

# **ADMINISTRATIVE DATA RESEARCH AND EVALUATION (ADARE) PROJECT**

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## **Additional Data Linkage Opportunities**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor has funded the multi-state Administrative Data Research and Evaluation (ADARE) Project since 1998. The return on this investment occurs when policy relevant research and evaluation findings are delivered to the Department.

The policy relevance of reported findings depends on the breadth of administrative record coverage and the quality of these records. This paper describes ADARE Project opportunities to broaden administrative record coverage beyond the core data sets now maintained or accessible by each Project researcher.

Section 2 describes the basic administrative record files that have been used by the Project researchers to date. Section 3 covers additional data sets that Project researchers are expected to acquire or gain access to during the current cycle of ETA funding. Section 4 explores other types of administrative records that would increase the policy relevance of some Project studies if successfully linked to current data sets maintained by the Project researchers. Section 5 defines recommended steps to achieve improved policy relevance of Project research and evaluation studies.

## 2.0 CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD COVERAGE

Each of the current ADARE Project researchers maintains or has approved access to a Project state's UI wage records, WIA Standardized Record (WIASRD) data, and AFDC/TANF records for female head-of-household payees ages 18 through 64. Some of the ADARE Project researchers have routine access to UI wage record coverage for one or more additional states. Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) participation and data exchanges with one or more adjacent states are described in Section 4.

### 2.1 Welfare to Work Transition Flows

From April 1998 through June 2002, UI wage records and AFDC/TANF records for female head-of-household payees ages 18 through 64 were linked and used to conduct studies of welfare to work flows in six central cities.<sup>1</sup>

- Baltimore City MD (a county equivalent jurisdiction)—1990 through 2002.
- Broward County FL—1994 through 1999 (not yet updated to include 2000-2002 coverage).
- Cook County IL—1995 through 1999 (not yet updated to include 2000-2002 coverage).
- Fulton County GA—1992 through 2002.
- Harris County TX—1992 through 2002.
- Jackson County MO—1990 through 2002.

This welfare to work transition research was updated in August 2003.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This research is summarized in Christopher T. King and Peter R. Mueser (eds.)(2002), *Welfare Reform in the Cities: The Transition from Public Aid to Employment in Six Urban Areas During the 1990s*. The manuscript is being edited for trade publication. For availability, contact Jonathan Simonetta at [simonetta.jonathan@doleta.gov](mailto:simonetta.jonathan@doleta.gov).

<sup>2</sup> Peter R. Mueser (August 2003), *Updated Welfare-to-Work Transition Dynamics*.

## 2.2 Workforce Investment Act Client Flows and Net Impact Estimates

Since July 2002, ADARE Project researchers have concentrated on linkage of UI wage records and WIA Standardized Record (WIASRD) data.<sup>3</sup> Two WIA Program Year cycles have been covered in 2003 ADARE Project reports:

1. Program Year 2000 (July 2000-June 2001).
2. Program Year 2001 (July 2001-June 2002).

Updating to include Program Year 2002 (July 2002-June 2003) will occur in November 2003, with report delivery scheduled for mid-December 2003.

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<sup>3</sup> This phase of ADARE Project studies was summarized in a series of ETA briefings by Project researchers in March, April and May 2003: Peter R. Mueser and David W. Stevens (March 26, 2003), *Mapping WIA One-Stop Client Flows; WIA One-Stop Client Flow Demographics; Low-Income and Welfare Client Priorities*. Christopher T. King and David W. Stevens (April 22, 2003), *WIA Performance Measures and Standards: The WIASRD and a Future with Common Measures*. Kevin Hollenbeck, Christopher T. King and Daniel Schroeder (May 7, 2003), *Preliminary WIA Net Impact Estimates: Administrative Records Opportunities and Limitations*. Contact Jonathan Simonetta for availability of these briefing documents and PowerPoint presentations. ADARE Project papers were presented by John Baj and David W. Stevens; Kevin Hollenbeck, Christopher T. King and Daniel Schroeder; Christopher T. King and David W. Stevens; and Peter R. Mueser and David W. Stevens at the U.S. Department of Labor Biennial Research Conference, Washington, D.C.: June 5, 2003. These Project researchers, joined by Phillip Rokicki and Jorge Zumaeta, were invited panelists at the *New Tools for a New Era* symposium on using administrative records sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Workforce Information Council, Washington, D.C.: July 24, 2003.

