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ABSTRACT

This report is based on the collective research of seven regional education laboratories related to the federally funded Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program. The participating laboratories were the Appalachia Education Laboratory (AEL) in partnership with the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis, Lab at Brown University Education Alliance, Northwest Regional Laboratory, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, and WestEd. Each conducted its own research project designed for different purposes, used different methodologies, and reflected the different perspectives of the researchers and contexts of each laboratory region. The report presents commonly identified themes that relate to the processes used by schools to plan for comprehensive school reform and how those processes supported program implementation. A key area in several of the projects was the amount of teacher participation in selection of reform models and its effects on implementation. The findings were mixed. Two laboratory projects explicitly examined the effect of model selection on reform implementation and school climate using similar instruments, but used different definitions of the constructs. Researchers at AEL/CREP found statistically significant differences in school climate and implementation progress between schools using different model-selection processes. Contradictory findings may be due to differences in conceptualizations and methodologies, but also to differences in school or district leadership and/or regional cultures. An appendix contains project summaries. (Contains 12 references.) (DFR)

# What Happens Before Schools Get the Grant: Planning for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program



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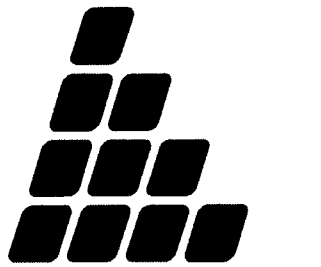


December 2000

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Edmund "Ted" Hamann of the Lab at Brown University Education Alliance provided methodological leadership and insight into the quality of interactions between education officials at the local, state, regional, and federal levels. Tracy Huebner of WestEd provided the group her conviction that the project was valuable, achievable, and contributed critical data and interpretation regarding comprehensive school reform experiences in California. Allan Sterbin of the Center for Research in Educational Policy, in collaboration with Steve Moats of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory articulated goals for the group and contributed crucial data and interpretation regarding local implementation of CSRD in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Inge Aldersebaes of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory contributed penetrating findings to the project about the day-to-day and cultural realities of reform in local schools. Steven Ross, Marty Alberg, Robert Horn, Deborah Lowther and Lana Smith of CREP, in collaboration with Barbara Davis at SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, contributed critical data and interpretation regarding comprehensive school reform implementation in southeastern states, and insights regarding the research process and implications for practice. Mary Church of the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning brought the most recent evaluation reports to the attention of the group and contributed unique perspectives from the Pacific Islands.

Other group members who provided crucial ideas, direction, and inspiration to the project included Kim Taylor from WestEd, Brett Lane from the Lab at Brown University Education Alliance, Larry Friedman and Deborah Banks from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Roy Dawson from the Laboratory for Student Success, and Joan Buttram and Robert Carlson from the Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory.

The shared responsibility for this research effort among all of these individuals made it possible for McREL to produce this report that documents the variety of ways that states and districts support local planning for comprehensive school reform. All group members gratefully acknowledge the thoughtful and competent authorship of Robert Reichardt from McREL who wrote this report. Finally, the CSRD Laboratory Coordinators Group is recognized for providing the inspiration for the project.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on the collective research of seven Regional Education Laboratories related to the federally-funded Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program. The participating laboratories are the Appalachia Education Laboratory (AEL) in partnership with the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis, Lab at Brown University Education Alliance (LAB), Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL), Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), and WestEd. Each participating laboratory conducted its own research project which were designed for different purposes, used different methodologies, and reflected the different perspectives of the researchers and contexts of each laboratory region. In an effort to examine key issues across the different research projects, the participants in this research initiative agreed to apply data gathered in their research to address four general areas of CSRD implementation. This report presents the common themes identified that relate to the processes used by schools to plan for comprehensive school reform and how those processes supported program implementation. The common themes identified and reported are organized by level of government: federal- and state-level, district-level, and school-level.

## Interaction of Federal and State Policies with Model Selection

As encouraged in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program legislation, resources from Title I and CSRD were combined to support comprehensive school reform in some schools. Two states considered here used CSRD to support other state initiated reform efforts. These state efforts limited schools' choice of models but also facilitated coordination between CSRD and other reform activities. State imposed time limits for submitting CSRD grant applications reduced the ability of some schools to gather information about designs, to disseminate that information within schools, and to involve their school communities in planning for the application. As part of the CSRD planning process, many applicants appeared to rely on needs analyses that were mandated by separate state or district policies.

## District Support of Planning

Districts supported the development of CSRD applications with data analysis, grant writers, data collection from model design teams, links with the community, and assistance to schools in integrating school and district standards or goals for the proposal. Districts also provided administrative support, such as negotiating with model service providers and help with budgeting. As an interested party and a key source of information about reform designs, districts could also reduce the choice of reform models available to schools. Limiting the model choices available to schools was sometimes a purposeful outcome of district-level needs assessments.

## School Planning Activities

A key area in several of the laboratory's research projects was the amount of teacher participation in reform model selection and its effects on implementation. The findings were

mixed. Two laboratory projects explicitly examined the effect of model selection on reform implementation and school climate using similar instruments, but used different definitions of the constructs. Researchers at AEL/CREP found statistically significant differences in school climate and implementation progress between schools using different model selection processes. While researchers at SERVE observed some similar patterns in their data, different statistical analysis techniques and variant definitions of the constructs were used. Using qualitative research methods, researchers at two other laboratories gathered data on the selection processes. McREL reported that teachers appeared to have (gradually) embraced principal-mandated reforms, while researchers at LAB at Brown reported faculty frustration caused by a principal's top-down decisions. These contradictory findings may be due to differences in conceptualizations and methodologies, but also to differences in school or district leadership and/or regional cultures.

Finally, the work at NWREL focused on schools that were not prepared for reform and described factors that influence a school's readiness to implement CSRD including leadership, vision, high expectations, and accountability.

**Next Steps**

The relationship between district roles, the model selection process, and implementation is an area of continuing research across the regional laboratory system. Given what is being learned about school preparedness for reform, a key direction for this continuing work is likely to be an examination of appropriate district roles given different school-level capacities to decide on and implement reforms.

# INTRODUCTION

In fiscal year 2000, Congress appropriated $220 million for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program (PL 105-78), a $70 million increase over appropriations in each of the previous two fiscal years. The majority of CSRD money is distributed to schools through state-run grant competitions to support local efforts to improve entire school operations and student achievement. The program also supports related research and technical assistance conducted at the Regional Education Laboratories (RELs).

The intent of CSRD has been to expand the quality and quantity of schoolwide reform efforts, to leverage ongoing efforts to connect higher standards with school improvement (especially for Title I schools) and to encourage coordination of all resources and school functions to meet identified needs. Many previous targeted and categorical federal programs for raising student achievement have tended to increase fragmentation and generally have failed to raise student achievement (Millsap, Millsap, Turnbull, Moss, Brigham, Gamse, & Marks, 1992; Puma, Jones, Rock & Fernandez, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). The CSRD program has been consciously designed to avoid such problems by using proven comprehensive approaches.

For students, the promise of CSRD is an improved education created when their school leaders engage in coherent, coordinated, schoolwide planning to implement strategies and programs with proven effectiveness. The work presented here — the work of the seven RELs participating in this research initiative — has been to broadly inquire into how this promise is (or is not) being realized in a variety of schools, districts and states across the U.S. It is based upon information gathered during the laboratories work as CSRD technical assistance providers and researchers.

# THE CROSS-LABORATORY CSRD RESEARCH PROJECT

The recently published national evaluation of CSRD stressed the need for continuing research into comprehensive reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). As part of that effort, each of the laboratories has been working with states, districts and schools as they implement CSRD.

