

Regional Educational Laboratory–Appalachia: Needs Assessment

Client: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance

Overview

The Regional Educational Laboratory–Appalachia (REL–Appalachia) seeks to identify and meet the educational research needs of state and local education agencies, school districts, and schools in the Appalachian region (Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee). Part of a network of 10 such labs across the country, REL–Appalachia is designed to conduct and disseminate research that supports continuous improvement in student outcomes, helps close achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students, and achieves other key goals of the No Child Left Behind Act. Emphasis is on long-term, rigorous evaluations of public education programs and short-term research projects investigating and analyzing education policies and practices.

Insight designed and implemented an annual needs assessment and provided analytical, data collection, and report writing services to REL–Appalachia. Each year, Insight submitted an annual report to the National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance on the needs of stakeholders throughout the region:

- The year 1 report documented the needs of state directors and school principals based on Insight’s discussions with representatives from state education agencies and a series of focus groups with school principals.
- In year 2, Insight interviewed school superintendents to identify their educational priorities and their information needs and establish connections between educators and laboratory researchers.
- In year 3, Insight developed targeted issue briefs on various topics such as “universal pre-K” and the call for providing high-quality early education, improving rural education, and high school reform.



- In year 4, Insight convened several 1-day professional development opportunities for stakeholders; these events aimed to bring evidence-based practices to practitioners. The events were typically based on the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides and included issues such as turning around low-performing schools and preventing students from dropping out of school.

Products

Selected products follow:

- *Regional Needs Assessment 2006: Identifying Research-Related Information Needs of School Principals* (June 2007)
- *Regional Needs Assessment 2007: Identifying Research-Related Information Needs of School Superintendents* (January 2008)
- *Issue Brief From the REL–Appalachia: Parental Involvement in Education* (June 2008)
- *Issue Brief From the REL–Appalachia: State Initiatives to Improve Access to High-Quality Pre-K Programs* (January 2008)