actually dictate text.

We know from the experiences of our project, of our project's staff in other venues, and from the input of many participants in our listserv, that speech recognition is being successfully implemented with students around the country. Many successful users are difficult to track, since they are students who are using the software at home to complete homework and longer written assignments. In some situations, the school may not even be aware that a student is using speech recognition. Some successful users are individuals who begin using speech recognition in school through advocacy and under the requirements of an IEP; situations like this can often quickly result in other students using speech recognition also, with students helping train each other. On a larger scale, some district- and state-wide initiatives are implementing speech recognition in a proactive manner. For example:

- The Integrated Technology Services of Collaborative member, Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools, have been providing consultation and support for the use of speech recognition technology with students for several years.

- The Washington State Office of Public Instruction's Special Education Technology Center has received a continuing grant over the past three years to integrate speech recognition as an assistive technology option into middle schools. As of this year the project will be in 23 middle school classrooms with up to 10 students using the technology in each class.

- The Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative works with the state Department of Public Instruction to provide consultation services in speech recognition to schools and for individuals. Similar efforts are underway in many states.

What is needed?

Successful implementation of speech recognition does not happen by accident. Schools must be committed to providing basic resources, staff must be committed to working with the student and the technology, and students must be committed to the process of improving their performance.

First, it is desirable if speech recognition is considered only as part of a continuum of assistive technology strategies. Speech recognition is relatively intensive in terms of training needed, and it is somewhat limited in terms of where it can be used. Other strategies should be considered for any given student. On the other hand, it is a very powerful solution in some cases and may be the most effective (or only) way to "reclaim" certain students. Finally, there is no reason why some students might not use multiple strategies, including speech recognition, depending on the demands of the assignment or the situation.

Learning to use speech recognition effectively requires three things. The user must learn to:

1. Speak so that the software can understand what is said.

2. Operate the software. This is especially important in learning to make corrections through the software so that the software learns the user's voice better.

3. Compose through a new medium – that is, not through the pencil or through the keyboard, but through speech. This IS NOT the same as speaking in conversation.

The most common complaint encountered in speech recognition implementation is that the software "just doesn't work" when the student talks to it. Digging below the surface of such complaints usually

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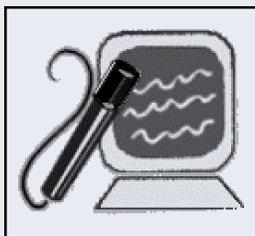
Speech Recognition Cont.

demonstrates that the student and adult supporter have not really understood the requirements of learning how to speak to the software to maximize its understanding (#1 above), and to make corrections the proper way to provide the software with useful information about its recognition errors (#2). Proper training is the solution.

For successful implementation of speech recognition, schools must provide:

- Training in implementation for staff. This implies not only actual workshop time, but also practice time for the staff.

- Outside support for staff and students, as needed.

- Adequate hardware and technical support for hardware problems, software installation, etc.

- Space for use of speech recognition. This technology does not require absolute silence, and can be used with considerable background noise if setup properly. However, some environments are very difficult to accommodate. A typically problematic space is the kind often encountered in older school buildings: high ceilings with hard surfaces (tile, plaster, etc.) everywhere and no acoustic absorption. Finding smaller spaces or area adjustments (e.g., a carpeted corner, use of a carrel, etc.) can help with this.

- Time for staff to work with student during initial stages of speech recognition use. Students need the most support when they are first using the software, and staff should have some leeway to provide this.

- Academic (substitute) credit for students who learn to use speech recognition. Rather than adding an extra to the already overburdened student, learning to use speech recognition might take the place of part of a class in computer literacy or be integrated into requirements of an English/writing class.

Staff (special education teacher, English teacher, or similar) should:

- Be willing to learn how to support the students using speech recognition. Adequate support requires learning the strategies that successful speech recognition users must know, which is further helped by learning how to use the software themselves.

- Provide a gradual "ramping up" of work requirements for students using speech recognition. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT! Once students gain fluency in using speech recognition they are often faced with a new phenomenon – the requirement to complete the same work as their peers. We have seen situations where students responded to this realization by rejecting the technology or rebelling in other ways. We believe it is critical to increase work demands gradually to allow students, who previously were unable to write effectively, a chance to accept their "new" writing abilities and acclimate to these new responsibilities.

