

## Using Test Results to Study Longitudinal Effects

The test results for this year have been delivered, carefully analyzed, discussed with parents, used to develop programs or deliver special instruction to students. Now what? Are they history? Or are they a link to consistent progress and an effective curriculum? At ERB we like to think that past test results, together with each new test, taken in concert with classroom performance, form a profile of vital information. Using this information to ask questions and seek answers can guide students, parents, teachers, counselors and administrators in making wise choices for individual students, as well as in suggesting curriculum and instructional review and development.

When we look at an individual student's profile, we are particularly interested in determining if the student is making consistent progress. The percentile rank will tell us if the student is maintaining his position within a normative group, and we can further determine the student's progress by reviewing her scale score on individual subtests. A review of the student's profile can help us determine strengths as well. Does the student continue to show stronger performance in one area than in another? Have interventions produced improvements that have been maintained? If there are peaks and valleys in student performance, have we been able to respond to them? What has our use of particular strategies taught us about the student's learning style or his interests?

Of course, a review of student profiles can be helpful to a school in other ways as well. A longitudinal study of year-to-year results of a group of students whose educational experiences have been similar can reveal the strengths and weaknesses in a curriculum. How do our students compare in specific areas with students in similar schools? Does this comparison continue over time? If we instituted changes, did performance improve with new materials, new instructional strategies or new technologies? Were successful changes the result of staff development efforts? How does the per-

formance of students in one group, i.e. students who began their career in our school, compare with the performance of students from a different group, i.e. students who entered our program at a later time?

Sam is a high school sophomore whose parents, teachers and counselors have been reviewing his test results, together with his classroom performance, since he was tested in the 6th grade. Each year's test data, when compared with previous data, have become valuable influences in the success of Sam's school career, and his parents are hoping they will help provide some important suggestions for his future. Each year they have compared scores to check the relationship between reasoning and achievement, and they are pleased to see that the relationship is consistent. Sam's language arts skills, especially his writing skills, have not been as strong as his math skills. Sam has received focused instruction in writing, while he has been recommended for advanced classes and independent projects in mathematics. His writing skills have shown some improvement; he has become an excellent math student. Sam, his parents, and his counselor have excellent information to guide class selection for his junior year, to suggest career paths that might interest Sam and colleagues that might provide programs for those careers.

Not all students are as successful as Sam. All the more reason why a continuous review of student performance is paramount in determining where the challenges lay. Do a few students need intervention in a particular area, or is there a disparity that should be addressed across grade levels? Do these weaknesses indicate a need for curriculum review? Have curriculum change or new methodologies been effective? Do we know what weaknesses continue to exist after interventions have been introduced? A review of year-to-year assessment is a valuable tool that, while it may not provide the answers, certainly can focus on the appropriate questions.

## ERB Conference October 22-25, 2003

A Delicate Balance: Technology & the Human Connection is the theme selected for the ERB Conference, October 22- 25, 2003 at the Crowne Plaza Manhattan Hotel in New York City. Keynote speaker for the conference will be Dr. Robert Sternberg, President of the American Psychological Association and director of PACE Center at Yale University. Dr. Sternberg will focus on how educators can use technology in teaching and assessments.

Another noted speaker will be Dr. James Garbarino of Cornell University who will address The Role of Technology in a Socially Toxic Environment. Dr. Garbarino will explore how children process and react to war, terrorism and a variety of influences from the media, the internet and video games.

An advance brochure has been mailed to all ERB members, and the full program and registration will follow in early fall.

## Summer 2003

- **Using Test Results to Study Longitudinal Effects**
- **ERB Conference**
- **Interpreting and Using CTP 4 Score Reports**
- **Writing: The Forgotten 'R'**
- **News from ERB Response to Algebra 2 & Geometry Survey**
- **Workshops Scheduled**

# Interpreting & Using CTP 4 Score Reports

As many of ERB's members know, the score reports for the CTP 4 provide helpful information to guide the work of teachers and administrators. Here is a guide to assist you with the interpretation and use of each report that is available with the CTP 4. ERB recommends your use of the *CTP 4 Handbook for Classroom Teachers* and the *CTP 4 Handbook for Administrators* for more detailed information on the interpretation and use of the score reports.

