



School Reforms That Work

Successful Strategies
for Educating At-Risk Youth

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Introduction: The Special Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Students Study

The Cycles of Education Reform

Until the mid-1980s, most observers tended to view education reform as a cyclical phenomenon which waxed and waned with the times and flow of national events. Calls for reform begun in 1983, however, have proven to have much greater staying power, gaining rather than losing momentum in recent years. This sustained call for reform is a unique development in the history of public education in America. What is behind the persistent urgency of calls for public school reform in the last decade?

The answer lies primarily in the global and technological changes that are continuing to alter America's economic landscape. Economic upheavals in the 1980s and 1990s have made one thing perfectly clear to most Americans — the assumption, widely held as recently as twenty-five years ago, that a high school diploma is a viable route to financial self-sufficiency, is no longer valid. The rapid global transformation into a technology- and information-driven economy is steadily increasing the skill demands placed on American workers, making both the quality and level of education a more essential factor in each individual's success in the economy than ever before. Even as these broader changes have occurred, dropout rates and poor academic performance among economically disadvantaged students have remained stubbornly high, foreshadowing the development of a perpetually poorly-educated underclass.

It was against this backdrop of urgency that a team of researchers set out to study innovative school reform programs and ideas aimed at producing greater academic success within at-risk student populations. Their findings, it was hoped, could offer some models or concepts or even cautions which could be used to frame and guide reforms occurring elsewhere in states and school districts throughout the nation.

The Special Strategies Studies: Framework and Methodology

In the fall of 1990, a major new public school reform study was launched focusing on the identification of potentially effective new strategies for educating disadvantaged / at-risk students. Under the leadership of Dr. Sam Stringfield of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the U.S. Department of Education-funded study focused on strategies and services implemented using federal Chapter I funding. The study, titled *Urban and Suburban/Rural Special Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Students Studies*, asked two primary questions:

- (1) Are there specific programs or restructuring designs that schools can use to enhance the learning of students identified as at risk of academic failure?
- (2) If so, what are their key characteristics and what local conditions and steps are required to replicate these promising programs?¹

¹ This and other material discussing the study findings are adapted with the permission of the authors from: (a) "Effective Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Students;" presentation of Dr. Sam Stringfield; Sacramento, CA; May 30, 1996; and (b) Sam Stringfield, Mary Ann Millsap, Elois Scott & Rebecca Herman; "The Three Year Effects of 10 Promising Programs on the Academic Achievement of Students Placed At Risk;" Draft Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association; April 8, 1996.

Ten programs or organizational models were studied, including a wide variety of approaches, program origins and age groups. Some of the programs were developed externally and then introduced into school sites around the country; others were largely “home-grown” by the district or school itself. Some involved whole school restructuring, embracing every aspect of the school environment, while others consisted of pull-out programs designed to complement rather than replace existing school structures. Some focused on early learning (grades 1-3) while others targeted high school students.

Strong variation was also present in the location and demographics of the schools studied. Sites and model programs included urban, suburban and rural sites in locations ranging from the East to the West Coast, Mexico to the Canadian border, the Sun Belt to the Rust Belt. The study sample included schools with majorities, variously, of students of Native American, Latino, African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander or European origins.

Once Dr. Stringfield and his colleagues had identified the reform approaches to be studied, they asked experts in each type — often the program’s originator or a well-known disseminator — to recommend to them examples of the fully implemented program. State and local Chapter I directors were also consulted, and of the 25 school sites ultimately studied, 23 received multiple “nominations” of this nature.

The *Special Strategies* study was exceptionally intensive. The design proposal called for three-year studies of cohorts of students in at least two schools of each identified program type; consequently, research teams spent three or more days on site in classrooms and conducting interviews at each of the 25 sites for five consecutive semesters from Fall 1990 to Fall 1992. Interviewees included administrators, teachers, parents and students. Additionally, at each school three low-achieving students were selected during the first year for extended observation, with researchers effectively “shadowing” these students through entire school days. The resulting highly detailed records of specific students’ progress provided a remarkable tool for assessing the impact of programs on student learning.

During the second and third years, researchers also visited alternate program sites to examine how the same programs were faring in different school environments. These visits provided data and insights as to the significance of consistent implementation and how contextual factors may affect individual programs’ functioning and effectiveness.

