Teachers as Leaders

Wyoming

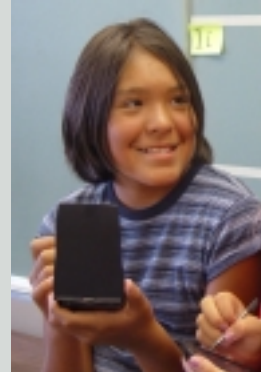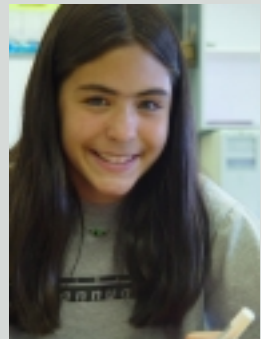### 2002 Action Research Report
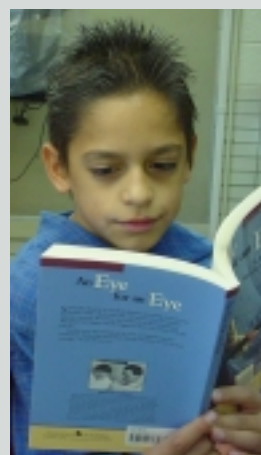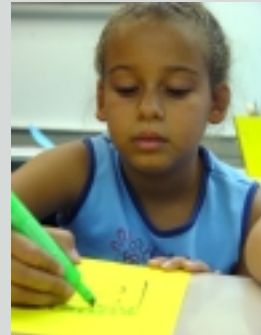
Raising Student Achievement

Improving Teacher Quality

Wyoming Teacher Policy Institute
Wyoming Department of Education

LOCAL DISTRICTS
C O N N E C T I N G

Buffalo
Casper
Cheyenne
Gillete
Riverton
Thermopolis
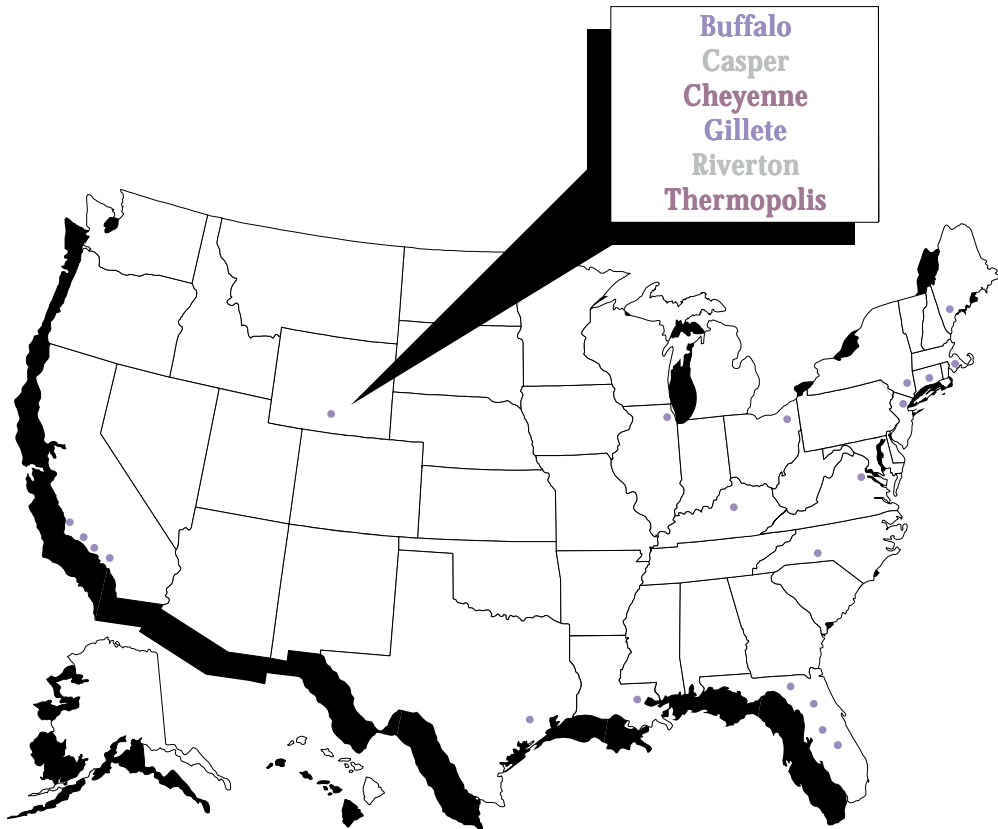
THE NATIONAL NETWORK

WTPI IS A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT among the Wyoming Department of Education, the University of Wyoming and public school teachers and administrators in six school districts across the state. WTPI is modeled after and affiliated with the national Teachers Network Policy Institute, a MetLife funded organization.

