

A stylized illustration of a child in a yellow shirt and polka-dot pants holding a computer monitor and keyboard. The background is a stylized globe with green landmasses and blue oceans. The child is standing on a green landmass, and the computer is floating in the air above them. The overall color palette is vibrant, with purples, blues, greens, and yellows.

A COMPANION TO The School Portfolio:  
A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement

# The Example School Portfolio

An **Eye On Education** Book

By Victoria L. Bernhardt,  
Leni L. von Blanckensee,  
Marcia S. Lauck, Frances F. Rebello,  
George L. Bonilla, and Mary M. Tribbey

# THE EXAMPLE SCHOOL PORTFOLIO

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*The School Portfolio:  
A Comprehensive Framework  
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by

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And, finally, in appreciation, we dedicate this product to all educators continuously improving their learning environments for students.

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Education for the Future Initiative offers School Portfolio, Data Analysis, and Database workshops at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

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## Foreword

### Leading by Example Improves Student Success

The SBC Foundation<sup>1</sup>, along with the Southwestern Bell, Pacific Bell, Nevada Bell, and Ameritech Foundations, has a tradition of leading by example. Through the volunteer work of our employees, the charitable giving arm of the Foundation, and the civic leadership of our company, we have promoted positive change throughout our service territory.

It is our heritage of community leadership that makes us proud to continue our support of the critical work of Victoria L. Bernhardt, a pioneer in education reform. We've supported Dr. Bernhardt and the Education for the Future Initiative for nearly a decade because we believe that through this organization's leadership in education reform, we've helped students achieve academic success. We've seen measurable increases in student achievement in schools across the nation through the efforts of Education for the Future.

*The Example School Portfolio, A Companion to the School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement* encourages schools to commit to and use school portfolios to implement change and increase student learning. In this book, Dr. Bernhardt, and her associates, Leni von Blanckensee, Marcy Lauck, Fran Rebello, George Bonilla, and Mary Tribbey, demonstrate how the School Portfolio clearly spells out the purpose and vision of a school and then measures performance against that vision.

Leading by example through work such as the School Portfolio, the Education for the Future Initiative has been doing what most legislators have only been able to talk about. They have implemented a results-oriented approach to education that focuses on measurable student performance and achievement.

As leaders in our industry and in the communities we serve, we share in the Education for the Future Initiative vision of broadening educational opportunity for every child and increasing the potential for each student to succeed. We hope this book is helpful to educators and school administrators who share that vision.

Gloria Delgado  
President  
SBC Foundation  
San Antonio, Texas

<sup>1</sup>The SBC Foundation, along with the Southwestern Bell, Pacific Bell, Nevada Bell, and Ameritech Foundations, is the charitable foundation of SBC Communications and its family of companies, including Pacific Bell, Southwestern Bell, Nevada Bell, SNET, Cellular One, and Ameritech properties.

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## Preface

The mission of the Education for the Future Initiative<sup>2</sup> is to support and build the capacity of schools to provide an education that will prepare students to be anything they want to be in the future.

*The Example School Portfolio, A Companion to the School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement* is offered to you in the spirit of this mission. The purpose of *The Example School Portfolio* is two-fold. The first purpose is to support the efforts of school personnel as they design and create their own school portfolio. The second purpose is to demonstrate the uses of the school portfolio as a continuous improvement tool.

From our experiences of 10 years, we know that schools committed to using school portfolios have been able to implement systemic changes and student achievement increases in one to two years. With the use of their school portfolios, these schools are able to maintain the changes over time, as well as obtain extramural funding to support the implementation of their visions.

The secret to the success of the school portfolio is basically in the implementation of three concepts—

- data-based decision-making
- alignment of everything the school does to a vision that is shared by all the people who make up the learning organization
- documenting the work and results

One of the greatest benefits of the school portfolio is having a place to organize school data in a meaningful way, from demographic data about the school's clients to data about the impact of their school processes on student learning. Used effectively, these data must be organized, kept historically, and must be available to any member of the organization when they want to use it. With the portfolio, members of the organization are able to see how all the parts of the school work together to implement the vision. The portfolio clarifies what needs to change to achieve alignment of the parts to the vision. When all elements of the school are in alignment, one plan can be created to implement the school's vision. Joel Barker (1993) describes in one of our favorite quotes:

*A vision without action is merely a dream.  
Action without vision just passes the time.  
A vision with action can change the world.*

---

<sup>2</sup>Education for the Future Initiative is located at California State University, Chico, whose Research Foundation acts as Education for the Future's not-for-profit Fiscal Agent.