May 30 Seminar on Special Strategies

On May 30, 1996, fifty California education policy-makers representing teachers, administrators, the state Department of Education and local school districts met in Sacramento to discuss the results of Dr. Stringfield’s studies. The seminar, the latest in a continuing series examining key current topics in education reform for Sacramento policy-makers, included an in-depth presentation by Dr. Stringfield, as well as considerable question-and-answer time.

The following sections provide an overview of Dr. Stringfield’s remarks, including supporting charts and graphs, followed by a summary of the questions and answers generated during the discussion period.

Samuel Coburn Stringfield, Ph.D. is a Principal Research Scientist at the Johns Hopkins University Center for the Social Organization of Schools (CSOS) in Baltimore, Maryland. He serves as Co-director of the Systemic and Policy Studies section of the Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk. His two most recent projects concern methods for improving programs within schools (*The Special Strategies Studies*, Stringfield et. al., 1996) and entire schools (*Bold Plans for Restructuring: The New American Schools Designs*, Stringfield, Ross & Smith, 1996).

Prior to coming to Johns Hopkins, Stringfield worked as a teacher, a program evaluator, a Tulane University faculty member and as coordinator of the Denver office of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. As a Kellogg Fellow, Stringfield studied the politics and economics of school improvement in the U.S., Asia, Africa and Europe. He is presently an executive committee member at large of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI).

Effective Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Students:

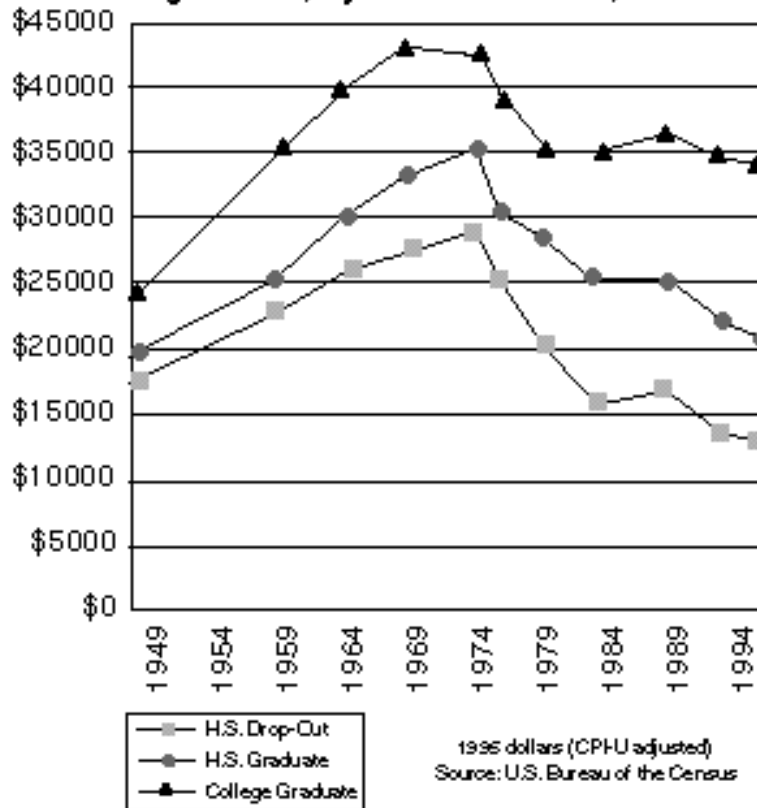
A Summary of Comments by Dr. Sam Stringfield

The idea of using educational reform programs to improve the nation's public schools has not had a particularly brilliant history in America. The concept moved to the forefront in the 1930s and again in the late 1950s, but always seemed to dissipate with time. For example, when the Russians launched Sputnik into orbit, every classroom in America got science materials. Once an American satellite was successfully launched, however, the materials stopped coming. This kind of frenetic but short-lived response has occurred twice already in this century. What is different about the current period — dating from 1983 to today — is that *it isn't going away*. Why?

The Economic Roots of Education Reform

If someone dropped out of school 150 years ago, they could go farm. A hundred years later, they went into the city and found assembly-line manufacturing jobs in the automobile or aerospace industries. Back then, you didn't need a college education to do these things.

