INFORMATION ITEM:

The Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE Center
at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The SERVE Center at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro has won a fourth five-year regional laboratory contract from the United States Department of Education (Institute for Education Sciences) valued at $37.7 million. Ludy van Broekhuizen and his entire staff at SERVE deserve our congratulations and respect for their work in winning this award. Also, there were many others who played a role, both within and external to the University, in winning this contract. It was truly a team effort. This is good news for UNCG and K-12 students throughout the southeast.

The Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE is one of ten members of a national network of institutions with similar missions, goals and strategies. These organizations have a long tradition of conducting high-quality, useful, cutting-edge research and developing processes and products to make new knowledge available to policymakers, state education agencies, schools, and families. Through their grass-roots involvement with educators in the field, they link the worlds of research, policy, and practice.

In addition to the Regional Educational Laboratory, SERVE administers a number of research, development, dissemination, and direct service grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements funded by the United States Department of Education and state and local education agencies. Among the recently funded activities are a project designed to support migrant pre-school children and their families in Florida, evaluation projects to support extended day programs throughout the Southeast, a high school redesign project working with smaller learning communities, a scaling up project for formative evaluation of technology funded by Microsoft Corporation, and a project that assesses science and American history instruction. In addition, SERVE continues to operate the National Center for Homeless Education and provide support to 21st Century Learning Communities grantees. All of these efforts are designed to meet the educational needs of students in the southeastern quadrant of the United States.

A. Edward Uprichard
Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Attachment
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are pleased to present this Technical Proposal for the operation of the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast (REL-SE). SERVE at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, under the leadership of Dr. Ludwig van Broekhuizen, is the prime offeror for this REL-SE Technical Proposal. The scope of work outlined represents a significant opportunity to improve the quality of education in the southeast. Educators are searching for proven approaches to improving student achievement so that time and money are not wasted on programs, practices, and policies with limited possibilities for contributing to student success. Increasingly, over the last fifteen years, educators we have worked with in the southeast have become eager for research to inform their decisions. Data-based decision making and research-based practice are terms used frequently at state, district, and school levels and they are used with increasing sophistication.

Evidence of this increasing acceptance of the need for high quality research findings comes from the fact that our southeastern state departments of education wanted to partner with us in identifying interventions to test in their states as part of the Task 2 proposed scope of work. The Alabama State Department of Education understood the importance of random assignment in developing a rigorous study of their new state-developed professional development program for improving math and science. This recognition in the field, of the need to work closely with organizations such as Regional Educational Laboratories in examining intervention effectiveness, provides us with a unique jumping off point for the 2005-2010 scope of work. With this proposal, we will nurture their emerging interest in using high quality research findings to inform their decisions about “what works.”

This proposal to operate the REL-SE reflects a model for a new kind of regional educational laboratory. This new model builds on our exceptional reputation in the southeast for providing products and services that respond to real needs and problems and on our established collaborative relationships with state and district leaders. Our letters of support clearly indicate our connectedness to the education community in the southeast region, a critical component to the success of the REL given the new focus.

The proposal for the REL-SE for 2005-2010 builds on SERVE’s past work in the region by joining together with partner organizations such as Abt Associates Inc. and Empirical Education Inc. Both are organizations known for their experience in conducting experimental studies involving random assignment and for their use of state-of-the-art analytic techniques. Highly qualified Principal Investigators (PIs) and research teams for the rigorous Task 2 studies represent an influx of significant substantive, methodological, and management expertise. In addition, a nationally recognized Technical Working Group has been identified, which can provide both content and methodological direction to study staff. Finally, this proposal includes expanded opportunities for staffing of the five tasks through a partnership with the Academy for Educational Development (AED), which is also the lead on the Task 6 proposal submitted. The U.S. Education and Workforce Development Group at AED, led by Dr. Denise Borders, and SERVE staff will team up to ensure that Fast Response projects are carried out quickly as new needs arise, with products disseminated in ways that build on AED’s over 30 years of experience operating national dissemination centers.