The work presented here is based on the research activities of several of these laboratories. Each of the participating laboratories focused on different levels of the educational system, including state-, district-, and school-levels.

Reflecting the different training of the researchers involved and the different regional contexts' involved, each laboratory has adopted different purposes, perspectives, methodologies, and contexts for their work. These different approaches and methodologies[1] are summarized in

[1] Other methods and studies may have been part of CSRD research at the participating laboratories, but they were not part of this project.

Table 1. For example, both LAB at Brown and PREL report findings relevant to CSRD implementation at the state level. The LAB at Brown's research method has been mainly ethnographic and relied on participant observation, interviews, reflection, and document review to detect patterns. PREL's work has focused on providing technical assistance, and has relied on results of self-study instruments to provide data upon which patterns or implementation were detected. Similarly, while several laboratories report findings relevant to CSRD implementation at the school level, each research approach and focus was different. PREL's approach was to determine needs for technical assistance across 10 sites and to respond to these needs. NWREL's approach was to provide intensive, individualized assistance to two low-performing schools to prepare them for comprehensive school reform. The approach at AEL/CREP and SERVE was to survey teachers and administrators systematically using standardized classroom observation and student assessment tools, and compare outcomes across different school climates, models and programs. McREL's approach to the study of CSRD implementation was to interview administrators about supports for CSR implementation and inspect responses for patterns. A more detailed description of each laboratories research project is contained in the Appendix to this report. This document and other products of the laboratories collaboration reflect the benefits of combining multiple research methodologies but also the logistical challenge of combining studies that have different, if overlapping, structures and premises.

**Table 1.**
**Summary of CSRD Research Included in This Report**

| REL | Research Focus | Methodology | Observations |
|---|---|---|---|
| AEL/CREP | CSRD Implementation Process | Survey & Case Studies | 12 schools |
| LAB at Brown | State role in implementing CSRD | Ethnography & Applied Research | 2 states, 20 schools |
| NWREL | Preparation for and implementation of reform in high needs schools | Case studies | 2 schools |
| McREL | CSRD implementation, literacy and district role | Case studies | 9 schools |
| PREL | Identify school needs and provide technical assistance | Questionnaires and Interviews | 10 schools |
| SERVE | CSRD Implementation Process | Survey & Case Studies | 39 schools |
| WestED | Role of Districts in CSRD | Computer aided analysis of interviews | 9 districts |

The participating researchers came together in April 1999 to learn about different reform perspectives and contexts and to inform the process of school improvement in ways beyond any individual effort. Since each researcher had already designed and begun conducting studies to address different questions, a considerable amount of time was spent deciding on a process that

would allow a coherent discussion of what was learned from the independent experiences and research.

A number of different approaches to working together were considered: (1) writing a book or monograph to which each would contribute a chapter, (2) developing or adopting a common rubric for measuring implementation success across CSRD sites, and (3) identifying a common set of areas to which each participant would respond based on their experiences and data. The group settled on the third option and generated the following set of four a set of common questions:

1. The planning process used to develop each school's CSR plan and how did the process support CSR implementation,

2. The relationship between leadership and CSR implementation,

3. The conditions that supported/inhibited professional learning,

4. The story you want to tell about CSR models, and its implications for policy.

The first question was selected as the focus of this cross-laboratory project. Each laboratory prepared a 10-15-page response to the question that focused specifically on issues of culture/climate, strategies and activities, decision making, external technical assistance, state guidelines and policy, and federal guidelines and policy. This document reports the common themes identified from these responses. In many cases, whole paragraphs from an individual laboratory's responses have been reproduced here, with the appropriate attribution.

Following a brief overview of the CSRD planning literature, the results section of the report is organized in view of a CSRD planning scheme shown in Figure 1. Essentially, complementary research is reported for multiple levels of education systems. That is, the results section begins by describing links between CSRD and Title 1 Programs, then discusses state-level planning, followed by discussion of district-level activities, and finally activities at the school level are reported.

## SCHOOLWIDE REFORM PLANNING LITERATURE

The literature on planning for school-wide reform identifies many of the themes that are also present in the laboratory research presented here, particularly with respect to information dissemination and participatory decision making at the school level.

The state has a considerable influence on setting the stage for schools to undertake comprehensive school reform. Many states have limited the models that schools can choose to implement (ECS, 1999). States play a role in providing schools with adequate time and autonomy to investigate the various models to ensure that the reform model selected is an effective and appropriate match for a school's needs and capabilities (ECS, 1999; Bodilly, 1998). Hurried start-up and lack of preparedness can lead to a mismatch between a school and the chosen design which then can contribute to poor implementation in the long run (Glennan,

1998). Lack of a reform at the state level can ultimately work against school-level reforms (Lusi, 1997). To assist schools most in need with planning and model selection, many states have provided programs for low-performing schools that lack the capacity and leadership to begin this process. Furthermore, some state education agencies have taken it upon themselves to assist schools in choosing a model by evaluating prospective models to make sure that they are compatible with state and district standards, analyzing research, encouraging schools to make site visits to other schools, and conducting workshops to help determine if a model is a match for the school (ECS, 1999).