Figure 1
**Median Income of Male Americans
 Aged 25-34, By Educational Level, 1949-95**



As Figure 1 shows, in 1949, the income prospects for a high school-educated American weren't that much lower than that of someone with a college or graduate degree. Plus, the overall economic pattern was one of uninterrupted growth in both economic output and individual wages.

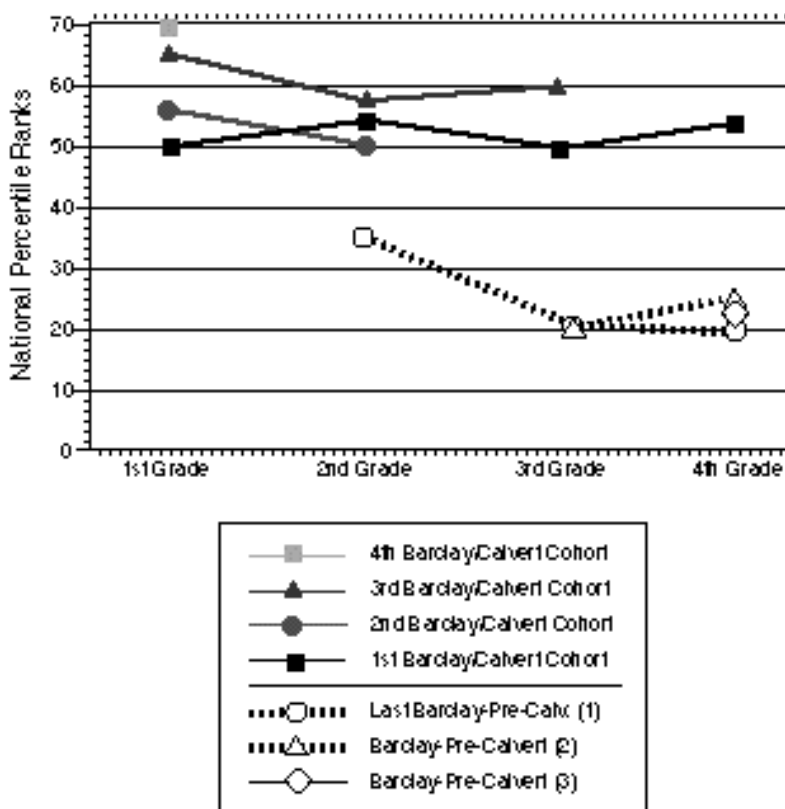
Beginning in the 1970s, there is a dramatic shift in the picture. Real income begins falling for all education levels, and it falls the quickest for high school dropouts, who by 1994 are on average making less on a constant dollar basis than their similarly-educated grandfathers. These people are generally not going to be able to afford health insurance, or retirement savings or be able to buy a home. And this new economic reality appears to be the principal factor behind the strength and persistence of the current outcry for education reform.

What Education Reform Can Do

Before discussing the larger study, it's helpful and illustrative of what education reform *can* do to look at a public school in Baltimore called Barclay. Barclay is 94% minority and 82% of the students are part of the free lunch program (indicating high numbers of disadvantaged, at-risk students). At one time, the achievement scores of Barclay students were hovering around the Baltimore city average — until they began using a

curriculum design created by a private, academically rigorous school in Baltimore known as the Calvert School, which for the most part attracted high-income families. What occurred when the Calvert program was adopted in the low-income Barclay School was remarkable:

Figure 2: Mean CTBS Reading Scores for Barclay/Calvert and Barclay-Pre-Calvert (control) Student, Spring 1991 - Spring 1994



The Calvert curriculum was implemented one grade at a time, beginning with an entering kindergarten class and phased into succeeding grades each year until today all grades are using it. Test scores increased dramatically, matching the national average; at the same time, absenteeism has dropped 60%. Nothing changed in terms of the demographic make-up of the neighborhood; the difference was that the kids were learning faster and better. The program included a heavy emphasis on writing, weekly checks of student folders for progress, an ongoing focus on staff development, a full-time coordinator, and materials.

The point of using the Barclay example is that inner city kids in America can do just fine — can, in fact, achieve at or even above the national average — and they can do it using funding available to schools under Chapter I². Different groups of kids may have different specific needs, but the types of programs they need to succeed are both imaginable and affordable and transportable to different settings — which is the basic concept underlying the *Special Strategies* study.

