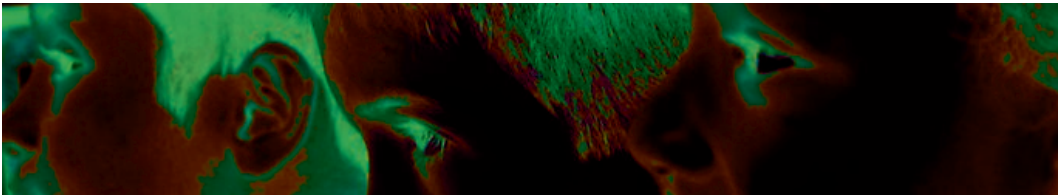
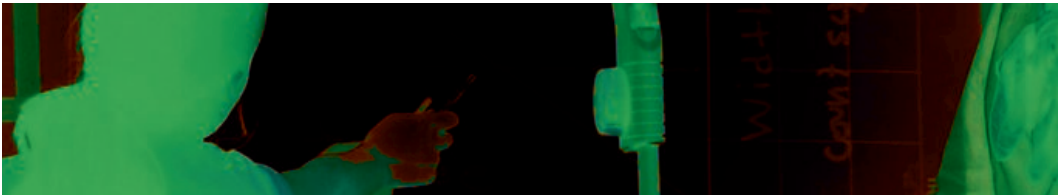




Collaboration and Innovation



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Our Mission

The Strategic Education Research Partnership will mobilize the expertise of teachers and school administrators, the power of scientific research, political will and financial resources in a collaborative endeavor to improve student learning.



Never has high quality education been of greater importance for individuals, families, businesses, and the economic strength and well-being of our nation. And yet the primary engine of innovation and improvement relied on by other sectors—problem-solving research and development—is woefully underutilized in education. Recognizing this, the National Academies’ National Research Council convened three panels of the nation’s foremost scholars, business leaders, and educators between 1997 and 2003. The committees were asked to determine how a focused, scientifically based program of research and development could generate a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in our nation’s schools. The outgrowth of their efforts was the creation of the independent Strategic Education Research Partnership (SERP).



SERP’s mission is to develop and support highly productive collaborations among forward thinking education practitioners and outstanding researchers, developers, and policy makers to solve the most intractable problems facing American education. SERP is accomplishing this goal by establishing a set of strategically placed field sites—school districts that enter into long-term partnerships with SERP-recruited researchers to engage in joint problem solving and continuous improvement rooted in scientific research and development. SERP work addresses urgent problems that the school districts identify, building on the existing work of the world’s best researchers and rigorously testing innovations in a variety of real school settings. The programs and practices emerging from the SERP sites promise to feed improvement in school districts throughout the nation. And the knowledge generated will equip teachers with the skills to give American students the quality education that they require for success in the 21st century.



The SERP model is the first to create an infrastructure for schools and universities to collaboratively tackle the problems of today as well as the challenges of tomorrow through scientific research and development in real world settings. As we continue to build upon our early success, we are encouraged that so many have responded so enthusiastically to the call for partnership.

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 President Emeritus, National Academy of Sciences
 Editor-in-Chief, Science Magazine

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 Executive Director
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SERP Field Sites

SERP operates field sites with the Boston Public Schools, San Francisco Unified School District, and 4 smaller, inner-ring suburban districts that are part of the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN): Arlington, VA, Evanston, IL, Madison, WI, and Shaker Heights, OH. The long term vision calls for 12-15 sites in varied geographic locations, and a large national network of affiliated districts and partnerships with whom the work is shared.

Boston

PROJECTS	PARTNERS FROM
Word Generation Academic Language Program	Harvard University
RISE Middle School Literacy Assessment	Boston University Wheelock College
SARI Adolescent Reading Course	Educational Testing Service Boston Plan for Excellence
Internal Coherence Project	

Minority Student Achievement Network

PROJECTS	PARTNERS FROM
Algebra Assignment Development	Carnegie Mellon University Temple University
Algebra Intervention Evaluation	25 MSAN Districts
Student Engagement & Motivation	University of Wisconsin University of Rochester University of Texas, Austin

