NCME national council on measurement in education

Volume 13, Number 3 NEWSLETTER September 2005

Annual Meeting Date Change

New Dates: April 8 – 10, 2006

San Francisco, California

FROM THE PRESIDENT

By James C. Impara, Buros Institute for Consultation and Outreach and Caveon Test Security

2006 Annual Meeting News

Many of you have already learned that AERA has made some changes in its meeting schedule and location for their sessions. NCME is modifying its meeting dates accordingly. NCME will now be held, still in San Francisco, on April 8, 9, and 10, 2006 (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday). This one-day shift retains our traditional meeting during days two, three, and four of AERA. The reason for the change is an ongoing labor situation in San Francisco regarding a dispute between the hotel management and the hotel workers' union that made it impossible for AERA (our meeting contractor) to schedule meetings at certain hotels.

Although there are still some uncertainties about the hotels and conference center in which our meetings will be held, there are some things we know.

First, some of the larger hotels may not be used for sessions and they may not offer conference rates. AERA is in the process of negotiating with smaller hotels for meeting rooms and lodging rates. We do not know where our sessions will be held. We are trying for either the Nikko or the Parq 55, but the final decision will be up to AERA as they negotiate for space. Most of the AERA sessions will be in the Moscone Center, which will be the conference Headquarters. As soon as we learn where our sessions will be held, we will announce it in the Newsletter, *EM:IP*, and on the web site (www.ncme.org).

Second, because the larger hotels may not offer conference room rates, lodging will likely be much more dispersed than is often the case. It will important for you to make your lodging arrangements as quickly as you can to ensure that you are located conveniently for our meeting location.

Third, the costs of holding the meeting (meeting rooms, catering, breakfast) will not change because of the revised dates. However, the costs of meeting in San Francisco will be substantially higher than the costs were last year in Montreal. Similarly, the costs of future meetings will also be higher than those we have typically experienced. AERA has already made a decision to increase their registration fees for 2006 and beyond. The NCME Board will be discussing this at its October meeting.

Fourth, we are concerned about the impact of the date change on attendance at various NCME functions because the meeting is being held over a weekend instead of during the week. We will be looking at this carefully in 2006. We have been informed that the AERA Council may bring up meeting scheduling (weekend versus weekday) as a discussion point in the future. Many societies meet over the weekend (as we will be doing in 2006) rather than during the week, and AERA will be considering such a shift for future meetings.

This is about all we know now regarding the date changes for the 2006 Annual Meeting. As we learn more and after the October Board meeting, information will be posted on the web site and elsewhere to try to keep you informed.

I am pleased to report we have received 295 submissions (paper proposals, coordinated papers, symposia, and training sessions combined) for the 2006 program! We will now be turning to the next stages. Program Co-chairs (Chad Buckendahl and Leslie Lukin) and the Training and Professional Development Committee (Lori Nebelsick-Gullet) are about to commence the review process.

Other News

At some point in the past NCME shifted from a calendar year membership (from January 1 to December 30) to an "anniversary date" membership (if you joined in June, your membership renewal was due in May of the following year). The Board has voted to move back to a calendar year membership schedule. Thus, if your renewal is due in May, you will be asked to renew for an extended renewal that will run out in December of the following year. A specific member renewal payment schedule is shown below.

Renewal Date	Amt Due	Renewal Date
1/1/06 – 3/31/06	1.0	1/1/07
4/1/06 – 6/30/06	1.75 (or .75)	1/1/08 (or 1/1/07)
7/1/06 – 9/30/06	1.5	1/1/08
10/1/06 – 12/31/06	1.25	1/1/08

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Note: There would be no interruption of journal delivery for renewing members. Those whose membership expires during the second quarter will be asked to pay the partial year plus next full year. Students will make partial year payments only.

Also at its July meeting the Board approved a new standing committee. Because AERA no longer serves as our Central Office we will need to be more attentive to our organizational finances. The new committee is the Budget and Finance Committee. Its charge will include working with the President and Vice President in developing budgets, reviewing financial reports, and recommending investment policies. This committee is in the process of being formed.

