Welcome to the second issue of the Research Review. In this issue, we are continuing our focus on scientific research in education and the importance of collaborative research with our P-16 partners. The articles featured emphasize the use of rigorous evidence in identifying and implementing educational practices to improve student performance. Resources to assist you with your research are also included. We hope this information is valuable to you as you design and implement your research projects.

We are also continuing our emphasis on the importance of collaboration with our P-16 partners and on building deep and ongoing relationships to further impact student performance on campuses and districts across the state. Researchers who are interested and involved with campuses and districts are necessary if we are to collaboratively provide high-quality teachers and a high-quality education to the diverse student population in our state.

Thank you again for your support and commitment to the Regents’ Initiative for Excellence in Education.

Dr. William E. Reaves
Associate Vice Chancellor for Public Education

Dr. Marianne Vaughan, Kimberly Teague,
Director of Research, Coordinator for Professional Development
Research Resources features the description and location of a website with articles and information of interest to researchers and faculty in education as well as other disciplines. In each issue, an article will be selected from the website, and a synopsis of the article will describe its topics and content.

The Featured Website

U. S. Department of Education: Research and Statistics

http://www.Ed.gov/rschstat/

Many of you have already searched through the USDE website and found many articles and resources of interest. In the first edition of the Research Review, we focused on the information available on the What Works Clearinghouse web-page. In this issue, we are focusing on the Research and Statistics web-page of the USDE website.

The Research and Statistics page features information on a number of different topics including: Research, Statistics, Evaluation of Programs and Assessment of Students. You can click on each of these topic areas to locate additional information. For example, if you click on Statistics, you are given three additional choices: General Resources, Surveys and Program Areas, and Statistical Tools. If you click on Statistical Tools, you are referred to “Data Analysis Tools” and “NCES Resource Search.”

“Data Analysis Tools” includes information from multiple National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data sources, such as: school, college, and library locators; test questions from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); comparisons of school finances; and “build a customized table” from the Common Core of Data. The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) resource lets you search all of the publications and documents available from the NCES and tells how to order NCES products and sign up to receive e-mail alerts.

The NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data that are related to education in the United States. The NCES collects and reports information on the academic performance of the nation’s students as well as the literacy level of the adult population. For example, if you are interested in student
academic performance in urban public school districts, you can review student data on the NAEP mathematics 2003 assessment at grades 4 and 8 for nine urban public school districts across the country, including Houston ISD.

The survey program for early childhood provides detailed information on children's health, early care and early school experiences. The elementary/secondary survey program provides information on the condition of public and private education through the Common Core of Data.

The postsecondary-level data system includes a variety of data on the nation's public and postsecondary institutions including student financial aid, postsecondary faculty, doctoral degree recipients, transcript studies and various longitudinal studies.

The Research and Statistics page also has a section called “Overview” that lists and describes a number of organizations that provide research, evaluation and statistics including:

- Institute of Education Sciences,
- National Center for Education Statistics,
- National Assessment of Educational Progress,
- Policy and Program Study Service, and
- Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

Each of the organizations included on the page leads you to a number of different resources which can be valuable to you as you plan and design your collaborative research projects. You can also use the “Search” feature to find information related to specific topic areas. Guide to Evidence-Based Practices, one of our featured resources, is a resource from this website.
The Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy prepared this guide to assist educators in distinguishing scientifically based practices that are supported by rigorous evidence from those that are not. The guide also provides assistance to educators in implementing evidence-based interventions in schools and classrooms.

Several examples illustrate the types of evidence-based interventions that have been found to be successful for improving student outcomes in randomized controlled trials, such as one-on-one tutoring by qualified tutors for at-risk readers in grades 1-3 and instruction for early readers in phonemic awareness and phonics.

The guide is organized in four parts:

1. A description of the randomized controlled trial;
2. Evaluation of whether an intervention is backed by “strong” evidence of effectiveness;
3. Evaluation of whether an intervention is backed by “possible” evidence of effectiveness; and
4. Important factors to consider when implementing an evidence-based intervention.