² Barclay itself did not use Chapter I funding; instead a local foundation funded the additional position and curriculum materials. However, the amount of private funding provided (less than \$100,000 per year) was well within what Barclay would have qualified for had it applied for project funding under Chapter I.

The Special Strategies Study

The *Special Strategies* study started with three questions the federal government wanted examined with regard to Chapter I:

are there programs that can be used in Chapter I to enhance student learning?

what are their key characteristics?

what conditions are necessary to implement them?

A preliminary literature search identified three common findings in previous research about Chapter I:

although it is a funding program, not a specific intervention, it has tended to have a positive impact, and that impact has grown over time;

innovative programs under certain repeatable conditions seemed to have a positive impact; and

considering the level of national interest in adopting educational innovations, there is a real shortage of third-party research on the more widely discussed programs.

After a great deal of consideration, including identifying programs that had unusually promising histories of effectiveness and programs that figured prominently in national school reform efforts, ten programs were selected for study. These programs differed along a number of dimensions, but for purposes of the study, they were evaluated on a two-dimensional grid.

The first dimension relates to the intended scope of the reform strategy. For example, several of the strategies are intended to change entire schools. These include the Comer School Development Program, Success for All, the Paideia program, the Coalition of Essential Schools, Chapter I schoolwide projects, and extended-year schoolwide projects. In contrast, Reading Recovery, METRA/peer tutoring, computer-assisted-instruction (CAI) laboratories and Chapter I after-school and summer programs leave the majority of the traditional school day intact and provide services that are distinct from the regular classroom.

The second dimension relates to the original source of program development — that is, whether the program was developed locally or by an external source. Chapter I schoolwide projects, most summer programs and peer-tutoring programs are developed locally, often at the specific school. However, the Comer School Development Program, Success for All, Paideia, the Coalition of Essential Schools, Reading Recovery and CAI laboratories are all developed externally at the national or international level. The externally developed programs offer or require levels of expert technical assistance. The schools utilizing METRA/peer tutoring both experimented with nationally developed components integrated in locally developed programs.

The programs and dimensions on which they were evaluated are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

TWO KEY DIMENSIONS IN WHICH SPECIAL STRATEGIES PROGRAMS DIFFERED			
		SOURCE OF PROGRAM / STRATEGY	
		External	Local
		Comer SDP Success for All Paideia Coalition of Essential Schools	Schoolwide Projects* Extended Year SWPs*
		Reading Recovery CCC	Extended Time METRA/Peer Tutoring*

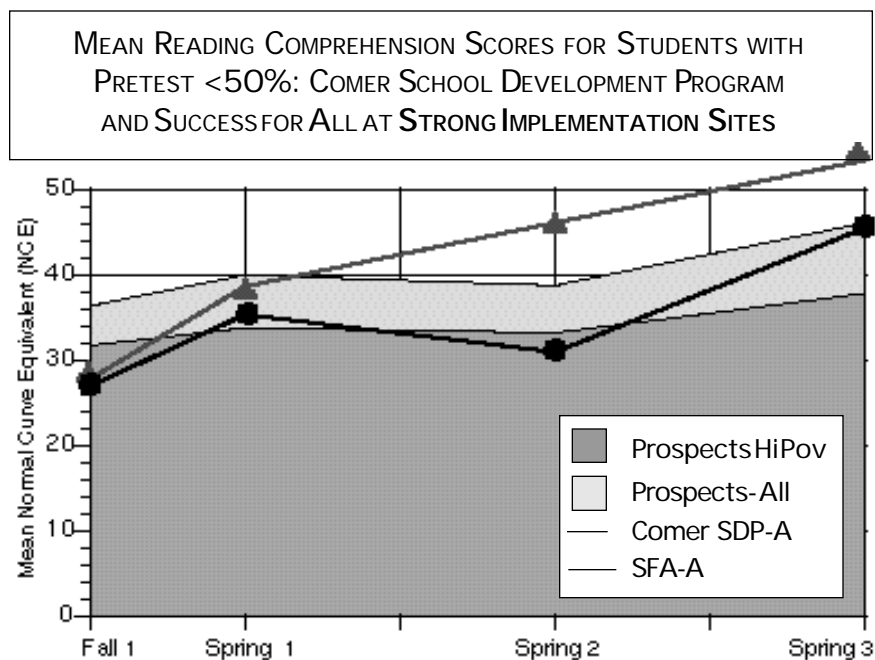
* Each contained several components, some of which were externally developed.

