



What Matters Most

Instruction & Curriculum | Student Supports | Schools & School Systems

2009 Annual Report

McREL

FROM OUR CEO

In 2009, we forged a new corporate vision for the future of our organization. It's a vision grounded in an inescapable reality we've confronted in our research on students and schools, as well as our experience working shoulder-to-shoulder with educators nationwide.

The reality in which we work is this: nearly one-third of all U.S. high school students fails to graduate with their peers and another third fails to graduate with the skills needed to succeed in college or the workplace. An even harsher reality is that in some impoverished communities, only about one in six students manages to graduate from high school. Failing to graduate can be devastating, decreasing earning potential and increasing chances of incarceration and a shorter life span.

We know the odds of success are stacked heavily against many students. Some manage to beat these odds, which is both remarkable and inspiring. But witnessing a lucky few students beat overwhelming odds is not enough. We envision a future in which the odds are changed for children everywhere.

We are convinced that with the right focus, support, and commitment, education systems can dramatically improve students' chances for success. Our vision for McREL is that we will be the organization that changes the odds for student success by

- 1 Conducting research and providing objective analyses to focus educators squarely on doing **what matters most**
- 2 Offering professional development and assistance that translate research into everyday action, helping educators implement **what works**
- 3 Developing new innovations and solutions that move beyond outdated and ineffective methods to provide **what's next**

We have developed a five-component **What Matters Most** framework, which identifies key leverage points for schools systems—areas where their efforts and investments of time and resources will most likely result in high returns for student success. As described briefly here, we have focused our own work on helping educators address these critical areas.

I invite you to learn more about McREL, our What Matters Most framework, and the success stories we've highlighted in this summary by visiting our website at www.mcrel.org. More important, I invite you—whether you're an old friend or new acquaintance of McREL—to learn more about how we can work together to help change the odds for the students you serve.



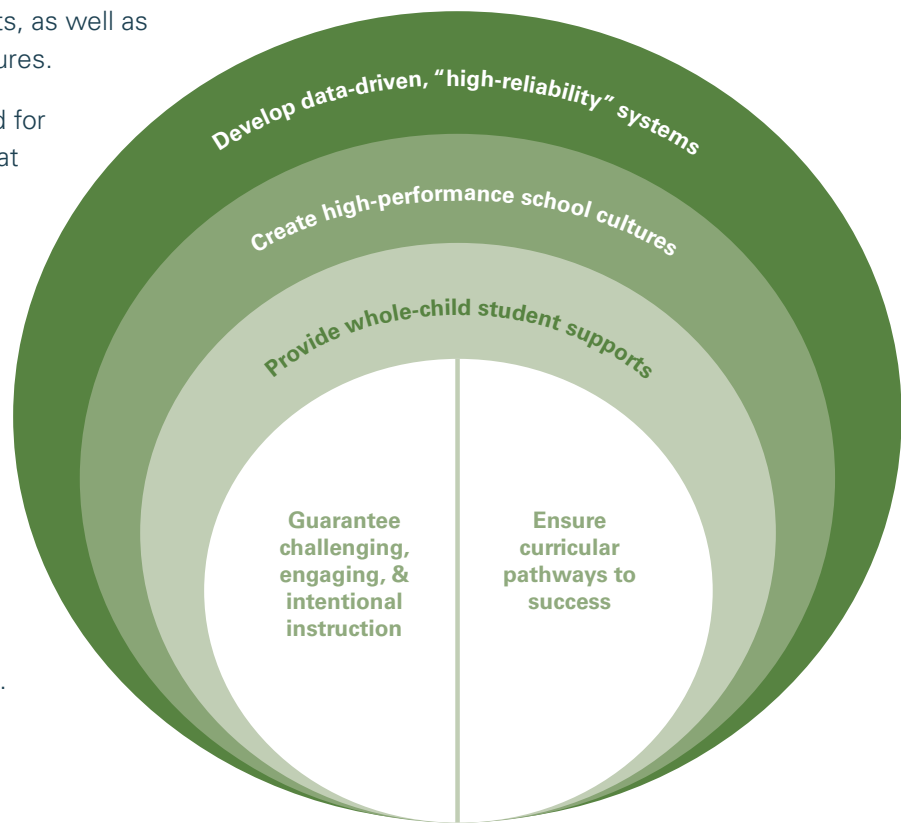
Tim Waters, CEO

ABOUT OUR APPROACH

Research on schools, district, and programs that change the odds for students reveals five opportunity areas where improvements can lead to dramatic gains in student achievement. McREL's What Matters Most framework identifies these areas and provides guidance to educators seeking an answer to the question, "Of all the things I might do, what matters most?"