The guide recommends the following steps in order to determine whether an educational intervention is supported by rigorous evidence.

1. An intervention can be considered as backed by “strong” evidence of effectiveness when:
   - The quality of studies involve randomized controlled trials that are well-designed, and implemented, and
   - The quantity of evidence involves trials that show effectiveness in two or more typical settings including a setting similar to that of the school in question.

2. If an intervention is not considered to be backed by “strong” evidence, then the evaluator must ask whether or not it is backed by “possible” evidence of effectiveness.
The types of evidence that can be considered as “possible” evidence are:

- Randomized controlled trials whose quality/quantity are good but fall short of “strong” evidence, and/or
- Comparison-group studies in which the intervention and comparison groups are very closely matched in academic achievement, demographics, and other characteristics.

The types of studies that cannot be considered as “possible” evidence are:

- Pre-post studies, which examine whether or not participants in an intervention improve or regress during the course of the intervention and then automatically assume that any improvements or regressions can be linked to the intervention;
- Comparison-group studies in which the intervention and comparison groups are not closely matched;
- “Meta-analyses” which include combining the outcomes of individual studies that do not respectively themselves meet the threshold for “possible” evidence.

If an evaluator considers both of the steps outlined above and the answer to both of these criteria are “no,” then the evaluator may surmise that the intervention is not supported by meaningful evidence.

When considering new interventions, there are several important factors to consider. Some questions to ponder are:

- Will the intervention have a positive effect in schools/classrooms and will its success depend on how closely the educators follow the details of the implementation?
- Will outcome data be necessary to determine whether or not the effects of the intervention in the schools differ significantly from the predicted evidence?

The document also includes very helpful appendices. Specific websites that could be useful in finding evidence-based educational interventions are listed. Of particular value, is a checklist that can be used in evaluating whether an intervention is backed by rigorous evidence. The reference section provides a list of documents, articles, and resources related to evidence-based interventions. The document can be found on the featured website, http://www.Ed.gov/rschstat/
American Educational Research Association
Publishing Educational Research: Guidelines and Tips

The AERA web site outlines several suggestions for submitting educational research. The two main topics of this section are comments with regard to building a manuscript and the steps to good writing. When building a manuscript, AERA suggests that writers consider the following:

1. Budget enough time to work on the first draft,
2. Decide what the goal of the paper should be then carry out steps to reach the goal,
3. Review the first draft,
4. Write a second draft that is as complete as possible,
5. Get feedback from colleagues and ask for constructive criticism,
6. Write the third draft after all the reviews are received and make changes,
7. Select journals in the field of intended study,
8. Check the journal guidelines for manuscript submission,
9. Send the manuscript to a journal,
10. Wait for the initial review.

The following steps for good writing techniques were adapted from work done by Richard Venezky (1991) of the University of Delaware. The steps included on the portion of the AERA web site for guidelines and tips to publishing educational research are:

1. Clear, concise writing takes effort. Take time and make time for writing. Write, rewrite and write some more.
2. Be direct and simple. Speak clearly.
4. Be fresh and lively; avoid clichés. Use good metaphors. Don't hesitate to make the article interesting. Use active verbs, and colorful language. Make your writing come alive by using poetic language.

When the submission process is complete, there are several other steps to be aware of in the publication of educational research. After a manuscript is submitted, an editor reviews the manuscript, decides if it is appropriate for review, and distributes it to reviewers. An acknowledgement is then sent to the author. The reviewers return the manuscript to the author with recommendations and feedback. The editor then makes a decision and notifies the author. Once the decision is made the author can choose whether or not to revise and resubmit the manuscript or to send it to another journal. It is useful to anticipate a critique rather than praise and to consider the reviews as ways to improve.
The Advanced Placement (AP) program is aimed at offering secondary-level students the opportunity to obtain college credit or advanced placement based on their performance on AP examinations. Generally, examination scores of 3 or higher are considered to be passing scores and students are usually awarded some type of college credit or advanced placement.