## Report: Class Roster

**Description:** This report is included in the basic scoring package. It lists eight students on a page, followed by their scale scores on each test and the percentile and stanine that the scores reflect in each of the norm groups chosen on the Order for Scoring Service (OSS). Administrators, teachers and counselors can review all of the students' scores and compare them individually or as a class to scores of the selected norm groups or to one another.

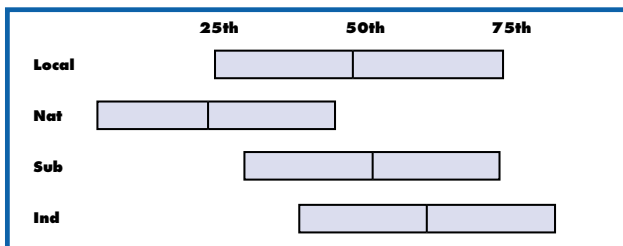
**Use:** This report is excellent for teachers and administrators. It helps them assess student achievement on each test in the test battery. Teachers can determine if there are discrepancies between scores on particular subtests that they want to investigate further in the item analysis. For example, if a student has a two-stanine difference between vocabulary and reading comprehension, the teacher may want to look at the skills assessed within each test to determine if there are any deficiencies that may require intervention. Depending on how many students show weakness in a particular area, the teacher can decide whether the implications extend to a few students or the class. If the latter is the case, the information can serve as a "reality check" on the curriculum being taught and may lead to grade-level discussions on curriculum and teaching.

## Report: Class Roster Summary

**Description:** This report is included in the basic scoring package. It contains information about the local group (usually a class) in relation to other selected norm groups. The bar graphs in the body of the report depict achievement at the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentile for a class/school/district followed by comparisons to scores for national, suburban public, and independent school norm groups, in that order. The lower portion of the report summarizes the information for each test by providing the local scale score that coincides with each of the three percentile rankings listed (25th, 50th, 75th), and the percentile comparison in each category for the norm groups selected.

**Use:** This report is excellent for teachers and

administrators. By viewing the bar graphs (as shown below) in relation to one another, teachers and administrators can see at once whether scores among subtests overlap within related categories (verbal reasoning and reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing, for example). They can also see how well their students are performing at each of these points in the distribution by comparing local achievement to the other norm groups at the same percentile ranges. The bar graphs also provide a quick and clear graphic view of the scores from the 25th-75th percentiles (the width of the bar for each test). That may lead to some discussion among teachers of a grade as to why the range is wider, showing greater student variability in one area than in another. Those conversations often lead to discussions about curriculum, teaching strategies, and the development of priority goals to guide work with children from grade to grade.



## Report: Administrator's Summary

**Description:** This report is included in the basic scoring package. The purpose of this report is to give a graphical picture of performance in a school for each grade on each test. The school receives a comparison of its scores to national, suburban, and independent norm groups at the same level on the same tests. You will be able to see how well groups at five different achievement levels are performing vis-a-vis their counterparts in the norm groups from the 90th percentile (highest achieving) to the 10th percentile (lowest achieving). The graphs in the report divide the local group's scores into stanines 1-9 and show the percentage of students "expected" to be in the below average (1-3), average (4-6), and above average (7-9) stanines compared with the actual percentage of students in your group.

**Use:** This report is useful for principals, curriculum directors, school heads, and superintendents. At a glance you can see differences in achievement levels as the class or grade is compared, in turn, to national, suburban public, and independent norm groups. You can compare your students' achievement against the group that is most similar to them and find out how well they are doing at different achievement levels. For example, by examin-

ing the scores of your students at the 90th percentile and comparing them to the norm group you choose (national, suburban, or independent), you can see how your top students compare to other top achieving students. Similarly, you can compare the achievement of your students at other percentile ranks (10th, 25th, 50th, and 75th) to determine how well your curriculum is working for your middle and lower achieving students. This kind of review enables schools to establish curriculum priorities, workshops, and strategies to address the needs of all learners.

## Report: Item Analysis

**Description:** This report is included in the basic scoring package. The main purpose of this report is to show which students demonstrate mastery of the individual skill areas covered by each test, and which of them some students seem to be having difficulty with. A separate item analysis is sent for each of the tests in CTP 4 and each page includes up to 35 students. Each of these reports indicates the percent correct for each question and category cluster (e.g., Explicit Information within Reading Comprehension), and compares that achievement to the

suburban public and independent school populations. You will also see how each individual child answered each question and the percent correct for every student on each major category covered by each test.