## **2.3 The WIA Standardized Record**

The WIASRD has three sections:

Section I— *INDIVIDUAL INFORMATION*

Items 101-131

Section II— *ACTIVITY AND SERVICES INFORMATION*

Items 301-345

Section III— *PROGRAM OUTCOMES*

Items 601-624 (Adults, Dislocated Workers and Older Youth)

Items 625-676 (Younger Youth)

The ADARE Project researchers have worked with WIASRD data for PY 2000 and PY 2001. These two Program Years include 'hard' and 'soft' exit dates July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2002.

The quality of the WIASRD information varies among the ADARE Project states, among WIASRD items within a state, and for some state-specific items over time.

Some states implemented the Workforce Investment Act in PY 1999 (July 1999-June 2000). PY 2000 was the second reporting year for these states.

ADARE Project states differed in WIA registration of Job Training Partnership Act clients who were active at the time of JTPA-WIA transition. A state's annual WIASRD file includes only WIA Core (other than self-service only), Intensive and Training Services registrants with 'hard' or 'soft' exit dates during that Program Year.

It is difficult to interpret WIA client flow profiles during the early years of WIA implementation. PY 2000 spikes and turning points in Core (other than self-service), Intensive and Training group counts reflect year of WIA implementation, decisions about whether to register active JTPA clients, WIA client assignment criteria and the timing and extent of MIS modifications. PY 2002 (July 2002-June 2003) profile updates should not be affected by these start-up problems.

## **2.4 Research and Evaluation Limitations**

The WIASRD has limitations as a research or evaluation database.<sup>4</sup> The most important reasons are:

- Coverage of WIA registrants only. This denies researcher access to potential comparison group members from the broader population of customers who ‘appear’ at a One-Stop in-person or through electronic record delivery.
- One-Stop staff control of the recorded WIA exit date. This discretionary opportunity blurs the clarity of interpretation of WIA client flows. Duration information is often used as a proxy for exposure to, or intensity of One-Stop or partner services. Delay in the recording of an exit date awaiting a preferred customer outcome status destroys a researcher’s ability to study the association of service intensity and subsequent employment and earnings profiles.

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<sup>4</sup> John Baj and David W. Stevens (August 2003), *WIA Standardized Record Data: Recommended Changes*, Washington, D.C.: Performance and Results Office, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 8 pp.

- Covering only the pre-registration and post-exit quarters of UI wage record information needed to calculate the core indicators of performance. Additional quarters could be used to refine WIA net impact estimates and achieve a better understanding of the relationship between short-term and longer-term employment, earnings and earnings gain or loss profiles. Absence of a consensus about the latter association limits our ability to “tell the WIA story.”
- WIASRD items 314 through 331 that are intended to capture information about WIA partner program participation. The ADARE Project states have made little use of these data fields to date. This short-circuits a researcher’s ability to provide an accurate description of WIA client flows through service modules, and to connect differences in these flow patterns to estimates of net impacts.
- WIASRD items 333 through 338 pertaining to training services are particularly frustrating from a research and evaluation user’s perspective.

Item 333—*Date of first training service*. This item is difficult to interpret because One-Stop staffs have not adopted a uniform definition of first training service. The boundary between Intensive Services and Training Services is not the same among states. This is a stand-alone date. It cannot be linked to an end date of this training service or to a possible sequence of training services.

Item 334—*Established Individual Training Account*. Start-up confusion and lags in administrative capacity to manage the issuance of Individual Training Accounts caused lower than expected counts in this WIASRD item in PY 2000 and PY 2001. Anecdotal evidence indicates that types of training with lower average costs continue to be preferred by some Local Workforce Areas.



