



CERA 2007

## Educational Research in the Accountability Era

### **Dear CERA Members:**

Welcome to Dana Point for the 86th annual conference of the California Educational Research Association (CERA). We hope that you will have a productive and refreshing time at the conference, getting new ideas and reuniting with old friends.

Our 2007 conference will address accountability with a focus on national, state, local, and classroom measures and the future of accountability. Never before has so much attention been devoted to accounting for performance in so many spheres of our public life. A cynical person might say that accountability mastery today is knowing how the appointed experts are slicing and dicing your world, and making sure your organization meets expectations or targets in the narrow ways your world is measured. A more optimistic view would be that accountability measures really are accurate barometers of performance and that higher outcomes do indicate higher organizational success in meeting performance goals. We are now somewhere between optimism and cynicism, between fact and farce.

NCLB carries the historical weight of fact and farce. What lies ahead might not be any better. NCLB legislation began badly, expecting schools to have all students proficient by 2014, while not recognizing that some students are in special education and working below grade level (some students, despite valiant efforts by many, will not reach grade level, no matter how much we all wish and work to make it happen). Also, no recognition was given to the fact that some students were English learners, and by definition, are not proficient in English. Though most will become proficient, the year 2014 will see newly arrived English learners, just as every year before and after 2014, and nearly all of these students will not be proficient in English the year they set foot in our country. Efforts to make NCLB a bit more realistic have seen mixed reactions: some have called alternative standards a watering down of the state standards, some have suggested the alternative standards don't reach far enough.

Suggested changes to the law include: smaller minimal subgroup sizes, so that more students will be covered by the need to make Adequate Yearly Progress; value added models that measure the progress a class has made under a given teacher; and more support for data systems to track student achievement.

The 2007 CERA conference will allow us to address some of these issues, and hopefully together we can make some progress towards enabling better accountability measures. Panels in the conference will focus on NCLB and growth measures, while several papers will focus on formative assessment, district assessments and state and national measures of accountability. Many other areas will be represented by research papers on teacher preparation, educational policy, and testing of special education or English Learner groups. While we might not have all the answers, we hope to move towards more reasonable, research-based measures than those devised by legislators who do not work in public education.

Jim Parker  
2007 President, California Educational Research Association