

IV. Review of the Research on Comprehensive School Reform and ELLs

Guiding Questions

- To what extent do comprehensive school reform and the research about comprehensive school reform expressly consider ELLs?
- To what extent do various schools and model designers expressly consider the needs and unique learning characteristics of ELLs when implementing or approving comprehensive school reform plans and designs?
- How do districts support equal educational access for ELLs within comprehensive and systemic reform?

Our searches through educational research literature revealed few studies focusing on English language learners and comprehensive school reform. Although there is a body of research on effective education for ELLs and a body of research on comprehensive school reform, only a handful of studies consider them in combination. Historically separate funding sources, policies, accountability systems, proponents, and knowledge bases have generated research that looks either at English language learners or at CSR. There is not much of an empirical record of their combination. Much of the work of combining them requires making inferences and suppositions from the research on one or the other.

“These [academically excellent] programs [for ELLs] have been shown to consist of unique, individualized, and inclusive educational settings. Do reform models that will be used by schools as part of their CSR programs for their ELL students allow for similar efforts?” (p. 2)

Cognizant of a disconnect between prevalent CSR models and the demographics of many CSR eligible schools, in 1999 the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP) at New Mexico Highlands University identified the “critical need for comprehensive reform strategies to meet the needs of ELL students...” (Wilde, Thompson, & Herrera, 1999, p. 2). CESDP also found that “...there is little information readily available with regard to which models are most appropriate for... ELLs... Thus far most do not address directly the learning needs of this population...” (Wilde, Thompson,

& Herrera, 1999, p. 2). To generate information on the topic, CESDP conducted a survey, collecting self-reported information from CSR schools with ELL populations that could report “demonstrated (i.e., data-based) improvements in ELL students’ academic achievement” (p. i). Based upon this survey, CESDP published *A Guide to Comprehensive School Reform Models Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners*. The guide reviews information provided by 18 CSR schools using externally provided models and 10 CSR schools using locally developed models. The CESDP guide revealed that among the schools surveyed, schools with smaller numbers of ELL students tended to use externally developed models and those with larger ELL populations tended to use locally developed models. The schools that used externally provided models reported that ELL students receiving language services constituted between 7% and 52% of their school populations. The schools that used locally developed models reported that ELL students receiving language services constituted between 17% and 95% of their school populations.

The CESDP guide, relying on school and model developers’ self reports, did not claim to provide either verification of data on achievement or detailed description of model implementation with ELLs; however, the identification of schools where ELL pedagogy and language services models either co-existed or were integrated with comprehensive school reform has provided the field with a good starting point for continued research. Before examining such research, it is worthwhile to consider a question posed in the CESDP

guide. The authors described the characteristics of schools recognized for their “academic excellence” by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) under Title VII: “These [academically excellent] programs [for ELLs] have been shown to consist of unique, individualized, and inclusive educational settings. Do reform models that will be used by schools as part of their CSR programs for their ELL students allow for similar efforts?” (p. 2).

Research Contexts

Much of the current literature on comprehensive school reform reports on implementation and evaluation of either locally created or externally developed CSR program models in particular schools. There is little empirical study of district-wide initiatives or of the district’s role in school-wide comprehensive reform. There is even less research on how districts support ELLs within a comprehensive school reform model. In order to get a better understanding of this dynamic within CSR programs, studies reviewed for this synthesis include: (1) research on externally developed or locally created reform models implemented in schools with high populations of ELLs, (2) research on schools deemed successful in educating ELLs, and (3) district- and system-wide initiatives in districts with high populations of ELLs.

Comprehensive School Reform at the School Level

Externally Developed School Reform Models and ELLs

There have been some research reports in recent years about externally developed reform models and their effectiveness for ELLs (Datnow, Stringfield, & Castellano, 2002; Stringfield et al. 1998). Findings from these studies have been both positive and negative. Datnow et al. (2002) conducted a four-year study of 13 schools from a large, multilingual, multicultural school district in the southern part of the United States; these schools were in the throes of reform. Each chose to adopt one of six externally developed restructuring models: Coalition of Essential Schools, Comer School Development Program, Core Knowledge, Audrey Cohen College System of Education, Modern Red Schoolhouse, and the Success for All (SFA)/Roots and Wings programs. The researchers observed classrooms and meetings, collected data regarding implementation of the program, and interviewed teachers and school and district administrators in order to determine the efficacy of the models in educating ELLs. Results of



the study showed that most of the reform packages had to be adapted to accommodate the linguistic needs of ELLs, a task often not easily accomplished. While some reform models were not easy to adapt, other designs like Core Knowledge proved very adaptable.