**Use:** This report is, perhaps, the most valuable one for teachers, who report that they use it more than any other. It can help you discover patterns of strengths and weaknesses among skill areas within each test. By reading down the report, teachers can check patterns of performance for the class as a whole and for individual students against the performance of suburban public and independent school norm groups. Since the questions in any given test represent a range of difficulty, it is important to consider local performance against the larger norm populations. A question missed by a substantial percentage of students in these populations is meant to challenge the highest performing students. Clearly, a lower class performance on this particular question is understandable. In short, teachers should look for questions on which their students' performance is at odds with the norm populations'. Reading across, teachers can see if a number of different students in the class are answering the same questions incorrectly. If many are choosing the same incorrect answer, it may offer a clue as to the source of the stu-

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## Writing: The Forgotten 'R'

Few people would argue the importance of writing as a communication tool; yet many of these same people decry the quality of student writing at virtually all grade levels in our nation's schools. It's as if writing has become a neglected area of study, recognized as important, but somehow left to others to teach. Just what is the status of writing in our schools, and what can be done to improve the situation?

A recently released report by the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges helps shed some light on this issue for us. The report notes that formal attention to writing "...leaves a lot to be desired, in both school and college." Specifically, the Commission points out that more than 50% of first-year college students are unable to produce papers that are relatively free of language errors. The results were no better at other levels. The latest findings (1998) from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that while 80% of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 are at or above the "basic" level of writing, only about 25% at each grade level are at or above the "proficient" level. These results are not surprising when you consider that, at the elementary school level, data from NAEP indicate that practically all students (97%) report spending three hours a week or less on writing assignments. In high school, only about half of twelfth graders report being assigned a paper of three or more pages once or twice a month in English class. And almost 40% reported such assignments "never" or "hardly ever."

What these results tell us is that many students do understand the language and can write at some level. However, they cannot apply those skills in systematic fashion to produce writing at high enough levels of skill, maturity, and sophistication required in today's global economy and work place. In other words, they can write, but not well; and that does not bode well for their future. The challenges for our schools, therefore, include providing more time for writing and writing instruction, assessing results fairly and accurately, and offering support for teaching it.

Time is perhaps the greatest challenge both in teaching writing and producing it.

Establishing a writer's voice and a feel for the audience, and mastering the mechanics of grammar and usage, are daunting tasks in themselves. Add to that the importance of understanding the distinctions among expository, narrative, and persuasive writing, and the time necessary to accomplish all of this seems endless. The organization of many schools often compounds the dilemma. At the middle and high school levels, many teachers face more than 120 students daily. Teachers who ask simply for a one-page paper weekly are overwhelmed with the challenge of reading, critiquing, and evaluating the product of their request. In order for them to teach writing effectively, and to critique those papers meaningfully, teachers need manageable class sizes. At the same time, writing labs or scheduled writing conferences need to be considered as part of the school's writing program. At the elementary level, it is not class size that interferes with the goal of devoting more time to writing. Rather, it is the competition writing faces with the array of other important skills and subjects teachers must cover in the course of a day. No matter what the cause of the problem, it is essential that we find a solution. Here are some thoughts.

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*"If students are to learn,  
they must write."*

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A quality writing program has to include an assessment component. Without accurate and reliable measurement of what students have learned, neither the academic officials and parents, nor the students will know the full extent of students' progress and growth. To be sure, writing assessment poses its own set of difficulties. For public schools, standards often differ from state to state. In addition, unless readers have been trained, they may have different expectations for student performance. Moreover, writing assessment should involve sufficient time to produce the writing, different pieces of writing designed for different audiences, and include measures of writing mechanics as well as overall development and organization. Teachers need to be given support in the reinforcement of the writing skills they are teaching. This requires writing to be part of the curriculum beyond the work done by

teachers of English. Using a rubric, with clear definitions of writing terms and examples to help identify different writing features, teachers in every content area can acquire the skills needed to assess their students' writing. Furthermore, students themselves can apply the rubric and, in so doing, begin to understand and adopt the elements of quality writing.