The following are the major conclusions of the study:

1. Students at risk of academic failure are capable of achieving at the national average.

Disadvantaged students are entirely capable of academic achievement; the key difference in their performance is the quality of the curriculum and instruction, rather than anything inherent in the student (i.e. genetic). Figure 4 displays data for four groups of students — the first grade groups at the Comer School Development Program (labeled SDP-A) and at the Success for All schools (labeled SFA-A) contrasted with data from a nationally representative weighted sample of first grade students (labeled Prospects). The data show that the progress made by students in the Special Strategies schools is particularly encouraging. The initially low-achieving students in both programs, Comer SDP-A and SFA-A began the study with reading comprehension levels below even the average for low-achieving students in high poverty schools, yet over their first three years in school, the students in these programs produced achievement scores that substantially exceeded both those of other students in high poverty schools, and those of initially low-achieving students in typical schools. The gains shown below don't come easy — they take a great deal of concentrated effort. But they are eminently possible.

Figure 4



- The challenges faced by schools attempting to educate large numbers of at-risk students are often enormous, and resources to address these challenges are often in short supply.

In the Stringfield team’s three years of fieldwork, they visited schools with scarce instructional materials and malfunctioning equipment, schools where paint was peeling in classrooms and hallways, where armed guards met visitors at the door, and in one case, where a body had been found in the school stairwell between visits. The educational challenges created by such conditions are obvious and tremendous.

- Schools can use federal compensatory education (Chapter I) funds to create or adopt and then sustain new programs they often could not have considered otherwise.

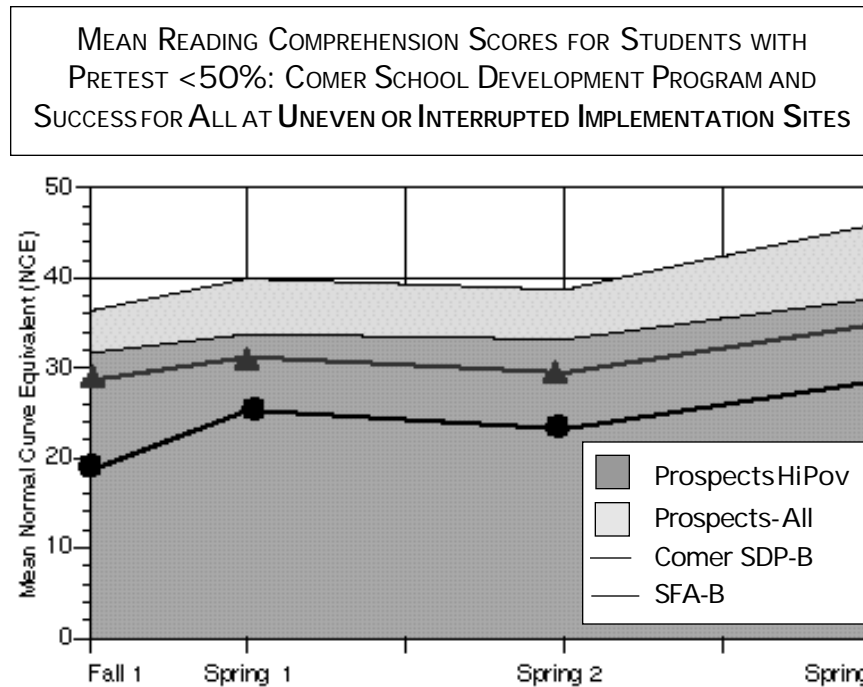
In the hands of creative and committed administrators and teachers, Chapter I has already become the primary engine for reform and innovation in schools serving poor children in America.

- Each of the programs studied offers clear strengths, yet even when visiting sites that were considered models by the program originators, great variance was found in both implementation levels and effects.

