Summary of Early Findings
Utilization of Math and Literacy Tools in Pilot Sites
February 2011

This memo provides a summary of findings after one semester of research on the implementation of foundation-supported instructional tools in literacy and mathematics. Research for Action's focus has been on examining the utility of the math and literacy assessment tools, teachers' responses to them, and contextual factors affecting their adoption. This summary draws from educator interviews and teacher surveys from one math site visit and four literacy site visits, as well as professional development observed in two literacy sites and two math sites. We wish to note that our findings for the math tools are more tentative because the start-up for this portion of the initiative has been slower, and hence we have less data.

Strengths and Early Successes

1. **Teacher buy-in for both literacy and math tools is strong.**
   - Surveys indicate that more than 90% of teachers using these tools believe they are a good fit for existing curriculum.
   - The vast majority of teachers (88% using literacy tools; 100% using math tools) report that the tools provide them with new information about students' knowledge of subject matter.
   - Users of both math and literacy tools believe they provide strong models for teaching.

2. **Teachers report tool utility and effectiveness, as well as increased student engagement.**
   - Eighty-five percent (85%) of teachers using the literacy tools report that they increase student engagement in literacy learning.
   - Math teachers laud the accessibility of the tools to all students.
   - Some literacy teachers reported students were writing more and producing stronger writing.
   - Some literacy teachers noted that seeing the student work from the modules had increased their expectations for what students can do.
   - Teachers in one school attributed an increase in math test scores to the professional development provided in preparation for the math tools.

3. **Teachers appreciate the professional development, and they want more.**
   - More than 80% of teachers using the literacy tools and 100% of teachers using the math tools reported that their professional development was helpful.
   - More than 80% of teachers using literacy tools reported wanting more professional development; the same was true for 83% of teachers using the math tools.
   - Time to collaborate with peers is one of the most valued aspects of the LDC work and of LDC and district professional development among participating teachers.

4. **Tool use and buy-in is already expanding in some schools.**

- Librarians, special education teachers and literacy specialists are supporting literacy tool implementation in some schools.
- Some teachers are using LDC module-like activities in non-module instruction.
- Some principals are deeply engaged in math professional development activities.

Emerging Challenges and Questions to Consider Moving Forward

1. **Determining how to sustain and expand tool adoption with fewer resources:**
   - Identifying and training a sufficient number of teachers and others to train new users;
   - Determining the appropriate role of principals, external partners, and technology;
   - Identifying existing school, district, and state resources that can be deployed to support adoption and expansion of tools.

2. **Arriving at the right mix of professional development to successfully adopt, sustain and expand the use of the tools:**
   - The process of developing literacy modules, rather than adopting modules created by others, facilitates implementation.
   - Eighty-five percent (85%) of teachers using the literacy tools and 100% of teachers using the math tools report needing more help adapting instruction for diverse groups.
   - Eighty-five percent (85%) of literacy teachers want more professional development on developing modules.

3. **Determining when approaches to supporting the adoption and expansion of each set of tools should differ regarding:**
   - Timing, strategy, type and expectations of professional development;
   - Involvement of principals, district staff, and state officials;
   - Alignment with district and curriculum and state standards;
   - Expanding the expertise and capacity of teachers involved.

4. **Increasing the relevance and utility of tools: How can tools be packaged and rolled out so that they are seen as (and are) integral to the curriculum and standards, rather than an add-on? Challenges include:**
   - Tool use can be time-consuming – scoring multiple writing drafts, extensive pre-lesson math work.
   - Teachers are struggling to find ways to break up math lessons over multiple class periods.
   - Science and social studies teachers are questioning whether more time focused on writing is "taking away" from content; math teachers also question whether the tools are competing with required content.
   - Some teachers using literacy tools see the module format as cumbersome.
   - The degree to which literacy tools are aligned to existing district approaches to literacy varies.
   - Teachers vary in their knowledge of the CCSS, and thus may not see the connection between the tools and the new standards.
   - Expansion strategies may need to differ depending on the number of additional initiatives that are competing with the math and literacy tools.

5. **Determining the optimal level of flexibility for the next generation of tools:**

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- Both literacy and math tool-users express some confusion regarding how far they can deviate from the tools and modules.

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