Item 335—*Adult education, basic skills and/or literacy activities.* This item is coded ‘yes’ or ‘no’ without any additional information about the nature of the activities offered. WIA section 134(d)(4)(D)(viii) states that training services may include “adult education and literacy activities provided in combination with services described in any of clauses (i) through (vii),” but see comments on the limitations of items 336 and 337 below.

Item 336—*On-the-job training.* This item is coded ‘yes’ or ‘no’ without any additional information about the nature of the training offered.

Item 337—*Occupational skills training or skills upgrading/retraining, and/or workplace training.* This item is coded ‘yes’ or ‘no’ without any additional information about the type of training services rendered. Grouped under this single umbrella are: occupational skills training, including training for nontraditional employment; programs that combine workplace training with related instruction, which may include cooperative education programs; training programs operated in the private sector; skill upgrading and retraining; entrepreneurial training; job readiness training; and customized training conducted with a commitment by an employer or group of employers to employ an individual upon successful completion of the training. The unobserved diversity of these types of training severely limits a researcher’s ability to connect type and intensity of training service received with subsequent employment and earnings profiles.

Item 338—*Occupational skills training code.* A staff person who is responsible for entering this information is told that “if training was provided for more than one occupation, record the code for the last significant occupational training.” This limits a researcher’s ability to link a particular training activity with this occupational skills training code.

## **3.0 ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS**

### **3.1 Overview**

The longitudinal files of UI wage records, WIASRD data and TANF information will be updated by each ADARE Project researcher.<sup>5</sup> However, growing recognition of ADARE Project research capacities, within the Employment and Training Administration and among other U.S. Department of Labor program executives, has raised the priority to be given to acquisition of additional administrative records.

Each of the ADARE Project researchers is expected during PY 2003 (July 2003-June 2004) to acquire or otherwise gain access to available historical coverage of:

- Unemployment Insurance claimant information; and
- Job Service registrant information.

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<sup>5</sup> The California Employment Development Department (EDD) and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (DJFS) are negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of California, Berkeley and The Ohio State University respectively to join the ADARE Project research team. Historical time coverage of the UI wage record, WIASRD and TANF files has not been confirmed. The university principals in each case understand that a basic responsibility during the current Program Year 2003 cycle of ADARE Project activity will be to provide other research and evaluation component principals with the historical information needed to bring California and Ohio up-to-date with the other states' client flow documentation, net impact estimates and welfare to work profiling. These new state principals and their EDD and DJFS partners further understand the requirement that all state-specific tabulations, figures and narrative interpretation must be approved by the state agency partner(s) before disclosure to the Employment and Training Administration and the public.

### 3.2 Unemployment Insurance Claimants

Unemployment insurance (UI) reform has been a persistent topic of legislative debate in recent years. Translation of debate into action is expected to be given a high priority in the next Congress.

The ADARE Project will cover 43 percent of the U.S. civilian labor force when California and Ohio join the current seven states (FL, GA, IL, MD, MO, TX and WA). Linkage of UI claimant information with UI wage records and ES-202 data elements<sup>6</sup> will enable ADARE Project researchers to respond to UI reform questions.

Confirmation of each state's historical coverage of UI claimant information is needed. Conversations with state UI staffs to date indicate that coverage will range from "more than 10 years" through 10 years in two states to as little as 3 years in one state.

State UI laws typically define whether, what and how UI administrative records can be disclosed to third parties. UI claims information is not necessarily subject to the same disclosure rules as UI wage record information.

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<sup>6</sup> The ES-202 *Employment and Payroll Report* is prepared by the Labor Market Information unit in each state employment security agency or its counterpart, under a core products agreement with the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In most states, researcher direct or indirect access to this file is needed to obtain the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code(s) assigned to the state UI tax account number of each reporting employer. The Bureau is now returning Longitudinal Data Base (LDB) micro data files to each state. These can be used to improve the accuracy and ease of following worker movements between predecessor and successor business entities. These descriptors, and Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Program *Quarterly Workforce Indicator* (QWI) information that will soon be available for some, but not all of the ADARE Project states, will contribute valuable economic 'context' information to improve researcher understanding of how WIA, Job Service and UI services affect employment and earnings patterns.