As noted earlier, class size is an important factor governing the quantity of writing requested by teachers. Ted Sizer, the former Dean of Education at Brown University and executive director of the Coalition of Essential Schools, advocated for personalization of instruction as one of the Coalition's guiding principles. He recommended that secondary school teachers have no more than 80 students in their teaching load so they could get to know their students well and truly make a difference in their education. This principle arguably makes sense more for teaching writing than perhaps any other skill. Even if 80 students per secondary teacher is impractical for many schools, a goal of close to 100 is not if we expect teachers to spend the time necessary to read papers and offer useful comments to their students' writing.

One of the ways to optimize teaching time and improve writing is to institute a writing conference period into English teachers' schedules. Teachers could then schedule individual students for writing conferences, seeing perhaps two or three students per conference period. The students could bring a recent writing assignment for discussion, or the teacher could use pieces from a portfolio kept for each student. It is a way to focus on writing intensively as a means to reinforce the skills taught in class.

For those who use ERB's Writing Assessment Program (WrAP), all of this may sound familiar. In effect, you have been ahead of the writing curve for as many years as your school has been using the WrAP. For example, you will recognize the rubric that is an important feature of the WrAP and a tool used by many teachers when they assign a writing task. It contains the very elements of writing emphasized by the Commission as essential to quality writing: overall development, organization, support-

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ing details, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics. Similarly, the modes of discourse used on the WrAP follow the recommendations of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) from year to year, thereby requiring students to write descriptive, informative, and persuasive pieces for different audiences using the prompts that guide the essays. The WrAP is sensitive to the time dilemma as well and is administered in two class periods. In the first period, the students are given time to think about what they want to say and how they want to say it; and they return the second day to revise and edit the piece for scoring. By sending the papers out to trained readers, the school is assured of objective scoring that is very helpful when sharing results with parents and students. It is little wonder that users of the WrAP applaud its value as a reliable instrument that not only assesses quality writing, but also supports the process-writing approach that is the hallmark of most successful writing programs.

More and more research supports what those successful in business have been saying for a long time: the need to write effectively is an essential skill in their day to day work. That led the National Commission on Writing to conclude that, "Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many." The way to eliminate the neglect writing has suffered is to act on their recommendations: increase the amount of time students spend writing; ensure that assessment is fair and includes prose actually created by the students (not simply answers to multiple-choice items); and provide professional development so teachers will evaluate student writing using common performance expectations and consistent standards. In fact, if students are to learn, they must write.

(Source: Report of The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, April 2003)

students' misunderstanding. Taken overall, the item analysis provides teachers and administrators with valuable information to monitor student learning and curriculum content.

### **Report: Individual & Group Instructional Summary (IIS & GIS)**

*Description:* These reports reveal how an individual student and class or grade perform on each CTP 4 test and skill category expressed in terms of percentage of questions correct rather than percentile ranks or stanines. In addition, the student's and group's performance is compared to the performance of the selected comparison groups (e.g., suburban public, independent). For each component section within each test category the IIS provides the number of students tested, the number of questions included in the test section, the number of questions answered by the student, and the percentage of questions correct in each case. The percent correct is calculated for each student and compared to the average percent correct in the school (if requested) and for other comparison groups the school selects. The Group Instructional Summary (GIS) comes at no extra charge when the Individual Instructional Summary (IIS) is ordered. It shows the average number of questions correct for the class or grade as a group, the average percent correct, and the average percent correct in the groups selected for comparison purposes.

*Use:* This report serves as an excellent supplement to the Item Analysis for use especially by teachers. The Group Instructional Summary is

*Like any good snapshots,  
tests results should be  
re-examined from  
time to time.*

especially valuable for teachers and administrators. The Individual Instructional Summary is a convenient way to share achievement information with parents about their child for each content area covered by the tests. Teachers can see how their students' scores compare within related areas, such as Reading Comprehension and Writing Concepts & Skills. Consistent scores among test categories is always a desired outcome in and of itself. When scores of individual students or groups show inconsistency, teachers can plan appropriate interventions for them. If teachers or administrators note patterns of discrepancies across a grade, that information often paves the way for conversations on curriculum and teaching strategies.