A letter of support from the office of the President of the University of North Carolina System, Dr. Molly Broad, shows that our proposal not only has the support of the university at which the REL-SE central office will be housed (UNCG), but also has the support of the statewide system of public universities, which opens up many collaborative opportunities. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, part of the Statewide University System, recently received funding to operate the National Research Center on Rural Education Support from IES. Dr. Thomas Farmer and Dr. Lynn Vernon-Feagans, Co-Directors for that Center, have both agreed to collaborate with us by serving on our REL-SE Technical Working Group. Thus, the Statewide University System in North Carolina is a substantial resource base from which to operate the REL-SE.

Summary of Work Proposed

The work must begin from an understanding of the region itself, the issues faced by the region in improving student achievement and meeting the goals of NCLB, and the kinds of information and resources that already exist in informing educators’ decisions. Where there are gaps in the existing research on programs, policies, and practices, our Technical Plan presents an approach that will provide our clients with evidence-based information coming from original, rigorous research and development studies. Embedded throughout the Technical Plan will be the
importance of collaboration with IES staff, other RELs, the Task 6 Coordinating Contractor, research centers, Comprehensive Centers, and other federally-funded providers and projects (What Works Clearinghouse, ERIC, etc.) to ensure highly-leveraged resources and systematic and targeted dissemination of information and products to appropriate client groups. A summary of the REL-SE proposed work for all five tasks is provided below.

**Task 1: Regional Education Needs Analysis, Training, and Technical Assistance and Fast Response Applied Research and Development Projects**

*Needs Analysis, Training, and Technical Assistance (TA) Unit*

The goal for Subtask 1.1 is to implement a Fast Response Plan that proactively and accurately reflects regional needs, provides effective outreach strategies, tracks requests and responses, and ensures high quality training and TA. The Fast Response Plan includes two primary objectives. One is focused on the needs analysis and outreach strategies. Our planned program of market research using an experienced subcontractor, Curtis Research Associates, will give us cutting-edge information on needs through sessions with client groups held in each state annually. In addition, our Policy Analysts located in physical proximity to the state superintendent (and having played such a role for the prior REL contract period) will hold regular meetings in the state to share findings from the RELs, educate client groups about evidence-based education, and identify emerging informational needs.

The second objective focuses on the coordination and planning of training and TA activities, for which the Regional Needs and Responses Database will be a critical tool. In addition to an Evidence-Based Request Desk which will be a single point of contact for all client requests, we propose aligning much of our training and TA with the dissemination of the Fast Response and Task 2 products. For example, a teacher quality seminar is proposed for state leaders such that they will meet with researchers on the front end to help frame questions that can be answered by existing databases. Then, the researchers conduct the secondary analyses and produce a short brief in response to the question, followed by a subsequent meeting with the state leaders to discuss the findings and generate the next question. In this way, training and TA is integrated into the process of developing Fast Response questions and resulting products.

As another example, to support the work of the Task 2 studies and expand district leaders’ understanding and interest in research on interventions, we propose to establish a Consortium of Educators for Evidence-Based Education (CEEBE), composed of district leaders who are either participating in Task 2 studies, or are open to participating if the right intervention was involved. We will interact with this group of district leaders in varied ways, both online and in person.

*Fast Response Applied Research and Development Projects*

We propose six Fast Response projects in Year One covering the critical content areas of teacher quality, high school reform, school readiness, adolescent literacy, algebra achievement, and leadership in low-performing schools. The needs for these Fast Response projects emerged directly from our conversations with state departments and others in the region. The work will be planned and conducted by teams of REL-SE and AED senior staff with content area expertise in the particular topic and will include highly regarded external researchers at various levels. AED, with its location in Washington, DC and international experience in educational improvement, provides an even larger pool of highly experienced and qualified staff that will help the REL-SE ensure quick responses to needs identified.

The six Year One Fast Response projects outlined in Table ES-1 represent our initial thinking about the kinds of responses we will be generating; that is, answering questions using secondary analyses, producing guides to conducting rigorous evaluations of new interventions, and compiling descriptive summaries of interventions, state strategies, or instruments and their evidence base. However, we expect the categories of work in these Fast Response projects will be fluid with new categories emerging in response to new requests.

