

School improvement programs based on effective schools research have continued to expand throughout the last decade. Approximately 42 percent of local school districts in the United States have programs based on this research. A number of significant changes are anticipated regarding the school's mission, curriculum, and the processes of planned change.

School Improvement Based on Effective Schools Research: The Decade Ahead

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The 1980s will surely be recorded in history as a decade of attempted educational reform. The past decade witnessed a relentless discourse on school reform at all levels—federal, state and local—unmatched since the late 1950s when the nation sought to respond to Sputnik. We will leave to future historians the task of assessing whether the strong rhetoric of former Secretary of Education William Bennett, the state mandates in 38 states, or the reformed preservice teacher education will indeed yield the improvements being sought by both those inside and outside the educational enterprise. Those future historians will also have to pass judgment on the extent to which programs of school improvement based on an internal renewal process contributed to attempted educational reform efforts.

Effective Schools in the 1980s

The decade of the 1980s began with a few local school districts and a modest number of individual schools, usually elementary, planning and implementing programs of school improvement based on the effective schools research findings of the 1960s and '70s. By the end of the '80s the number of local school districts engaged in such programs had increased dramatically. Today the schools and districts actively engaged in this approach to school improvement number in the thousands. A recent study by the United States' General Accounting Office found that an es-

timated 42 percent of the local school districts are currently engaged in a school improvement process, framed in whole or in part around the effective schools research. Given this trend, it would seem safe to predict that internally planned and initiated school improvement based on the effective schools research will continue to increase through at least the first half of the present decade. The continued, and even expanding, interest in this approach to planned school improvement suggests that the reformers at the federal and state levels have severely underestimated the willingness of local educators to engage in school reform.

Three general observations about school improvement based on the effective schools research during the 1980s seem warranted.

First, the research base of effective schools has been expanded. Now there are more published studies in the United States and abroad that further validate and elaborate the original research findings. The studies cover the full spectrum of K-12 schools and include a wide range of school types: rural and suburban, as well as urban. This has strengthened our ability to generalize well beyond what was possible ten years ago.

Second, a major transformation of the original school improvement process is underway and the results are promising. At the beginning of the 1980s we assumed that schools could and should be improved school by school and one school at a time. By implication, this suggested that the local board of education and central office staff could be largely ignored. Thus the focus was on the principal, teachers, and other staff at individual buildings. As the programs multiplied, it became clear that their success would be greatly expanded if the board of education and district office staff (especially the superintendent) supported school improvement based on effective schools research, if they treated it as a district priority and set about creating the district context to assure its success. Currently the most promising programs, while still emphasizing the school as the operational unit for change, begin by creating a district framework of policies, priorities, and programs designed to assure long-term success.

The third significant change occurred toward the end of the 1980s. Many of the educational agencies beyond the local school district began to align goals and priorities with the effective schools model for school improvement. For example, either by law or policy many state departments required local school districts to develop long-term plans for school improvement based explicitly on effective schools research. As a result, hundreds of local schools had no choice about school improvement itself or this particular approach. Mandating such change is not without "down side" costs, for the advocates and trainers seeking to assist local schools have had to overcome resistance engendered in schools. Nevertheless, this has served to create a level of activity that was not anticipated earlier; we now have to see whether such activity will translate to true progress or simply more activity.

Not only have state agencies been mandating these changes, but a number of regional accreditation agencies have begun to change their standards (or have already changed them) to include the major concepts associated with the effective schools approach. More than anything else, this has stimulated the secondary schools to consider seriously the effective schools framework. Before the changes in the accreditation standards and procedures, most secondary schools ignored this research-based model of planned change for good reason. Now the change has opened up the framework to hundreds of secondary schools across the United States.

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Additionally, the federal government now supports effective schools with resources. Because of recent changes in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the Hawkins-Stafford Amendments, millions of dollars allocated to Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 can be used by local districts to support planning and implementation with effective schools.

All these changes taken together have served to institutionalize further the effective schools process of school improvement. It would seem reasonable to assume that the momentum currently associated with this model of school renewal and development will not quickly disappear. Those districts that remain on the sidelines may wish to reassess their "wait and see" attitude.

Two reasons help explain the increasing popularity of this broad based approach to school improvement. First, the model has been judged to be comprehensive enough to include within this framework the other dimensions of schooling that desire attention, such as curriculum reform and improved teacher effectiveness. Second, the effective schools research movement is a practitioners' movement; as such it has a level of face validity associated with it among teachers and administrators seldom enjoyed by other approaches to school improvement.

School Improvement—The Decade Ahead

Much of what is likely to happen to the effective schools movement in the early 1990s is predictable, given the momentum it has gathered recently. However, the model of school improvement based on the effective schools framework will undergo significant changes in the decade ahead.

The metaphor of the journey has been used to describe the process of school improvement based on the effective schools research. In using this metaphor we should note that as in any journey, the effective schools process of school improvement has: (1) a destination, (2) a mode of transportation, and (3) a map to be followed throughout. The journey metaphor with its three parts is a useful framework for discussing the anticipated changes in school improvement that are likely to occur in the decade of the 1990s.