We have also found that when schools document where they are and where they want to be, their growth and progress will encourage them to continue implementing change and moving forward. Those who do not document lose track of where they are and what they agreed to do. The school portfolio is the documentation of process, products, and progress. The school portfolio works equally well with high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools.

*The Example School Portfolio* represents one hypothetical (River Road Elementary) school's approach to building a school portfolio. This school neither began with a totally committed staff nor with the data they needed to make their decision-making purposeful and in alignment with their vision. Over the three years represented in this portfolio, one can see what it took to get the data teachers needed to understand how to meet the needs of all their students, and to understand what processes needed to change to get different results. Readers can also see how easy it is to look in on another school and relate to how they operate. By standing back and looking at the school, one can see clearly what the school could do to make significant changes to get different results. After reading this book, teachers and administrators will look at their own school with new eyes and find those elements that, if pulled into alignment, could make all the difference.

Throughout the book, the authors have written annotations in the margins. At the end of each chapter, we summarize what River Road staff wrote with respect to each section, other things that could be included in that section of a school portfolio, and our recommendations for getting more effective results sooner. In addition, we provide insights about how the sections work together to lead to systemic change, and offer practical advice about how to work with staff to get the work done efficiently and effectively. School personnel can borrow words and ideas, and see how the sections fit together as they create their own sections. Although written about an elementary school, this book is applicable to schools of all grade levels.

On the basis of reading this book and the previously published *The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*, Second Edition, we encourage you and your school to consider creating a school portfolio, if you do not have one already. If you do have a school portfolio, we hope you find something in this book that will improve and support what you have already done.

Best of luck to you. Feel free to let us know your impressions of *The Example School Portfolio, A Companion to the School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*. We will be continuously improving it.

Sincerely,

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# Part 1

## Introduction

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# Chapter 1

## The Need for an Example School Portfolio

## The Need for an Example School Portfolio

Since the early 1990's, when Education for the Future Initiative schools first began using school portfolios, school personnel have been requesting a book that would describe step-by-step procedures for creating their own school portfolio—a “how-to” book. In response to that request, and to enable the dissemination of the work, *The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement* (Bernhardt, 1994; Second Edition, 1998) was published, and workshops to assist schools in developing school portfolios were (and still are) conducted by Education for the Future Initiative staff.

As a direct result of the school portfolio book and workshops, school personnel became curious to see examples of portfolios created by schools that had successfully used the process. To provide those examples, Education for the Future Initiative staff duplicated excerpts of a few schools' actual portfolios and lugged those heavy binders to their workshops, apologizing to participants because they could only look at the example school portfolios during that workshop session. Occasionally, upon special request, and when a school swore on a stack of portfolios that they would return the examples on a specific day, Education for the Future Initiative staff reluctantly left an example with them. Problems soon developed. When the examples were not returned by the date of the next workshop, participants in that workshop were consequently precluded from seeing the school portfolio example for their schools' grade levels.

To address the obvious need for an example school portfolio that school personnel could keep, Education for the Future Initiative Associates collaborated to produce this book, which can be used to assist school personnel with the development of their own school portfolio. Data from real schools have been used to create this fictitious school portfolio.

*The Example School Portfolio* is a companion to *The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*. With these two publications, any school can design and create their own school portfolio. *The Example School Portfolio* is organized around the Education for the Future Initiative Continuous Improvement Continuums. The research behind each of the Continuums is presented in the school portfolio book. The Continuums appear in both *The School Portfolio* and *The Example School Portfolio* books, along with recommendations for using them with staff for measuring your school's progress towards comprehensive schoolwide improvement. An additional publication, *Data Analysis for Comprehensive Schoolwide Improvement*, explains the importance of data and how to effectively gather and use data to make better decisions and to promote systemic change. The methods used to analyze the data shown in this example are displayed in the data analysis book.

## What is a School Portfolio?

A school portfolio is a purposeful collection of work that tells the story of a school and the staff's systemic continuous improvement efforts to better serve their clients—the students. The school portfolio clearly spells out the purpose and vision of a school. It measures and ensures congruence of all parts of the organization to enable the implementation of the vision. A school plan and vision are key to moving a school or district towards continuous improvement.