- Be committed to providing some "make up" instruction. Typically, by the time of middle school, students who have perennially struggled with writing have missed a lot of important instruction in writing basics. Immediate overemphasis on deficient mechanics can be discouraging. Teachers should first value and support the increase in amount produced and work on higher-level organization (thinking) issues while helping students come to a gradual appreciation of the importance of writing mechanics.

- Be willing to try speech recognition with some students who might be unlikely to ever use the technology completely independently, but who might use the software with some level of support to produce text that they could not otherwise.

"Once students gain fluency in using speech recognition they are often faced with a new phenomenon – the requirement to complete the same work as their peers."

ILIAD Sponsors Cadre of Trainers & Supports Middle Grade Reform Effort

As announced in previous editions of *Urban Perspectives*, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded four partnership projects to address the information needs of parents, service providers, administrators, and policy makers related to the requirements of IDEA '97. The Collaborative is one of seven primary partners in the ILIAD Project (IDEA Local Implementation by Local Administrators Partnerships).

During this third year of implementation, the Collaborative will be developing a Cadre of Trainers comprised of current and former urban special education leaders. The Cadre – Assistant Director Jeri Muoio, Associate Director Ingrid Draper, along with recently retired Ann Arbor, Michigan, Director David Yamamoto, Tucson, Arizona, Director Betsy Bounds, and Worcester, Massachusetts, Director Ruth Gadbois – participated in a three-day training program on a number of the aspects of IDEA '97 and will be available to participate in professional development activities in member school districts in the Spring 2001.

Middle Grades Reform

Leaders in special education are often concerned with how best to move forward their agenda for students with disabilities in a complex organization. With the support of the ILIAD Partnership, the Collaborative has been given the opportunity to work with Collaborative member and District Superintendent John Comer of New York City's Community School District 22 in expanding inclusive practices in the District's middle grades as part of a comprehensive school reform initiative. This project is one of the few comprehensive school reform efforts that is not only directed to middle grades level but also imbeds support services to students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Participation in this initiative will allow for the study of the advancement of critical IDEA principles such as access to the curriculum and least restrictive environment, through comprehensive school reform. This is of particular interest and value to ILIAD and its partners.

Finally, as part of its work with ILIAD, the Collaborative will be conducting a citywide conference for middle school leadership in New York City. The conference will discuss the relationship between middle grades reform and the implementation of critical IDEA'97 requirements. ∎

For more information about the ILIAD Partnership, contact Jeri Muoio at 617-969-7100, ext. 2728, or at jmuoio@edc.org.

IDEAs that Work

Office of Special Education Programs

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Speech Recognition Cont.

Individual students (and parents) must:

- Acknowledge that this technology is not necessarily the correct solution for all students, including themselves.

- Acknowledge that mastery of the software requires some effort and some flexibility in ways of working.

- Acknowledge that mastery of the software will entail a (hopefully gradual) increase in workload to reflect the level of work expected for grade level (or depending on other identified disabilities), and express a willingness to participate on that basis.

From the financial perspective, speech recognition software is relatively inexpensive, and it is important to know that many students can use a single piece of speech recognition software, limited only by amount of disk space for voice files and available time to use a single computer. Speech recognition does require relatively newer, more powerful computers, so there may be an initial hardware expense. The greatest costs in use of speech recognition are those involved in initial training of teachers/staff who will be teaching
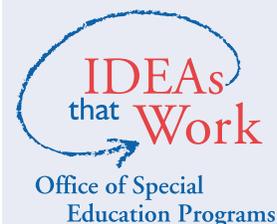
Happy Birthday IDEA

**Phil Ferguson, Co-Director,
National Institute for Urban
School Improvement**

Phil Ferguson

*"It is useful
to remind
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passage."*

It has been said that we walk backwards into the future, looking back to where we have been but are unable to see clearly what lies ahead. If that is true then at least we should keep our eyes open. It was an eye-opener for me a few months ago, when I realized that November, 2000 was the 25th anniversary of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Back in 1975 – and for many years afterwards – the law was called either PL 94-142 or the more cumbersome "Education of All Handicapped Children Act." Whatever it has been called, however, the law has continued to represent one of the most active and detailed arenas for federal involvement in public education at the local level.