In the past NCME has solicited sponsorships of two activities: the Annual Fitness Run/Walk and the No-Host Cocktail Hour and Reception. Different people were responsible for solicitation of sponsors for each of these events, so some organizations were approached twice and other organizations not at all. In the future, there will be a single solicitation made from the President and all sponsors will be recognized in the Program and with signage at the No-Host Reception and the breakfast/business meeting.

NCME is trying to strengthen its relationship with the National Association of Test Directors (NATD). We have had a formal working relationship with them for over a decade. Their president will be invited to write a column in the next Newsletter that talks about that organization. We have also mutually agreed that the Co-chairs of the Classroom Assessment Award Committee will include one person from the Assessment Training Institute (ATI) and one person from NATD.

The NCME web site is being moved from its current location to the Rees Group. Until the move is completed, some items on the web site will be a bit out of date. The conversion process is slower than anticipated. Be patient; the web site conversion will soon be completed.

Thanks to all of you who have volunteered your time and efforts to serve on Committees, to review program submissions, and to submit program proposals. Without your efforts NCME would not be such a great organization.

10 Burning Questions for Bruce Wheeler, NCME's New Executive Director

By Bruce Wheeler, The Rees Group, Inc.

1. NCME recently changed our Central Office from AERA to The Rees Group, which is an association management company. What can NCME members expect as a result of this change?

In the grand scheme of things, we'll do many of the same things that AERA did for NCME. We'll support the Board and volunteer committees, send and process membership renewal notices, answer member questions, coordinate mailings of the journals with the new publisher, keep your books and prepare financial reports, etc. We'll also be supporting the website and listserve and working on the annual conference. I think the difference members will see or feel will be the difference between being a relatively small fish in AERA's big pond, to being a big fish in The Rees Group's smaller pond. We'll be able to give a higher and more personalized level of service to members as well as to NCME's leadership team.

2. As an NCME member, why should I feel good about part of my dues paying for a management company?

The answer is expertise and experience. We work with more than 15 different associations and bring the best of what we learn from each of them to NCME's table. When an issue arises, when the Board is considering a change in policy, or when the addition of a new member-benefit is being discussed, we have ample experience on which to draw when recommending a course of action. Basically, NCME gets to benefit from all the work we've done with other associations. Also, we have a goal to streamline operations and improve efficiencies so that more can be done for members without adding to the bottom line. In the end, I see working with a group like ours as an investment in NCME's future.

3. Can you give an example of how streamlining a particular system will benefit NCME members?

Sure. One change that the Board has already approved is moving from membership renewals based on anniversary date to renewals based on the calendar year. This shift means that we can focus staff resources on membership renewals during a relatively short, isolated period of time, thus freeing up resources throughout the rest of the year to provide greater support to other membership issues and activities.

4. What about students? How do they fit into this new management model?

I have a personal belief that strong associations have strong ties with students, and NCME could be a model for others in this area. Students of today are full members of NCME tomorrow, so I'm very pleased by the grad student activities already in place and look forward to supporting those and others moving forward. Speaking of moving forward, here is my charge to students: be active! Let your student representatives know what you want and need from NCME so that we can be an even better resource for you.

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5. What do you know about measurement? How important (or not) is a management company's knowledge of an association's area of focus?

What do I know about measurement? More than I did three months ago! And, I assure you, not as much as I will know a year from now. Having said that, our role isn't to direct the 'content' of NCME, but rather to manage it's associational functions, such as filing your taxes, being legally compliant with various state and IRS regulations, getting dues notices out in a timely manner, and responding to member requests. Some of the issues NCME is facing right now are purely associational challenges. We're working on better ways to communicate with members, to record and report financial information, to support committee activities. For those issues, it's important to understand who the members are because it gives us insights on how best to work with them. This is both a challenge and a joy for me. It's also one of the parts of my job that I enjoy most!

6. You've spent time with the Board of Directors and conference attendees. What are your impressions of us?

At the risk of sounding disingenuous, you are without a doubt one of the nicest and easiest to get along with groups I've had the pleasure of working with. This is an association of individuals who truly appear to like and respect each other. The Board is focused and dedicated. And watching NCME members at the convention in Montreal, I was struck by how welcoming the group was to newcomers. I felt a part of things from the moment I arrived and was never made to feel like an outsider or, worse, the hired help. I'm grateful for that, and it speaks volumes to me about the overall quality of this group.