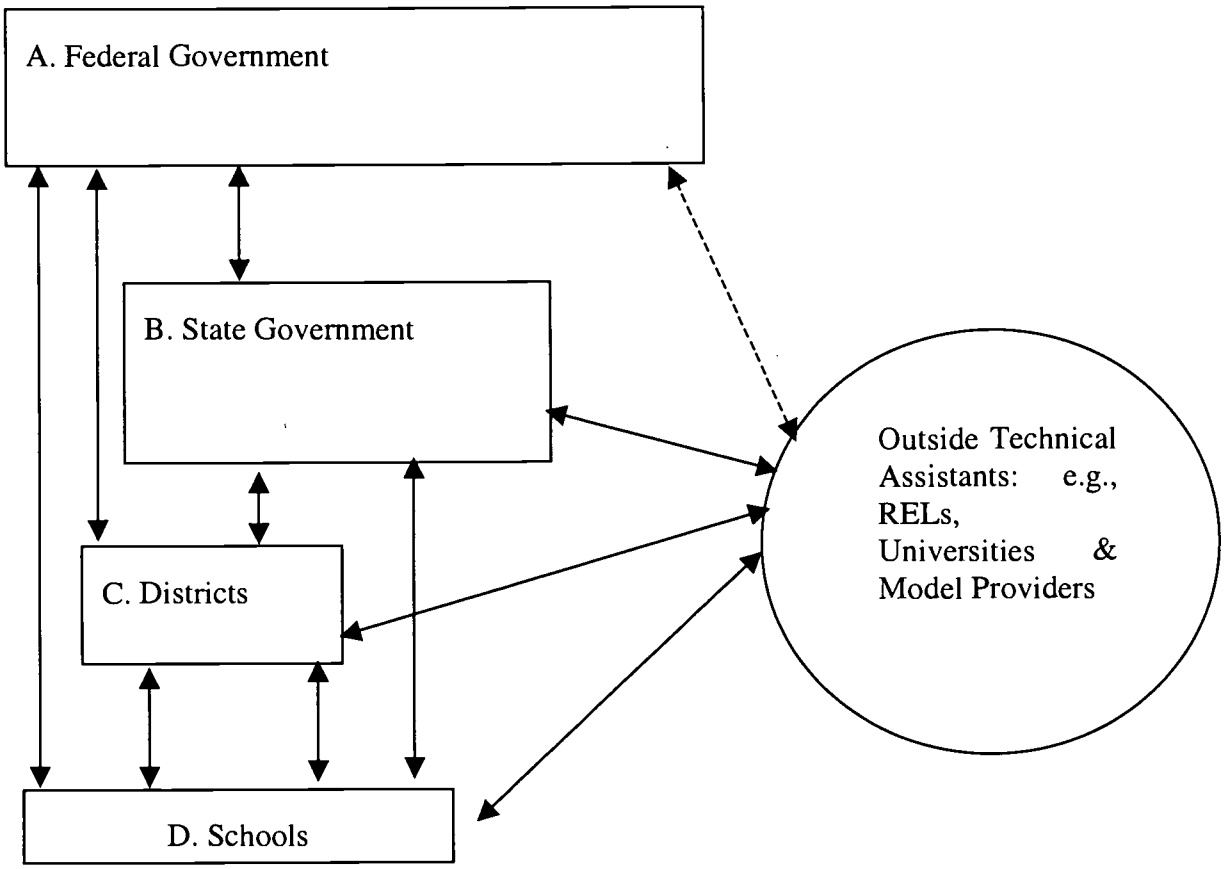


**Figure 1: Schema of CSRD Planning** (Dashed lines show relationships that are not addressed in this document)

Earlier research, especially work with the New American Schools, has found that district support was essential for schools when they begin a comprehensive school reform planning process. First, observed leadership from the state and district level can be a strong catalyst for change as well as reassuring to teachers (Bodilly, 1998). An especially strong message of support at the district and school level is the reallocation of resources to support the planning process (Bodilly, 1998). In addition, most schools require guidance and leadership from the state and district offices regarding the skills and knowledge that they need and are expected to teach students (Glennan, 1998; McREL, 1999). One approach has been to provide professional development to school staff on how to conduct a needs assessment and how to work as a team (ECS, 1999; SERVE, 1997). With regard to selecting a model, districts have allocated time and built time into teachers' schedules so that they can participate in the planning process. This has

proven conducive to more successful implementation (Haynes, 1998). Some districts have also held design fairs to present schools with a variety of models and information, have had model representatives come to schools and give presentations, and have funded site visits to other schools using a given model that is being considered (Slavin, 1997).

The literature suggests that school-level planning should begin with a needs assessment that includes an evaluation of student test score and demographic data (ECS, 1999; McREL, 1999). The success or failure of a reform program relies heavily on teachers, the change agents who will actually implement the program (McREL, 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that research suggests that teachers need to be involved in the decision-making process from the beginning. This includes involving teachers in goal setting, studying different models, and interviewing model developers (ECS, 1999). This "orientation" phase is vital to establish staff support for mission, goals, and philosophy of the programs to be implemented (Haynes, 1998). School personnel can also visit demonstration sites in order to make an informed decision about the appropriateness of a specific model (Glennan, 1998; Slavin, 1997). A communication breakdown during this stage, whether it is a poor understanding of the design, staff resistance, or not enough information, can contribute to a mismatch between the program and the school (Glennan, 1998). Furthermore New American Schools research has shown schools that adopted a model without fully understanding it, or schools that did not have a voice in what model they chose, showed lower levels of implementation than those that were well informed and had substantial involvement in the decision-making process (Bodilly, 1998).

## CROSS-LABORATORY FINDINGS RELATED TO CSRD PLANNING

### Federal Level Finding

***Direct Link Between CSRD and Title 1.*** Title I schoolwide programs have served as a source of encouragement to develop and adopt comprehensive reform programs. These programs have also offered resources that were used to network and gather information about reform designs, ultimately supporting CSRD applications. As was the intent of CSRD legislation, it appeared that in some schools, principals were combining resources from Title I and CSRD to support comprehensive reform.

> The State and Federal Consolidated Grants Official in one of the mid-size districts reported that five years ago, the district embraced Title I schoolwide programs, moving all schools into the program. He stated "the district valued comprehensive school reform and started doing it on its own anyway. Supporting school applications for CSRD allowed the district to continue supporting and guiding schools in a process they already had underway. (McREL)

> In two sites, the Title I program played a networking role as evident by reports that the Title I coordinator learned about the CSRD program at a conference and recommended to principals that they apply for the CSRD program grants. He then assisted with the process. Other mention of Title I influence on CSR planning was that Title I funds were used to support professional development related to the CSR program. (McREL)

CSRD and Title I schoolwide initiatives in Puerto Rico and New Hampshire appeared to be complementary. Title I was seen as initiating comprehensive reform with CSRD resources being used to support and strengthen ongoing reform efforts.

> The relative contribution to comprehensive reform from CSRD and Title I are not clear. Among the Lightspan schools (in Puerto Rico) that LAB at Brown researchers visited the school change processes are comprehensive, but are that way because of use of comprehensive Title I schoolwide plans. CSRD funds have allowed the schools to 'shore up' a few areas of identified weakness. (LAB at Brown)

> LAB at Brown researchers, who facilitated a workshop on local evaluation strategies for CSRD schools in New Hampshire, heard leaders from three of the six schools acknowledge the role of Title I schoolwide planning in initiating their comprehensive school reform processes. CSRD was seen as providing more targeted resources after the whole-school change process was well underway. (LAB at Brown)

**State-Level Findings**

***Integrating CSRD With Ongoing State Initiatives.*** The national evaluation noted that the implementation of CSRD has been "accompanied by a great deal of state activity" (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In the research done at the participating laboratories, at least two states used CSRD funds to support other reform efforts. Elsewhere, CSRD implementation within a state was shaped by educational priorities identified at the state level. This can be seen as a type of policy alignment.

> (Maine decided) . . . to concentrate its limited CSRD resources all at the high school level, to integrate CSRD with *Promising Futures* (1998) — its statewide secondary level reform initiative — and to include non-CSRD participating schools in CSRD-related professional development. (LAB at Brown)

California used the CSRD program as part of an overall effort to aid low-performing schools.

> California's approach to comprehensive reform is a multi-pronged effort supported by the Public Accountability Act of 1999. This Act includes the federal government's CSRD program as well as statewide efforts to ensure the maximum of under-performing schools receive the necessary resources to formulate and implement school wide plans for reform. (WestEd)

> In California if a district was unable to present a compelling plan to support its schools, all schools in that district would be ineligible for CSRD grants. (WestEd).

In a third jurisdiction, Puerto Rico, educational priorities declared by the Commissioner of Education clearly also influenced how that island chose to rollout CSRD.

> The Commissioner called for particular emphases on improving instruction in English and incorporating technology into the classroom. While neither Lightspan nor the Computer Curriculum Consultants models that were adopted in more than two-thirds (58 of 75) of the selected CSRD schools in Puerto Rico are comprehensive on their own, both respond directly to the Commissioner's priorities. (LAB at Brown)

***State Role in CSR Model Selection: Guiding School Choices.*** The model parameters in the federal CSRD request for proposals allowed states to provide guidance on the models schools could select. A clear example of this was Maine where a waiver was obtained from the U.S. Department of Education to limit CSRD implementation to the secondary level and to add parameters for applicant schools to assure consistency with the state's high school reform framework *Promising Futures*. In effect, Maine required interested model providers to illustrate how their models matched the core practices embraced in their statewide reform framework.