San Francisco

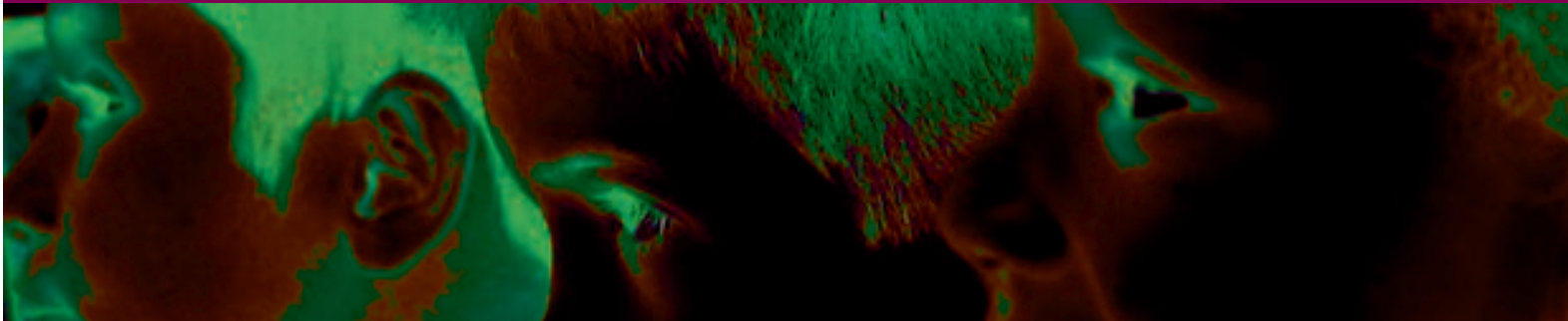
PROJECTS	PARTNERS FROM
Mapping Learning Trajectories in Middle School Science	University of California, San Francisco
Developing Formative Science Assessment & Instructional Responses	University of California, Berkeley Stanford University
Sense-Making in Middle School Mathematics	Exploratorium
Literacy & Language in Math & Science	San Francisco State University Lawrence Hall of Science
Professional Learning Communities	

SERP Field Site Operating Principles:

- 1** The school district partners define the agenda. However, focal problems must be shared by other districts around the country so that the work will be of broad value.
- 2** SERP recruits an interdisciplinary team of researchers, developers, and practitioners who are among the nation's most accomplished in the field. Many of the academic leaders on these teams serve without compensation, building on the national service tradition established by Abraham Lincoln at the National Academy of Sciences.
- 3** Multiple lines of inter-related work on instruction, assessment and school organization are launched simultaneously to address the real-world complexity of the challenges.
- 4** Design work includes both researchers and practitioners at every stage, attends from the start to designing for scale, and deliberately builds on prior work.
- 5** Interventions are subjected to rigorous scientific evaluation, providing solid evidence of their effect on student achievement.

“We are breaking the mold in terms of traditional research structures.”

—Kenji Hakuta, Stanford University



perspective

suspend

transfer

justify

conflict

controversy

diminish

prohibit

stable

diverse

interpret

contributor

factor

estimate

Word Generation

Word Generation is a program for building the academic language middle school students need to succeed in school. It incorporates the specific vocabulary required to comprehend subject area texts, and engages students in developing and supporting arguments, and writing persuasive essays. Developed in the Boston Field Site under the direction of Harvard University Professor Catherine Snow, the program can be used in all subject areas, and across all middle grades. It serves as a companion to any curriculum, requiring just 15 minutes from a different content area teacher each day of the week.

Word Generation topics are highly engaging. The classroom climate comes alive as students consider each other's arguments about serious issues of national importance. The school-wide focus on Word Generation topics and the coordination across teachers in multiple subject areas strengthens coherence and community in the school.

Word Generation is widely available to school districts free of charge via the web at www.serpoinstitute.org. The web-site provides extensive video-taped professional development, and is replete with footage of classroom teaching and interviews with teachers and administrators. The site, along with summer and year-long professional development opportunities, provides a solid foundation that is now supporting other districts in taking the program to scale.

Pilot data collected for students in Word Generation and control schools show positive impacts on vocabulary scores as well as on state standardized test scores, with the largest gains among language minority students. A large scale field trial of the program is planned, as are additional adaptations for English Language Learners.

Sample Topics:

Junk food: Should schools sell it?

Steroids: Substance abuse or an innocent boost?

Is the death penalty fair?

High school dropouts: What can be done?

Violence and the media: Are rating systems necessary?

How should schools prevent bullying?

Strategic Algebra Assignments

Nationwide, only about one-half of all students and about one-third of all minority students complete Algebra I, a course critical to success in more advanced high school mathematics and a gatekeeper for college. Many students have problems mastering algebra because they do not understand key mathematics concepts, and because the intrinsic demands of increased abstraction and generalization require a high level of disciplined engagement.

The Strategic Algebra Assignments Project (SAAP) is designed to give students the boost they need to succeed in Algebra I through innovative homework assignments. These assignments interleave worked examples showing correct or incorrect solutions into more traditional homework problems. Students are asked to explain why a worked example is correct or incorrect. Prior research in laboratories demonstrates that this technique expedites student learning of math concepts and skills, and more effectively lays to rest stubborn misconceptions. Students often completed these assignments more successfully and more quickly than traditional assignments, an important feature for struggling adolescents.