Purposes and potential uses of a school portfolio are to—

- establish one living document that describes an overall school plan and the school's mission, vision, beliefs, and rationale for improvement
- document efforts on a number of elements important to school improvement and align them with the vision
- understand the complexities of the schoolwide organization
- provide readily accessible and necessary information for data-based decision-making
- reflect on progress and purpose
- troubleshoot the continuous improvement efforts of the school
- assess and guide the school's unique approach to continuous schoolwide improvement
- be accountable
- communicate to students, staff, parents, and community
- replace a local, state, or regional accreditation process<sup>3</sup>
- apply for resources

The elements of a school portfolio include the following:

- *Information and Analysis* establishes systematic and rigorous reliance on data for decision-making in all parts of the organization.
- *Student Achievement* supports schools in moving teachers from providers of information to researchers who understand and can predict the impact of their actions on student achievement.
- *Quality Planning* assists schools in developing the elements of a strategic plan including a mission, goals, action plan, outcome measures, and continuous improvement and evaluation.
- *Professional Development* helps staff members, teachers, and principals change the manner in which they work, i.e., how they make decisions; gather, analyze, and utilize data; plan, teach, and monitor achievement; evaluate personnel; and, assess the impact of new approaches to instruction and assessment on students.

<sup>3</sup> The School Portfolio is *not* an add-on. It becomes the story of the school and the work behind implementing the vision. Many state and regional accreditation associations are recognizing the benefits of the School Portfolio and allow schools to use it in lieu of their traditional requirements.

- *Leadership* assists schools in thinking through shared decision-making and leadership structures that will work with their specific population, climate, and vision.
- *Partnership Development* assists schools in understanding the purposes of, approaches to, and planning for educational partnerships with business and community groups, parents, other educational professionals, and students.
- *Continuous Improvement and Evaluation* assists schools in further understanding the interrelationships of the components of continuous improvement and in improving their processes and products on an ongoing basis.

### *The Purpose of This Book*

The first purpose of this book is to support the efforts of school personnel as they design and create their own school portfolio. The second purpose is to demonstrate the use of the school portfolio as a continuous improvement tool. School personnel can borrow words and ideas, and see how the sections fit together as they create their own sections. Readers will see how the elements of the school have to be in alignment in order to attain sustainable student achievement increases. Readers will also see how different results can be achieved through an understanding of the impact of the instructional strategies used throughout the school—the school's processes. Feel free to copy the beginning pages of the school portfolio chapters for your beginning pages. (These are the pages that have the Education for the Future Initiative copyright at the bottom of the pages—pages 29, 32, 88, 124, 146, 162, 180, and 208.) You may also request the digital files via our webpage—<http://eff.csuchico.edu>.

### *The Organization of This Book*

*The Example School Portfolio* is a prototype of a real school portfolio. The school, River Road Elementary, is fictitious; however, the data and examples come from a number of real schools.

The work revealed in the River Road Portfolio took place over a three-year period. We have divided the work into three parts: Introduction; The River Road School Portfolio; and Summary and Conclusions. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the portfolio and a summary of how the work evolved in the school over the three years. Part 2 which encompasses Chapters 3 through 10 are the River Road portfolio. These sections are organized

around the Education for the Future Initiative Continuous Improvement Continuums found in Appendix A of this book. Specifically, those sections and chapters appear as follows:

Chapter 3	Introduction to the River Road School Portfolio
Chapter 4	Information and Analysis
Chapter 5	Student Achievement
Chapter 6	Quality Planning
Chapter 7	Professional Development
Chapter 8	Leadership
Chapter 9	Partnership Development
Chapter 10	Continuous Improvement and Evaluation

On the pages in each of these chapters, the authors have written annotations in the margins which are intended to support you as you build your school portfolio. At the end of each chapter, the authors summarize—

- the progress made by the school during the three-year period and what is driving the results they are getting
- traditional items schools would want to put in that section of their school portfolio
- how the work demonstrated in that particular chapter makes a difference for continuous improvement
- recommendations for working with staff to help them create their own school portfolio efficiently and effectively

Additionally, from the perspective of the authors' practical experiences, you will find insights into each section and how the sections work together with the other sections are shared.

Part 3, Chapter 11, Summary and Conclusions, pulls the River Road Portfolio, a review of the elements of a school portfolio, and the recommendations of the authors together into a conclusive discussion. Appendix A houses the Education for the Future Initiative Continuous Improvement Continuums along with recommendations for their use. Finally, Appendix B shares some mechanics for putting the actual portfolio together. We have tried not to duplicate ideas already provided in *The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*.