The AP program is overseen by the College Board and offers 34 AP courses in 19 different content areas. Nationally approximately 60% of high schools offer AP courses. In Texas high schools there have been steady increases in the number of students taking AP exams and scoring a 3 or better from 1994-2001.

African American and Hispanic students continue to be underrepresented in the snapshot of Texas students participating in AP. AP program participation has been found to be an accurate determiner of college success, according to a study entitled *Facts about the Advanced Placement Program* by the College Entrance Examination Board.

In October 2003, a study regarding the assessment of AP participation and academic success of students at Texas A&M University was completed by the Center for Mathematics and Science Education. The project staff who conducted this study were Dr. Timothy Scott, Dr. Homer Tolson, Adrienne Bentz and Yi-Hsuan Lee. The data for this study was obtained through the Student Information Management System of Texas A&M University for the 2001-2002 school year.

Three specific areas of inquiry were examined for this study. The first was the extent of AP participation for Texas A&M University freshmen. The second was the extent of significant differences in characteristics and performance scores of students within the AP participation group. The last area of inquiry dealt with the extent of significant differences in characteristics and performance scores for students who differed in terms of AP participation (AP vs. Non-AP).

The variables for the study involved high school and university performance and characteristic variables such as SAT, ACT, grade...
point ratio, group, gender, ethnicity, class size and class rank. The researchers found that almost 50% of freshmen for the fall 2001-2002 school year had some form of AP credit. Most of the AP credits were for English. Students who earned a score of 5 performed better academically than students scoring a 4. Students who earned a 4 outperformed students who earned a 3.

Major findings in this study revealed that, overall, students at Texas A&M University who received AP credit academically outperformed students in the Non-AP Group. AP students outperformed Non-AP students even when equated in terms of SAT ability. Males exhibited higher SAT scores on the average than females. However, females outperformed males in terms of grade point averages earned during their first year at Texas A&M University. African American, American Indian and Hispanic students were underrepresented in AP program data and had performance scores that were generally lower than other ethnic categories. Students from larger class size environments outperformed and made up a larger portion of the AP Group than students from medium and small class sizes. Students who were ranked higher in their class standings outscored those with lower class rankings.

Correlations involving measures of first-year university academic success, which tended to group together, and the indicators of high school academic ability, which tended to overlap with each other, exhibited low linear relationships. The range of relationships between characteristic variables and performance factors was from nearly zero to almost high.

Assessment of actual AP course participation is of interest to the research team and the Texas Center for Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate (AP/IB) Initiatives. A longitudinal study is needed to determine if the averages and differences found in this one-year examination of Texas A&M University apply to several freshmen classes. Future documentation will also be needed to determine the academic success of these students beyond the freshman year.

This study was among the first to study academic trends of Advanced Placement students in Texas. While more and more attention is being placed on high-quality research in the areas of public education, a void continues to exist in this state and beyond. The Center for Mathematics and Science Education at Texas A&M University is committed to gathering this much needed information, statistically analyzing it and informing policymakers based on Texas data.
Calls for education reform have focused the public’s attention on teachers and the quality of instruction in our nation’s classrooms. This study is the second year of cross-sectional survey research to address the issue of the quality of beginning teachers produced by the nine universities within The Texas A&M University System (TAMUS).

The first study of system-wide teacher preparedness was conducted last year under funding by the Commissioner’s Educational Research Initiative, 2002 (O’Dell, et al., 2002). Although minor changes in survey instruments and procedures were made in order to enhance data quality, the essence of the 2003 study remained consistent with that of the first and results could therefore be meaningfully compared.

The 2003 study consisted of three components. The first was a survey of all 2001 – 2002 TAMUS teacher graduates. They were surveyed regarding the degree to which they felt that their educational program prepared them to teach, perceived strengths and weaknesses of their programs and asked about factors that could influence readiness. The second component of this study was a survey of the teachers’ respective principals. The items within the principal survey paralleled several of those from the teacher instrument. The third component consisted of compiling a data set that documents beginning TAMUS teachers’ performance on the state licensure test.