- **Guarantee challenging, engaging, and intentional instruction.** At the core of effective systems are teachers who challenge students, develop positive relationships with them, and are intentional in their use of a broad repertoire of teaching strategies.
- **Ensure curricular pathways to success.** High-performing systems guarantee that every student, in every classroom, no matter what the aspirations, is provided with both *challenging and personalized* learning experiences that prepare each of them for life success.
- **Provide whole-child student supports.** Setting high expectations requires providing students with the scaffolding they need to succeed—a just-in-time, personalized response to students' cognitive, psychosocial, and academic needs.
- **Create high-performance school cultures.** Effective schools ensure high-quality learning experiences in every classroom. At the same time, they develop a culture of high expectations for learning and behavior, which is an even more powerful predictor of student success than socioeconomic status.
- **Develop data-driven, high-reliability systems.** High-performing school systems put data systems and processes in place to ensure high-quality learning experiences for all students, as well as real-time responses to student failures.

Beyond this framework is the clear need for high expectations to drive everything that occurs in schooling—from instruction teachers provide to the curriculum offered to students to cultures created inside schools to district-level, "no excuses" goals for student learning. To change the odds for students, systems must set a high bar for everyone in the system and be vigilant about making sure people meet those high expectations. McREL continues to help educators at all levels find the balance between the two while implementing principles that are research-based and proven effective.



Instruction

Observation software unifies instruction, improves learning

Principals in Olmstead Falls, Ohio, faithfully conducted classroom visits and collected data, but they weren't seeing improved teaching or student learning. McREL taught them how to use PowerWalkthrough® software on their hand-held devices to capture data regarding teachers' use of *Classroom Instruction that Works* strategies. Nearly immediately, principals had clarity about the areas where teachers needed professional development and took action to ensure students received more unified and effective instruction. Not only did PowerWalkthrough help establish a common instructional language throughout the district, but it also allowed the district to monitor progress toward its non-negotiable goals of making learning targets clearer for students and providing students with high-quality feedback.

Curriculum

Study provides curricular framework to ensure success for all students

Increased diversity in the classroom brings curricular challenges to even the most seasoned teachers. McREL's Adapted

Curricular Enhancements (ACE) study focused on improving the instruction of science in mainstream classrooms to students with visual impairments. The study engaged more than 20 teachers in Colorado and Pennsylvania in developing and testing materials and a framework to better understand the spectrum of visual disabilities, determine the needs of visually impaired students, and implement more effective techniques and tools. This framework helps teachers engage *all* of their students in lessons that not only educate but can lead to future career opportunities.

Student Supports

Project connects families and student supports

Nearly 1,000 students in Immokalee, Florida, were eligible to receive extra academic support, but less than 20 percent of those students and their families were taking advantage of it. McREL's collaboration model, part of a three-year federal grant project, has allowed two out-of-school-time (OST) programs, Supplemental Educational Services (SES) and 21st Century Community Learning Center, to provide more instructional consistency for students and better communication and coordination among



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ABOUT OUR WORK

day school teachers, afterschool providers, and SES tutors. As a result, more students are participating in both programs and are receiving more focused, research-based instruction.

School Cultures

Schools learn culture is the “secret” to improvement

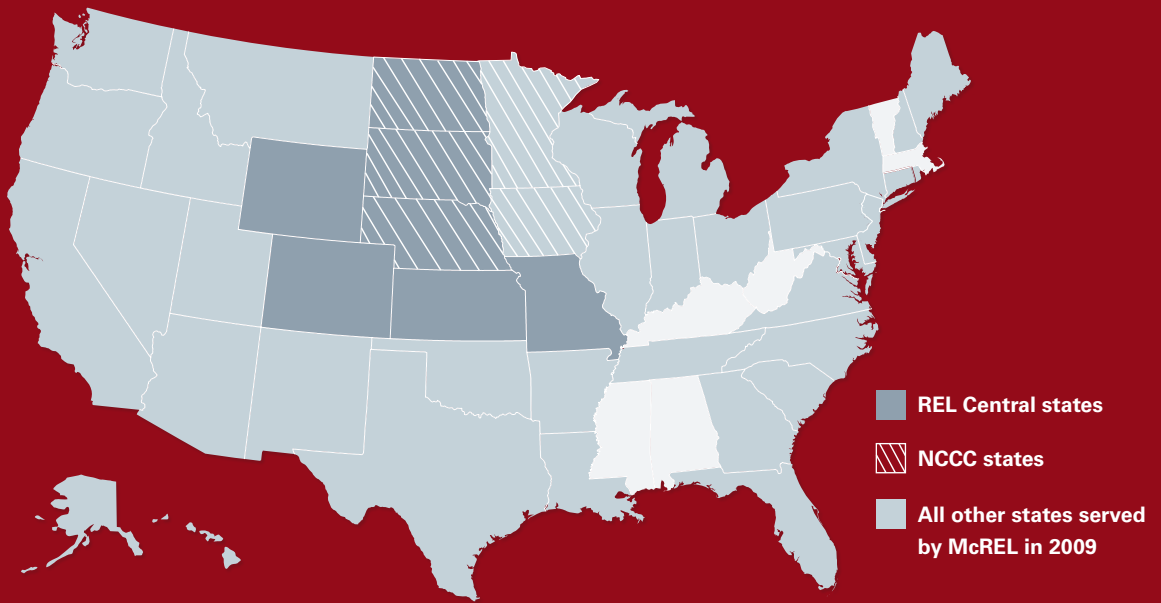
Labeled a “turnaround school,” Northeast Guilford High School (NEHS) in McLeansville, North Carolina, needed to act quickly to create a culture of high expectations. NEHS generated quick wins that translated into long-lasting change using McREL’s five-step Success in Sight approach to school improvement. McREL helped NEHS “take stock” to identify two areas of focus—student engagement and building teacher capacity. By developing professional learning communities and implementing instructional strategies, NEHS built a strong, collaborative, and positive culture. Student test scores in mathematics and science have risen dramatically, including a 24 percent increase in Algebra II, and NEHS was named one of the most improved schools in the county.