**Table ES-1**

**Subtask 1.2 Fast Response Applied Research and Development Projects: Year One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Research Team</th>
<th>Immediate Client</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Research Team</td>
<td>Immediate Client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1.2.1: Dynamic and Rapid Research in Teacher Quality Using Secondary Analyses: Policymakers and Researchers as Partners | Explore the problem through secondary analysis of extant databases          | Elizabeth Glennie, Duke University  
Jenni Owen, Duke University  
Barbara Howard, SERVE Center  
Adria Gallup-Black, AED  
*Charles Clotfelter, Duke University | All states  

1.2.2: Guide for States and Districts on Evaluating Early College and Related High School Reforms | Summarize current evaluation methods/instruments and develop guidance for doing a rigorous evaluation of the intervention | Julie Edmunds, SERVE Center  
David Rabiner, Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke  
Harold Wenglinsky, AED  
*Thomas Farmer, National Research Center on Rural Education Support, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill | North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  

1.2.3: Measuring Children’s School Readiness | Describe the quality of readiness assessment instruments | Glyn Brown, SERVE Center  
Catherine Scott-Little, University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
*Donna Bryant, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill | Florida Department of Education  

1.2.4: Middle School and High School Literacy Across the Curriculum Interventions | Identify, catalogue, and assess the evidence base on middle school literacy | Michael Kamil, Stanford University  
Treana Adkins Bowling, SERVE Center  
Kim Anderson, SERVE Center  
Adria Gallup-Black, AED  
*Joseph Torgesen, Florida Center for Reading Research | Georgia Department of Education  

1.2.5: Choosing Professional Development for Improving 9th Grade Algebra | Identify, catalogue, and assess the evidence base on quality professional development interventions in math | Barbara Dougherty, University of Mississippi  
Cos Fi, University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Catherine Oleksiw, AED  
*Robert Floden, Michigan State University | All states  

1.2.6: School Leadership: Approaches for Low-Performing Schools | Identify, catalogue, and assess the evidence base of state strategies regarding school leadership | Catherine Oleksiw, AED  
Natasha Lekes, AED  
Cindy McIntee, SERVE Center  
*Ivan Charner, AED | South Carolina Department of Education  

*Indicates Proposed Senior Reviewer

**Task 2: Rigorous Applied Research and Development**

The goal of Task 2 is to conduct rigorous studies that examine the effects of proposed policies, programs, or practices on academic achievement and related high priority needs of the region. The five studies outlined here, designed with known researchers, represent a unique opportunity to support states, districts, and schools in...
basing their decisions about interventions on scientifically valid information. In turn, they will provide evidence relevant to issues at the national level.

These partner organizations and researchers have joined the REL-SE in planning the set of studies proposed here. Each research team exemplifies the true meaning of a team. The complementary skills and knowledge each member brings will ensure the successful implementation and completion of each study. For example, Abt Associates Inc. and Empirical Education Inc. will provide leadership to and consistency across the study teams in the areas of design, sampling, random assignment, analysis, and technical report writing. Dr. Stephen Bell of Abt Associates will provide cross-cutting methodological leadership. Each study team also has a PI who will contribute specific knowledge about the research base on the intervention or issue under study and recent approaches to conducting effectiveness research in the topic area. Finally, each research team has a SERVE or AED study manager who has credibility with and access to state and district contacts. The selection of team members was strategic, and the particular roles of each are well defined.

The ten Technical Working Group members committed to this effort represent an outstanding panel of nationally-recognized and funded researchers, highly experienced with conducting experimental research on educational interventions, and just as importantly, truly committed to and interested in the work of assisting the REL-SE in becoming a pre- eminent Regional Educational Laboratory in terms of its success in accomplishing the mission defined by IES. Our Technical Working Group members are:

1. Dr. Russell Gersten, Instructional Research Group, Signal Hill, CA
2. Dr. David Francis, the University of Houston, Houston, TX
3. D. Michael L. Kamil, Stanford University, Stanford, CA
4. Dr. Thomas Farmer, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC
5. Dr. Lynne Vernon-Feagans, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC
6. Dr. Catherine Snow, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
7. Dr. Michael Coyne, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT
8. Dr. Kenneth Dodge, Duke University, Durham, NC
9. Dr. Elfrieda L. Hiebert, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
10. Dr. Robert Floden, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

Recruiting strategies for identifying participants are critical to the success of randomized experiments. The REL-SE, based on its 15 years of work in the region, can call on all state departments and over 150 districts with whom we have worked in the past. Similarly, AED operates many programs in our southeastern states and can also access state and district contacts quickly and easily. We requested letters from southeastern districts to demonstrate that we can feasibly conduct rigorous studies in the region. Over 30 district superintendents returned letters of intent (Appendix A) indicating their interest in partnering with the REL-SE in rigorous experimental studies of important interventions.