**Wyoming Teacher
Policy Institute**

Leading action research in Wyoming

How Teachers Can Influence
Educational Policy from their Classrooms

Historically, teachers have been left out of the critical vision-building process that informs policy making, yet teachers are responsible for implementing education policy. When policy makers consult and listen to teachers, policy reflects the realities of schooling and has a greater chance of being successfully implemented. The Wyoming Teacher Policy Institute offers teachers the opportunity to bring their voices to the policy-making process locally, statewide and nationally by:

- Framing practical policy questions related to improving student achievement;
- Participating in a professional community of K-12 teachers who conduct action research in classrooms and schools;
- Developing policy recommendations based on research;
- Engaging the public and policy makers in conversations about education policy; and
- Publishing and disseminating research findings and recommendations locally, statewide and nationally.

WTPI Activities

WTPI TEACHERS *are engaged in action research, dialogue and meetings with administrators and policy makers throughout Wyoming.*

MISSION STATEMENT

TO IMPROVE student learning by empowering teachers through ongoing research that engages others and influences education policy.

Project Title	Changes in Classroom Instruction: Who's Leading the Charge	Parents as Partners
Findings	• Teachers feel they are "not valued" by administrators • Teachers need to feel empowered to bring about changes needed in the classroom • Collaborative work validates teachers and instructional decisions through mutual support • The greatest insights are gained from listening to reflections from other teachers	• Parents participate in academic activities when invited into the classroom frequently • Student achievement increases as parent participation increases • Parents demonstrate strong support for standards when involved in academic activities • Student attitudes toward school and authority become more positive as parent participation increases
Teacher Voices	"Effective administrative support for teacher growth includes classroom visits to see 'what is really going on,' taking part in professional development with teachers, peer coaching and mentoring and allowing for greater flexibility and experimentation in the classroom!"	"Parents will support teachers when they are convinced we are working as partners to ensure the success of their children."
Research Support	"Principals and teachers will only be mobilized by caring and respect, by talented people working together and by developing shared expertise." (Fullan, 2001)	"It is only when parents become active partners with teachers that they become as interested in innovative educational theories as the educational experts themselves." (Cortes, 1996)
Action Steps for School Districts	• Teams of teachers and their administrators should enter into staff development activities together • Staff development opportunities should be ongoing with a component of self reflection and team discussion	• Target parents of students in the lower quartile of standardized tests • Create incentives for parents to participate in their child's classroom academic activities • Encourage employers to be supportive of the educational community by allowing parents time to attend school-based activities • Provide training for involving parents in the educational process through the State Department of Education and community college
Researcher	JOANNE GASTON Assistant Superintendent Riverton	JEAN DAVIES Goins Elementary School 5th Grade • Cheyenne

Meeting Technological Standards through Integration	Navigating Nonfiction
- Students are required by 75% of school staff to use the Internet for research 10% of the staff have students use spreadsheet programs, such as Excel; 50% require use of word processors and Power Point - Most staff members feel it would require too much time to teach technology skills in addition to content area standards - In middle school computer classes, students learn technology skills as they work on projects assigned by core teachers	- Implementation of nonfiction reading and writing strategies significantly increased reading levels and writing achievement of all student participants - Most students became proficient or advanced in reading and writing while one student advanced to partially proficient
"To prevent loss of instructional time from content standards and to ensure that all students have the computer skills needed for high schools, the middle school should continue to require computer classes that teach skills and provide opportunities for completing projects that integrate technology and content area standards."	"Often primary students have not had any experiences with nonfiction, and they lack the skills required to be successful in learning from nonfiction sources. Nonfiction education must begin in the earliest grades in order to give children a fighting chance for understanding the genre as they mature." "Action research in the classroom can make a difference when it is shared with supportive decision makers."
"The great teachers of the future will be great coaches who depend heavily on technology to bring each student along as fully and quickly as they are able." (Wheling, 2002)	"Nonfiction breeds passionate curiosity; passion leads to engagement. We need to get more trade nonfiction into our classrooms so the kids can read it, appreciate it, learn from it and write it more authentically." (Harvey, 2002)
- Provide professional development training for teachers to experiment with the use of technology in the classroom - Provide professional development training and time for teachers to integrate content standards and technology into the curriculum - Require middle school students to be proficient in basic computer skills: Word, Power Point, spreadsheets, and Internet	- Provide elementary students experience with nonfiction at an early age - Incorporate nonfiction strategies with other district literacy programs - Include nonfiction teaching strategies in staff development - Make acquisition of nonfiction literature a priority - Build high quality nonfiction libraries
DONNA DANIELS **Thermopolis Middle School** **7th Grade • Thermopolis**	**DEBRA MEREDITH** **Lincoln Elementary School** **3rd Grade • Riverton**