The study sought to meet four primary objectives:

- The first objective was to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of perceptions of TAMUS teacher preparation programs. Given that
responses were solicited from two perspectives, ratings from each were evaluated in their own right, as well as compared. Answers to open-ended questions were documented and analyzed, providing opinions regarding program strengths and weaknesses in the teachers’ own words.

• The second objective was to identify factors including, and in addition to, the components of a teacher’s preparation program that could influence a teacher’s perceptions of preparedness. It was of particular interest to assess the potential impact of teaching in a high-need school. However, other variables—including whether or not an individual was teaching out-of-field and the percent of students with special needs—were also examined.

• The third objective was to expand the scope of the O’Dell, Goetz, Zhang, Lee, and Mohundra (2002) study. This was primarily accomplished through analysis of the beginning teachers’ teacher licensure performance. Teachers’ own accounts of their preparedness and performance on state licensure examinations have both been proposed as indicators of teacher quality (Kanstoroom and Finn, 1999). It was, therefore, of interest to assess the relationship between these two measures.

• Fourth, this study constituted a first step in establishing a longitudinal database that tracks perceptions of teaching preparedness.

Results indicated that, overall, TAMUS first-year teachers felt prepared for the classroom. With respect to specific activities, these individuals felt most prepared to engage in tasks that positively promote learning within the classroom and least prepared to meet the needs of Special Education and limited English proficiency (LEP) students, as well as to teach advanced content. Although principals largely agreed on these strengths and relative weaknesses, they consistently rated the teachers as more highly prepared than did the teachers themselves. Among the variables examined, perceived support (i.e., from parents, school administration, and experienced teachers) appeared to most strongly affect feelings of overall preparedness.

No relationship was found between state licensure performance and perceptions of preparedness. Finally, mean responses to 16 survey preparedness items were almost uniformly higher this year for teachers than they were last, indicating that beginning teachers in this year’s study felt more prepared to teach. The majority of increases were statistically significant. In general, the mean ratings given by principals in 2003 were slightly higher than those given in 2002, but not significantly so. Principals this year did, however, perceive teachers’ ability to teach the state’s curriculum content as noticeably higher.
Did you ever wonder what made faculty interested in research related to K-16 education? In this section, a faculty member from one of the A&M System universities will be featured and will describe their background and some of their favorite projects.

Dr. A. Anil Kumar,
Head of Physics Department and Professor of Electrical Engineering,
Prairie View A&M University

What made you choose physics as a profession?

I have always been excited about the natural world; in particular the origins of various phenomena and processes, and more importantly, how those phenomena and processes may be employed for the benefit of society.

What do you consider some of the more unique aspects of your education?

The educational system in India, especially in schools and at the B.S. level, is very different from that in the U.S. The school education is very rigorous and almost regimented. For instance, I had to choose a “group” in the 9th grade. I chose MPC (Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry). MPC subjects were taught every year in school, with heavy theory and laboratory content. You could fail and stay at the same grade level multiple times. Almost all of the languages and social studies, with heavy emphasis on international perspectives, were covered in school. College, apart from one language requirement, was almost entirely a rigorous exposure to MPC. Almost at every stage of my career, I have been exposed to fundamental connections between the various disciplines.

Why is the Science Education Laboratory (SEL) so important?

The SEL is a part of a much larger picture I have been developing to make science a part of the daily staple for students, their parents and teachers. Unfortunately, today in the U.S., science is known to be important but too tough and rigorous.

The perception of what science is also constitutes a major problem. Science is usually presented as complicated formulas, equations, ‘serious’ folks doing ‘serious’ things, sort of nerdy. Science should be presented as a mode of thinking, which can in turn be applied to many other disciplines.

The objective of the SEL is to provide hands-on learning experiences to high school students and their teachers, on a consistent basis, and thus to expose them to what college life...
will be. Based on the old adage, “What I hear I forget, what I see I remember and what I do I understand,” my hope is that SEL will stimulate and sustain interest in students and their teachers, so that a higher percentage of high school students will pursue advanced scientific education and scientific careers. Our activities will also include joint supervision of science and engineering projects of school students by their teachers and our faculty.