Linguistic adaptability aside teachers reported that they sometimes found it difficult to teach ELLs all of the topics included in the curriculum because material was not available in the students' native languages. As

a result, the curriculum was frequently not as comprehensive for the ELLs as it was for English proficient students. In the case of one Success for All Spanish program, teachers substituted ESL strategies for the strategies suggested by the model for oral language development. Additionally, researchers found that, except in the case of one school implementing Success for All, schools received little support from either the design team or the district when they had to make adaptations for their ELLs. The authors of the study stressed the importance of including equity and multiculturalism as explicit goals in any reform initiative. While they found that some models helped teachers learn about their students' languages and cultures, others did not. The needs of ELLs were a low priority in some schools. Many teachers had a preconceived idea that ELLs were not capable of higher order thinking.

In a report related to the same study, Stringfield et al. (1998) described a school, referred to as Wild Cypress, that had successfully adapted the Core Knowledge reform model for its bilingual students. The population of the school was 90% Hispanic, and more than a third of the students were classified as limited English proficient (LEP). A major goal of the school was "exemplary bilingual education for all students" (p. 243). Teachers at Wild Cypress chose the Core Knowledge model because they felt it would "build on the school's strengths and...help the faculty and students focus on the substantial contributions of all nations to the world's rich history and diverse cultural fabric" (p. 343). Teachers worked together to adapt the Core Knowledge curriculum for their students. They collaboratively decided when and in which language they would introduce the components of the program to the students. The authors

concluded that “a carefully chosen reform plus a thoughtful, persistent, thorough implementation has resulted in consistently high achievement for a large number of potentially at-risk, multilingual students” (p. 344).

Datnow and Castellano (2000) conducted a qualitative study of three schools implementing Success for All. Their sample consisted of one school that had successfully implemented the model for two years, one that was having implementation problems, and a third school that was just beginning implementation. All three schools had high Hispanic populations (from 45 - 72% of the student body) and high percentages of students classified as Limited English proficient (from 46 - 85%). The researchers conducted extensive interviews with teachers and administrators and observed instruction in individual classes both during SFA instructional periods as well as during non-SFA instructional periods. Results of the study showed strong administrative influence on the adoption of SFA at the schools. In one case, the school had received a large Title VII bilingual education grant and therefore needed a research-based bilingual literacy program. The principal explained to the staff that SFA was the only bilingual program he had found that was supported by strong research evidence. Some teachers felt pressured by this to accept the SFA model. While teachers and principals regarded training in the SFA program as positive overall, teachers trained in the Spanish component of the program expressed some dissatisfaction. Training for them was conducted in English but the manual they were given was in Spanish. Consequently, they had to adapt much of the training they received to a different language.

Datnow and Castellano (2000) reported problems with instructional groupings and learning materials for ELLs. Overall, the homogeneous grouping of students for the 90-minute SFA reading time was typically unproblematic. However, there was a problem in one school where students were placed in the Spanish SFA reading program but were in an English-only program for the rest of the day. Teachers did not see the benefit of teaching students to read in Spanish while writing instruction was conducted in English. As for the material provided by

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the SFA program, teachers using the materials for the English SFA component considered them acceptable, while teachers using the Spanish materials found them to be unacceptable. There were reported to be fewer choices of basal readers and novels for the Spanish version of SFA, language errors in the Spanish material, and a hard-to-understand teacher's manual.

Results of the SFA reading assessment as well as anecdotal information from teachers reported by Datnow and Castellano (2000) showed an overall gain in reading achievement both in English and Spanish at all three schools. One teacher reported that his Spanish-language students were transitioning more quickly into English. The researchers also assessed the effectiveness of instructional practices. Several areas of theory and research informed the questions used for the assessment, including research on education, diversity, authentic pedagogy, and effective programs for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Results showed that while there was evidence of student dialogue in all three schools, none were considered strong in encouraging personal and cultural identity. They also found that the pedagogical strategies used during SFA time were not being used by teachers during non-SFA time.

"I believe you have to do a resource needs assessment, but I believe all parties must be involved in it to build ownership of the problem from the beginning; because unless I recognize the problem, I won't act on it."

--Sharon Saez, Educational Testing Service

Locally Developed School Reform Models

A Study of Secondary Schools That Help Recent Immigrant Students Succeed

Adger and Peyton (1999) reported on four schools that did not adopt external comprehensive school reform models but instead participated in designing a program to help recent immigrant students succeed in their secondary schools. With assistance from the Program in Immigrant Education (an organization funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) and in collaboration with a local outside organization such as a university or a research-, business-, or community-based organization, the schools designed projects with an emphasis on: (1) innovative strategies for improving ELLs' English language proficiency and literacy and (2) providing academic content mastery and better access to postsecondary institutions or the work force. At the core of each project was a school-based committee consisting of teachers, administrators, and community members (e.g., university researchers, business people, employees of non-profit agencies); the committees were instrumental in reorganizing and restructuring standard procedures in their schools to better accommodate ELLs. The committees based their decisions on student data such as academic achievement, English language proficiency, scores on state testing, dropout rates, and the percentage of ELLs who pursued a postsecondary degree. For example, the task force of a Maryland high school that had partnered with the University of Maryland-Baltimore County created special courses to help ELLs pass the state-mandated tests in citizenship, reading, writing, and math. These classes helped more ELLs pass these tests. The task force also provided assistance to prospective college-bound ELLs. It organized groups of students and helped them fill out college applications, apply for scholarships, write resumes, and visit colleges. Results showed that in the first year, the 27 students who were regular participants were all accepted to college, with many receiving scholarships. The second year of the project yielded similar results. Partnerships with parents and community organizations were vital to the success of several Program in Immigrant Education projects. In one middle school, teachers and parents worked together