Project Title	Action Research in a Professional Development Site
Findings	• Professional Development School (PDS) pre-service students who conducted action research became more reflective and gained confidence and competence as teachers and collaborative colleagues • PDS faculty who conducted action research increased their sense of ownership for building issues • Action research created a greater sense of camaraderie within and between departments • Action research resulted in an increased awareness of the similarities and differences among a diverse population of students • Action research "raised the bar" for teachers' sense of professionalism
Teacher Voices	"As a result of participation in action research, PDS students felt they were more reflective and had more confidence and competence in their abilities to educate students as well as to work collaboratively with their colleagues."
Research Support	"What if schools and universities were not two places, occasionally intersecting, but instead one place where teaching, learning, research and community service were occurring all the time?" (Barth, 2001)
Action Steps for School Districts	• PDS pre-service students should have a greater fundamental understanding of action research and more opportunities to conduct this research within their programs • More time should be built into the school day for reflection, dialogue, collaboration, and book study • All educators should have opportunities for understanding the process of action research as well as sharing the results and testimonies from individuals who have completed research • Partnerships with University instructors and building professionals should be created to teach the process of action research to interested educators • Action research should become a mind-set and way of life vital to the role of professional development in the building
Researcher	JUDY WARFEL & KAREN DELBRIDGE Johnson Junior High School 7th—9th Grades • Cheyenne

Multi-grade Level Standards through Service Learning

- There is a need for improving the delivery of health knowledge to elementary students
- Service learning in health is an excellent way to meet the needs and meet standards in elementary health education
- Ninth graders demonstrated the ability to advocate health knowledge skills to younger peers through service learning
- When used as a teaching tool, service learning reaches children who don't/can't/won't learn in the traditional classroom setting

"Service learning is an effective method for meeting standards, helping students apply knowledge and skills beyond the classroom and developing social responsibility."

"Develop policies and launch projects which support students' participation in community-based learning activities." (Burak, 1993)

- All students should be given the opportunity to engage in school-based service learning experiences
- More classroom space is required to accommodate the wide range of learning materials a teacher needs to help students conduct successful standards-based service-learning projects
- Students must have access to and gain skills in technology to apply knowledge and skills beyond the classroom

CORNELIA DEREEMER
Johnson Junior High School
9th Grade • Cheyenne

Collaboratively Developing Writing Rubrics

Students participating in the development of writing rubrics:
- Improved writing assessment scores
- Increased growth on vocabulary assessment
- Improved scores in writing dictation
- Writing rubrics were written in child-friendly language
- Students' dialogue about writing showed awareness of what makes a good writer

"Students become better writers when they have autonomy to develop their own writing rubrics. By evaluating their own writing, they strive to improve."

"Maintain a supportive classroom environment in which students feel safe experimenting with new ideas and approaches." (Bangert-Downs and Bankert, 1990)

- Implement professional development on writing rubrics with students
- Integrate writing throughout the curriculum
- Use student-generated rubrics in all classrooms to assess writing on a regular basis
- Make daily writing mandatory in grades K-5

KATHLEEN CRAIN
Wyoming Indian Elementary
2nd Grade • Lander

Making a Difference in Wyoming Schools

Teachers' voices add **a u t h e n t i c i t y** to policy debates, and they provide 'on the ground' snapshots of the real effects of new and old policies on classrooms and children.

—Linda Darling-Hammond
Former Executive Director, National Commission on Teaching & America's Future

DEBRA HOLLOWAY, *Director of Teacher and Leader Quality*
Wyoming Department of Education
Hathaway Building 2nd Floor
2300 Capitol Ave.
Cheyenne, WY 82002-0050