In exploring the need for studies with our states, several states suggested interventions of immediate interest to them. Alabama requested that we propose a study to test the effectiveness of their state program for improving math and science achievement at the school level. Georgia, with its fast-growing population of English Language Learners for whom many teachers are unprepared, requested that we explore the effectiveness of a teacher training model that could be used statewide.

All of the interventions we propose to study attempt to improve instructional strategies and, thus, student achievement. Language proficiency at the elementary level, literacy at the pre-kindergarten, early elementary, and middle school levels, and math and science at the middle school level are the focus areas. The longest intervention is the Alabama study of the state’s Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) professional development program. In this case, the intervention, although directed at teachers’ improvement of instructional strategies in math and science, also attempts to build systemic support for the continuous improvement of instruction and, thus, the intervention spans two years. This Alabama study represents a unique opportunity for a REL and a state department to collaborate on a rigorous study of a large state initiative that is trying to impact instructional change in all schools in the state.
## Table ES-2
### Task 2 Rigorous Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Study</th>
<th>Research Team</th>
<th>First School Year of Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **2.1.1: The Effectiveness of an Early Literacy Professional Development Intervention** | Susan Burns, George Mason University  
Catherine Scott-Little, University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Carolyn Layzer, Abt Associates Inc.  
Glyn Brown, SERVE Center  
Senior Advisors: Catherine Snow, Harvard University, David Francis, University of Houston | 2007–2008                        |
| **2.1.2: The Effectiveness of a Program to Accelerate Vocabulary Development in Kindergarten** | Joan McLaughlin, Abt Associates Inc.  
Paula Schwanenflugel, University of Georgia  
Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett, University of Georgia  
Treana Adkins Bowling, SERVE Center  
Senior Advisor: Michael Coyne, University of Connecticut | 2006–2007                        |
| **2.1.3: The Effectiveness of Text-Based Small Group Discussions in 7th Grade Language Arts Classrooms** | Fumiyo Tao, Abt Associates Inc.  
Ian Wilkinson, The Ohio State University  
Karla Lewis, SERVE Center  
Senior Advisor: Thomas Farmer, National Research Center on Rural Education Support, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill | 2007–2008                        |
| **2.1.4: The Effectiveness of Sheltered Instruction in Georgia 5th Grade Classrooms (SIOP)** | Micheline Chalhoub-DeVille, University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Michael Kamil, Stanford University  
Paula Egelson, SERVE Center  
Kim Anderson, SERVE Center  
Senior Advisor: David Francis, University of Houston | 2006–2007                        |
| **2.1.5: The Effectiveness of the Alabama Math Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI)** | Howard Wenglinsky, AED  
Denis Newman, Empirical Education Inc.  
Jean Scott, SERVE Center  
Senior Advisor: Robert Floden, Michigan State University | 2006–2007                        |

*Note: Dr. Stephen Bell as Task 2 Methodological Leader will provide quality assurance regarding methodological rigor across all studies.*

The importance of our set of studies is in the:

1. Quality of the interventions—all are well-developed interventions with some prior piloting and evidence that an impact on achievement can be expected if implemented well.
2. Support for the studies in the region—all are proposed in a particular state that has been involved in initial discussions of the studies and key SEA leaders have submitted letters of support.
3. Quality of the research teams—all have both content and experimental research methodology experts leading the study with SERVE staff working closely with these experts as the on the ground study managers, recruiting sites, implementing interventions, and collecting data.
4. Quality of the partners—as organizations, Abt Associates Inc. and Empirical Education Inc. will supplement the research teams with extensive expertise in the conduct of experimental studies, and offer assistance on such tasks as obtaining OMB clearance, conducting power analyses and complex statistical analyses, and writing technical reports.
5. Quality of the Technical Working Group—members of our Technical Working Group provide years of experience in conducting and publishing rigorous experimental studies across our areas of focus with many of them having direct experience serving on What Works Clearinghouse committees.

