

## Teacher Professional Development Works in Geography Education

Numerous studies show how teacher professional development in geography education improves students' learning.

Results from the 2010 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) demonstrate that teacher professional development leads to better outcomes. For test-takers in the 8th grade, overall scores were significantly higher for students who had teachers who reported attending civics, geography, or history-related conferences or workshops in the past two years. Likewise, teachers who reported having been trained in the use of software applications and other technology in the past two years had students perform significantly higher on the NAEP test.

In 2002, researchers at McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) investigated the impact of the Alliance Program. The purpose of the study was to compare the achievement of students of Alliance teachers with a carefully matched sample of students who had taken the 2001 NAEP geography assessment. The study found that students of teachers who have been involved in the Alliance program have statistically significantly higher levels of achievement when compared with students of similar demographic backgrounds from an NAEP sample.

The major findings of the study include the following:

- Students who had Alliance members as teachers had significantly higher scores overall compared with students in the matched NAEP sample.
- Item-level analyses also show that Alliance students outperformed the NAEP sample and identify relative strengths of these students. Alliance students tended to perform better on questions pertaining to understanding U.S. geography, reading maps, and drawing and interpreting maps.
- The teacher demographic variable that significantly impacted student achievement was the frequency that the teacher participated in the Alliance summer institutes.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION

Teacher professional development in geography education is vital for teachers who never took a geography course at the university level. Plus, teacher professional development provides teachers with spatial reasoning skills that are in demand by today's employers.



*Without prepared teachers, geography is hidden in the curriculum.*