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to help students with their homework assignments. The homework assistance program resulted in improved grades for all students involved.

In another example of school-community partnership, a middle school and a local university established a mutually beneficial relationship. University officials provided opportunities for the students to visit their campus and interact with university students of similar backgrounds. The school

and university hoped that this interaction would convince the middle school students that postsecondary education was viable for them. Students from the university also participated in a mentoring program with the middle school students.

The university provided professional development to the middle school faculty in sheltered (comprehensible) instruction for ELLs and on other topics of interest. In turn, school administrators allowed the university to establish a “learning laboratory” at the middle school for students in their college of education whose focus was urban education and language-minority students.

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The Importance of Teacher Commitment and Taking Care of the Whole Child

Borman et al. (2000) studied a grassroots model of school improvement as part of their study of four different types of school improvement models. They reported on one Midwestern school, with a 92% Latino population, that showed marked improvement as measured by student

attendance, authentic instruction, and standardized test scores. The school's improvement plans emphasized ongoing professional development and positive relationships with community organizations. The school annually assessed the needs of students' families and implemented programs designed to take care of the whole child. Community agencies assisted the school in providing resources to the families.

A committee that included current teachers and the principal hired new teachers. Teachers implicitly understood that the school would not tolerate low expectations for these students because of their economic or ELL status. The principal had confidence in the ability of her teachers and did not mandate the adoption of a certain program or method of teaching. Instead, she encouraged teachers to attend professional conferences and to share what they had learned with their colleagues. The school initiated an after-school lab where teachers, and sometimes parents, worked together to improve teaching and learning.

Over the eight-year period in which the school was studied, the attendance rate increased from 94% to 97%. From spring 1992 to spring 1999, reading scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) increased by 29 percentage points. The math scores for the same time period increased by 44 percentage points.

The authors of the study concluded that grassroots reform efforts are effective if they have the initial support and commitment of the teachers. Teachers will accept a proposed reform more willingly if they are provided with solid evidence that a reform will "make a difference for their students" (p. 67). Additionally, reform efforts must consider the needs of the whole child and not just improvement in academic achievement. In other words, reform models should provide resources that help students function in their community.

Challenging Content and a Strongly Developed Second Language Acquisition Program at the Elementary and Middle School Levels

The National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning has published Educational Practice Reports (McLeod, 1996; Minicucci, 1996; Nelson, 1996) on innovative school reforms that successfully provided ELLs with both challenging content and a strongly developed second language acquisition program. A nationwide search for schools


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successful in achieving high standards for their ELLs was conducted. National, state, and local educators with an understanding of ELL programs nominated 156 schools and selected eight (four elementary and four middle) for study. Aside from having achieved high standards, criteria for nomination included: (1) schools with language arts, mathematics, or science programs that were of high quality, especially for LEP students; (2) schools undergoing restructuring; and (3) schools with comprehensive, well-implemented language acquisition programs for their LEP students. Regrettably, the authors did not specify

their criteria for determining the programs to be “high quality” and “well implemented.” Based on their selection criteria, telephone interviews were conducted with 75 potential sites. From these telephone interviews, the number of potential sites was reduced to 25. Fifteen of those sites were chosen for a one-day visit based on demographic, geographic, and/or programmatic reasons. The researchers wanted their choices to represent the diverse environments in which English language learners receive their education. For example, in some schools most of the LEP population was from a single language background, while in other schools English language learners spoke several different languages. In some cases the school was a neighborhood school, while in other cases students lived throughout the district. Eventually, eight of those sites (four elementary and four middle schools) were chosen for intensive study. McLeod (1996) explains that the study “focused particularly on understanding the ways in which recent trends in education reform can be applied in a school context that includes significant numbers of students with limited English proficiency” (p. 5).