It is useful to remind ourselves how different it was for many children and their families before the law's passage. My memories of the law's beginnings are personal as well as professional. In 1975, our son, Ian, was 6 years old. Instead of entering first grade that year, he faced a school system that legally excluded him from *any* public school services. Forget about mainstreamed or self-contained classes. The state where we lived allowed school districts to deny services to children who were so disabled that they "could not benefit from educational services." There was a three-part test. To be eligible for public education, a child had to be 1) ambulatory (i.e., able to walk); 2) continent (i.e., toilet trained); and 3) able to follow simple directions (i.e., stand in line and keep your hands to yourself). Ian bombed out on all three criteria, so the district essentially said "See ya later, kid." Some 20 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* had said that segregated public schools were inherently unequal and unconstitutional, it was still legal to exclude children with disabilities from attending any public school, segregated or not. For an entire generation of parents, the passage of 94-142 represented a profound sea change in the public response to their children. If a state wanted to receive federal funds, then it had to accept responsibility for the education of all children regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. The new federal law was the culmination of years of efforts by parents and other advocates around the country. Court cases and state laws gradually reached a point where it became politically untenable not to have uniform federal legislation for all children. The law was passed by Congress and grudgingly signed into law a few days later by President Gerald Ford. He released his accompanying statement expressing doubt that the federal government would ever live up to the funding promises made within the body of the statute (an easy prediction, but one that proved depressingly accurate).

It is altogether proper that we should celebrate the changes prompted by *IDEA* over the last quarter century. It is simply hard to imagine how our special education system would look without its enactment. It is also appropriate to use this anniversary to acknowledge and reflect upon the combination of unfilled promises and unintended consequences that have accompanied the law's implementation. Let me mention three areas where the law has either been an underachiever or has actually become a barrier to further reform of the special education system. I will organize my comments around some of the "alphabet soup" that has become part of the vernacular for anyone involved in special education today. We need some new acronyms.

FAPE

The guarantee of a "free, appropriate public education" for all children was certainly one of the cornerstones of *IDEA*'s reconstruction of special education. However, what is now clear – if it was ever in doubt – is that a federal policy of "zero-

reject" does not add up to positive expectations for significant achievement. As the civil rights element of the law, FAPE mandated the presence of children with disabilities within the school system; it did not mandate high expectations by teachers and administrators. As with children from other minority groups, students with disabilities have all too often been allowed in the schoolhouse door but not supported as students who can learn and contribute to the learning of others. Propelled by the *Rowley* decision, "appropriate" has all too often become a synonym for "barely adequate," providing a legal excuse to congratulate ourselves for simply accommodating a student's physical presence. We need to change the message and raise the expectations for both ourselves as educators and for our students. Instead of FAPE, how about ASAP: *A*ll *S*tudents (regardless of ability) *A*re (high) *P*erformers. Let's do it ASAP.

LRE

The history of the "least restrictive environment" principle is a fascinating one. On the one hand, the principle says that schools must, whenever appropriate (there's that word again), educate students in the general education classroom with the supports needed to make that successful. On the other hand, many proponents of inclusive approaches to education are now coming to believe that what was intended to ensure a full array of supports for all children has become a legal life preserver for the more segregated educational placements. In this view (which I share), the term "LRE" has become synonymous with the educational endorsement of the continuum logic that we have come to rely upon for service delivery to people with disabilities in all domains of life. Whether we are talking about residential, vocational or educational service systems, the logic of the continuum remains powerful: separateness of setting is directly proportional to intensity of support. The more support a student needs, the more segregated the student must be from other students. This entrenched logic then transforms inclusion into justifications for "dumping" rather

that an opportunity to restructure the way we think about supporting diverse learners. We now realize that with a redirection of resources and support strategies, people with even the most severe, multiple disabilities can be supported in community settings rather than large, congregate care facilities (six states have now closed all of their institutions for people with intellectual disabilities). Similarly, we are increasingly discovering how to embed even the most intensive educational supports within the general education classroom and the neighborhood school. Unfortunately, the principle of *LRE* has become an obstacle to fully implementing that knowledge. Instead of LRE we need a principle of QED: Quickly Eliminate Displacement (from the neighborhood school). We have enough examples now to demonstrate that a continuum of support does not require a continuum of placements.