Ken Koedinger (Carnegie Mellon) and Julie Booth (Temple University) have worked with algebra teachers from the SERP-MSAN field site to develop a bank of homework assignments that are now being tested in a rigorous, year-long randomized trial with over 2,000 students. Importantly, the assignments can accompany the wide variety of curricula used across districts, making them easily scalable. The study will be concluded and the bank of assignments will be available in the summer of 2009.

Making Sense out of Math

Word problems are part of the daily diet in middle school mathematics and are common on state tests and district benchmark assessments. Yet despite frequent exposure, a large proportion of students struggle with these problems year after year. The SERP-San Francisco team observed a weakness in students' sense-making capacity as the root cause of this struggle. As international comparison studies have shown, students in countries with higher achievement in mathematics attempt to make sense of problems first, while American students tend to go straight for an answer.

Alan Schoenfeld (U.C. Berkeley) and Phil Daro (SERP Institute) are collaborating with a group of mathematics teachers to develop a set of innovative tools that any teacher can use with relatively little training to shift students' focus (and teachers' teaching) to sense-making. These include:

- Problem-solving think-alouds, in which teachers spend time listening to students' reasoning and follow with questions about the situation rather than about the answer;
- Problems posed in “stem” form, in which the question is withheld until the class has discussed the mathematical structure of the problem situation;
- Reciprocity, or “vice versa”, in which students are given an equation, graph, or diagram, and are asked to generate their own problem, thus developing an understanding of how problem situations relate to mathematical equations and graphs; and
- Diagrams, in which teachers help students develop the critical reasoning skills needed to explicate the underlying relationships in a problem situation.

By design these teaching techniques will fit inside a teacher's practice, rather than requiring that a teacher's practice fit inside a new program or curriculum. They will integrate effectively into a wide variety of approaches or philosophies of mathematics teaching. The SERP math collaborators are now focused on testing the impact of these approaches, and designing mechanisms for diffusion to other teachers and districts.

“Researchers tend to work on timeless things while school leaders have urgent needs. SERP is designed to produce educational material on a timescale that educators can use.”

—Uri Treisman, University of Texas, Austin.

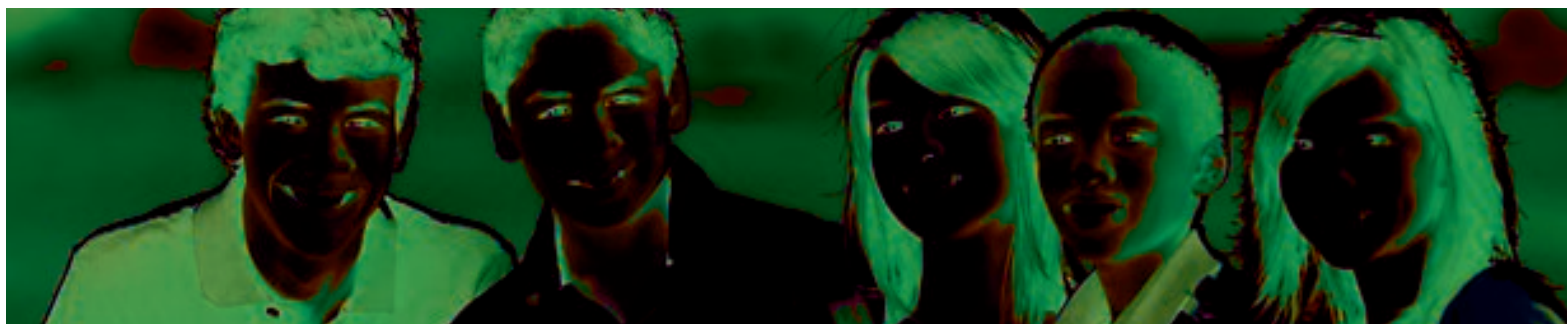
RISE Middle School Literacy Assessment

Many assessments tell teachers how far below grade level students are reading, but not why students struggle with reading. The RISE Assessment (Reading Inventory and Scholastic Evaluation) was developed in response to the need expressed in the Boston Field Site for profiles of middle school students' reading strengths and weaknesses. SERP collaborators from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and Boston University designed, piloted, and revised an instrument that met the specifications of the school district: it can be administered to a class of students (not one-on-one) within a single class period, and by a regular classroom teacher (not a reading specialist).

The RISE has been programmed for delivery to schools via the web. Data are batched back for scoring, and the electronic format allows for a relatively quick turn-around time. Unlike many standardized tests, the results are available for making placement decisions in short order. The instrument is now being tested more widely, with the goal of making it available to other districts. Additional development work is planned to extend the span of grades covered, to introduce adaptive features, and to add formative components.

