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Comprehensive School Reform: A Proven School Improvement Method for Troubled Schools

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As legislators in Arkansas begin to consider options for spending both Title I and categorical funds and as school leaders in Arkansas look for proven options that will increase student performance, especially for low performing schools that serve low income students, comprehensive school reform (CSR) is one research-supported option to consider.

WHAT IS CSR?

The purpose of CSR is to integrate research-based practices in a school-wide effort to raise student achievement and improve other important student outcomes such as dropout rates or student behavior. Though there are a variety of CSR models, they all have one common goal: to re-organize and re-vitalize entire schools rather than simply using a band-aid method of implementing numerous focused or specialized, often uncoordinated school improvement initiatives. When implemented correctly, CSR models represent a comprehensive and scientifically based approach to school reform that enables schools to help not only their at-risk students, but their entire student population (See Table 3 for a list of CSR guiding principles).

FUNDING CSR

Since the 1994 reauthorization of Title I, schools have been encouraged to use these funds for school-wide initiatives rather than the regularly implemented targeted programs. Thus Title I funds, along with other categorical funding streams that are often made available to schools with a high percentage of low-income students in attendance, have become the key financial backing for the standards-based, school-wide reform movement.

SELECTING A CSR MODEL

There are a variety of CSR models from which schools can select. The good news is, in an effort to help schools in this selection process, for several years researchers have been studying the effectiveness of the most commonly implemented CSR models. Findings from the most recent review of CSR models were published

this past Fall by the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center (CSRQ) at the American Institutes for Research. This report reviewed close to 800 existing studies that examined the 22 most widely implemented elementary school CSR models. Each CSR model was reviewed using stringent standards and rated on five domains:

- Evidence of positive effects on student achievement;
- Evidence of positive effects on additional outcomes;
- Evidence of positive effects on parent, family, and community involvement;
- Evidence of link between research and the model's design; and
- Evidence of services and support to schools to enable successful implementation.

The domain focused on positive effects on student achievement is most relevant to the needs of Arkansas' students.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE MODELS OF CSR: EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

The review by CSRQ, which echoed the findings of many previous reviews of CSR models, found that two models stand above the rest with regard to their ability to increase academic achievement for at-risk students; those two models are: **Direct Instruction** and **Success for All**. Both models were rated *moderately strong* on evidence of positive overall effects and cost around \$80,000 to implement during the first year, with prices dropping each additional year. Table 1 lists the seven top rated CSR models along with information regarding their rating on the five domains. While each of the CSR models mentioned here is meant to be implemented in elementary school, several of them also serve middle schools, junior highs, and high schools. There are other differences between these CSR models such as mission, program components, costs of implementation, etc. Tables 2A-2G provide some basic information about all of the previously mentioned models of CSR.

Table 1: Evidence of Effectiveness for the Seven Highest Rated CSR Models

| Model | Evidence of Overall Positive Effects on Student Achievement | Evidence of Positive Effects on Diverse Student Populations | Evidence of Positive Effects in Subject Areas | Evidence of Link Between Research and Model's Design | Evidence of Services and Support to Schools to Enable Successful Implementation |
|--|---|---|--|--|---|
| <i>Direct Instruction (Full Immersion Model)</i> | Moderately Strong | No Rating | Moderately Strong in Reading; Moderate in Math | Very Strong | Very Strong |
| <i>Success for All</i> | Moderately Strong | Moderate | Moderately Strong in Reading; Moderate in Math, Science and Social Studies | Very Strong | Very Strong |
| <i>Accelerated Schools PLUS</i> | Moderate | No Rating | Moderate in Math and Reading | Moderately Strong | Very Strong |
| <i>America's Choice School Design</i> | Moderate | Limited | Moderate in Math, Reading and Writing | Very Strong | Moderately Strong |
| <i>Core Knowledge</i> | Moderate | Limited | Moderate in Reading; Limited in Math, Science and Social Studies | Moderate | Very Strong |
| <i>School Development Program</i> | Moderate | No Rating | Moderate in Reading and Math | Very Strong | Very Strong |
| <i>School Renaissance</i> | Moderate | No Rating | Moderate in Reading; Limited in Math | Strongly Moderate | Very Strong |

AIR Rating Scale:

| | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Highest Rating - | Strong |
| | Moderately Strong |
| | Moderate |
| | Limited |
| | Zero |
| Lowest Rating - | Negative |

Table 2A: Direct Instruction (Full Immersion Model)

| Model | Grades Served | Mission | Foundational Principles | Total Cost (Best Estimate) |
|--|----------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Direct Instruction (Full Immersion Model)</i> | K-8 | Acceleration student performance using interactive, systematic, and explicit instruction supported by a system of data analysis and problem solving tightly linked to instruction. | A scripted curricular program that incorporates instructions and grouping strategies. The model seeks to accelerate learning for all students and provide teachers with appropriate strategies by targeting factors that are within a school's control. These factors include assessment, instruction, grouping, scheduling, professional development, and resource allocation. | \$75K(Y1) \$74K (Y2) \$68K (Y3) |