> The most formative decision that shaped Maine's CSRD implementation design was the decision by Maine's Commissioner of Education to use CSRD as a vehicle to promote *Promising Futures*. Because of this decision, only secondary schools in Maine were eligible for CSRD funding. It also meant that Maine had created a framework ensuring that all of its CSRD schools and their plans were sufficiently similar such that the recipient schools could aid and learn from each others' implementation efforts. Whether this was initially an intended outcome of the CSRD adaptation decision is unclear, but it created a feature of Maine's CSRD program (similarity of design) that the state program coordinator has positively exploited ....: In a very real sense, Maine created its own CSRD model—*Promising Futures* — that was consistent with at least one of the catalogued CSRD models — the Coalition of Essential Schools. (LAB at Brown)

***Time and Its School-Level Impacts.*** A very clear method of increasing or decreasing the model options open to schools was through the amount of information available to schools concerning models. A simple, but powerful mechanism that can limit the available information to schools is the amount of time schools have to complete their CSRD proposal (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This time can be limited by short deadlines set by states issuing the RFP, or slow mechanisms within districts for alerting schools of the funding opportunity. It should be noted that the original federal timeline for CSRD rollout in all states was very ambitious. While some states were able to meet this timeline, federal education policy-makers relaxed the original requirements.

Limited planning time reduced the ability of schools to gather information about designs, disseminate that information within schools, and to involve a full range of their school communities in CSRD proposal preparation. As evident below, schools in some of these states also reported that they felt rushed by state guidelines. Because of such hurried preparation, several unsuccessful applicant schools studied expressed relief at the failure of their bids.

> In the first round of Maine funding all schools faced what the state CSRD coordinator now characterizes as a too short timeline. ...the school had had about a five-week window between hearing about CSRD at a state-sponsored forum and

when the complete application was due. While this principal felt that her stewardship of the proposal was one of the finest leadership moments of her career, other faculty in her building emphasized and she conceded that the proposal had generated resistance that still lingered. Faculty doubt was articulated as "who are they [the feds/the state] to tell us what to do," "CSRD is too top-down," and so on. Indeed, almost a year after hearing that they would not be funded, there was still palpable bitterness related to CSRD as a top-down program and a sense that the school had "dodged a bullet" by having its application denied. (LAB at Brown)

.... the hurry-up schedule for grant development meant that only a small team of faculty wrote the grant...Because the original proposal drafting timeline at this school had not lent itself to broad faculty involvement, many of the uninvolved faculty felt little compulsion to heed the grant proposal or the *Promising Futures* framework. In a sense, after their grant proposal was not funded, the principal sided with this uninvolved majority, resisting both the state framework, as well as those on his own faculty who had figured out a way to customize and use the state framework. (LAB at Brown)

In contrast, some states, by design or political coincidence, were slower to rollout CSRD. The extra time for planning was used advantageously by some schools and districts.

For the second round of funding in Maine, the request for proposal was made available eight months before the applications were due, and the state CSRD coordinator organized several workshops to support the development of applications. (LAB at Brown)

The request for proposals was released in April of 1999. Districts and schools received technical assistance support on writing the grants from April through July. RFPs were due to the state department on July 30. Grants were awarded in October of 1999. Because the federal program was initiated in other states prior to the spring of 1999 both the schools and districts in California were aware of the program and it's potential to support reform efforts well in advance of the release date. In fact, almost all districts in our sample reported "waiting" for California to announce its competition. (WestEd)

In anticipation of the release of the request for proposals many districts began working with schools to help staff learn about the nine components of the program and to provide information on different research-based models of reform. Once the competition was announced districts stepped up their support to assist schools prepare submissions for the July deadline. (WestEd)

**District-Level Findings**

***Needs Analysis: Supported By Districts And States.*** It appears that many grant applicants included a needs analysis as part of their planning process. In the McREL region, ongoing needs assessments, done to meet state mandated accreditation requirements, helped

schools identify needs and select designs. A number of laboratory studies examined the types of needs assessments used by schools. In general, however, it was not possible to determine if the needs analysis was used in CSRD planning or added to the grant applications *post facto*.

> In all nine sites (in the MCREL study), an ongoing school improvement planning process or a needs assessment was used to develop the comprehensive school reform plan. The needs assessments were both formal and informal. In some mid-size districts, accountability systems alerted central office personnel to needs. In another district, central office personnel became generally dissatisfied with the reading performance of children across the district in the primary grades. This dissatisfaction led to a district wide reading initiative which involved piloting a CSR model in four of the district's schools. (McREL)

> Ongoing school improvement processes were mentioned explicitly by respondents in three sites when explaining how they became involved in the CSRD program. Respondents at one rural Kansas school reported that an application to the CSRD program was a natural outgrowth of the state Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA), the school-by-school improvement/accreditation process. In another site, the school improvement plan developed to address the schools low performance became the basis of its CSRD application. In a third site, a respondent attributed their CSR implementation progress to their school improvement planning process. (McREL)

Based on data from the principal interview, teacher focus group, and application documents, all 12 CSRD schools included in the (AEL/CREP) research study used some type of needs analysis process as reported in Table 2. (AEL/CREP)

**Table 2.**
**Needs Analysis Components Used At Schools**
N=12, 1999-2000 (AEL/CREP)

| Needs Analysis Components | Number of Schools Reported Using The Component |
|---|---|
| Student achievement data | 12 |
| Deficiencies in current curriculum | 7 |
| Teacher need for specific training | 7 |
| Amount and degree of parental involvement | 5 |
| School/community demographics | 12 |
| School Improvement Plan | 7 |
| District plans/goals | 3 |

However, based on these data, it was difficult to determine if the needs analysis information was actually used during the planning and model selection process or if it was simply added to the document *post facto*. (AEL/CREP)

*District Support of School Applications.* There was a wide variety in the amounts and methods of district support provided to schools. This support ranged from assisting with information gathering to helping schools complete tasks associated with the CSRD applications.

> All districts reported a supportive environment from district staff personnel in facilitating the development of CSR applications. Some schools reported they were most interested in receiving hands-on support from district staff, whereas others wanted more autonomy to reflect and develop their plan. (WestEd)
>
> In order to make CSRD a priority, district staff showed support to schools in many different ways. Some districts provided funding for school staff to visit model developer fairs to learn about the different kinds of researched-based models and the ways in which they would work to support their individual school's goals for reform. Others hosted fairs at their district for schools. Many districts hired grant writers to coordinate the process of both preparing and writing the grant. The majority of schools in our sample spoke of the ample support their districts provided facilitate their application process. (WestEd)
>
> The amount of support provided to schools during the planning and model selection process varied greatly by school. In some schools, the support provided by the district was substantial. (AEL/CREP)

States and districts expanded the number of models from which schools could choose by providing information on multiple models through mechanisms such as model fairs. Districts have further supported expanding the number of model choices by providing resources for visits by school personnel to demonstrations, presentations and schools implementing the design.

> From our initial analyses we learned that schools found district support was most helpful when districts
>
> - had an existing infrastructure for reform,
> - hosted design fairs to introduce different models to schools,
> - provided funding for schools to visit presentations and demonstrations of model implementation, and
> - assigned district personnel to attend professional development trainings with school staff. (WestEd)
>
> One strategy used in the planning and model selection process was to provide educators with additional exposure to CSRD model(s). Techniques used to provide this exposure varied by school. The most popular technique was for a team from the school to visit other school sites using a specific CSRD model. The team observed classrooms and asked questions of the faculty and staff. Seven schools (of 12) used this approach.... Another approach designed to provide educators with more exposure to various models was a "model fair." The fair consisted of multiple model developers presenting their models to teachers from

numerous schools. Videos and information packets were available for teachers, as well as the opportunity to ask specific questions about the model. Teams of teachers from two schools (of 12) used this approach.... Other approaches included attending a model seminar or watching a video. (AEL/CREP)

For the majority of sites (7 of 9), districts appeared to provide access to and dissemination of information about the CSRD program and model providers. In the mid-size districts, demonstration sites served as proof that CSR models were effective or were identified as pilot sites to examine feasibility and effectiveness of models. (McREL)

Some districts also financially supported school personnel visits to demonstration sites outside the district. Frequently, principals acknowledged the helpful assistance of district personnel with preparing and writing the CSRD application and providing supporting data. (McREL)

.... the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) stated an intention to provide technical assistance in the form of CSRD information dissemination. (PREL)

Although districts (and states) worked to provide schools with opportunities to gather information on designs, it is not clear that information from these events was actually used in model selection.