The Effective Schools Destination

By the end of the 1980s the battle lines became clearly drawn regarding school improvement. In no small way, the effective schools framework and its advocates can share the credit or blame for this clarification and the attendant battle lines. From the beginning the effective schools research suggested that the primary mission of schools ought to be "teaching for learning for all." As the advocacy of this mission became more widely known (if not accepted), it became clear where the political opposition would (and did) gather. Those who favored either the custodial mission or the mission of sorting and selecting students organized and began their counterattack. The excellence advocates called for "teaching for learning for many or a few." Those who advocated that schools serve as the family which "many poor children never had" began to advance the notion of nurturing first and teaching for learning second—if time permitted. How these struggles will be resolved is not yet clear. What is clear is that the nation must come to terms with the child care issue or it will have neither good schools nor reliable custodial care—except for the economically disadvantaged. A nation with as many at-risk children as ours is an at-risk nation.

In the decade of the 1990s the debate will continue and probably intensify. The position of effective schools advocates is clear. At the moment there is no consensus as to

what this country will accept as evidence of school improvement. If and when consensus is reached, and assuming it focuses on the mission of teaching for learning for all, the effective schools framework will surely be able to help the nation's schools get them from where they are to their chosen destination.

A second related issue surrounding the destination (or mission) debate has to do with curriculum content itself. The effective schools process has helped to clarify two other truths which are most unsettling because of their inherent conflict. On one hand, it is true that virtually all students tend to learn those things on which they spend the most time. On the other hand, it is true that the curriculum of the public schools must be trimmed back because the schools are trying to teach too much content in too little time and with too few resources. Currently the mission of many teachers is to cover content. The effective schools model asks teachers to commit themselves to assuring that their students learn the content they cover. To be successful in this mission, they will have to abandon aspects of the curriculum content. This abandonment is going to be an extremely delicate issue and is likely to become volatile before it is settled. The 1990s is likely to be recorded as the decade of the great curriculum debates. These debates probably cannot be avoided, since it is unlikely that the political processes will provide enough resources to teach all that is essential in our rapidly changing society. Such debates should be welcomed and include a broad cross-section of educators and community representatives.

Ron Edmonds said, "We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all students." I would like to add to that statement the phrase "... whatever we choose;" but to do so assumes that we can agree on what it is we want *all* students to know.

Mode of Transportation

On our journey to school improvement the means by which we will seek to get from where we are to where we want to go seems both clear and compelling. The democratization of the American public school is the means for successfully making the journey. We have tried to use top-down, outside-in mandates for change only to come up against a wall because so few educators at the local level are willing to own the change. Without ownership and enthusiasm and commitment, few ideas have the potency required for long-term success. A new organizational form—one that invites teachers and administrators to work collaboratively as partners in the process of school reform—represents our best hope for sustained school reform. However, several changes are needed if this democratic form of school organization is to deliver its promise. In the 1990s these changes must take hold or the old order will probably reaffirm its grip on the public schools. First, administrators must be trained to work in the network organization. Second, teachers must come to believe that the time and energy required to make the democratic school is worth the effort. Third, the necessary time for discourse and training must become a priority for boards of education. Finally, from research and proven practices we must deliver powerful visions of what can be done through democracy to improve the schools. Ron Edmonds said "... We already know more than we need in order to do that ..." I would like to amend that statement by adding for emphasis, "we already know *more about what to do and how to do it* than we need in order to do that."

The Map

During the last decade the effective schools journey has followed a map of the correlates or characteristics of effective schools as they were identified in the original studies. Surprisingly, these correlates have displayed a resiliency that amazes many. It is unlikely that any of the correlates will be found unimportant as we strive to improve the schools. However, two changes in the map for effective schools are likely to occur in the future. First, the research on effective schools is going to be joined even more closely with the effective teaching research, and the resulting descriptions are going to be even clearer, mutually reinforcing, and even more powerful as instruments for successful school transformations.

Second, the characteristics of effective schools are likely to evidence a significant growth in the 1990s. Once the present correlates are firmly in place they will serve as a foundation for taking the school to an even higher level. A couple of examples will illustrate what is being suggested. First, we spoke of a safe and orderly environment as an important characteristic. In the past, the evidence of the presence of this characteristic was usually the absence of certain negative or undesirable behaviors (e.g., violence). In the 1990s research and effective practice will likely see this characteristic develop to the point where its presence will be established by evidence suggesting the presence of certain desirable behavior (e.g., students helping each other). Second, the characteristic of strong instructional leadership has been largely associated with behaviors of the principal. In the 1990s this concept will likely develop to the point where the concept of leadership is dispersed and includes virtually all the adults in the school. Leadership will

become a community concept. A last example has to do with frequent monitoring of progress. In the 1980s we expected teachers to monitor progress frequently and, where necessary, make adjustments. In the 1990s this critical factor will be expanded to suggest that students should be taught to monitor their own progress frequently and make the necessary adjustments in their individual behaviors.

The map is changing. It is becoming more detailed, and the descriptions of the terrain to be traversed are growing even richer and much better developed. Hopefully, the research and proven practices will quickly assist in the second generation to develop this map.

Summary

School improvement based on effective schools research is like a journey that is well underway. The level of activity that was present at the end of the 1980s will carry us well into the 1990s. The current decade is sure to be exciting because of the critical issues that must be resolved. The issues of mission will require great debate. Issues associated with democratization of the schools are going to require additional training. Finally, the map to be followed must grow and develop in order to keep pace with school improvement.

In the mid-1970s Ron Edmonds said "We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do this. Whether we do it or not must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we have not done it so far!"

Edmonds' statement is more true than ever today. It remains to be seen whether we have the needed political will to do it before the year 2000!