6. Potential impact for the region and nation—our studies address instructional strategies that have the potential of increasing student achievement across a spectrum of levels of schooling and content areas.

Task 3: National Laboratory Network (NLN)

Several possible Fast Response projects included in Task 3 represent ideas that emerged from our extensive discussion with states about their needs. Florida and several other states indicated that they had limited data on the effectiveness of their Supplemental Service providers. In response to this request, we suggest (in Task 3) that the Task 6 Coordinating Contractor convene a cross-REL group to discuss this need and determine if some states are evaluating these services in ways that can be shared with the other states. In addition, Mississippi was searching for information from other states on strategies for working with persistently failing schools, short of takeover. Such a request is more likely to find an answer in a NLN coordinated project than in a single REL project. Thus, we proposed a work group be formed to formulate an answer to Mississippi’s question.

Task 4: Regional Dissemination

Our Dissemination System Plan provides us with an opportunity to provide procedures that ensure high quality products and to develop innovative dissemination methods. Our Quality Assurance procedures are in place from operating the previous REL contract but they will be revised with significant input from our various partners, ED staff, and others to ensure that reviews of our work are demanding and rigorous. With SERVE staff teaming up with AED staff on this task, innovative methods of dissemination will be piloted. To aid in conceptualizing our expected outcomes, we outlined a set of five objectives, indicators, and performance targets so that we can track our progress.

Table ES-3

Task 4 Five-Year Dissemination Plan: Objectives, Indicators, and Performance Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Performance Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective 1: Provide high-quality, useful research information to meet the needs of customers.</td>
<td>4.1: Circulation of products and receipt of electronic materials.</td>
<td>Increase the number of REL print products disseminated and the number of hits, views, and PDF downloads on the NLN Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 2: Strengthen the capacity of the education community in the use of evidence-based findings to inform decision making.</td>
<td>4.2: Client participation in evidence-based events.</td>
<td>Increase client receipt of REL technical assistance, training events, conferences, and network building regarding evidence-based topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 3: Encourage state and district leaders to be active and knowledgeable partners in conducting evidence-based research.</td>
<td>4.3: Recruitment and retention rates of intervention sites.</td>
<td>Increase the percentage of sites/participants recruited for intervention studies compared to sites declining participation. Decrease the attrition rates of sites/participants recruited for REL-SE research studies. Increase the level of participation of district staff in the CEEBE (see p. iii).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Objective 4: Collaborate with and through other federally funded agencies or projects.**

**4.4: Contacts with other organizations in planning, implementing, or disseminating.**

Increase number of joint collaboration events, referrals, and products/services disseminated through agencies such as CCs, Research Centers, ERIC, etc.

**Objective 5: Contribute to the knowledge base about “what works.”**

**4.5: Publications, presentations at refereed conferences, and acceptance of studies for the What Works Clearinghouse.**

Increase number of publications in refereed journals, books, and book chapters; publications in practitioner-oriented journals; presentations at refereed conferences; and acceptance of research studies for the What Works Clearinghouse.

---

**Task 5: Planning, Management and Reporting**

Having operated the REL contract for the southeast for 15 years, we can start from a foundation of an already well-functioning and supportive governing board, knowledgeable about the work of the RELs and committed to ensuring that we address the most critical needs of the region. All of our Task 2 studies will have as their context the critical goal of reducing the achievement gap and, as such, most will test interventions that are designed to address the particular needs of subgroups or at-risk populations. Our governing board keeps us focused on this larger goal of improving student outcomes. In addition, our staff and management structures are in place ensuring a quick start to the work proposed.

Finally, as a strategic collection of organizations with specific strengths and clearly identified roles to play in ensuring the overall objectives as outlined in the RFP, we look forward to the opportunity to operate the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast and further the mission of evidence-based education. We believe our work in providing high quality research to the region will have significant impact on the quality of the learning opportunities afforded students, particularly those who are most at-risk for failure.