Four Exemplary Elementary Schools Studied

Nelson (1996) reported on the four elementary schools that implemented language development programs for English language learners as part of the school-wide restructuring project. Two of the schools were located in Texas, one in El Paso and the other in the Houston school district. The third school was in an inner-city neighborhood of San Diego, while the fourth was located in Chicago. He highlighted six elements of restructuring that the four



schools had in common: (1) a reorganization of the school that supported improved teaching and learning for all students, including ELLs; (2) adaptation of school programs to address the needs of ELLs; (3) access to challenging content for ELLs; (4) opportunities for ELLs to interact with English-only peers; (5) introduction of innovative curricular strategies such as whole-language, literature-based curriculum and thematic, integrated curriculum; and (6) implementation of innovative instructional strategies including cooperative, active, and experiential learning. Two of the four schools restructured so that ELL teachers could team-teach with monolingual English teachers. In addition, teachers integrated students from both classes for some instructional activities. Another of the schools in the study divided its students into four ungraded “wings” based on developmental stages instead of grade placement. Teachers were then able to organize instructional groups according to developmental needs rather than on the basis of traditional age/grade structure. Teachers also were instrumental in planning their own professional development, which included learning and implementing new strategies for the language development of ELLs. The four schools employed several different approaches to addressing their students’ English language acquisition needs. Two of the schools used a transitional bilingual approach, and a third used a two-way bilingual model. Spanish was the primary language of all the students from these schools. Since the fourth school had some students whose primary language was Spanish as well as students who spoke one of the Southeast Asian languages, the school opted for a combination of bilingual and sheltered instruction and hired support staff fluent in the students’ languages to provide primary language assistance.

Teachers adapted strategies normally used with English-only students for the ELLs, because access to advanced English literacy skills was deemed just as important for ELLs as their English language acquisition. The schools implemented strategies such as Writer’s Workshop and Reader’s Workshop in both the first and second language. Accelerated Reader, a computer-based test, enhanced reading comprehension at one school. Students read books outside of class in either English or Spanish and then took a comprehension test. Teachers reported that “students were engaged in their reading and were willing to try increasingly sophisticated books... [teachers] felt the program increased reading comprehension and a love of reading and provided exposure to a wide variety of experiences through books” (p. 9).



Four Exemplary Middle Schools Studied

Minicucci (1996) reported on the four exemplary middle schools that were able to provide ELLs with quality science and math courses. Minicucci cited several features common to all the schools: (1) math and science curriculum were creative and aligned with national efforts in math and science; (2) the school afforded ELLs the opportunity to participate in the innovative math and science programs; (3) the second language development programs and the science and

math programs coordinated with each other; and (4) the school reorganized to support the curricular changes. Additionally, all schools partnered with an outside agency that assisted in curriculum design and professional development.

One of the exemplar schools, a school in the Boston area, worked with the non-profit agency Technical Education Research Center (TERC) to develop a science program for students in the school's Haitian Creole bilingual program. Students decided on the topics they would study and developed the questions they would explore on that topic. The school introduced a method called "science talk" (Cheche Konen, see Roseberry, Warren, & Conant, 1992) whereby students selected a topic to discuss (in either Haitian Creole or English) that was related to findings from an experiment they had conducted. This method allowed students to "guide the discussion, develop topics, argue evidence, explore their findings, and formulate additional questions" (p. 10).

Minicucci (1996) reported on another exemplary school, located in a low-income Latino community in California. This school devised a method of transition for ELLs by which students ready to enter English-only classes were "clustered together" in those classes. For example, an eighth-grade, monolingual, English algebra class had 15 ELLs. The students worked together in cooperative learning groups to solve math problems. They used both their first language and English when discussing in the groups. Many of the teachers in the English-only classes had received training and certification in ELL education.

A third school, situated in San Francisco, adopted a block scheduling program that allowed students to study a topic that integrated content from math, science, language arts, and social studies. The teaching format used extended units on topics that were relevant to students. The fourth school, located in Texas near the Mexican border, adopted an innovative newcomers program. The Language Acquisition for the Middle School Program (LAMP) provided sheltered English classes as well as an intensive English as a second language (ESL) program. In addition, students received Spanish language arts classes. The LAMP classes were smaller in size, usually 14 to 15 students per class. Teachers grouped students into LAMP families (one for beginning ELLs and another for intermediate ELLs). The five teachers assigned to each family met on a daily basis to plan classroom and school-wide activities and discuss any problems their students were having. Instructional strategies employed at the school in Texas included cooperative learning and using thematic units relevant to the students' lives. The School of Education at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) supported the school's professional development activities. Teachers attended a math institute at UTEP that helped them restructure the math curriculum. Other professional development opportunities for the teachers included training in multicultural education, language development, and the use of computers in the classroom. Minicucci (1996) concluded that the needs of ELLs could and should be considered in reform of curriculum and instruction, particularly in math and science. The exemplary schools she presented showed that creative practices like site-based decision making, smaller class size, alternative scheduling, and teacher collaboration resulted in quality instruction for ELLs in both content and language development.

“Practitioner research gets teachers to become self-reflective and forms the best staff development. Engaging teachers and school staff in doing research about the community and about practice creates a space to change belief.”