The SEL currently consists of several mechanical, magnetic and electrical experiments, PCs and Macs with interactive digital libraries, and other multi-media equipment and materials such as the SmartBoard. It also has design projects such as fuel cell cars. We plan to enhance the SEL to include experiments for more diverse learning and to expand to middle and elementary school students. The logistics of such development and expansion will, of course, depend upon feedback, assessment and funding, among other factors.

Has the Regents’ Initiative been important in your life?

Several of the changes I have made in the Physics Department were initiated upon my appointment as its head in Spring 2001. My appointment to the Academy for Educator Development has provided me with an opportunity to interact with a lot of intellectuals in the TAMU System and its partners – community colleges, schools, state government representatives and other organizations. Having had all my education in India where the educational system is very different, my own comprehension of the educational system in this country has been greatly enhanced by the Regents’ Initiative.

As a result, I have developed new contacts and collaborations in Texas and the rest of the U.S. The various meetings and conferences I attended and the panels I served on were extremely useful for me in my own development.

What have you learned about students in partnering with high schools?

I am still largely in the learning mode. The teachers and administrators I have met are very passionate about what they are doing, which is perhaps the most important and necessary trait for any profession. Everyone wants the same thing – better educated citizenry – but I see a sort of disconnect among the various groups: students, parents, teachers, university faculty, state officials, etc. As one of my favorite authors Chinua Achebe said, “Children are young, but they are not naïve. And they are honest. They are not going to keep wide awake if the story is boring. When they get excited you can see it in their eyes.”

Another of my favorite authors, the great Canadian scholar Northrop Frye referred to teaching as recreating the subject in the students’ minds. From my side, I think that we need to make our stories interesting. For instance, if I teach the same way I was taught (or worse, the same way I learned) I am doing a disservice to my students. Students today are different – more technologically prepared, more aware of the world – so we need to learn what they are looking for. We have the technology to customize the instruction and the learning processes.

What are some of your most innovative plans for PVAMU’s Physics Department?

The department has a small but excellent faculty and staff. We will continue innovating our programs and courses. Some of these innovations (subject to appropriate approvals) will include: a new physics teacher education/training program, new collaborative research efforts with other disciplines in the TAMU System, new collaborative “pipeline” degree programs (master’s and doctoral) in physics with TAMUS components and other universities, and a new master’s program in physics education (a new program track overlapping with business.)
Characteristics of Successful Principals in South Texas

Dr. Carolyn McCreight and Dr. Claudio Salinas
Texas A&M International University

In August of 2001, Dr. Carolyn McCreight and Dr. Claudio Salinas of Texas A&M International University conducted a study of the characteristics of successful principals in South Texas. This study is especially pertinent when considering the growing number of limited English proficient students in Texas, many of which attend schools in south Texas. McCreight and Salinas sent a 10-item questionnaire to 162 South Texas principals whose campuses earned exemplary or recognized ratings according to the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for at least two consecutive years from 1998-2000. The questionnaire was designed to highlight successful administrative approaches for increasing student success.

According McCreight and Salinas, principals of successful schools identified three essential approaches that contribute to making a school high performing:

- Collaborative development of a school vision and mission supporting high student achievement,
- Continuous monitoring and adjusting instruction to meet the needs of each student,
- The creation of a positive school climate, a “family” campus atmosphere supportive of student success.

The questionnaire revealed that as a group, South Texas administrators ranked the establishment of a school vision and mission as most important for school success. The survey results also indicated that “high expectations for students and staff, a caring attitude by both principal and staff for the students’ personal and academic achievement, and teachers skilled in teaching students with varying needs were the most important factors influencing student success” (McCreight & Salinas, 2001). Administrators reported that in order to in-
crease student attendance incentives, rewards, and recognition were most often used.