High-reliability Systems

Teacher evaluation system prevents failures, boosts successes

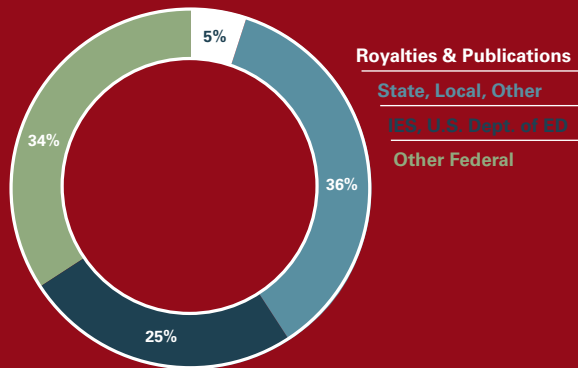
North Carolina’s patchwork of measures for evaluating teacher performance clashed with the state board of education’s expectation that every public school student graduate prepared for postsecondary education or for work in a global society. To reconcile the two, McREL partnered with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to develop, validate, and implement a comprehensive system. Teachers report that with the new and clearly articulated professional teaching standards, they now discuss their evaluation ratings with their principals and collaboratively develop professional growth plans to guide their improvement as they move toward achieving “Career Status.” With the teacher evaluation system in place, NCDPI is moving toward becoming a high-reliability organization focused on ensuring success for all of its 1.4 million students.





Since 1966, McREL has served as a federally funded regional educational laboratory, helping educators translate research into practice. Now known as the REL Central, it operates in seven states. In addition, we provide research-based services to education agencies of five states through our U.S. Department of Education-funded North Central Comprehensive Center (NCCC). Through more than 200 other federal, state, and local contracts, we provide professional services and deliver products to educators nationwide and internationally. In 2009, we served clients in 44 states and four foreign countries.

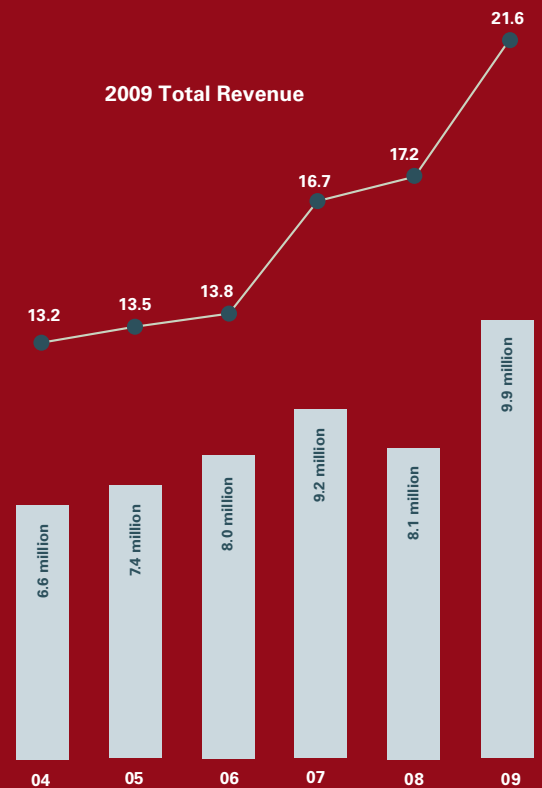
2009 Non-Investment Revenue by Source



Since 2006, when we committed to expanding McREL's impact and reach, we have achieved 56 percent growth in revenues.

Once almost exclusively a federal contractor, McREL has expanded into new revenue streams, diversifying our portfolio of work. Today, more than two-fifths of our revenues come from non-federal sources.

2009 Total Revenue



2004-2009 Total Net Assets-Unrestricted