--Pedro Pedraza, Hunter College

High School Small Learning Communities and ELLs

In contrast to the successes for ELLs in the above-mentioned schools, Lili Allen (2001) found that ELLs were in danger of losing basic services when five Boston high schools initiated the Career Pathways reform efforts. Under this reform, the schools were restructured into smaller learning communities, and students in Career Pathways attended classes together. The project-based curriculum emphasized a particular career theme. A school-to-work model provided out-of-school experiences in the workplace (such as job shadowing) and opportunities for exploring postsecondary study and skills development. Allen found that headmasters at the schools struggled to ensure that Career Pathways attended to the needs of and services for ELLs in the midst of this restructuring. There were concerns about whether appropriate Career Pathways courses would be made available to all ELLs or only to the more proficient ones. State requirements about language assessment teams that are required to meet and assess progress for the ELLs were also a concern. Another major issue was how to staff all the smaller learning communities with a sufficient number of bilingual personnel, because they were limited in number. There were also not enough bilingual staff to teach the upper-level pathway courses in the students' native languages. Some schools tried to concentrate resources by staffing only a few career pathways with their bilingual and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers and encouraging ELLs to choose those pathways.

The leaders of the five schools in the report handled the problem in different ways. At one high school the headmaster organized the staffing and class scheduling in collaboration with the bilingual director. Because of their efforts, ELLs were able to take the same pathway courses as English-dominant students but in their native language. Sometimes these students were taught by mainstream teachers who were fluent in the students' first language. At a second high school, ELLs with advanced proficiency could not benefit from pathway courses because the timing of the courses conflicted with upper-level ESL courses. With the help of a consultant, the school somewhat resolved the issue by having ELLs with advanced English proficiency attend mainstream career pathway courses and receive core content courses in their native language.

As increasing numbers of high schools are restructured into smaller learning communities and career or theme-centered "academies," they must contend with the issues of providing ELLs access to opportunities, resources, and qualified ESL and bilingual staff, discussed by Allen (2001). Funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, researchers at Brown University's

Education Alliance are currently conducting research on these and other issues relating to English language learners, small learning communities and high school reform.

Related Research on Schools Demonstrating Success with English Language Learners

Given the limited number of studies on comprehensive school reform and English language learners, schools seeking to design successful, integrated, school-wide approaches for English language learners must look farther afield to other related research. There are a number of studies and reports on schools that have redesigned curricula, provided professional development, and involved students, parents, and communities in creating programs for English language learners.

For example, Walqui (2000) reported on four high schools that designed special programs for their newly arrived immigrant students. One high school opened a “Reception Center” for newly arrived English language learners. The students spent half a day at the center in ESL classes, which helped prepare them for sheltered (comprehensible) content and mainstream classes that they would attend during the other half of the day. Another school described by Walqui concentrated reform efforts on teacher training and staff development. Teachers concentrated on learning about and discussing the cultural and linguistic development of their many English language learners. Additionally, they received training in the best methods and strategies for working with English language learners. The staff of the school even decided to work on a Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) program for their students.


“Don’t just look at students within your school; look at students who’ve left and the factors causing them to leave. That’s a way to involve other schools and agencies too. Before you start restructuring groups, do your due diligence and get a sense of what the real structure is in and out of the school.”

--Ariana Quiñones, National Council of La Raza



Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999) in collaboration with the Region One Service Center of Texas as well as the Texas Education Agency conducted a study of eight schools (three elementary, three middle, and two high schools) that outperformed most other schools in their district on state standards. The schools, which were located on the Texas-Mexico border, had a high population of English language learners as well as a large number of students of low socioeconomic status. The schools were purposely selected for this qualitative case

study because the authors wanted to highlight schools that demonstrated instructional practices and learning environments that resulted in achievement of high standards. Criteria for selection were that two thirds of the students in the school were Mexican-American; standardized tests scores (TAAS) of the students were well above average; and the school had received some type of state or national recognition for teaching and learning. Various components of the schools, such as leadership, parent involvement, community participation, math, and reading instruction, were studied. Wagstaff and Fusarelli (1999) reported on the leadership qualities that were evident in these schools. They found that administrators, professional staff, and community members in these exemplary schools communicated and collaborated in both the governance and leadership of the school through a site-based management approach. Both the school mission and the school vision were clear and supported by all parties involved. Additionally, instructional needs revealed by testing results were used to design curriculum and professional development. In another section of the report, Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999) reported on parental involvement. They found that when parents committed themselves to the school, they supported all the children not just their own. There were three different types of school/community relationships observed in the schools in this study. Brooks and Kavanaugh (1999) identified the Community as Resource Model, the Traditional Community Model, and the Learning Community Model. A large number of the schools in this study fit the Community as Resource Model. The relationship between the school and the community was tenuous at best and depended on the needs of the school. The school looked to the community



for assistance in solving the school's problems. In the Traditional Community Model, the school served as the "center of activity" (p. 63) for both the school and the community. The populations of the school and community were similar, and teachers and other school members were fully integrated into the community. One school in the study fit the Learning Community Model. In this type of model, the school is considered an integral part of the whole community's learning. School staff are actively involved in working out solutions that will help not only the school but also the surrounding community. Based on the results of the study, the researchers made several recommendations for improving school-community relationships. They encouraged more professional development for both school personnel and community members. Additionally, they felt that the cultural and economic characteristics of the community should be considered when devising plans for school-community partnerships, taking into account the continuously changing nature of a community.