IEP

The Individualized Education Plan was probably the most controversial portion of *94-142* during its original debate in Congress. Under the law, not only, would the federal government place a general requirement on state and local educational agencies about who it had to serve, but also, where it had to serve them. The IEP provisions went into amazing detail about how teachers had to plan what and how they would actually teach students. Not even waiting for the implementing regulations (as with most such legislation), the statute itself included specific language about when meetings had to occur, who had to be present, how goals and objectives for individual students had to be written, and how disagreements were to be mediated. Steps to insure parental involvement were spelled out. Most parents, including myself, were delighted at how the legislation seemed to empower our advocacy on behalf of our children. Indeed, in schools and districts where the spirit as well as the letter of the IEP provisions have driven their efforts to link with parents, the effects of this planning process have been truly impressive. Again, though, the reality has been different than

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Collaborative Forges Partnerships with New National Projects

youth with or suspected of having disabilities, LASER has adopted the following mission to: a) develop cadres of faculty and graduate students in minority institutions who will conduct and sustain urban special education research/scholarship; b) develop a national strength-based model that documents strategies for enhancing individual and institutional research capacities; and c) define and coordinate a national agenda that narrows the gap between research and urban school practice. LASER will provide technical assistance and professional development for minority doctoral students and faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), or Other Minority Institutions (OMIs). LASER's impact on the research and practice of urban special education promises to be very far-reaching.

The Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (EPRRI)

The Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (EPRRI), at the University of Maryland, will conduct a five-year program of policy analyses, research, and dissemination involving policy makers, practitioners, parents/families, advocates, and consumers. EPRRI's activities are designed to meet the following five goals: a) develop Topical Reviews that provide comprehensive analyses and policy options on selected topics; b) conduct Policy Forums with key stakeholders to identify, analyze, and validate policy issues on critical topics related to accountability-based reforms; c) conduct a program of field-based research in collaboration with core states and LEAs, and on selected emerging issues; d) provide a cohesive program of study and mentoring to selected graduate

students in education policy and/or special education; and e) disseminate products of EPRRI to broad national audiences using multiple formats. EPRRI promises to produce policy-relevant, research-grounded knowledge that can significantly impact the educational outcomes of children and youth with disabilities. ∎

For more information about EPRRI and LASER, contact David Riley at 617-969-7100, ext. 2340, or at <u>driley@edc.org</u>.

Accurate School Completion Rates

specifically at those who graduated with a diploma in relationship to the revised completion data, and found that Baltimore had a 32 percent completion rate with a diploma.

I believe this methodology would be helpful in establishing performance indicators for other urban districts. Using all exit data is unjust to these districts and serves to obfuscate the true picture by introducing extraneous data. At the same time, I also believe that the meaning of this data should be interpreted only in the context of the district itself, because local and state policies have a direct impact on whether students receive diplomas. For example, though Chicago and Baltimore have similar completion rates, Chicago has a higher diploma rate but does not grant certificates. Some states require passage of high-level exams in order to graduate while others do not, and even within-state comparisons can be unfair, given the urban character of our districts. That being said, what is important is that we measure and improve the performance of our districts based on accurate and fair data. We need to use these data to establish benchmarks on which our school improvement efforts can be based. ∎

Happy Birthday IDEA Cont.

the promise in too many instances. The letters have all too often come to stand for an empty activity meant to ensure procedural compliance rather than educational relevance. Teachers dread the paper work because it has little connection to their day to day instruction. Administrators worry that they have omitted some procedural step that will leave the school or district open to attack by an "unreasonable" parent. Parents see a process where their participation is nominal at best and adversarial at worst. They are asked to ratify professional decisions rather than contribute to shared planning. Teachers spend hours preparing documents instead of teaching children. Instead of IEP, we need a process of CPL: *C*ollaborative *P*ersonalized *L*earning. Such a

process would work for all children, that would reward shared decision-making, that would emphasize strengths as well as areas of improvement, and that would personalize without isolating.

Despite the problems, the law has been important. Together with Section 504 and the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, *IDEA* represents the legislative elements of a revolution in disability rights that occurred in the last half of the 20th century. So, happy birthday *IDEA*. May your next 25 years see some new acronyms, some better outcomes, and a whole lot more to celebrate. ∎

For more information about the National Institute for Urban School Improvement, visit their website at: <u>www.edc.org/urban.</u>

Speech Recognition Cont.

students how to use the software effectively, and subsequent time for actual training. However, we are seeing that training costs per student are dropping as each staff member begins working with more than one student.

