

## MID-ATLANTIC: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C.



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### Ask a REL

Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

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### From the Director

[REL Mid-Atlantic](#) would like to wish you a Happy New Year!

We are excited about the promise a new year holds and particularly enthusiastic about the progress REL Mid-Atlantic is making on the many excellent projects started in 2012. We begin the year with two new Research Alliances: Early Childhood Education and Principal Effectiveness. As discussions with education stakeholders progressed and projects and studies developed, we moved toward a combination of broad-based and more narrowly focused Research Alliances to address the needs of the communities in the mid-Atlantic region. For instance, Rural Education has evolved into Rural Student College Readiness to better capture the specific interest and needs of our rural community partners in Pennsylvania, while Dropout Prevention remains a broad-based Research Alliance as originally planned.

The principles guiding this restructuring will help REL Mid-Atlantic more effectively target the local research needs of our partners, while keeping region-wide needs in mind, as we continue to build the capacity to use research to inform educational policies and practices.

As our Research Alliances make progress on their respective research agendas, REL Mid-Atlantic will bring you the latest offerings from our direct research services. These are research projects we are conducting on pressing education topics identified by stakeholders. In addition to featuring

## **Submit a question for future issues of the newsletter**

The Spotlight section of next month's newsletter will feature readers' questions on teacher evaluation with responses from Kevin Booker, the Coordinator of the [Teacher Evaluation Research Alliance](#).

If your question is chosen, you will receive a REL Mid-Atlantic thumb drive, pen, writing pad, and mobile screen cleaner. Questions must refer to the topic of teacher evaluation and/or REL Mid-Atlantic's work in that area. We will select the question or questions that offer the best opportunity to share information germane to teacher evaluation.

Send your questions via e-mail to [newsletter@relmidatlantic.org](mailto:newsletter@relmidatlantic.org) or send them to us via [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#). In addition to your question, please tell us your city, state, and profession. Responses will appear in future issues of the newsletter.

Send us your questions by January 31!

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highlights from these projects in this newsletter, we will also publish a quarterly research update in a special issue of the newsletter to share the latest news and information about REL Mid-Atlantic resources as they become available.

In this issue, we highlight the Professional Learning Research Alliance. Cindy Blitz, the Coordinator of this Alliance, explains how REL Mid-Atlantic is collaborating with education stakeholders to address the topic of professional development for teachers.

On January 18, we are looking forward to REL Mid-Atlantic's Technical Working Group Meeting in Philadelphia.

We welcome your comments and suggestions, and invite you to follow us on [Twitter](#) or like our page on [Facebook](#).

### **Teresa Duncan**

*Director*

REL Mid-Atlantic

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## **Spotlight: Professional Learning Research Alliance**



### **Q&A with Cindy Blitz**

Professional Learning  
Research Alliance Coordinator

#### **What are some of the challenges facing the Professional Learning Research Alliance?**

Teachers' professional development is crucial to the success of our educational system. However, the scientific literature offers little practical guidance as to how best to meet the challenges of engaging teachers in professional development, evaluating the impact on students and teachers, and realigning schools' instructional practices with educational goals. The Professional Learning Research Alliance (PLRA) will help interested stakeholders in the mid-Atlantic region acquire this kind of practical knowledge. The goal is to have PLRA members collaborate to identify common challenges and opportunities in professional development, share and exchange perspectives and experiences, and engage in evidence-based inquiry to develop, implement, and evaluate useful professional development programs.

For instance, several PLRA members share an interest in teachers' professional learning communities (PLCs) as a potentially effective instrument of professional development. REL Mid-Atlantic is helping them to pursue this interest through two current research projects--a review of the literature on online and hybrid models of PLCs, and an evaluation of a PLC initiative at a local school district.

#### **How is the Professional Learning Research Alliance helping educators address these challenges?**

The ultimate goal of REL Mid-Atlantic is to build the capacity of PLRA members to collect and use data that can inform decisions about

professional development. We will help PLRA members by identifying common professional learning needs in the region and tracking progress toward professional learning goals. Our main task here is to engage partners in routine information-seeking activities related to professional development. We will also coach and support our stakeholders in the area of strategic planning. The data we collect on instructional practices and student achievement will be used to set common professional development goals, identify best practices, and develop implementation protocols that our members can follow. But perhaps our most important contribution will be creating structured opportunities for members to connect with one another, share experiences and perspectives, and collaborate on professional development projects and initiatives. Building a strong foundation for collaboration among educational stakeholders in the region is key to teachers' professional development.

#### **How can educators become involved in this research alliance?**

To find out more about the PLRA, please contact me at [cblitz@relmidatlantic.org](mailto:cblitz@relmidatlantic.org). You can also [visit our web page](#).

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## **Upcoming Bridge Event**

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### **Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making**

*March 18, 2013  
Monroe, New Jersey*

REL Mid-Atlantic and the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association are co-hosting a Bridge Event to discuss the effective use of data to monitor the academic progress of students and evaluate instructional practices. Sharnell S. Jackson, a co-author of the Institute of Education Sciences' Practice Guide *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making*, will review the guide's recommendations. She will also address suggestions about implementation of the recommendations.

The event is geared toward school teachers and administrators. Attendees will participate in small-group planning activities and will look at how to apply the recommendations in their own schools or districts. Please visit the REL Mid-Atlantic [website](#) for more details.

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**SIGN-UP NOW**

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