The two final sections of the study that were reported involved the math and reading curricula (Reyes & Pazey, 1999; Rutherford, 1999). The researchers noted that the teachers believed in the academic ability of the students and expressed their expectations of quality work. Teachers received training in strategies for working with their populations. They planned integrated units that incorporated the students' first languages and cultures and connected to the students' personal knowledge and backgrounds. The classrooms were student centered with evidence of cooperative learning activities, opportunities for students to interact with one another, and both peer and cross-age tutoring. In some schools there were special classes for students transitioning from Spanish to English. The teachers in the schools used several types of assessments: teacher-made tests, oral assessment of a student's knowledge of content, portfolios, and extended student projects. In concluding their reports, the authors cited specific reasons for the success of the programs in the schools studied: (1) strong support from the leadership of the school; (2) a committed faculty and staff; (3) community and parent support; and (4) programs for the students varied and were geared to the specific needs and wishes of the parents, students, and/or community.

Comprehensive School Reform at the District Level

The District Role in Comprehensive School Reform

Districts play an important role in successful implementation of any school reform and often influence the types of reforms chosen by individual schools (Yonezawa & Datnow, 1999). For example, California districts encouraged particular schools to apply for CSR funding, provided technical assistance, and supported model fairs so schools could learn about particular models (WestEd, 2002). In Puerto Rico, where the entire commonwealth is considered a school district, the Puerto Rico Department of Education reviewed a number of external reform models and then presented schools with a finite list of initiatives they could pursue (Hamann et al., 2001). The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE, 1998) suggested that districts could be instrumental in ensuring an effective match between a particular reform design and the needs of the school by providing schools with the facts necessary to make informed choices. Districts also need to ensure that the curriculum and content standards of schools entering into a comprehensive school reform align with the district and state standards. Additionally, districts may have to make changes in their operational routines in order to support school-level reform. Responsibilities at the district level can also include monitoring both the quality and performance of the design team, informing parents and community members about school reforms, and administering an appropriate accountability system. Massell (2000) indicated that, in many instances, help from the district—which she identified as the local school board, the superintendent, and the central office staff—was the only source

of external assistance schools received in their reform efforts. In a policy brief that reported on a two-year CPRE research study in 22 school districts—in California, Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, and Texas—Massell highlighted four “capacity-building” strategies that showed potential for being “major mechanisms for enacting improvement” (p. 1). The strategies included using data to make decisions about teaching and learning, increasing teachers’ knowledge and skills, assuring that curriculum and instruction

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are aligned with state standards as well as district policies, and providing additional resources and attention to schools that are performing poorly.

Studies of District Support for Comprehensive School Reform Initiatives in Schools with English Language Learners

School-wide reform efforts have a better chance of providing quality education for all students if the district supports them (Berman et al., 1995; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). Research shows that district support is an essential component of successful school reform programs (Berman et al., 1995; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Wong & Sunderman, 2000). The relationship between school and district is important even when schools enter into contracts with externally developed models such as Success for All, Core Knowledge, Coalition of Essential Schools, Modern Red Schoolhouse, Comer Schools, and others. Studies indicated that district involvement can have both positive (Berman et al., 1995; Kirby et al., 2001; Minicucci, 1996; Stringfield et al., 1998) and negative consequences (McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996; Stringfield et al., 1998) for schools implementing reform. Two studies reported preliminary findings from 13 multilingual/multicultural schools, in a large urban school district, that were in the early stages (second through fourth year of implementation) of school-wide reform (Stringfield et al., 1998; Yonezawa & Datnow, 1999). The district's superintendent was instrumental in the initial phases of school reform, organizing fairs at which educators from district schools received information about various reform designs. Administrators from the district frequently visited schools, sponsored workshops, provided funds for teachers to attend conferences, and assisted principals in adapting some reform models to the needs of their ELLs. Likewise, in their study of eight exemplary schools in the midst of reform, Berman et al. (1995) found that district support for innovative, high-quality programs made a "direct and, in some cases, a crucial contribution" to the successful education of ELLs (p. 2). Although the level of support for the school differed from district to district, common features included training, support for smaller class size, and flexibility in creating a program to meet the needs of their student population. Dentler and Hafner (1997) found that administrators' expertise regarding ELL-pertinent issues (e.g., second language acquisition, alternative assessment) correlated with effective support of ELLs. Researchers also found that decentralizing control and encouraging site-based decisions in regards to budgets, personnel management, curriculum, assessment, and scheduling contributed to successful school reform implementation (Minicucci, 1996; Miramontes et al. 1997).