### **Report: Individual Narrative Report (for parents)**

*Description:* This report compares the individual student's performance on each test taken to the percentile ranks and stanines of the norm groups (national, suburban, and/or independent) selected by the school. The table on the top portion of the report shows how the student's scores compare to the other norm groups selected. The graphical representation in the bottom portion of the report places the percentile score the student earned on each test within the norm group identified and highlighted in the top portion of the report. Each score is embedded within a bar representing the possible range of scores the student might earn on a different day or on a different set of questions.

*Use:* This report is designed to be given to parents and is accompanied by an interpretation folder to help parents understand such terms as "norm group," "percentile rank," and "stanine." It also describes the categories measured in the test. If the school wants to compare its students' performance to a national norm group, it must choose this narrative parent report on the Order for Scoring Services (OSS).

### **Report: Individual Subscore Report (for parents)**

*Description:* This report contains information about an individual student's performance at both the test and content category levels. On the top portion of the report, the student's performance on each test is reported as a percentile rank and stanine within each comparison group selected by the school. In the lower portion of the report, each test--and the content categories within them--is listed. The bar graph represents the average percent correct for either the suburban or independent school population selected and highlighted at the top of the report. The diamond represents the student's percent of correct items for each category.

*Use:* This report is designed to be given to parents, along with an interpretation folder to help parents understand such terms as "norm group," "percentile rank," and "stanine." A quick look at the diamonds representing the student's performance against the selected norm groups will show in relative terms how well the student did in each category. The report makes it easy to examine consistency between related subtests (verbal categories, for example), and helps to identify possible areas of difficulty for the student. It can help teachers communicate a student's strengths or needs in conjunction with other work done by the student in class.

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On this parent report, only suburban and independent norm comparisons are possible; national norms are not available for this report.

## **Report: Primary Grade Parent Report**

(for use in grade 1, 2, and fall of grade 3)

*Description:* This report to parents offers information on the child's performance using standards set by primary grade teachers from ERB-member independent and suburban schools working with ETS. Rather than using norm-referenced statistics in these highly formative early years, we have chosen to report how well the child met the expectations typically found in primary classrooms of ERB-member schools. Therefore, the report tells in which areas the child's results indicate that he or she is meeting expectations, exceeding expectations, or developing. This keeps the focus on the child's own performance at a time in school when cognitive development can be quite variable and comparisons to other students subject to considerable fluctuation.

*Use:* This report is for use with parents of children in grade 1, 2, and the fall of grade 3. The scores are criterion-referenced, with three performance-level standards established by the panel of educators based solely on their expectations for students. The report is accompanied by an interpretation folder that contains content category descriptions and explains how cut scores for each content area are determined. On the back page of the folder parents will find a list of the tests and content areas along with the number of correct answers required to "meet" or "exceed" expectations for each area. In cases where a child's scores appear on the report as "developing," parents, teachers, and administrators have an opportunity to review and discuss extra support that may be advisable to help the child. At the same time, teachers can begin conversations with parents about what is covered in their curriculum, whether the category in question is emphasized at that grade in the school, and what the teacher will be doing to address any learning needs of the child. Often the parent report serves as the catalyst for these discussions through which teachers can establish rapport with families and enlist their support in the child's learning.

## **Report: Primary Grade Teacher Report**

(for teachers of grade 1, 2, and fall of grade 3)

*Description:* This report gives teachers of primary grades a general indication of their students' development at the time of testing. It provides a count of the students, and the corresponding percentages, in each class that are "meeting," "exceeding," or "developing" in the

content categories covered by each test. This means that the performance standards remain the same from year to year along with the scores required of the student to "meet" or "exceed" expectations in that area. The report also identifies the percent of students in each of the three achievement categories in the class or school and in the independent and suburban norm groups. In other words, the norm information for teachers is given as the percent of students in the norm group that score in each category, not as percentile rankings. This is an important distinction. By presenting the percent of students in each norm group, the report can help a teacher judge whether a student's performance is developmentally appropriate.