Other considerations
Another type of speech recognition was alluded to above. This is the decade-old technology, *discrete speech recognition*, represented now in the market by a single product, **DragonDictate**. Discrete speech recognition requires that one speak one-word-at-a-time. We have found that some students prefer the slower pace of dictation in discrete speech recognition, as well as several features of **DragonDictate** that are

not present in newer products. If a struggling writer has had difficulty adapting to continuous speech recognition programs, it might be worthwhile considering **DragonDictate** if someone is available to train and support it. All of the considerations mentioned above apply to implementing this technology as well. The **Speaking to Write** website has some resource for this purpose.

Final thoughts and words of encouragement
As with any promising new educational strategy, the use of speech recognition has proceeded in fits and starts, sometimes along a circuitous route. Yet, we have seen firsthand the positive outcomes of use of speech recognition

software on the lives of individual students we know. Some of these students were (and are) pioneers in using the technology, so their efforts were not always directly achieved or rewarded. Now, there are increasing numbers of students across the country who are using speech recognition successfully to meet some or all of their writing needs. As more schools move forward with this and other technologies in a more systematic way, we better understand how to assure successful outcomes for students and also how to manage the costs that inevitably accompany such initiatives. ∎

For more information about Speaking to Write, contact Bob Follansbee at (617) 969-7100, ext 2716, or at bfollansbee@edc.org.

National Institute Marketing Campaign

contributed and/or from which Collaborative members benefited. Last fall, Charlene Green of Clark County (Las Vegas, Nevada) served as co-facilitator to an online discussion focussed on inclusive schooling practices. Collaborative members and others can view an archive of the discussion at: http://www.edc.org/urban/forums.htm.

More recently, Patrick Teicher of Northside ISD (San Antonio, Texas) wrote the introduction to a National Institute *Topical Summary* on English-language learners with disabilities. In March 2001, the National Institute's new series entitled *School Districts On The Move* will feature a publication written by Pia Durkin of Boston Public Schools and her superintendent, Thomas Payzant, on that school district's efforts to design and implement a more unified system.

Collaborative Members Benefit from National Institute
In addition to five Collaborative member districts directly benefiting from National Institute on-site activities, all Collaborative members have been the beneficiaries of its product dissemination efforts. More than 25,000 copies of National Institute publications have been distributed to Collaborative member districts and their schools. Products have included the *On Points* series, brief summaries of research on critical issues in urban education, and *Improving Education: The Promise of Inclusive Schooling.* All of these publications, and more, are available for free and can be downloaded in English and Spanish on the National Institute's award-winning Web site www.edc.org/urban. ∎

For more information about the National Institute events or products, contact Bonnie Johnson at 617-969-7100, ext. 2486, or at bjohnson@edc.org

Collaborative Staff Changes

leading ILIAD Partnership activities. (See related article on page 7). In addition, she will be working with Senior Policy Advisor Tom Hehir and Associate Director Ingrid Draper to support the technical assistance and networking needs of the Collaborative's growing national membership.

Promotions, New Hires, and Sabbaticals

Bonnie Johnson, Collaborative staff person for the past three years, has been promoted to Project Coordinator and is responsible for managing the organization's finances as well as the myriad conferences, meetings, and publishing activities the Collaborative and its various partner projects sponsor.

Kacie Wick has joined the Collaborative as its Senior Administrative Assistant and will be taking the lead in planning the organization's Spring and Fall meetings, as well as supporting its communication and dissemination efforts.

Jennifer Minotti is on leave from the Collaborative and its host organization, Education Development Center, to enjoy an eight-month tour of Asia, Russia and Europe.

Welcome New Member Districts

The Collaborative currently links over 70 school districts from 24 U.S. states plus the District of Columbia. Nine new member districts joined the Collaborative since June 2000. Please join us in welcoming:

- Amphitheater Public Schools, Tucson, AZ
- Leon County School District, Tallahassee, FL
- Palm Beach County School District, Palm Beach, FL
- School City of East Chicago, East Chicago, IN
- Revere Public Schools, Revere, MA
- Trenton Public Schools, Trenton, NJ
- Akron Public Schools, Akron, OH
- School District of Greenville County, Greenville, SC
- El Paso Independent School District, El Paso, TX

For contact information pertaining to each member district, please visit our website at http://www.edc.org/collaborative/members/dist.html

Spring 2001 Meeting

Topic: Research to Practice in Urban Schools

May 3 - 5, 2001 in Detroit, Michigan

For more information, contact Kacie Wick at (617) 969-7100, ext. 2105 or at collaborative@edc.org

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