Lack of district support, or pressure from the district to adopt particular models, may impede implementation and success of school-wide reform. Some schools chose their school-wide reform designs based on available funding or on a district administrator's personal agenda, rather than on a model's appropriateness for the student population (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). Certain reform design models require a high percentage of teacher support and approval before implementation. However, in some cases teachers reported feeling pressured by school and district administrators to accept a certain reform model; in these cases teachers were less confident that the model was appropriate for their students and therefore less confident implementing the new program. Changes in district administration also proved detrimental to some school reform programs (Datnow et al., 1998).

In 1995, a newly appointed superintendent of the Philadelphia Public Schools initiated a district-wide reform agenda entitled Children Achieving. The agenda implemented new academic standards in math, English language arts, science, and art. The plan divided the district into clusters of elementary, middle, and high schools. Schools in the cluster were expected to become learning communities that would plan and make decisions regarding curriculum and professional development (Wong & Sunderman, 2000). Wong and Sunderman studied four schools during the first two years of the Children Achieving reform. The students in the four schools were predominantly minority children from low-income families. Two of the schools had a high number of language-minority students; one of the schools had a large Hispanic population, and the remaining school had a high population of Asian ELLs. Researchers visited the schools, conducted interviews with staff members, observed classrooms, and collected documents pertinent to the school and the students. Teachers reported more flexibility in providing services for their students because they were not tied to district directives about special classes or instruction. The researchers found, however, that instructional practices at the two schools with a high population of language-minority students did not change significantly as a result of the Children Achieving agenda. Teachers continued to delegate instruction and remediation of the lowest performing students to teacher assistants or to programs that took students out of the classroom—"pull-outs"—instead of considering alternative teaching strategies. There was no indication in the study whether teachers addressed the specific learning needs of their second language learners or what district support was offered to schools with this special population.

Districts and the Needs of English Language Learners

It is important for districts to work with individual schools and the designers of reform models to ensure that programs specifically address the needs of ELLs. These students often do not have the opportunity to fully participate in school-wide reform. Districts should address issues of equity and multiculturalism as part of any reform initiative. Berman et al. (1995) documented the district's role in supporting reform at eight schools considered exemplary in involving ELLs in reform. Although the intensity of the support varied, common characteristics of actions these districts took included: fiscal and managerial control at the school level, recruitment of personnel trained in language acquisition and bilingualism, professional development for teachers, district endorsement of the school's efforts in developing bilingualism for their students, and circulation of information about reform efforts to school staff. These districts also secured waivers of state requirements that precluded full participation of ELLs in reform initiatives. Some federal and state rules and restrictions regarding services provided to ELLs have been cited as impediments to full inclusion of ELLs in school-wide reform (Mace-Matluck et al., 1998; Stringfield et al., 1998). Stringfield et al. (1998) found from their work in the 13 urban, diverse schools undergoing reform that some ELL students were separated from other students because of their limited English proficiency. Schools excluded these students from some portions of the reform program, and they received less model-specific instructional time than students in mainstream classes. Additionally, some models did not allow for instructional adaptations to meet ELLs' academic needs. Likewise, in searching for schools that provided exemplary science or math programs for ELLs, Minicucci (1996) found that often schools had an exemplary program in the desired discipline but did not accommodate ELLs. She explains: "In some cases, they [national, state, and regional experts] conceived of LEP students as belonging to a larger group of 'disadvantaged' students and did not specifically consider the language development issues confronted by teachers educating LEP students. The dilemma can be put in simple terms: the experts who concerned themselves with LEP students were not familiar with efforts underway to upgrade science and

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mathematics learning, and the educational experts who concerned themselves with upgrading science and mathematics learning were not familiar with educating LEP students” (p. 3). This reiterates Miramontes et al.’s (1997) point that efforts to accommodate ELLs and efforts to reform schools have been unnecessarily dichotomized. In contrast to this, in their study of 11 school districts with an increasing number of immigrant students, Dentler and Hafner (1997) found that the three districts showing improvement all had a good understanding of ELL issues above the classroom level. Districts can also recommend that school reform designs be initially created with the ELL population in mind and later adapted for the monolingual English student body. For example, staff members from the Technical Education Research Center (TERC) in collaboration with teachers from a school in Boston developed an innovative science program for ELLs. Part of the program involved student-led discussions related to experiments and activities conducted in class. Teachers allowed students to discuss in their first language (Haitian) and use English for purposes of clarifying misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Since the program proved quite successful for the ELLs, the school adapted it and implemented it for the rest of the school population (Minicucci, 1996).