7. Next year at this time, what do you hope will be different about NCME?

Actually, I expect much to remain the same. NCME doesn't need an overhaul. Perhaps a little fine tuning, but that's about it. And you've got a terrific group of volunteers who will direct any changes that need to be made, so the organization is in excellent hands!

8. Other than a Board member telling me, how will I as a member know whether this new relationship between NCME and The Rees Group is successful?

Of course, I hope members will be pleased with any and all interactions with staff, which is the most immediate test of how we're doing. Are we responsive? Are we helpful? Is the experience of calling for information or with a particular need a positive one? Looking at the bigger picture, it is also my hope that the board will be able to focus less on operations and more on programs, which means members should see more and richer program opportunities, as well as other enhanced benefits.

9. So, do you consider yourself to be Rees Group staff or NCME staff?

The Rees Group pays my salary. But I consider myself to be a staff member of NCME. And I encourage NCME members to think the same way. When you call us, you're not calling The Rees Group, you're calling NCME's home office – which, by the way, you can do by calling 608-443-2487. My extension is 143.

10. Our new home office is in Wisconsin, so what do you predict for the Packers this season?

Great things, of course! Those of us who live in Wisconsin and face six months of winter cling to this hope above all others. Well, that's not true. We also cling to the hope that spring will arrive in early March instead of late April…

TWO VIEWS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

By Sue Brookhart, NCME Newsletter Editor

Two views of formative assessment are presented in the two articles below. I encourage you to read both of them and join with the authors in thinking about the crucial issues of the purposes, uses, and users of formative assessment. In my view, and in the view of the Newsletter Advisory Board, it is a good use of newsletter space to present different, even conflicting, perspectives on important measurement issues, and formative assessment certainly is one. Whether you as a reader have already formed a strong opinion about this topic (as I confess I have), or whether you are new to exploring the issue, you will learn from these two pieces. All readers will find they present well-written arguments for their respective points of view. It is my opinion, editorial and otherwise, that we will be able to address each other better if we understand each other. I hope the main result of the dialogue that ensues – while of course of interest and professional value to NCME members – will be to benefit the students our formative assessments seek to serve.

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE RECENT EXPANSION IN THE USE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR FORMATIVE PURPOSES

By Lee Jones, Johnna Gueorguieva, and Scott Bishop, Riverside Publishing Company

Over the past two decades, as the national and local emphasis on improving education for all students increased, many states established standards for student achievement along with criterion-referenced testing programs. In 2002, the enactment of the federal *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation firmly established state assessment programs as tools for accountability. Under NCLB, states, districts and schools currently face repercussions—the withholding of federal funds, the transfer of students to higher-performing schools, and state control of low-performing schools—if the achievement of all student subgroups does not exhibit adequate yearly progress. With test stakes greater than ever, school administrators face intense pressures to ensure that all students perform well and that their schools show significant improvement each year. In the face of these pressures, school leaders are seeking quick and effective interventions for improving student achievement. They are turning to "formative assessments" to be part of this solution.

In this article, we describe the expansion of the use of formative assessments, describe the increase in the use of a specific type of assessment used for formative purposes, ("interim benchmark assessments"), and reflect on the potential challenges these pose for the educational measurement community.

Formative assessments traditionally have been characterized as assessments that: 1) are conducted on a frequent or ongoing basis, 2) are tightly integrated with daily instruction, 3) enable nearly immediate adjustment of instructional actions by teachers and learning behaviors by students, and 4) have as an ultimate goal the improvement of student learning.