Showcases of CSR model providers were hosted collaboratively by State Education Agencies (SEAs) and the Regional Educational Laboratory. Occasionally, however, knowledge about CSR model providers and their characteristics appeared to be shaped more by word of mouth than by research findings. (McREL)

Similar to the state departments of education, districts could also reduce the available model choices to schools. Limiting school choices was sometimes an outcome of needs assessments conducted by the district. Perceptions of school-level needs led some district administrators to direct schools towards specific types of reform such as literacy, to supporting specific models such as *Success for All* and *The Learning Network*, or to develop local models. Districts also directed schools to specific designs for fiscal reasons or for the perceived good of the district at large.

Four schools either did not mention support from the district, or the support was more limited.... In the three remaining schools (of 12), external assistance was provided by the district, but included more than just support. In one school, district representatives practically mandated which model the school would adopt... In the other two schools, the county developed a CSR model for use in the schools. (AEL/CREP)

District central office personnel attended conferences or showcases seeking information on CSR models and then made recommendations and disseminated the information to school personnel. (McREL)

In more directive districts, central office personnel appeared to sway CSR model selection with financial reasons or for the good of the district at large, perhaps deliberately studying different options to determine how best to meet the needs of students. One of our nine sites was piloting *The Learning Network*, as were three other non-CSRD schools in the district, in response to dissatisfaction with primary grade children's reading. In another district, when asked what were the identified needs for the school improvement efforts at the school working with *Lightspan*, a central office administrator explained that English Language Learners needed extended learning time and *Lightspan* was considered an alternative, less expensive look-a-like to Extended Day for providing curriculum reinforcement. (McREL)

In some instances districts were very hands-on with helping schools select their reform models. In three cases, only one model was presented to schools as a possible option whereas in the other districts five or more models were provided as options. In general, district staff tended to perceive their input as simply advice and not direction. However, the schools perceived it quite differently. In our school interviews, staff stated that the districts narrowed their options. This suggests the districts should be more aware of the power they exert through proposing possible model choices for schools. (WestEd)

Districts supported CSRD applications with analysis, through hiring grant writers, gathering information from model design teams, liaison with the community, and helping schools integrate school and district standards/goals for the proposal.

From initial analyses of our research we learned the technical assistance for schools both in preparation for and implementation of CSR plans was best aided by districts when district staff

- worked to clarify the grant, its nine components, and the process of preparing such a large document,
- hired or used in-house staff to support schools in the writing of CSR plans, and
- assigned staff to work with schools preparing and or implementing their CSR plans. (WestEd)

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of the CSRD program is its complexity. In addition to being asked to develop plans that include technology, parent/community involvement, professional development, and a research-based model of reform, schools are asked to intuit how these elements mesh together to form a comprehensive plan for reform. (WestEd)

In five schools (of 12), the state and district provided extensive assistance to the school during the planning process. School districts analyzed student achievement data for these schools as well as other pertinent needs data. Districts also provided

technical assistance in writing the grant, as well as functioning as a liaison between the school, model developers, and the community. In some cases, the state also provided assistance in the form of an external facilitator who was assigned to the school via another project. The external facilitator participated extensively in the research and analysis process. (AEL/CREP)

Two laboratories noted the role of districts in providing administrative support such as negotiating with model service providers and budgeting know-how. WestEd researchers noted how schools appreciated this help from districts, while PREL research noted that "paperwork" between schools and model service providers was an implementation problem.

From the initial analyses of our research, we learned the decision making process for schools was best aided by districts when

- districts provided information to assist schools in their model adoption, negotiation of contract with developers, and facilitation of billing/materials associated with models; and
- informed schools about reallocation of resources. (WestEd)

Additionally, schools talked about the ways in which districts facilitated contractual negotiations between the school site and the model developer. (WestEd)

Biggest administrative hurdles to implementation:

- Contract writing, financial planning
- Contract approval forms, including Sole Source approval, tax clearance, Board of Education approval. (PREL)

The relationship between district support and model implementation is not clear.

At the present, there is no evidence that the amount of district support has made any difference in implementation of CSR models. (AEL/CREP)

## School-Level Findings

***School Interface with Model Providers***. An issue that was briefly touched upon by some researchers was barriers (both physical and logistical) to collaboration between schools and model providers.

Some of the Maine schools that did not identify the *Coalition of Essential Schools* as their "model," made this "choice" because the *Coalition's* support infrastructure was too distant from their school. The Southern Maine Partnership (a *Coalition of Essential Schools* regional center), which is based at the University of Southern Maine, is nine hours from Caribou, one Maine CSRD recipient site,

and more than five hours from several others. Reflecting both the unavailability of *Coalition* support and the disposition for local autonomy, these "too-distant" schools all opted to implement locally designed models. As an aside, the experience of these "too distant" schools, all were rural, highlights a possible national issue regarding CSRD and rural schools; namely the dramatic limitation of model provider choices because of such geographic inaccessibility. A 1998 LAB at Brown survey identified several model developers who were unable or unwilling to have their model implemented in Puerto Rico. (LAB at Brown)

Biggest hurdles to implementation:

- Long distance from technical service providers
- Materials arrived late...(PREL)

***Model Selection at the School Level.*** A key issue discussed in the research of several participating laboratories is the level of teacher participation in model selection. Two laboratories specifically looked at the relationship between teacher participation and either school climate or model implementation. SERVE described three different decision mechanisms: Administrative; Team/Committee; and Whole School. AEL/CREP described two decision mechanisms: Top-Down and Participatory Decision-Making (PDM) for selection of models that were not locally developed.

AEL/CREP and SERVE used the same survey instruments to examine school climate, and level of reform as outcomes of the model selection process. AEL/CREP found a relationship between the style of planning engaged in and the nature of the subsequent implementation. A key question that has not yet been completely addressed, because of the relatively early stage of the current CSRD implementation, is the link between decision making processes, model implementation and student performance.

> Six schools used a participatory decision-making approach to choose a model. In these schools, a committee or group of teachers was selected to research and assess models; using school needs analysis data and other instruments.... Teachers would typically choose a set of CSRD models for further research and analysis... The next round of model evaluation typically included teachers doing extensive research on a smaller number of CSRD models, which sometimes included visits to other schools using the model. Teachers would then present their findings to the entire faculty, who would then vote on the model that best met the needs of the school. (AEL/CREP)

> The second approach to choosing a model was much less participatory, although it was sometimes couched in participatory terms. Four schools in the study used a Top-Down approach. In these schools, only one CSRD model was presented to teachers for their consideration. Teachers were either not aware of additional models or had no opportunity to consider additional models (i.e., no opportunity was mentioned in the interviews or application document). (AEL/CREP)

The cross-laboratory pilot question asked if the planning and model selection process had an impact on CSR implementation. In order to address this question, teacher questionnaires were analyzed to determine if teacher responses at schools using a Top-Down approach differed from responses from teachers at schools using a PDM approach. (AEL/CREP)