Each of the ten programs studied had something — some element or outcome — to recommend it to a school somewhere. However, three years of data gathering revealed that a large part of the “effectiveness” of a particular program was determined by the willingness of members of the school, district and community to undertake the particular reforms. It also revealed that there is no such thing as a “silver bullet” cure-all program — achieving gains with these programs meant hard work and careful, sustained implementation. No program was found that a school’s leadership could just throw into place and then walk away. Figure 5 makes this point clearly. The data represented here is the same as shown in Figure 4, and described above. The Comer School Development Program (labeled CDP-B) was never embraced by the

principal at the school and the district did not actively intervene to ensure the components of the program were working as intended. As a result major components of the School Development Program existed in name only. Likewise at the Success for All school (labeled as SFA-A), the district's support for the program was at best lukewarm and implementation at the school was marked by a change in leadership and a near dismantling of the program. As a result, students in both schools produced academic achievement gains only marginally greater than the averages for students attending similarly high-poverty schools.

Figure 5



5. The schools in the study obtaining the greatest gains for their at-risk students paid a great deal of attention to issues of initial and long-term implementation, and to institutionalizing the reforms. Several general and a great many program-specific implementation issues, if not successfully addressed, permanently crippled otherwise promising programs.

a. A realistic perception of local strengths and areas in need of improvement was key.

Successful schools found the right program to match their needs, which starts with knowing what your needs are.

b. Initial options among diverse program and design options are many, yet choices were often made within a narrow range.

A few of the schools which succeeded in this study were lucky enough to pick the right program for them without doing a lot of research; others studied multiple reforms before settling on one. Different programs may be more or less appropriate in different settings and academic circumstances; Success For All is a great program for many schools but not as good for others. One way to think of it is that

chemotherapy and aspirin are both very effective medical treatments, but you wouldn't necessarily want to treat a headache with chemotherapy or cancer with aspirin. Administrators and faculty need to look at a variety of programs and reflect carefully on their choice.

- c. Full, active district, school administration and faculty commitment to the final choice of reforms was typically not sought, but often proved critical.

One extremely unhappy teacher can severely hamper the implementation of a reform program, even just by simply outlasting it. Several of these programs require a secret ballot vote by faculty before implementation. It is important to give people a say in the decision-making in order to get them behind a program once it has been selected. The principal or a small group of teachers can't do it alone; schools are too big and there's too much complexity involved in most of these reforms.

- d. Allowing "transfer with dignity" for any faculty member unwilling to undertake a reform that had been voted in by the great majority of a faculty was often helpful.

In Philadelphia, if a teacher is unable to adapt to the structure and/or curriculum of a reform program, they are permitted to transfer to another school without loss of any seniority, either within their district or within the school to which they transfer. This can be a significant asset in maximizing faculty support for a given reform.

- e. Acquiring and productively using long-term, targeted technical assistance was often critical to program implementation.

Among the schools studied in *Special Strategies*, if schools did not build use of technical assistance into the program, the program usually didn't work. People consistently underestimated the kinds of resources and skill and commitment it took to produce a quality program at their school. The Barclay example is very instructive here — intensive training took place before each semester began, and sustained technical assistance was utilized throughout the school year.

- f. Recurring themes at sites discontinuing or trivializing a reform included:

- i. budget cuts or repeated threats of budget cuts;

If the school or district's administrative leadership either cuts or threatens repeatedly to cut a reform program, the net effect is to kill the reform. Once reform has been devalued, the momentum swings strongly in favor of institutional inertia.

- ii. new principals not being informed of and socialized into the new program;

In one of the two Success For All (SFA) schools studied, the district moved the principal whose leadership had been instrumental in the school's decision to adopt SFA to another school after the program's first year of implementation. The new principal had not been briefed on SFA, in fact knew nothing about it or that she was going to an SFA school until she was already there. There was no coordination between the district and the school, nor between the principal and the faculty or the SFA coordinator. As a result, the program faltered and was abandoned briefly in the second year before being re-started in the third. The achievement gains at this school were much smaller than in the school which had consistent, sustained implementation.

iii. failure to address the concerns of reluctant staff members;

Faculty and staff members often have good reasons for being reluctant to adopt reforms without making some adjustments, but once there has been an effort to address their concerns, something like “transfer with dignity” must be available to allow reforms to move forward.

iv. decisions from central administration to move to the “latest thing.”

Indulgence in fads also frequently kills real reform.

