course, only part of what schools do. Nonetheless, well-developed accountability and assessment programs – tied into curriculum, instruction and other learning activities – can play a major role in helping to improve student achievement.

The appendices offer many examples of tools several of the participating schools use to assess student achievement. We offer them as examples from which other schools can learn.

Chapter One:

HOW THIS PROJECT WAS CARRIED OUT

This project proceeded in four basic stages.

Stage One – Collecting Information

This project began its work by asking, "What are the key components of a program which effectively assesses student achievement in academic areas?" We collected information in a variety of ways.

1. We scanned the literature, both print and web-based.
2. We shared information with, and asked for advice from, leading national education and school reform organizations including: the Coalition of Essential Schools, American Federation of Teachers, American Association of School Administrators, Annenberg Rural Challenge, Council of Great City Schools, FairTest, National Education Association, National Writing Project, National School Boards Association, National Association of State Boards of Education, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, ACHIEVE, Center for Education Reform, and many others.
3. We posted a request for information and suggestions on dozens of listservs.
4. We asked five nationally known assessment authorities for their suggestions:
   - James Catterall, professor of education, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles;
   - Ed De Avila, president, Linguametrics Group, Oakland, California;

- Al Ramirez, associate professor, Educational Leadership, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs; and former Iowa State Superintendent of Public Instruction;

- Lauren Resnick, director, Learning Research and Development Center and professor, University of Pittsburgh; and

- Jim Ysseldyke, Associate Dean for Research and Birkmaler Professor of Educational Leadership, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota and former director, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

These organizations and individuals shared information they had generated, or knew about, which offered advice on how to assess student achievement in various ways and in various fields. We also collected and compiled 59 distinct characteristics that might be used as *criteria* to identify schools employing best practices.

Stage Two – Evaluating Suggested Criteria

The next step was to evaluate the criteria. The five nationally recognized assessment authorities helped the authors narrow the list of suggestions to six we all agreed were *critical* to assessment systems that are both valid and reliable. We also identified an additional three we considered *valuable*.

Stage Three – Selecting Schools to Participate in the Study

We then published these criteria, inviting both charter and district-operated public schools exemplifying these characteristics to apply to be part of this project. Schools could nominate themselves or be nominated by others. A small stipend was provided to the selected schools to defray their costs for project participation.

Participating schools were asked to: 1) provide materials about their assessment practices that they were willing to have shared broadly; 2) be willing to send representatives to a national meeting to interact with each other and to respond to a draft report on this project; and 3) be willing to be a part of a network of schools sharing assessment information, initially within the project, and ultimately with a broader group.