### *Learn from This Example*

Our recommendation to you is to learn from this example. Start your continuous improvement efforts with the school portfolio process and with the commitment of your staff. The Education for the Future Initiative Continuous Improvement Continuums are excellent for organizing your school portfolio, for measuring where your school is right now, and for discussing what evidence you have to demonstrate you are where you think you are.

You will see student achievement increases when all the elements of your school are aligned with your vision, when you have analyzed your data to know the results you are getting now based on current processes, and when you have altered current processes to get different results. Documenting your work through the school portfolio process will make a significant difference in realizing increases in student achievement and implementing systemic change.

River Road is far from a perfect school. It started this process a little haphazardly, but eventually embraced it. See if you can understand how you can get their third-year results by the end of year one. It is possible!



# Chapter 2 Overview of the River Road Elementary School Portfolio

## Overview of the River Road Elementary School Portfolio

In the eight chapters that follow is a fictitious school portfolio organized around the Education for the Future Initiative Continuous Improvement Continuums. The portfolio is written as if the teachers of the school, River Road Elementary, have documented three years of their work in this portfolio. In an actual school portfolio of a real school, the narratives would be written by staff members based on input from all staff (this element is further discussed in the Leadership Chapter.) The real school would also include many artifacts showing its work. Examples of artifacts or evidence have been noted throughout this fictitious school portfolio, and some have been created for inclusion in this book.

This chapter presents an overview of how the work of this school evolved over the three years it committed to developing and using the school portfolio process. Additionally, it describes what the school looked like the year before it started using the school portfolio. It projects how this work might evolve in the next two years if the staff continues to progress at the same rate they have worked during the initial three years. Tables 1 through 8 in this chapter display these five years of growth and change. A brief summary of each section of the table follows a short introduction to River Road Elementary School.

Chapter 10, Continuous Improvement and Evaluation, summarizes the River Road staff's assessment on the Continuous Improvement Continuums during the three years of this school portfolio work. It is an excellent summary of the progress and next steps of River Road staff as they progressed over the years. You might want to begin with this chapter if another overview is desired.

### Introduction to River Road Elementary School

This brief chapter introduces us to River Road staff's purpose for creating a school portfolio, and sets the context of the change efforts documented in the portfolio.

Information and Analysis

TABLE 1  
River Road Elementary School Growth

Pre-Existing	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS					
Accomplished	Accomplished	Accomplished	Accomplished	Planned	Planned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Title 1 database (at the district level)</li> <li>♦ ELD database (at the district level)</li> </ul> (Both used to produce reports for state.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Reading Recovery teachers collected and used Reading Recovery scores</li> <li>♦ Standardized test scores used in paper form by teachers</li> <li>♦ Collected baseline questionnaire data from parents, students, and staff (yearly hereafter)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Established school database (made data available to teachers, but used primarily by Reading Recovery teachers and administration)</li> <li>♦ Reports provided and discussed in staff meetings</li> <li>♦ Staff read about their students' cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Provided reports with historical assessment data of individual students to each teacher</li> <li>♦ Developed and collected authentic assessment scores</li> <li>♦ Evaluated interventions and special programs</li> <li>♦ Began follow-up of students after they leave the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Give teachers access to networked database including use of optional fields</li> <li>♦ Add intervention strategies to database</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Use optional fields within database at classroom level</li> <li>♦ Use comprehensive data to predict and prevent potential problems at classroom level</li> </ul>

River Road is a school of over 900 students, with many low income families and a growing immigrant population. River Road became purposeful about the need to work more systemically as a result of two events: first, the superintendent mandated that staff must bring all students up to academic grade level by the end of grade three; and second, shortly thereafter, several staff members attended a school portfolio workshop and saw that using a systemic approach, based on data and documented in the school portfolio, could help them discover how to make the school responsive to the needs of all students.

River Road started building their school portfolio without knowing their clients, which you will witness to be a most critical element in the success in their school's continuous improvement efforts. Like most staff, River Road teachers thought they knew their students and their families, but were surprised when they collected the data and saw the facts. River Road began with very little data of any kind for staff to use to improve their instructional processes. They had standardized test scores and some demographics. Staff and administration used data only in a reactive sense. In other words, data were used to provide reports for district, state, regional, and federal accreditation and funding agencies. The reports were not shared throughout the school. In fact, many reports were created at the district level and

never seen by school staff. As staff began their continuous improvement work, they realized data held the answers to many of their questions:

- How and what do we need to improve to increase student learning?
- How can we get all students reading on grade level?
- How do we know if what we are doing is making a difference?