*Use:* This report is designed for use by teachers of students taking the CTP 4 in grade 1, 2, and the fall of grade 3. By looking at individual student performance on the report, the teacher can determine how well a child meets

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*Test results need  
to be used to be useful.*

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the expectations typically found in primary classrooms of ERB-member schools. For example, if only three children in a particular class are "exceeding" expectations in a certain area and the norm groups selected for comparison also have few students in this category, the teacher might conclude that only a few children this age are developmentally ready to perform well on this part of the test. On the other hand, if the comparison groups reveal more students exceeding the expectation than in this class, the teacher will likely think about the reasons for this and consider instructional strategies that might help the students. This report, therefore, allows teachers to see overall performance of a class as well as specific scores for each child. With this information, teachers can discover where a student is progressing as expected, or needs additional support.

## **Report: Median Percentile Chart**

*Description:* This report gives an overall view of the performance of your local group (by grade level) in relation to the other three norm groups (national, suburban, independent) on all of the CTP 4 tests. It plots the local students' median (50th percentile) score for each test against the median of the national sample (the straight line on the graph).

*Use:* This report is recommended especially for use by administrators. It is excellent for showing parents, for example, why students belong

in a school that uses the CTP 4. It is more than likely that your students will far outperform national norms. At the same time, you can show how your "average" students at the 50th percentile compare to all of the groups. An administrator can see at a glance how each group is performing relative to other norm groups on each test area. In cases where achievement varies relative to the norm groups, the administration and faculty can discuss possible reasons and set curriculum and teaching priorities as appropriate.

## **Report: Achievement/Reasoning Consistency Analysis**

*Description:* This report presents a list of student names for each achievement test taken. A check mark is placed in one of three columns indicating whether or not achievement and reasoning scores are consistent with one another, the achievement score is low relative to the comparable reasoning score, or high relative to the reasoning score. We emphasize that while the reasoning tests are not designed to be predictors of achievement, there is an expectation of a strong positive relationship between a student's verbal and quantitative reasoning skills and his or her performance on the related achievement tests. The achievement test score reflects performance on tests measured against the curriculum aligned to them. Reasoning skills reflect student facility with higher order problem solving. They require students to demonstrate skills in more abstract contexts and apply them to logical relationships in verbal and quantitative contexts.

*Use:* This report is useful to both administrators and teachers. When comparing achievement scores to reasoning scores, they look for significant differences (two stanines or more) that could indicate, if consistent with other evidence, whether or not a student is working to potential or perhaps spending too much time trying to excel at the expense of other things. By detecting a discrepancy between achievement and reasoning skills, this report may lead to a narrowing of contributing factors and strategies to address or correct them.

*A final thought:* Remember, a student's score on a test tells you what happened, but it doesn't tell you why it occurred. For that you need to consider a whole host of issues. That is why we encourage teachers, administrators, and parents to look at test results in the context of other work the child is doing at school and at home.

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## News From ERB...

### Response to Algebra II & Geometry Survey

Last spring ERB sent a survey to member schools that had used the Algebra II and/or Geometry end-of-course tests in the past. We asked users of these tests if they would be willing to purchase test booklets and pay for machine scoring of these two tests. Of the 22 schools that responded, 11 indicated some interest in the purchase and scoring of either or both tests. This limited response supported our decision not to include Algebra II or Geometry in the production of CTP 4 in levels 8 and 9. Furthermore, the low volume of use makes the cost of printing these two tests in a booklet prohibitive. Therefore, ERB will not print these two end-of-course tests.

However, we will continue to provide alternatives for schools wishing to administer these tests. ERB will send a letter out shortly indicating how schools may obtain copies of the Algebra II and Geometry tests along with answer keys for hand scoring. Please note that the decision not to publish Algebra II and Geometry tests has no effect on the fully revised Algebra I test that is part of the CTP 4 test battery and can be found in the Level 8 and 9 test booklets.

### Workshops Scheduled

Susan Norwood, ERB test consultant, will offer a test interpretation session at the Florida Council of Independent Schools Conference, November 13-14. A test interpretation session will also be offered by Ann Harris, ERB test consultant, at the Georgia Independent Schools Association Conference, November 3. Information for registration will be included in the conference literature.

Regional workshops on CTP 4 and WrAP will be offered Sept. 29 - Oct. 2 in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas by ERB test consultants Sue Nigro and Lois Eha. Information and registration forms will be forwarded to California schools in late July.

## SAVE THE DATE!

This year's conference  
dates are October 22-25, 2003.