Responses on the Comprehensive School Reform Teacher Questionnaire (CSRTQ) from Top-Down schools and Participatory Decision-Making schools were compared using analysis of variance. Specific teacher questionnaire items were chosen for the analysis due to their conceptual link with a participatory decision making approach. The response scale used ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Results from the analysis of variance are reported in terms of the F ratio, and the significance level (p) are reported in Table 4. (AEL/CREP)

The same pattern of differences between Top-Down and Participatory Decision-Making schools was true for the Parent/Community Involvement Benchmark. On this benchmark, the low end of the scale indicated limited parental/community involvement, and the high end of the scale indicated parents being active supporters, and faculty and staff regularly plan opportunities for quality parent/community participation. These are reported in Table 3. (AEL/CREP)

**Table 3.**
**Comparison of Participatory Decision-Making and Top-Down Approaches**
CSRTQ and Implementation Measures
N=253, 1999-2000, (AEL/CREP)

| Questionnaire Item | Mean Top-Down Approach | Mean Participatory Approach | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I have a thorough understanding of this school's comprehensive school reform (CSR) program | 3.4 | 3.7 | 4.18 | .042 |
| 12. Students in my class spend much of their time working in cooperative learning teams | 3.6 | 3.9 | 4.16 | .043 |
| 17. Community support for our school has increased since comprehensive school reform has been implemented | 3.0 | 3.4 | 10.46 | .001 |
| 19. Teachers are more involved in decision making at this school than they were before we implemented comprehensive school reform | 3.1 | 3.4 | 6.63 | .011 |
| 21. Because of our school's program, teachers in this school spend more time working together to develop curriculum and plan instruction | 3.3 | 3.7 | 8.87 | .003 |

| Questionnaire Item | Mean Top-Down Approach | Mean Participatory Approach | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 22. Teachers in this school are generally supportive of our CSR program | 3.5 | 4.0 | 14.72 | .000 |
| 27. My school receives effective assistance from external partners (e.g. university, businesses, agencies, etc.) | 2.9 | 3.3 | 6.31 | .013 |
| **Implementation Measures** | | | | |
| Curriculum Benchmark | 2.5 | 2.8 | 5.68 | .018 |
| Parent/Community Involvement Benchmark | 2.2 | 2.6 | 4.36 | .038 |

A similar analysis was conducted using the School Climate Inventory. Eight items on the Inventory were chosen for analysis due to their conceptual link with a participatory decision-making approach... Six items were related to parental and community involvement in the school. On three items, teacher responses from Participatory Decision-Making schools were significantly higher than those from Top-Down teachers. Differences on the remaining three items were non-significant... Two items on the Inventory addressed the issues of faculty and staff cooperation, and teacher involvement in decision making. These results are reported in Table 4. (AEL/CREP)

**Table 4.**
**Comparison of Participatory Decision-Making and Top-Down Approaches To Model Selection on the SCI**
N=243, 1999-2000 (AEL/CREP)

| Questionnaire Item | Mean Top Down Approach | Mean Participatory Approach | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Community businesses are active in this school | 2.9 | 3.4 | 9.2 | .003 |
| 11. Parents are involved in a home and school support network | 3.2 | 3.1 | .37 | .543 |
| 18. Parents are invited to serve on school advisory committees | 3.9 | 4.1 | 5.5 | .019 |
| 19. Parent volunteers are used whenever possible | 3.9 | 4.0 | .50 | .483 |
| 28. Faculty and staff cooperate a great deal in trying to achieve school goals | 3.8 | 4.1 | 6.7 | .010 |
| 31. Teachers do not participate enough in decision making | 2.7 | 2.8 | .03 | .856 |

| Questionnaire Item | Mean Top Down Approach | Mean Participatory Approach | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 32. Information about school activities is communicated to parents on a consistent basis | 3.9 | 4.1 | 1.6 | .202 |
| 37. Parents are often invited to visit classrooms | 3.6 | 3.9 | 3.9 | .048 |

Although AEL/CREP found a relationship between the model selection process and both implementation and school climate, researchers at SERVE did not perform the same statistical tests and thus did not report similar findings from their data. These different findings may be partially due to the use of different constructs in describing the decision-making mechanisms.

> We hypothesized that schools using the more inclusive and democratic Whole School approach would tend to engender greater teacher buy-in to the comprehensive reform design, and increase awareness of the planning and implementation processes. The sub-groups are as follows:
>
> - **Administration:** Seven schools indicated that the administration or individuals outside of the school selected the comprehensive school reform model. One school was excluded from the comprehensive school reform teacher questionnaire analysis due to missing data.
>
> - **Team/Committee:** Fifteen schools indicated that a small group or committee selected the comprehensive school reform model for their school.
>
> - **Whole School:** Fourteen schools indicated that the entire school's faculty and staff participated in the selection process for the comprehensive school reform model. However, one schools was excluded from the analysis of the comprehensive school reform teacher questionnaire items because no questionnaires were submitted. Additionally, two schools were excluded from the analysis for the school climate inventory because of missing data. (SERVE)
>
> For this preliminary examination of outcomes, we examined the descriptive outcomes for meaningful trends and patterns. The means shown in Table 5 were derived from a three-point scale, with 3 indicating agreement and 1 indicating disagreement. A response of 2 was considered neutral. For both of the questions from the teacher questionnaire, the Whole School process schools had a slightly higher mean. The Administration process was consistently rated the lowest. However, the effect sizes for the Whole School subgroup advantage were in the +.20 - +.25 range, indicating a relatively weak effect. (SERVE)

**Table 5.**
**Mean Ratings of Decision-Making Involvement on Teacher Questionnaire**
N=1025, 1999-2000 (SERVE)

| Question | Administration | | Team/ Committee | | Whole School | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| Teachers are more involved in decision making at this school than they were before we implemented comprehensive school reform. | 2.12 | .85 | 2.16 | .79 | 2.32 | .79 | 2.21 | .80 |
| Teachers in this school are generally supportive of our CSR program. | 2.48 | .74 | 2.54 | .65 | 2.65 | .62 | 2.57 | .66 |

In other studies, laboratory researchers observed different model selection processes, with some additional insights into top-down approaches and also subsequent attitudes and behaviors. As with the AEL/CREP and SERVE research, these studies also found different responses in schools to top-down decision-making. In some instances teachers appear to have (slowly) embraced principal-mandated reforms. Differences in school leadership and/or regional cultures also may explain some of the differences in findings across CSRD site.

> District culture varied across sites. In some districts, CSR model selection appeared to be site-based, in others, model selection appeared more top down, an integral part of district-wide initiatives. In the former districts, central office personnel played supportive, information providing, guiding roles. (McREL)
>
> Within school buildings, the majority of sites experienced resistance to change among staff; however, a couple of principals commented on how resistance or an attitude of compliance dissipated after implementation began. (McREL)
>
> The study was not designed, nor was evidence collected, to determine under what conditions a top-down or bottom-up approach is more effective for improving schools and student achievement. (McREL)
>
> Leadership and management style strongly influenced how decisions were made. In both schools the leadership styles were very different but had an adverse effect on the staff's active involvement in the entire planning process. The decision-

making process at both sites were exclusive in nature. Opportunities were few or not genuine in planning and decision making, resulting in the staff placing the locus of control outside of themselves — feeling "done to" rather than engaged in the process. (NWREL)

The LAB at Brown reported a schism created by top down behavior at a school that was not successful in its bid for CSRD funding. This research project also described a slightly different meaning to the phase "top-down."