Over recent years, however, the range of assessments referred to as "formative" has expanded, now referring to a continuum of practice from informal teacher observations and classroom-administered mini-assessments designed to provide "just-in-time" feedback, to middle-stakes district and (perhaps eventually) statewide tests designed to inform instruction before end-of-year state accountability testing. While assessments across this continuum all serve formative purposes, i.e., the goal of improving instruction and student learning, the more assessments move from teacher observation and a tight integration with daily classroom instruction, the more they move from the traditional definition of formative assessments described above. *(continued on page 4)*

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The fact that a range of assessments are now used for formative purposes is probably good for education. For example, many districts that administer norm-referenced tests for the purpose of obtaining profiles of their students' knowledge and skills relative to a nationally-representative sample can also use the tests for the value-added formative purpose of identifying student strengths and weaknesses relative to state standards covered on the NRT, to focus instruction on areas where improvement is needed. Indeed, an unintended benefit of a broad interpretation of formative assessments may be that teachers are more inclined to regard tests and test results as *actionable*, rather than passively receiving tests scores as top-down and disassociated from the curriculum.

Increasing numbers of districts are implementing a type of formative assessment often referred to as "interim benchmark assessments." These are assessments administered periodically during the year, usually district- or statewide, for the purpose of assessing expected learning to date in specific areas covered by district or state standards. Also, several recent *Requests for Proposals* for statewide testing programs have asked that test publishers include formative assessment components that are similar to interim benchmark assessments in their offers for assessment solutions. More typically, large school districts solicit bids for these programs independently of the state.

What are the typical characteristics of the interim benchmark assessment programs that are emerging from school districts? The typical program models the NCLB testing requirements: content areas usually focus on reading, mathematics, and science and span Grades 3 through 8, although frequently assessments extend from Grades 2 through 10. Assessments are administered approximately quarterly, and in some instances more frequently. This allows each periodic assessment to focus only on learning goals for a defined period of instruction. Thus, more test items can be allocated to specific domains than is usually possible on the state's NCLB test. A near-immediate analysis and reporting of results is desired. Scores are invariably reported in relation to specific state standards or grade-level expectations in order to provide diagnostic information regarding strengths and weaknesses relative to the performance benchmarks that students are expected to achieve at particular points in the school year. There is usually an expectation that performance data can be aggregated at the class, school, and district level for each participating grade so that results can be used not only by teachers to implement desired instructional interventions at the individual student or class level, but so that results can inform short- and longer-term institutional programmatic decisions that also will improve student learning. The explicit assumption is that improvement of learning in gap areas identified by interim benchmark assessments will improve performance in those areas.

The goals are noble, but this is a heavy burden to place on an assessment program that also requires quick scoring turnaround and rapid reporting of results. Some states and districts are requesting services for their programs that pose significant technical challenges, including scaling, equating, and other types of score linking. Requests for validity evidence are frequent, including studies of the relationships between interim benchmark assessments results and performance on the state's NCLB assessment. Costly and complex data-collection designs will be required in order to support the uses of interim benchmark assessments to make inferences about individual student strengths and weaknesses, growth in student learning, prediction of future performance, and efficacy of instructional intervention.

These are not insurmountable challenges, but the demand from policy-makers for acceleration of improvement in learning creates a tension that could work against the development and implementation of successful interim benchmark programs. Certainly this will require the establishment of an ongoing research base and data-collection designs that are more robust and complex than might have been envisioned for more traditionally-defined formative assessment programs.

In closing, we will re-state the observation that regardless of one's sociopolitical view of NCLB, the measurement challenges that continue to emerge from its implementation still justify its NCME-anointed nickname of "No Psychometrician Left Behind." There is still much work to do.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AS ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

By Judy Arter and Rick Stiggins, Assessment Training Institute

Definition

Formative assessment is the use of assessment processes, materials and results to help maximize student learning during the course of instruction. This contrasts with summative assessment which seeks to judge the sufficiency of student achievement at a particular point in time.

Effective formative assessment requires more than assessing frequently and, as important as it is, more than teachers using the findings from frequent assessments to plan the next steps in instruction. Effective formative assessment includes teachers providing descriptive feedback to students. It also involves students in understanding the learning targets they are to hit, becoming accurate assessors of those learning targets, assessing self and peers in relationship to those learning targets, tracking their own progress toward those learning targets, and describing what they know, how they've grown over time, and their next steps in learning. In short, effective formative assessment involves action on the part of *both* teachers and students.