Table 2B: Success for All

| Model | Grades Served | Mission | Foundational Principles | Total Cost (Best Estimate) |
|------------------------|----------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>Success for All</i> | K-8 | To help all students (especially those that are disadvantaged and at-risk) to achieve at the highest possible levels. | This model helps schools identify and implement a set of strategies and instructional programs that support every child with additional supports for students not making adequate progress. The instructional practices and procedures focus on cooperative learning and aligned professional development and materials. The model targets achievement outcomes in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Additionally, the model targets non-achievement outcomes in student attendance, retention and promotion, and discipline rates. | \$89 (Y1) \$58K (Y2) \$34K (Y3) NA (Y4) |

Table 2C: Accelerated Schools PLUS

| Model | Grades Served | Mission | Foundational Principles | Total Cost (Best Estimate) |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Accelerated Schools PLUS</i> | K-8 | To enrich the lives of all students, especially low-income students that have a history of low academic performance and remediation, through an environment characterized by accelerate instruction with high expectations and teaching methods traditionally reserved for only high achieving students | Powerful Learning, which is an instructional philosophy that integrates three elements of accelerated instruction: materials, learning opportunities, and classroom settings. By building on the strengths of students, the school can use instructional strategies traditionally reserved for gifted students to accelerate the learning of all students. | \$62K (Y1) \$62K (Y2) \$62K (Y3) \$15K (Y4+) |

Table 2D: America's Choice School Design

| Model | Grades Served | Mission | Foundational Principles | Total Cost (Best Estimate) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|--|--|--|
| <i>America's Choice School Design</i> | K-12 | The standards-based model seeks to ensure that all students are successful on local and state assessments, are prepared to do college-level work without remediation, and are ready to participate in today's economy. | This model seeks to provide teachers and schools with a coherent standards-based educational system. The New Standards performance standards are benchmarked standards developed by America's Choice and form the cornerstone of model. The standards cover English language arts, math, science, and applied learning and also include examples of student work that are benchmarked to indicate how and why they meet the standard. America's Choice aims to prevent student failure by early intervention and acceleration rather than remediation. | \$70K-\$105K (Y1) \$70K-\$105K (Y2) \$70K-\$105K (Y3) \$25K-\$30K (Y4+) |

Table 2E: Core Knowledge

| Model | Grades Served | Mission | Foundational Principles | Total Cost (Best Estimate) |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--|---|---|
| <i>Core Knowledge</i> | K-8 | To form a more equitable society by educating all children with a shared, sequenced curriculum, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. | This model is designed to provide teachers with a set of specific topics to be taught in language arts, history, geography, mathematics, science, and the fine arts. The content is presented in a grade-by-grade sequence in order to prevent repetition or gaps in the acquisition of knowledge. The sequence is meant to raise literacy rates and provide students with a shared language and knowledge base regardless of race, gender, or SES. | Varies depending on number of staff and students at the school. |

Table 2F: School Development Program

| Model | Grades Served | Mission | Foundational Principles | Total Cost (Best Estimate) |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>School Development Program</i> | K-12 | To mobilize schools and communities to support children's healthy development, resulting in academic success, improved school climate, and increased contributions to civic life. | This model offers a structure and process for mobilizing teachers, administrators, and community members to support children's maturation along six developmental pathways: physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical. Underlying the model's structure are three assumptions that provide the foundation for model implementation: 1) Many students experience severe developmental gaps and the model acknowledges these gaps, all students are expected to meet high standards and, therefore, students are not labeled or tracked; 2) All students, regardless of their level of academic are entitled to opportunities for development; and 3) Teachers and administrators alone cannot provide developmental support. SDP encourages schools to partner with parents and community members who can provide additional support and resources. | The cost is based on adoption of the model by a school district. The minimum administrative fee charged by SDP for districts is \$5,000 for up to five schools and \$1,000 for each additional school. |

Table 2G: School Renaissance

| Model | Grades Served | Mission | Foundational Principles | Total Cost (Best Estimate) |
|---------------------------|---------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| <i>School Renaissance</i> | Pre-K - 12 | To help educators make data-based decisions in order to meet the needs of diverse learners. | This model seeks to reform instructional practices and school management by increasing data-based decision making. | \$57K (Y1) |
| | | | | \$37K (Y2) |
| | | | | \$28K (Y3) |
| | | | | \$17K (Y4) |

Primary Reference:

The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center at the American Institutes for Research. (2005). *CSRQ Center report on elementary school comprehensive school reform*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at: http://www.csrq.org/documents/ESCSRQReport-Full_000.pdf

**Table 3: Eleven Guiding Principles of CSR Models
According to the U.S. Department of Education**

All CSR models:

1. Employ proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on scientific research and effective practice and have been successfully replicated in schools.
2. Integrate instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management.
3. Provide ongoing, high quality teacher and staff professional development and training.
4. Establish benchmarks and measurable goals for students' academic achievement.
5. Be supported by school staff and administrators throughout the school.
6. Provide support to school staff and administrators by creating shared leadership and responsibility for reform efforts.
7. Provide for meaningful parent and community involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities.
8. Make use of high-quality technical assistance from an external entity that has experience and expertise in school-wide reform and improvement.
9. Include a method of assessment and evaluation of the success of the reform model.
10. Identify federal, state, local, and private financial and other resources available that the school may use to coordinate services that support and sustain the reform model.
11. Either have been found, through scientific research, to significantly improve student academic achievement or have strong evidence that it will significantly improve student academic achievement.

Source: U.S. Department of Education. (2003). *CSR program overview*. Retrieved April 4, 2006, from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/compreform/2pager.html>