> At an unsuccessful applicant school, the local control of the CSRD grant development process by a small cadre of 'change-oriented' faculty (with the principal's vague blessing) had become grounds for a faculty schism. When the grant was not funded, this group (that wrote the grant proposal) was nonetheless initially still optimistic because of various promises that *Promising Futures* would be implemented anyway at the school. This group subsequently became frustrated when in their minds the principal reneged on that promise. In their minds it was a top-down decision to do nothing. This highlights how complaints about "top-down" methods can be directed at in-building processes as well as to mandates from district, state, or federal levels. It even suggests that external programs can be sought as a way of averting top-down structures. (LAB at Brown)

Research by the laboratories is likely to continue on the relationships between decision making and outcomes.

***School Capacity to Reform***. School preparedness for reform was addressed in NWREL's work with schools that did not receive CSRD grants and can also be derived from some of the LAB at Brown's research that has already been presented.

> The most significant lesson in our preliminary data analysis is the necessity of preparing for change. This involves creating an internal catalyst for change where the locus of control is within the school community. Once the school staff recognizes the need for change, the next step is to develop a climate that fosters change. The two sites we are working with have a history of chaos and poor performance. The time it has taken to examine the professional working culture of each school and then to begin reshaping the organizational climate to support comprehensive reform has been lengthy. However, without addressing the readiness for change and investing into constructing a school culture and climate that advocates shared decision making and planning, change will be fleeting, replaced by the next a new idea, principal, or reform effort that is imposed on the school staff and community. The key issues that have percolated from our data analysis and influence a school's readiness to undertake comprehensive school reform are the following:
>
> - Quality and stability of leadership
> - Ability of the staff to collaboratively work as a team

- Environment of respect and trust
- A clearly defined and shared vision
- Embracing high expectations
- Desire and willingness to change among the staff (which influences degree of commitment)
- External technical assistance and support
- Accountability. (NWREL)

## CONCLUSIONS

The various laboratories research projects about CSRD have taken many approaches and perspectives. This attempt to look for common themes across projects has revealed a wide variety of ways that states and districts support and mold CSRD. It makes clear that understanding CSRD planning requires consideration of roles and actions across multiple levels within the education system.

Some states clearly integrate or align CSRD with other reform efforts. District roles in planning comprehensive school reform varied, including mandating models for schools, supporting school searches for appropriate models and support help in writing proposals, and assistance with contract negotiations. Many researchers examined the process used by school to select designs. A key issue of interest in several laboratory studies was the level of participation of school faculty in model selection. Each laboratory has categorized this level of participation in different ways. A key challenge for researchers looking at school-level decision making is to develop common definitions for the various levels of teacher participation in model selection and other key management decisions.

A key issue that is not completely understood is how alignment of CSRD within existing policy frameworks and institutional roles interacts with the model options available to schools and the success of CSRD implementation. State-level alignment and its effects are evident. Maine's alignment of CSRD with existing reform efforts limited CSRD to secondary schools and narrowed the potential model choices for schools, yet added coherence to the rollout. This allowed participating schools to easily learn from each other. California's requirement of district and school applications gave a *de facto* advantage to districts that had existing reform plans and structures for facilitating schools' efforts.

The importance of alignment of policy frameworks and institutional roles between districts and schools is not as clear. It is clear that districts served many different roles, and schools used many different model selection processes. However, the evidence is mixed on the how district roles and school-level model selection processes affected implementation.

Work with schools that were not successful in their CSRD applications showed that schools must develop a capacity for reform. Next questions for investigation may be to examine

which district roles are appropriate, given different school-level capacities to make reform decisions. In other words, given the wide variety of district support and decision-making processes, is it likely that some types of district support are more appropriate for different levels of school decision making and reform capacity? District policy frameworks for schools with substantial reform capacity may include the ability to temporarily allocate resources for grant competitions and administrative support; district policy frameworks for schools with less capacity may be more directive and/or developmental.

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# APPENDIX

## Participant Research Project Summaries

### AEL, Inc./CREP Project Summary

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During the 1999-2000 academic year, AEL, Inc. and the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis collaborated to conduct research in 12 Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) schools located in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. These schools were chosen to represent a wide variety of urban and rural locations as well as a variety of CSRD models. Data gathered at the schools included principal interviews, classroom observations, teacher focus groups, faculty questionnaires, CSRD Applications, and implementation benchmarks.

Findings from the first year of the research study include (1) the amount of support provided to schools by the district varied greatly, (2) all schools reported needs analysis information in the CSRD application document, however, it was difficult to determine if the needs analysis information was actually used during the planning and model selection process or if it was simply added to the CSRD application document post facto, (3) teachers at schools using a participatory decision-making approach to model selection reported significantly higher levels of support for the model than did teachers at schools using a tops down approach, and (4) schools using a participatory decision-making approach reported significantly greater progress in implementing the model than did schools using a top down approach.

A related technical report will be available on the AEL website (www.ael.org) in early 2001.

### LAB at Brown Project Summary

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Dr. Ted Hamann, a Research and Development Specialist at the LAB, authored all the initial reports and subsequent editing that constitute the LAB's contribution to this cross-REL

study. However, LAB colleagues Brett Lane, Matt Hudak, Ivana Zuliani, and Patti Smith have all carried out substantive CSRD work upon which he draws.

Dr. Hamann's roles in relation to CSRD have included both research and technical assistance, with research being his predominant role in Maine and technical assistance provider being his main role in Puerto Rico and in New Hampshire. However, his Maine role did include some technical assistance and a summary of his visits to CSRD schools in Puerto Rico is the basis for a technical report he has prepared for OERI.

With planning processes as the obvious focus, the segments of LAB research presented here look in particular at the interface between federal initiators of CSRD and state departments of education and at the interface between state departments of education and schools. However, the LAB's studies in Puerto Rico have also considered the interface between schools and model providers. For reasons discussed in the text, that is not a pertinent concern for Maine because of the particularities of its CSRD roll-out strategy.

The LAB has been conducting an ethnography-oriented statewide case study of CSRD implementation in Maine since February 2000. This research, also describable as an "ethnography of education policy", uses a framework outlined by Levinson and Sutton (in press). The LAB's research in Maine has included site visits at 14 schools (8 of them CSRD schools), evaluation of six CSRD schools' school portfolios, review of site documents (ranging from schools' CSRD applications to the state CSRD coordinator's formative evaluation frameworks), facilitation at a workshop for all 11 Maine CSRD schools, attendance at a summer academy that highlighted changes underway at several CSRD schools, joint presentations at three national meetings with Maine educators involved in CSRD, and collaboration with developers of Maine's *Promising Futures* secondary reform framework who helped push for that state's linkage of CSRD and *Promising Futures*. The LAB CSRD work in Puerto Rico involved a March 2000 training workshop for school site visitors/evaluators and two September 2000 trainings on school-site self-evaluation. During their trips to Puerto Rico for the workshops, LAB staff were able to visit six CSRD implementation sites in what are best described as '*visitas de conocer*' (i.e., visits to gain familiarity). The New Hampshire reference in the report comes from information gathered during a school self-evaluation workshop with all six New Hampshire CSRD schools.

From the above activities, the LAB has drawn numerous conclusions, many provisionally. However, based on their work, Dr. Hamann and his colleagues are confident of their claim that state-level interpretations, adaptations, and resulting supports of CSRD are critical for CSRD planning, alteration, and enhancement. Adjustments at the state level make CSRD implementation at the local level more responsive to state and local contextual factors and thereby more viable. State-level adjustments also mean that CSRD looks substantively different in different jurisdictions.

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LAB technical reports on CSRD in Maine and Puerto Rico will be available after December 10, 2000. For requests contact Ted Hamann (Edmund_Hamann@brown.edu) or Brett Lane (Brett_Lane@brown.edu).