6. Promising programs that concentrated their efforts in the early grades tended to obtain larger achievement gains from at-risk students than did programs spreading resources more evenly over the elementary grades or in secondary schools. Within the schools observed during first through third grades, students in schools using externally developed programs tended to achieve greater academic gains than did students in schools using locally developed programs. Students in schools working with whole school reform tended to achieve greater gains than did students in schools attempting various pull-out programs. None of the secondary schools achieved stable implementation across the full school and, perhaps as a result, none produced a pattern of achievement gains.

7. A series of findings regarding classroom activities across virtually all of the programs was, in one sense, distressing. Extensive observations of class periods and students’ whole school days provided a picture of instruction driven by management issues, of very uneven access to subjects beyond reading/language arts and mathematics, and of seemingly straightforward issues such as scheduling often stifling reforms. A more optimistic view of this finding is that there remains ample room for instructional improvements, even in schools considered to be models.

The glass is both half-full and half-empty. Despite years of reform the study observed mostly traditional subject specific teaching, with little emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, even in model schools. And yet a number of the schools are showing increases in achievement. The study leaders’ ultimate conclusion was that, although there were improvements in student achievement in these schools, with better administration and instruction, the improvements could have been still greater.

8. Most of the programs studied are continuing to evolve and expand. These systematic self-improvements bode well for the future of school reform.

Reforms are like software — there is a constant process of adaptation and adjustment; through this process, improvements emerge over time. With sustained pressure for reform, the reality is becoming a constant process of evolution and refinement.

Key Elements of Successful Reforms

In order for any reform program or structural design to work, it is essential that a school clearly define its goals before deciding which reform to adopt, i.e. you have to know exactly what your students need and then make sure the program meets those needs. Where the *Special Strategies* study found successes, invariably the school in question had taken the time to define clearly what they were trying to accomplish

It is important also to stress that goals must be strictly limited in order to achieve results. If a school identifies and adopts three or four clear and finite goals, it may have a chance of actually accomplishing them. If it adopts 25, it is inevitable that it will fail at virtually all of them. (Success For All is a good example of a goal-oriented reform — SFA’s goal is to ensure that every student reads at grade level by the time they complete third grade.)

Budgeting is another key consideration; schools must be clear going in what the anticipated costs of a given reform will be, and then understand that it may cost more in the end than originally estimated. Chapter I is often a stable and important funding source for reform. However, district, state and private funds can also be a very valuable complementary source of funding to Chapter I.

Finally, in order to succeed, reforms must be embraced and sustained by both the school and the school district. Each must share a strong vision and commitment to the project itself and to maintaining strong lines of communication. Some degree of adaptation to each individual school environment is inevitable, but there has to be a strong team behind the reform in order for reform to survive the various and many challenges it inevitably will face.

The Building Blocks of Successful Reform

A successful school reform effort must include:

- (1) clear goals and a shared perception of their importance;
- (2) a stable environment supporting the proposed changes - repeated shifts in approach or the failure to achieve support for the changes results in a continuation of business as usual;
- (3) the understanding that effective reform takes time, i.e. no expectations of instant results;
- (4) reliable funding for staff development;
- (5) the flexibility to choose a principal and/or teachers who are committed to the selected program, including the availability of the “transfer with dignity” option; and
- (6) release from traditional requirements that are in obvious variance with the goals of the agreed-upon restructuring program.

In addition to this design, the program should require:

- (1) Ongoing reports on progress.
- (2) Multi-year evidence of changes in student performance.

Conclusion

The good news is this: if reform programs such as those studied in *Special Strategies* are adopted in keeping with these guidelines, clear evidence exists that the lowest-achieving students, who begin the study below the national average and also are from schools with tremendously high poverty, are capable of achieving at or above the national average.

The Stringfield Study: A Discussion

The discussion following Dr. Stringfield's presentation was lively and wide-ranging. Chief among the issues raised were concerns about personnel (the roles of teachers and principals in implementing programs, and their relations with school boards and superintendents) and about the factors Dr. Stringfield cited as the keys to successful implementation (i.e. choosing the right program and then implementing it fully and correctly). Several of the most provocative and illuminating exchanges are summarized below.

Question/Comment: Doesn't the stress placed on faithfully replicating programs and relying heavily on outside technical assistance marginalize and devalue teachers' important role in school reform? What should teachers' role be in the process of identifying and implementing special strategies?