The basic items needed for research purposes include:

- Claimant social security number, so UI claims information can be linked with other administrative records maintained by or accessible to the researcher.<sup>7</sup>
- The beginning and ending dates of each ‘spell’ of UI benefit payment. A ‘spell’ is defined as an uninterrupted series of benefit payments. The research need is to be able to analyze sequential spells and spell durations, and to relate both incidence and length to demographic descriptors and indicators of local economic conditions and dynamics—thus the importance of the BLS LDB and Census Bureau LEHD Program QWI data series.

UI benefit amount will not be available in all of the ADARE Project states because some state laws prohibit disclosure of this information even if it is going to be used for statistical purposes. ADARE Project researchers who can obtain this information should do so, because there is substantial policy interest in how benefit amount and earnings replacement percentage affects the duration of a UI benefit spell and the number of spells that occur in a reference benefit year. A substitute approach will be explored, but this would impose a new data programming and processing burden on the UI unit—calculate the percentage of the claimant’s maximum benefit eligibility that was received during a reference benefit year. Those defined as having *exhausted* their eligibility will have received 100 percent of their maximum eligibility amount.

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<sup>7</sup> Each researcher is responsible for encryption of confidential administrative record information at the time of receipt. Use of a *personal identification key*, or PIK, follows in the footsteps of best-practice confidential data management policies maintained by the Census Bureau, Internal Revenue Service, Bureau of Labor Statistics and other entities with long traditions of sustained improvement of confidential record management practices.

Reference to an “uninterrupted series of benefit payments” raises the complex issue of sanctions. A person who files a UI claim must first be determined to satisfy monetary eligibility requirements fulfilling base period employment and earnings criteria. Then, having been defined as monetarily eligible, a claimant must be and continue to be able to work, available for work (or in some cases available for *satisfactory* or *appropriate* work) and actively seeking work. Failure to satisfy any one of these continuing qualification criteria can result in disqualification for a specified period of time or until the disqualifying status is removed. The ADARE Project researchers do not plan to request sanction or other administrative action information.

### **3.3 Job Service Registrants**

ADARE Project researcher acquisition of or access to Job Service registrant information is important for several reasons:

- Job Service registrant information can be used for comparison group purposes to test the sensitivity of WIA net impact estimates to the defined comparison group.
- Traditional Job Service activities are being integrated into One-Stop locations and delivery of services at different speeds and completeness among the ADARE Project states. Coverage of Job Service activities and client flows is important to cast the researcher’s descriptive and analytical net as far as possible to include partner services and client mixes.
- New Job Service performance indicator reporting has started so employment and earnings statistical series will be available for comparative use.

The minimum core of needed items includes:

- Job Service Registrant social security number.
- Registration date, so the time sequence of various service exposures can be defined.

Further inquiry within each of the ADARE Project states needs to occur before deciding on a common definition of Job Service action items to be included in each researcher's request for Job Service administrative records. Job referral and results documentation is of highest priority, but definitions and completeness are expected to be uneven among the ADARE Project states.

## **4.0 OTHER TYPES OF ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS**

### **4.1 Overview**

The return on the ADARE Project investment occurs when policy relevant research and evaluation findings are delivered to the Federal sponsor. Awareness of ADARE Project achievements and potential has grown since the December 2002 delivery of the King and Mueser (eds), *Welfare Reform in the Cities* manuscript, researcher briefings held in March, April and May of 2003, and researcher participation in two national forums in June and July 2003.

Two persistent laments are expressed about current administrative record limitations:

1. UI wage records, WIASRD items and TANF files do not document what covered workers do, have done and could do in the workplace. The only occupational information available from these administrative records is the WIASRD type-of-training item.