By year two, staff had put together a lot of data, but it was not deep enough or useful for their immediate or long-term needs. From the time staff knew they needed data, to the time they generated the database that would give them all the data they wanted, almost three years had passed. After two-and-a-half years, teachers were able to chart the previous year's standardized test scores and authentic assessment ratings for each of their students. Now, in year four, they are in a position to set goals for the end of the year, work backward to determine where the students should be every month in order to reach the end-of-year goals, and measure monthly to know if they are getting there and to know if they need to adjust instruction for the class or any student. The networked database accessible to teachers enables them to predict and prevent potential student failure.

Schools need this type of database in order to conduct action research, to understand the impact of their processes on student learning, and to be able to predict and prevent student failure. This work requires district support and dollars. If districts can build databases that can also be accessed and used by schools and allocate personnel to help them with this work, the results would be tremendous.

Student Achievement

TABLE 2  
River Road Elementary School Growth

*Vision Written*

*Present*

Pre-Existing	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<b>STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT</b> <i>Goal 1—Early Literacy: All students will read at or above grade level by grade three</i>					
Accomplished	Accomplished	Accomplished	Accomplished	Planned	Planned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided Reading Recovery for bottom 20% of grade one (2 teachers)</li> <li>Piloted literacy groups in grade two</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented literacy groups in all grades two</li> <li>Piloted literacy groups in grade one (2 teachers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented literacy groups in kindergarten and grades one</li> <li>Extended Reading Recovery (43 additional part-time teachers)</li> <li>Examined student writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Added speech and language screening for students below-grade level before placing in literacy groups</li> <li>Encouraged all teachers to use Reading Recovery strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement Reading Recovery strategies in all classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement Reading Recovery strategies in all classrooms</li> </ul>
<i>Goal 2—Standards and Assessment: Curriculum and assessment will be based on rigorous standards</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some authentic assessment and student portfolios used in some individual classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas shared by teachers on how student portfolios can reflect language arts standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created six-level rubric in writing</li> <li>Encouraged use of student portfolios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used student self-assessment through portfolios as part of parent/teacher/student conferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align curriculum with standards and assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align curriculum with standards and assessments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Districtwide workshops in student portfolio process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District developed language arts standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District developed language arts assessments</li> <li>District developed math standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District developed math assessments</li> <li>District developed science standards</li> <li>District aligned state and local standards</li> <li>District tied report cards to standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District will develop science assessments</li> <li>District will develop social studies standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District will develop social studies assessments</li> </ul>

See Table 3 for Goals 3 and 4

TABLE 3  
River Road Elementary School Growth

<i>Vision Written</i>		<i>Present</i>			
Pre-Existing	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<b>STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (Continued)</b>		<b>Goal 3—Technology:</b> <i>Technology will be integrated into the curriculum at all grade levels to enhance student learning</i>			
<b>Accomplished</b>	<b>Accomplished</b>	<b>Accomplished</b>	<b>Accomplished</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Planned</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed technology plan</li> <li>Some classrooms had and made use of computers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided at least one computer per classroom</li> <li>Teachers started to share ideas of computer uses in the curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revised technology plan</li> <li>Added technology coordinator</li> <li>Began Tech Wizards in grades four and five</li> <li>Provided second computer to all classes in grades four and five</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District network was established</li> <li>Technology coordinator began</li> <li>Technology plan is implemented</li> <li>Provided second computer to all classes in grades two and three</li> <li>Extended Tech Wizards to grades four and five</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate technology into project-based units</li> <li>Provide second computer to all classes in kindergarten and grade one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate technology into project-based units across all grade levels</li> </ul>
<b>Goal 4—Hands-on Project-based Instruction:</b> <i>Students will have greater access to the curriculum through hands-on, project-based learning</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District adopted hands-on science program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented project-based science units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District adopted hands-on math program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Math and science project-based units were developed and used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align Adopt-A-Watershed units to science standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement Adopt-A-Watershed units schoolwide</li> </ul>

Staff members at River Road were congenial with one another but pretty much existed in their own isolated classrooms when they began their continuous improvement efforts. Staff knew they needed to change that approach. The teachers' ultimate goal was to begin working together for the benefit of the students by building a continuum of learning that makes sense for all students. During year one, teachers realized they needed data and standards for student performance and assessment to help inform their efforts. They conformed to the district timeline, taking four years to create their baseline standards and assessments. Because they had data for Reading Recovery, the teachers could clearly understand the processes that needed to change to get different results in reading. They made progress with primary reading instruction and achieved positive results.