When asked about meeting the needs of limited English proficient students, the administrators reported that students should be placed with a certified bilingual or English-as-a-second-language teacher skilled in diagnostics, monitoring, and teaching students with language needs. When asked about working with migrant students, the administrators indicated that peer tutoring and having a certified bilingual or English-as-a-second-language teacher was of utmost importance. In order to meet the needs of students with a history of low achievement the administrators reported that assessing student needs, proper placement on academic learning level, and appropriate program use were fundamental to the success of these students.

When recruiting new teachers, the principals look for experienced teachers with positive attitudes who are willing to meet the needs of each student and attend trainings as needed. The administrators ranked a positive school climate and the consistent monitoring of student achievement as the most important factors influencing school success. The major suggestions that the administrators would offer to other principals seeking high student achievement were:

- Set a vision and mission and sell that vision and mission to teachers, students and parents;
- Know the students and their needs and monitor student achievement regularly; and
- Celebrate teacher and student success.

According to McCreight and Salinas, future research on the topic of leadership characteristics of border administrators might include superintendents in high-poverty, high-performing districts.
Georgia A&M University-Corpus Christi and Roy Miller High School School-University Partnership: A successful collaboration focused on K-12 achievement

Dr. Timothy Wells and Dr. Martin Ward, Professors of Education
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Dr. Timothy Wells and Dr. Martin Ward, Professors of Education at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, are actively involved in a field-based partnership between TAMU-CC and Miller High School (MHS), which began in 1998.

Dr. Wells and Dr. Ward admit that gaining the trust and interest of MHS faculty proved to be challenging at the beginning. “The MHS teachers were skeptical to work with us so I went up and down the hall to recruit them to work with our pre-service teachers. Finally, I invited them all for a taco breakfast, they came in and we started talking; after two years the teachers stopped me in the hallway to request a pre-service teacher for their classroom,” said Dr. Wells.

The partnership is beneficial for TAMU-CC pre-service teachers because they gain real-world, hands-on experience. Pre-service teachers are able to observe a variety of teaching strategies and they are able to gain knowledge of the demands of teaching students in a low socio-economic in-
ner-city school with a diverse population.

TAMU-CC pre-service teachers also tutored MHS students who struggled with the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. After tutoring, MHS students who had previously failed the TAAS test had a 100 percent pass rate for the 2001-2002 academic year. The tutoring program will continue with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test.

TAMU-CC field-based classes meet twice a week at MHS and course goals include:

• Gaining awareness of the complexities involved in the daily operation of Miller High School;
• Improving the understanding of teaching as a profession and overall professional competence;
• Developing instructional planning skills;
• Increasing knowledge of instructional evaluation and student assessment;
• Utilizing technology to support/enhance instruction;
• Preparing for the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES);
• A reflection journal which describes an event and analyzes the incident; and
• Classroom teaching and analysis – Teach three lessons in a classroom assigned by the teacher.

TAMU-CC pre-service teachers also have the opportunity to work on the Legacy Project which consists of giving a power point presentation to MHS students regarding the importance of attending college, the variety of majors available to study, the advantages of job opportunities and higher incomes. In addition, the pre-service teachers introduced and promoted teaching as a career. “Pre-service teachers help recruit MHS students into col-
lege because the high school students are able to observe college kids who are becoming teachers...they relate to people just a few years older than them,” explained Janet Cunningham, Dean of Instruction at Miller High School.

Ms. Cunningham advised that TAMU-CC faculty, pre-service teachers and MHS faculty have developed a great working relationship over the past five years and she is looking forward to continually enhancing the partnership.