Response: The study shows how these programs work and don't work under different circumstances — the more faithfully they're adhered to in the classroom, the better the results. If teachers don't buy into the process, or the curriculum, or whatever the foundation of the particular reform is, you have a major problem. Additionally, it's worth noting that we talk about professionalism in education in a different way than we talk about professionalism in almost any other field. In most professions other than education (take medicine or law as an example), we hold practitioners responsible for following certain procedures which have been determined to be the most effective, and hold them accountable constantly for the outcome of their work. Providing a curriculum pre-designed for a group of students should not be viewed as limiting a teacher's professionalism. Being a professional means getting the job done in the most effective way possible.

Question/Comment: The concept of "transfer with dignity" is interesting and definitely a new one for American education. How do you see it working in a real-life situation? Isn't the dignity aspect problematic? Can it really work for shifting "undesirables" around?

Response: Implementation and the effectiveness of that implementation is going to occur differently in different places. The City of Philadelphia did it successfully under former Superintendent of Schools Connie Clayton. She virtually declared it to the school board, laid out the rules, negotiated it *quickly* with the union and explained it to teachers. In the end, most of the teachers were delighted about it because of the dignity aspect.

There are, however, differences in the issues exposed by transfer with dignity in the field. Some teachers just philosophically don't like a given reform, and are capable of performing well in the classroom without it. They are the ones who can benefit from transfer with dignity. Others, though, are genuinely incompetent and unable to teach well either inside or outside of a reform program. They need attention from their

principal and a concerted effort at staff development to turn their performance around. It's been shown that if administrators deal with the issues forthrightly, it's possible for situations like this to work out for the best — either teachers get better, or they leave education.

Question/Comment: How do issues of race and language diversity and cultural diversity factor into the implementation of programs like these? What about the colonial or even outright racist attitudes some administrators hold toward mostly minority schools?

Response: Racism is abhorrent, and school reform can offer an opportunity to counter it, if it's done right. In developing core school reform goals, some schools may decide that one goal should be to have kids reading at grade level by a certain grade, and another should be to deal with racism actively and have an inclusive system on all levels. What needs to be understood is that you just can't try to accomplish those two and then ten other things at the same time. Three or four core goals are almost always the most an organization can adopt and reliably accomplish anything with regard to any of them.

Question/Comment: Reform isn't that simple; you can't just pick a program and stick it in place and assume it will work. The right conditions have to all be there for success to come about.

Response: That's absolutely right. The way we structure education in the United States today, 99 times out of 100, educational reform fails. We're terrible at implementing and stabilizing reforms, and we need to get better. It's not enough to have good ideas; you have to be able to implement them and sustain them. First off, you have to do a good job of matching the needs of the school to the strengths of the program you choose. But once you've done that, the key becomes implementation; no school reform is any better than its implementation. And here we go back to some of the key factors mentioned earlier:

— *shared core goals;*

if you can't agree on what matters you're not going to get anywhere;

— *shared perception by public and school that failure in core tasks would be disastrous;*

there has to be a sense of urgency about meeting your goals.

Final Thoughts

The study offers state policy-makers a blueprint for changing the way our most troubled schools function and improving disadvantaged students' ability to succeed academically. The study, at its core, is about transportable technologies — programs that can be introduced in a variety of settings and help a school achieve positive results. It offers a real ray of hope for many schools across California and the nation which are today facing very difficult circumstances.

Hope isn't enough, though — these programs do cost money, and they require a stable funding source to succeed. While Chapter I provides a source of first resort, the State of California should be prepared to provide supplementary financial support where necessary and appropriate. The fieldwork conducted by Sam Stringfield and his colleagues makes it clear that for programs like these, temporary funding is wasted funding; only by sustaining a program over the long term can lasting results be achieved. Some modest additional measure of state funding can provide California's public schools with the flexibility to adapt and sustain these proven programs.

These findings and the specific programs they are based upon represent fertile ground from which education policy-makers may reap innovative new strategies for educating at-risk youth. The reality demonstrated here is that the right school reforms, well-implemented and sustained, can assist traditionally low-achieving, disadvantaged youth in achieving at or above the national average. State and local education policy-makers who are committed to improving our education system should pay careful attention to the findings of this study, and take action to put its findings into practice in schools and districts throughout California.

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