2. Accurate descriptors of educational attainment, criminal conviction and sentencing information, and active substance abuse are known to be correlates of employment and earnings opportunity. These descriptors are unavailable to the ADARE Project researchers with few one-time access exceptions.

## **4.2 Occupational Information**

The concept of occupation is threatened as a practical descriptor or classification tool. Occupational classification was necessary and popular in the 1930s as industrial unions grew and the U.S. Employment Service struggled to develop a universal taxonomy for assigning titles and codes to listed job orders and registered job seekers.

Today, a growing number of on-line matching services have adopted different ways of describing the essential qualities of job openings and relevant attributes of job seekers. Industrial relations researchers and labor economists continue to document the pervasiveness of heterogeneity in the workplace.<sup>8</sup>

Advocacy persists to add an occupational item to the UI wage record. There are many reasons to oppose this move, even though Alaska does collect such information to comply with State legislation pertaining to Native Alaskan employment opportunity. Those who advocate this costly step are encouraged to revisit the history of unsuccessful state pilot efforts to do this.

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<sup>8</sup> Particularly important progress is being made by the Sloan Industry Centers Program. Descriptions of the Program and the 19 centers are available at [www.sloan.org/programs/stdnrd\\_industries](http://www.sloan.org/programs/stdnrd_industries) and [www.sloan.org/programs/industry\\_centers.shtml](http://www.sloan.org/programs/industry_centers.shtml).

### 4.3 Educational Attainment

Optimism can be expressed about practical ways to add educational attainment information to ADARE Project databases in some, but probably not all of the soon to be nine Project states. Florida has long been an, if not the acknowledged leader in the integration of confidential education records with other confidential administrative records for performance accountability and funds allocation purposes. Texas adopted many of the features of the Florida approach to database management and use. California has sought the counsel of the Florida program managers. Illinois, Maryland, Missouri and Washington have moved along independent paths, but awareness of what others have done and are doing continues to influence what is adopted and retained in each state. Ohio has moved rapidly in recent years to adopt some of the best practices of the earlier pioneers. Academic research use of confidential education administrative records remains beyond the reach of the Georgia ADARE Project researchers.

An important fact about educational attainment is that it is dynamic—subject to change. Retrieval of a self-reported educational attainment level from a dated administrative record is increasingly vulnerable to understatement of a person's current attainment level.

The traditional categories of less-than-high school and high school diploma<sup>9</sup> are inadequate for research use.

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<sup>9</sup> Often, high school diploma *or equivalent* is a single answer category. GED is usually covered by this addition. This is unfortunate for many research purposes because the GED is not equivalent to a high school diploma in many respects, and there is increasing state-to-state variance in what “passing” the GED means—there are multiple components of the GED portfolio and passing standards are set by each state. An added challenge is the growing diversity of types of high school diploma.



Similar references to some college credit without receiving a credential<sup>10</sup>, college certificate or degree, and post-graduate or professional studies fail to offer the descriptive content that is needed for research purposes. The growing popularity of advanced credit course-taking in high school blurs the traditional abrupt transition from secondary to postsecondary achievement. Engagement in on-line course taking on the Web is difficult to document and classify. Continued education grows in frequency of occurrence and diversity of provider and content.

The optimism expressed at the beginning of this subsection is based on having a solid foundation of knowing what to collect and how to collect it represented among the ADARE Project researchers. This optimism is tempered by the dynamic changes that continue to recast how continued education and training is delivered. Further tempering of the optimism is recommended because of the uncertain nature of continued access to confidential education records. Researchers must remain vigilant and vocal to ensure that lawmakers and others understand the important distinction between *statistical* uses of confidential information and *commercial* use.

A final caution with regard to ADARE Project access to confidential education information is that educators are properly concerned about the “story” that can be told with one state’s UI wage record information. Those who are concerned point to the growing importance of independent contractor employment and high levels of interstate and international mobility.