“What’s amazing to me is that groups—people from different universities, as well as teachers, coaches, and superintendents—are holding engaging sessions in field sites. In my 40 plus years in education, I’ve never seen anything like it.”

—Tom Payzant, Harvard Graduate School of Education



Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention

The SARI program (Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention) was developed in response to RISE assessment data indicating that a significant portion of middle school students still struggle with basic reading. Basic reading skills are generally taught only in special education classes in middle school under the assumption that students already know how to read. However evidence suggests that for a sizable number of students in urban school districts around the country progress stalls at the 4th grade level. These students often do not require special education placement, but they cannot access grade level texts in middle and high school without a reading intervention. The RISE assessment provided the data to identify this population of students.

The program, developed under the direction of Professor Lowry Hemphill at Wheelock College, is integrated into the English Language Arts (ELA) course. Students who need the reading supports are placed in a separate ELA class, but are kept on track in terms of accumulating credits for graduation. The SERP team identified and developed materials written at a fourth grade level that have content appropriate for adolescents. Because middle school ELA teachers are not prepared to teach basic reading, a teacher preparation course was developed by Dr. Hemphill to accompany the intervention.

Now in its first year of piloting, the course is expected to increase the scores of students to a sixth grade level—the threshold for successful participation in middle and high school classes. The first semester of pilot data will be available in the summer of 2009.

Mapping Scientific Understanding

The SERP science work in San Francisco is designed to address two problems:

- 1 There is a yawning achievement gap between students who are doing well and those who are doing poorly in science, and that gap falls along demographic lines;
- 2 Both state standards and science textbooks cover far more topics than teachers can possibly teach, or students can possibly learn, in a single school year. Little of what is interesting and important in science survives the drive for coverage.

To compete with the long list of nations that are outperforming American students on international science assessments, teachers will need to provide a much deeper understanding of core scientific concepts to a much larger portion of the student population.

Mark Wilson (U.C. Berkeley) and his colleagues are working with a team of San Francisco science teachers and science experts from a variety of fields to map the progress of student thinking, from naïve to scientifically accurate, on a set of core science concepts. The stages of thinking mark the stepping stones across the achievement gap. The SERP team is developing and validating formative assessment items and creating scoring guides that will allow teachers to see where students fall in their understanding. In the next phase they will identify and/or develop instructional responses—including labs and other inquiry activities—to support the full range of students to move to higher levels of understanding.

The plan is to develop one progress map for each marking period in the school year for each of the middle grades. This will allow science teachers to go into greater depth on 4-6 science topics a year, while still using the text book materials to cover other topics in less depth. Following the development phase, future work will include a study comparing the overall performance of students who are taught using this strategy to the performance of students in classes that cover more material but do not go in depth in the subset of topics. The materials will be compatible with whatever science curriculum a district has chosen.

Building Capacity for School Improvement

Improvement initiatives often arrive at the schoolhouse door in the form of new programs or more rigorous demands for accountability. But whether change will take root and flourish, or die on the doorstep, depends more on the receptivity and readiness of those on the other side of that door than on the reform itself. A growing body of evidence points to a school's level of internal coherence, or capacity for collective action towards a shared goal, as critical to successful reform. The IC initiative (Internal Coherence), directed by Harvard University Professor Richard Elmore, is designed to foster school coherence, and thus improve the chances that innovations in instructional practice will result in sustainable improvements in student achievement.

Internal Coherence is high when teachers and administrators in the school trust each other, share core beliefs and practices, and have common expectations about how they will decide on and account for what they do. Despite our understanding that heightened levels of coherence are critical to raising achievement school-wide, we know little about how to intervene to foster this organizational capacity. The IC initiative, which works at both the school and district level, is experimenting with ways to do just that.

SERP is working with the leadership of the Boston Public Schools on coherence-building in a set of high priority schools. An Internal Coherence Survey has been developed and piloted, and can be accessed by other districts (www.serp.institute.org). Data from the survey can help districts target supports to the needs of the school. Or it can be used by a single school to better diagnose its own organizational strengths and weaknesses. The teacher survey is coupled with a set of observation protocols for instructional practice and interview protocols for selected teachers and administrators. Data from these sources are aggregated into a school profile that serves as a basis for discussion of how schools might improve their internal processes to incorporate new practices of teaching and learning. As these approaches are further developed and field-tested, results will be shared widely.

“We are not just interested in being studied. We want the research to focus on what goes on in our schools, and SERP helps make that happen.”

—Laura Cooper, Evanston Township High School

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