At times, district administrators working to ensure quality educational programs for ELLs were at cross purposes with those working to ensure successful school reform. Driven by the need to ensure equitable programs for non-English speaking students and by the demands from the local Chamber of Commerce—which was having problems finding qualified bilingual

professionals—one district issued a mandate requiring that all teachers not endorsed to teach English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) complete the required training so that they could be endorsed (Yonezawa & Datnow, 1999). Teachers juggled their time between the professional development needed to obtain the ESOL endorsement and the professional development needed to understand and implement the new school reform agenda. Yonezawa and Datnow reported that some principals were not able to fully implement reform designs because



they could not demand any more time or effort from faculty who were studying for the ESOL endorsement. This conflict between programs was a common problem in many CSR schools with ELLs. Although Stringfield et al. (1998) found one school that was able to accommodate both the needs of the ESOL program and the needs of the reform designs by securing a waiver from the state's mandates for ELLs, most schools attempted to resolve the problem by reducing the amount of time that ELL and ESOL teachers participated in the reform program. Berends



et al. (2002) researched the implementation of externally developed models of reform in the San Antonio, Texas school district during the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 school years. They compared schools that had adopted models supported by the New American Schools (NAS) initiative with non-NAS schools to see if the NAS schools were more innovative in regards to curricula and instructional approaches. (Models supported by the NAS included Audrey Cohen College; Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment for All Students; Co-NECT; Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound; Modern Red Schoolhouse; National Alliance for Restructuring Education; and Roots and Wings.) The population of students in the sample included 85% Hispanics and 10% African Americans. The LEP population was 16%. Surveys, observations, and interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and administrators. Student data were also collected.

The researchers did not find significant effects of the NAS designs on student achievement, although they cautioned that the programs were still in the early stages of implementation. They did find, however, a positive link between student performance and the leadership qualities of the principals in both the NAS and non-NAS schools. Schools whose principals communicated their expectations to both teachers and students, supported and encouraged the activities of the teachers and staff, demonstrated confidence in the teaching staff, and took a personal interest in the professional development of their faculty had higher scores in reading and math on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Findings from interviews with teachers suggested that the district may have unknowingly impeded implementation of reform designs by pushing for a concentration on teaching TAAS skills. Teachers reported not having enough time to implement the reform model's curriculum due to the district's emphasis on teaching skills included on the TAAS exam. The researchers criticized federal and state policymakers for promoting CSR and other reform initiatives at the same time: "The implementation of high-stakes testing regimes—the apparent outcome of many standards-based reforms—might preclude the adoption of rich and varied curricula that challenge students and motivate them toward more in-depth learning experiences" (p. xxv).

Districts, Accountability, and English Language Learners

Many districts have endorsed the use of standardized tests as a measure of students' academic progress. However, concerns have been expressed as to whether this type of test is a fair assessment of what students really know and are able to do, especially when those students are still in the process of learning English. Some researchers believe that the only fair assessment of ELLs' progress is through a measure developed specifically for that population, while other researchers support the idea of including ELLs in mainstream testing as long as accommodations or modifications are provided (Menken, 2000). What matters is that ELLs be included in wide-scale assessment in some manner so that districts and schools realize the importance of offering these students the same quality and quantity of instruction afforded mainstream students (Rivera & Stansfield, as cited in Menken, 2000).

Comprehensive School Reform at the State Level

In a 2001 study, Hamann, Zuliani, and Hudak found few explicit references to English language learners in state-issued requests for proposals (RFP) for CSR. They concluded that ELL concerns may become more central to school CSR programs when state departments of education build more explicit and frequent references to ELLs into their requests for CSR proposals and into their scoring rubrics.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have highlighted three different bodies of research on approaches to CSR in districts with an ELL population: studies of schools successful in educating ELLs, studies of locally created or externally developed reform models implemented in schools with a high population of ELLs, and studies of system-wide initiatives in districts with a high population of ELLs. These studies yielded common characteristics of successful approaches to integrating ELLs into comprehensive school reform:

- **ELLs' needs were considered in the planning stages of CSR.**
- **ELLs were supported by the entire school staff.**
- **Partnerships were maintained with parents and community organizations.**
- **Professional development was conducted for all staff on issues of language and culture.**
- **High expectations were set for ELLs.**
- **District support was provided for resolving conflicts when the implementation of CSR initiatives was not aligned with state and district mandates for ELLs.**

“Don’t say, ‘What are the resources I need to give to these schools?’ but ‘What are the resources the community can give?’ Build on your strengths not your weaknesses. ‘How can we collaborate to make this community stronger?’ Be proactive, not simply responsive. Create a different way of thinking about engagement and what that means.”

--Sharon Saez, Educational Testing Service