In this we have followed the lead of the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) in the UK. For us, formative assessment is what the ARG calls "assessment *for* learning." Assessment *for* learning is intended to inform instructional decisions made both by teachers *and their students*, not just more frequently, but in a continuous manner as learning unfolds. Done well, it reveals not only which students are meeting which state standard, but how each student is progressing up the scaffolding leading to mastery of each standard. It relies on a range of assessment methods to generate evidence that may be unique to an individual student or classroom. Assessment *for* learning goes beyond identifying who needs more help to literally *being* that instructional help.

Reasons this is an Important Topic

This view of formative assessment is important because it is assessment *for* learning practices that have yielded the remarkable gains in student achievement reported in the research literature over the past 30 years. For example, in his original mastery learning research, Bloom and his students (1984) made extensive use of classroom assessment in support of learning and reported subsequent effect sizes on student test performance of one to two standard deviations. Black and Wiliam's (1998) research review synthesized some 40 studies from around the world on the impact of effective classroom assessment and reported effect sizes of .4 to .7 standard deviation, with the largest gains coming for the lowest achievers. Meisels and his colleagues (2003) involved students in performance assessments and reported effect sizes of over one and a half standard deviations on subsequent tests. Finally, Rodriguez (2004) reported effects of similar size in U.S. TIMMS math performance arising from the effective management of classroom assessment.

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Black and Wiliam (1998) report the actions that teachers should take to create these gains. On their list were providing descriptive feedback to students and student involvement in their own assessment.

Issues
The biggest issues for us right now are (1) the extent to which current formative assessments being implemented by districts have the features that enable them to be used by teachers and students as assessments *for* learning, and (2) educator preparation to implement assessment *for* learning.

Districts and teachers need to think through the design of the short-cycle, benchmark, or common assessments being selected or developed as formative. To be truly useful, instructional assessments need to have the following features (e.g., Popham, 2003; Herman, et. al. 2004):

- Everyone needs to have a common understanding of what skill or knowledge students must master and the assessment adequately covers those.
- Each assessment covers only a few learning targets in enough detail to both draw a good conclusion about level of mastery and provide diagnostic information about student misconceptions.
- Each assessment is tied closely to instruction so that it is available while instruction on the relevant learning targets progresses.
- Each assessment uses the assessment method (selected-response through performance assessment) most appropriate for the type of learning being developed (knowledge through skills and products).
- Assessments are tailored to where in the continuum of learning each student currently fits.
- Assessment materials, such as rubrics, are available in student-friendly versions.

These features enable teachers to understand at the point of need exactly where students are having successes, understand on which subparts of complex standards students are having trouble (and exactly what trouble they're having), and provide descriptive feedback to students (or, better yet, have students practice giving themselves descriptive feedback).

Dylan Wiliam (2004, p. 4) points out, "In the United States, the term 'formative assessment' is often used to describe assessments that are used to provide information on the likely performance of students on state-mandated tests—a usage that might better be described as 'early-warning summative.'"

Lorrie Shepard (2005, slides 28 and 29) talks about the idea of formative assessment being hijacked. She says, "Data-driven instruction and commercial test publishers have produced systems that, if used frequently, will produce the next round of inauthentic, test-driven curricula."

In other words, schools and districts can't make assessment *for* learning operational merely by purchasing tests, scoring services and information management systems. Such systems are not bad; they serve the needs of certain decision-makers. But, they don't automatically provide the assessment *for* learning characteristics that lead to the improved achievement gains shown in the literature. This is especially true if the "formative" assessments:

- Occur quarterly (or even monthly); teachers and students make decisions multiple times each day.
- Use only multiple-choice items; some student learning outcomes require other assessment methods.
- Cover multiple standards, none of which in detail; teachers and students need specific information about what students are doing well and their next steps in learning.
- Are lock-step: everyone gives exactly the same test at the same time.
- Are "early-warning summative."

Even if formative assessments *are* effectively designed, there aren't enough measurement experts in the world to devise for teachers all the assessments needed to provide the daily diagnostic information teachers and students need. Only teachers can do this.

The issue is that educators don't automatically understand how to use assessment information to plan instruction (e.g., Ayala, 2005; Kim, 2005) or how to use assessment materials and procedures (such as test specifications, rubrics, and student exemplar work) to make learning targets clear to students, provide descriptive feedback to students, and meaningfully involve students in their own assessment and goal setting. Educators have typically not had the opportunity to learn about, experience, or see concrete examples of assessment *for* learning.