**McREL Project Summary**

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In winter 2000, McREL conducted a multiple case study of nine CSRD-funded schools in four central region states. The study focused on classroom practices in K-5 literacy in association with CSR model orientation, namely, whether the model focused on literacy or was more generally focused on school culture and developing human potential. In addition to surveying teachers about their use of classroom literacy practices, school and district administrators were interviewed about the role of district support for school reform. This report describes findings from these administrator interviews. The role of districts as information providers and guides and supporters of the grant application process was evident across the majority of sites. Specifically, both locally-designed and state-directed needs assessment and school improvement processes prepared local school teams to successfully apply for CSRD program participation.

**PREL Project Summary**

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This document presents the results of program evaluation research investigating *Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project* (CSRDP) planning and its effect on the quality of reform implementation.

Three phases of the formative evaluation of CSRDP are addressed: technical assistance, demonstration site selection, and early implementation. Technical assistance was provided by the Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE), model program developers, and PREL. To assess satisfaction with services received in preparation for and throughout the process of early program implementation, administrators of schools receiving grants were interviewed to assess their satisfaction. Provisions for technical assistance from each of the service providers were

found to be good, with recipient ratings evidencing high levels of satisfaction with pre-proposal assistance and post-funding provisions. Among reported difficulties in carrying out programming, paperwork issues in the form of completing contracts and approvals were repeatedly described. These responses evidence a potential benefit to future recipients of CSRDP funds of increased technical assistance training and support in this area.

The second phase of the CSRDP formative evaluation involves the degree to which the protocol for the selection of demonstration program sites was followed. An inspection of ratings of the model programs were found to be carried out appropriate to the intentions stated in the state's federal CSRDP grant proposal.

The third phase in the formative evaluation of CSRDP is the early implementation of model programs conducted since the period of grant awards (January 1999). To measure the fidelity of early CSRDP implementation, HIDOE site visitation measures and decisions regarding the overall progress of schools were observed. An analysis of the year one implementation of CSRDP schools revealed that the major events carried out by CSRDP schools included the receipt of model developer trainings, HIDOE/PREL technical assistance, attendance at CSRDP-related conferences, and planning activities. In the first year, eight of the ten CSRDP schools were found to be in the process of planning their CSRD program, while the remaining two initiated implementation.

Preliminary year two evaluation measures indicate that CSRDP implementation is proceeding as planned for more than half of the sites (56%). Delays in implementation for all sites have occurred as a result of insufficient time for planning, articulation, and teacher preparation; unavailability of program materials; inadequate professional development; program ambiguities; lack of teacher commitment; and the need to modify elements of the program to meet school needs, among others. Preliminary findings also indicate that the integrity of implementation is highest for schools with reform models having the highest levels of programmatic structure (e.g., Success For All, America's Choice), though high structure is sometimes associated with implementation delays.

**NWREL Project Summary**

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The purpose of this in-depth study is to document, analyze, and report about how high poverty, low-performing schools successfully restructure themselves and utilize limited resources in order to support and sustain comprehensive reform efforts that focus on improving reading achievement for all its students. NWREL selected a rural k-8 school on the Oregon coast and an elementary school in an agricultural community in Washington as partner sites for

this case study. NWREL has been drawing on its internal expertise and services to provide information, technical assistance, staff development and other resources to assist these schools in their efforts to fully implement a research-based reading system that is embedded in comprehensive school reform.

This case study addresses the blind spot in the majority of comprehensive school reform research by investigating what is needed to create a fertile school environment that initiates and sustains schoolwide reform efforts. The case study schools provided critical knowledge of what it takes to effectively restructure a high poverty, low performing school. The research reflects one constant theme: *schools need to prepare for change by first creating a positive, supportive environment of respect and trust.* This theme and its key features are found on every researcher's list of essential ingredients for successful reform. What has been absent from the implementation of reform is the time and devotion necessary to truly concentrate on this crucial first step. People, not programs, make change happen.

A report titled "Programs Don't – People Do Insights into Schoolwide Change" will be available December 1, 2000. In this report informs and assists beleaguered schools to successfully negotiate the difficult and complex process of change, most specifically, as they develop a comprehensive schoolwide literacy program.

**SERVE Project Summary**

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Report Summary prepared for SERVE by Steven M. Ross, Marty Alberg, Robert Horn, Deborah Lowther, and Lana Smith at the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP), The University of Memphis

The SERVE study of Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) schools consisted of examining processes and preliminary outcomes regarding design selection, teacher and administrator support, school climate, implementation process, and teaching strategies at 39 of the 333 CSRD school in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina, the six states of the SERVE region.

Selected questions from the Comprehensive School Reform Teacher Questionnaire (CSRTQ) and the School Climate Inventory (SCI) were considered relevant to the present analysis interests. A review of the CSRTQ and SCI was conducted to determine the questions that were logically relevant to assess comprehensive school reform implementation, program support, and inclusion in decision making.

Qualitative comments provided by Site Researchers and process records for each of the CSRD schools were used to determine inclusion of schools into one the three design selection sub-groups: Administration, Team/Committee, and Whole School.

Based on the analysis, the following overall findings emerged:

- There appears to be general support by the teachers for their CSRD program
- Teacher involvement in decision making and their level of trust in the schools was relatively low
- Commitment, achievement, and review of school goals appear to be strong areas in most schools

As the longitudinal study continues through the 2002 school year, SERVE will obtain further data regarding the implementation and success of the varied comprehensive school reform designs. A related regional report will be available in December 2000.

**WestEd Project Summary**

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This study looks at the ways in which nine districts in California supported schools from the pre-application phase through the first year of implementation of comprehensive school reform. Our major finding is that district staff worked in a variety of *different* ways with schools. We identified two different typologies to best characterize different approaches to supporting schools. Our rationale for creating typologies is to provide a common language to educators working with reform.

From this study we learned that over time there was a developmental process between both the schools and the districts. In the pre-application phase the majority of schools that developed the highest scoring plans worked closely with district staff and/or staff hired in from the outside paid for by the district. In the implementation phase the majority of schools that reported the greatest sense of satisfaction with their plans were schools that maintained their initial relationship with the district but the district itself was less proactive and more reactive to specific school requests.

Through our work we learned districts can support schools both through intervening, proactive measures as well as waiting and reacting to individual school needs. Through both proactive and reactive work districts increased focus on student achievement by reducing the number of distractions that would otherwise divert energy of principals and teachers. Districts can remove distractions by reducing the extent to which central office staff plays rule-monitoring

roles. With fewer central office dictates, principals and teachers have more time to address instructional improvement. Similarly, district staff may be required to work in ways that reduce many of the bureaucratic or auxiliary functions that tended to divert the attention of school personnel away from teaching and learning. As we learned districts helped schools build their capacity to change by utilizing a combination of proactive and reactive techniques to best facilitate comprehensive school reform.

Concurrent with the research we also learned that a dual approach (providing proactive support as well as reactive) to supporting schools worked well for a number of sites. In some instances districts offered a great amount of support up front through the application phase and then let the schools take over to implement their plans. For some schools this worked very well, while in other schools, staff reported they would like more support from the district. Although there were some complaints about the reactive approach it seemed to be well received by the majority of our sites during the implementation phase, and also the most realistic option given the human and financial resources available at the district level.

A less successful strategy and certainly one that caused confusion at the school sites was a reactive approach to working with schools *both* in their applications for and implementation of CSRD. There are several reasons why districts adopted this behavior. In two cases districts started out as very proactive, but when key staff members left there was no one in place to take over their scope of work therefore necessarily forcing the schools to take over and manage for themselves. In other cases districts opted to rely on the support of model developers in implementing CSR plans.

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