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<sup>10</sup> Again, the diversity of postsecondary credentials is growing. Business advocacy for customized course and program offerings and student advocacy for access to non-traditional combinations of courses are pushing community colleges and some universities to expand the number of exit points that are defined as worthy of and amenable to transparent certification. Of course, the proliferation of profit seeking providers of postsecondary continuing education opportunities, motivated in part by the lure of student controlled funds, has added to the pressure on traditional public institutions to compete on a common footing. This translates into pressure to accommodate the immediate vocational interests of the business and student customers.

#### **4.4 The Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS)**

The WRIS is an interstate wage record information exchange capability managed by the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) with technical management by Lockheed-Martin because L-M had previously developed and managed the interstate UI claim filing and processing system for the Unemployment Insurance Service. The WRIS was undertaken in response to a perceived national need to include out-of-state employment and earnings information in performance accountability calculations. Early design counsel was offered by state personnel who had pioneered the negotiation of one-on-one data sharing agreements between states having self-interest in casting a wider geographic net for performance accountability purposes. Florida, west coast and middle-Atlantic states entered into selected exchanges of interstate information at different times.

The ADARE Project researchers will explore whether and how relevant WRIS information can be included in the portfolio of administrative records that each maintains. On-going negotiations within the U.S. Department of Labor and between the Department and other Federal entities will determine the future scope of the WRIS and the authorized uses that can be made of this information.

#### **4.5 Federal Civilian and Military Employment**

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Department of Defense (DOD) have cooperated with individual states that have requested access to Federal government employment information for performance accountability purposes. The TANF High Performance Bonus Program and the incentive awards associated with WIA and Perkins performance have increased state interest in gaining access to this information. Today, there is no national clearinghouse for the transmittal of these requests to OPM and DOD.

#### **4.6 Independent Contractor Employment**

This type of employment remains inaccessible to the ADARE Project researchers. An increasing number of workers are defined as an independent contractor by their employer. This practice relieves the employer of multiple tax liabilities. One consequence of this spreading practice is that these workers are removed from or never appear in the UI wage record database.

Community college administrators and private profit seeking providers are among the vocal protesters of a current inability to include these people in performance indicator calculations. Information technology workers often freelance, as do increasing numbers of allied health care workers, real estate agents, automobile and other sales representatives.

### **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BROADER COVERAGE**

The core UI wage record, WIASRD and TANF databases maintained and routinely updated by the ADARE Project researchers have provided new policy relevant insights about the timing and quality of WIA exiting registrant and TANF recipient flows into employment. The addition of UI claimant and Job Service registrant information will add to the descriptive value and statistical power of these core databases.

Beyond these five data sources, high priority should be given to:

- ES-202 and Longitudinal Data Base (LDB) information sought in partnership with state Labor Market Information units.
- Quarterly Workforce Indicator (QWI) series from the Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Program, again through the state Labor Market Information unit partners in this Program.

- Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) information from the designated managing unit in each state employment security agency or its counterpart.
- Federal civilian employee (OPM) and military personnel (DOD) information, which is not readily accessible through a single national clearinghouse at this time. Coverage of each must be defined. Office of Homeland Security and Department of Defense confidentiality requirements have affected access to some, perhaps large employment components.
- The National Student Clearinghouse. Florida has pioneered negotiation of a data sharing agreement with the Clearinghouse and has completed a pilot cycle of data acquisition. The findings from this pilot are available and contain some surprises.<sup>11</sup>

The ADARE Project is at a pivotal stage of development and opportunity. A solid foundation of common databases has been established. Core products have been designed, produced and updated. Researchers have achieved an important quality of teamwork that is necessary to realize the policy relevant value from the Federal investment. The new California and Ohio research teams will add complementary interests and expertise to the current mix.

There is a fine balance between ambition and actions that take advantage of new data acquisition opportunities and the challenges that accompany expansion of scope and responsibilities. The ADARE Project researchers look forward to working with their state agency and Federal agency colleagues to find and maintain the “right” balance.

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<sup>11</sup> Jay Pfeiffer and Duane Whitfield, Florida Department of Education.