We in the measurement community know all too well that these have rarely been part of the teacher or administrator preparation curriculum (e.g., Crooks, 1988; Stiggins, 1999). So, a major question in making assessment *for* learning operational remains, how do we get teachers and school leaders the opportunity to learn how to use sound classroom assessment practices?

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New *NCME Newsletter* Editor Named

Scott Bishop, Riverside Publishing

Editor for Volumes 14 – 16

2006 - 2008

The nominating committee: Dave Frisbie (chair), Steven L. Wise, and Thel Kocher, has proposed the following slate of candidates for the next election (early 2006).

Board Members:
At large: Gregory Cizek and Steve Sireci.
K-12: Leslie Lukin and Joe O'Reilly.
Vice President:
Wayne Camara and Anne Fitzpatrick

ITC CONFERENCE
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL TEST ADAPTATION ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

The 5th Conference of the International Test Commission, "Psychological and Educational Test Adaptation Across Languages and Cultures: Building Bridges Among People," will be held at the University of Louvain in Brussels, Belgium, from July 6 to 8, 2006. The main goal of the conference is to bring together experts on the topic of test translation and adaptation theory and practices with researchers, educators, psychologists, policy experts, and testing specialists for the purpose of sharing insights, guidelines, and research findings. The conference program will consist of invited lectures, one-day workshops, symposia, paper sessions, and posters.

Topics that will be on the program include the presentation of the 2nd edition of the ITC guidelines for test adaptation, technical advances in test adaptation methodology, approaches for checking structural invariance of tests over language groups and cultures, test ownership and adaptation, equating of scores across language and cultural groups, practical examples of good test adaptation methodology, and international comparative studies of educational achievement (e.g., TIMSS and PISA). Applications of test adaptation advances will be broad: to include the educational, industrial, clinical, and personality fields; and to include achievement, aptitude, and personality testing, credentialing exams, and questionnaires and surveys. More information about conference registration, and procedures for submitting workshop proposals and symposium, paper, and poster presentations can be obtained by writing itc2006@psp.ucl.ac.be or by going to the conference website at www.psed.ucl.ac.be/itc2006. Keynote presenters and workshop presenters include Dave Bartram, Barbara Byrne, Fanny Cheung, Linda Cook, Paul Costa, Kadriye Ercikan, Dan Eignor, Filip de Fruyt, Ron Hambleton, Janet Harkness, John de Jong, Stephen Sireci, Fons van de Vijver, and Bruno Zumbo.

CASMA-ACT INVITATIONAL CONFERENCE
CURRENT CHALLENGES IN EDUCATIONAL TESTING

ACT and the Center for Advanced Studies in Measurement and Assessment (CASMA) of the University of Iowa are sponsoring a one-day conference on Saturday, November 5, 2005, at ACT's conference facilities in Iowa City. A Keynote Address will be given by Laura Schwalm, Superintendent, Garden Grove Unified School District, Orange County, CA, winner of the 2004 Broad Prize for Urban Education.

Sessions and speakers include:
(1) Welcome (Richard Ferguson, CEO, ACT; David Skorton, President, University of Iowa)
(2) K-12 Testing and NCLB (Robert Linn, University of Colorado and CRESST);
(3) Computerized Grading of Essays (eRater; KAT; Vantage Learning);
(4) NAEP 12th Grade Testing (Sharif Shakrani, National Assessment Governing Board; Ted Stilwill, former Director of Iowa Department of Education);
(5) Non-cognitive Assessment in College Admissions and the Workforce (Robert Sternberg, Yale; Michael Campion, Purdue; Paul Sackett, University of Minnesota).
(6) Panel Discussion on a "Hot Topic"
(7) Reception

The registration fee is $50 (includes breakfast, lunch, and reception). The registration deadline is October 7, 2005. To register and to obtain travel and hotel information, go to http://www.act.org/casma .

Contributing sponsors include the College Board, CTB/McGraw Hill, Harcourt Assessment, Measured Progress, National Evaluation Systems, Pearson Educational Measurement, Riverside Publishing Company, and Vantage Learning.