A Snapshot of Miller High School Demographics

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<tr>
<th>Total Student Enrollment:</th>
<th>1,570</th>
<th>Teachers by Years of Experience:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Distribution:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning Teachers 6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>1-5 Years Experience 17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>6-10 Years Experience 20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>11-20 Years Experience 28.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>Over 20 Years Experience 27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
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*All information above is from the Texas Education Agency’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). For more information on Miller High School, including test scores, go to www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aegis
Dr. Deanna Nekovei, Associate Professor of Education at Texas A&M University-Kingsville and Coordinator of the King Ranch Family Trust Early Education Center, oversees a collaborative project between the King Ranch Early Education Center, Texas A&M University–Kingsville and Kingsville ISD. The collaboration strives to promote excellence in education and Dr. Nekovei works with both Harrel Elementary and Epiphany Episcopal schools to implement the Center’s projects which provide mentorship and hands-on experiences for pre-service teachers and students.

Dr. Nekovei’s Academy Fellowship project, Making Cultural Connections with Web Cams, is one of the Center’s newest additions. This program seeks to broaden students’ learning by providing them with an avenue of communication with peers across the U.S. on topics of interest to children. The program addresses questions such as: What is it like to live in rural Pennsylvania? How are people alike and different from one another? Thus far, students have shared their cultural experiences via email and fax. The mission of this project is to enhance the children’s understanding and respect for other groups and to improve students’ ability to articulate communication.

Other projects between the Center, TAMU-K and KISD are:

**Writing from Predictable Text:** This project focuses on increasing reading and writing skills in the kindergarten classroom. The teacher reads a picture book which contains repetition and the children negotiate the text following the pattern of the book. The student and teacher are able to write a story together utilizing an interactive writing format.

**An Alphabet Book a Week Keeps Illiteracy at Bay:** This program was initiated because many children began first grade without substantial knowledge of the alphabet and its role in reading and writing. Alphabet books enable children to learn about letters, their individual names, individual sounds, the way they look, that letters make words (e.g., c-a-t) and in turn, how words work (e.g., cat, hat, mat). The success of the Alphabet project led former Harrel Elementary principal Edna Figueroa to purchase alphabet books for the school’s three remaining pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms.

**Shared Reading in Content Areas:** The focus of this project is to integrate the shared reading of Science Big Books into the 4th grade curriculum. Purposes of this project include improving reading skills and science content knowledge and instilling a love of science and reading in children. Teacher-administered assessments show that the students’ knowledge
of the special demands of information text was increased.

**Designated Master Teachers:** Master teachers have been selected to act as a liaison between their school and TAMU-K. They also assist Dr. Nekovei with the implementation of new Center projects on their campuses. Velma Longoria, kindergarten teacher at Harrel Elementary, holds a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education from TAMU-K. Ms. Longoria presents professional development projects in the area of early literacy and she also serves as a mentor for colleagues and pre-service teachers.

Dr. Nekovei hopes that the collaborative efforts of the Early Education Center will enhance efforts to recruit, train and keep the best and brightest educators in the teaching profession in order to meet the needs of pre-kindergarten through fifth grade level children in South Texas. By continually developing innovative programs that positively impact student achievement, Dr. Nekovei and the teachers and students of Kingsville ISD are building a model early education program in South Texas.

**For more information about these projects please contact Dr. Deanna Nekovei at Texas A&M University-Kingsville:** kfdln00@tamuk.edu

**Harrel Elementary**
**Kingsville ISD**

Total Student enrollment: 237  
Ethnic Distribution:  
- African American: 6.8%  
- Hispanic: 81.0%  
- White: 11.8%  
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 0.04%  
Economically Disadvantaged: 81.9%  
Limited English Proficiency (LEP): 19.8%  
Special Education: 4.02%  
Teachers by Years of Experience:  
- Beginning Teachers: 0%  
- 1-5 Years Experience: 12.9%  
- 6-10 Years Experience: 0%  
- 11-20 Years Experience: 38.8%  
- Over 20 Years Experience: 48.3%  

*All information above is from the Texas Education Agency’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). For more information on Harrel Elementary School, including test scores, go to www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

**The Web Cam project mentioned above has been presented as follows:**

Nekovei, D. & Smrekar, J. (November 2003). *Making cultural and linguistic connections for young children through the use of web cameras: Enabling children to share home cultures by eliminating the problems of time and place.* National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
Research Review

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