

Comprehensive School Reform

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Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) refers to approaches to improving outcomes in entire schools. CSR sees the school as the primary unit of change in education. It seeks to implant effective practices in all of the central areas of school functioning most likely to affect student achievement: Curriculum, instruction, assessment, grouping, accommodations for struggling students, parent and community involvement, school organization, and professional development (see Stringfield, Ross, & Smith, 1996; ERS, 1998; CSRQ, 2006a,b; Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003). In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education defined comprehensive school reform as innovative programs that include all of the following elements:

1. **Coordination of resources:** The program identifies how all resources (federal/state/local/private) available to the school will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform effort.
2. **Effective, research-based methods and strategies:** A comprehensive school reform program employs innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices, and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics.
3. **Comprehensive design with aligned components:** The program has a comprehensive design for effective school functioning, including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management, that aligns the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a schoolwide

reform plan designed to enable all students to meet challenging state content and performance standards and addresses needs identified through a school needs assessment.

4. **Professional development:** The program provides high-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training.
5. **Measurable goals and benchmarks:** A comprehensive school reform program has measurable goals for student performance tied to the state's challenging content and student performance standards, as those standards are implemented, and benchmarks for meeting those goals.
6. **Support within the school:** The program is supported by school faculty, administrators, and staff.
7. **Parental and community involvement:** The program provides for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement activities.
8. **External technical support and assistance:** A comprehensive reform program utilizes high-quality external technical support and assistance from a comprehensive school reform entity (which may be a university) with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement.
9. **Evaluation strategies:** The program includes a plan for the evaluation of the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved.

Ideally, a comprehensive school reform model is one in which each of the elements is carefully and planfully integrated around a shared conception of how

students will learn and develop. CSR models are usually intended to be selected by a school staff, perhaps from a menu provided by a state department of education or district leadership, or perhaps through some other mechanism. Most CSR models require that staff members vote to adopt the model, and most require a supermajority in favor (say, 80%). The idea is to engage the energies and enthusiasm of a given school staff around a common vision and a common set of strategies, but not to ask the staff to completely design its own reform model. Comprehensive school reform designs are provided by organizations (mostly nonprofits) that provide professional development, teacher and student materials, and perhaps most importantly a network of like-minded schools around the country who share similar visions and support one another's efforts.

Comprehensive school reform occupies a middle position in the spectrum of reforms proposed for schools, between teacher-by-teacher change strategies and systemic district, state, and national strategies. Advocates of comprehensive reform argue that teacher-by-teacher reform is difficult to do at scale, and that isolated teachers without support from their colleagues and building administration are unlikely to adopt or maintain high-quality reforms in their daily teaching practices. In schools implementing CSR practices, teachers have colleagues who are working toward similar objectives, sharing a vision and a language to describe that vision and sharing practical strategies for achieving the vision. Almost all CSR models include a facilitator or coach within the school who visits teachers' classes, organizes opportunities for teachers to work with each other, facilitates discussions about data, student work, classroom teaching practices, and other elements, ensures coordination

among program elements, and acts as a communication link between the principal and the teachers. A few individual teachers implementing a given innovation within a school are unlikely to enjoy this level of support, if for no other reason that it is not cost-effective to have a facilitator for just a handful of teachers. Comprehensive school reform takes the view that genuine, lasting change takes place in supportive, face-to-face groups, and that schools are capable of establishing norms of practice and expectations for continuous improvement that would be difficult to establish on a teacher by teacher basis.

History of Comprehensive School Reform

Comprehensive school reform experienced its heyday throughout the 1990's, but its origins go back much further. A few of the oldest comprehensive models arose almost completely independently, from very different backgrounds. The earliest is probably James Comer's *School Development Program* (SDP). Comer, an African-American psychiatrist at Yale, focuses on helping school staffs to learn about children's development and to connect with parents and community members to provide a supportive environment for the development of pro-social behavior and motivation (Comer et al., 1996). Another early model was Theodore Sizer's (1984) *Coalition of Essential School* (CES). Focused entirely on secondary schools, Sizer's model grew out of the progressive tradition. Henry Levin's *Accelerated Schools* (AS) model also had a strong progressive bent, but initially focused on elementary schools (Hopfenberg, Levin, & Chase, 1993). Comer, Sizer, and Levin all emphasized groups of teachers working together within the school to develop their own approaches to instruction, parent involvement, and other elements, but none of them

provided specific approaches to curriculum and instruction. In contrast, our own *Success for All* model (Slavin & Madden, 2001) grew out of research on cooperative learning rooted in particular content areas, and had very specific conceptions of how teaching and learning should take place. *Direct Instruction* (DI; Adams & Engelmann, 1997) began in the 1960's with structured instructional strategies in reading and math, and developed into a comprehensive school reform model in the 1990s. Unlike SDP, CES, and AS, *Success for All* and *Direct Instruction* provide detailed guides to teachers, student curriculum materials, and specific training. They see whole-school reform primarily as a means of supporting proven classroom strategies.

Four of the five early CSR models were mainly focused on high-poverty elementary schools. The one exception was the *Coalition of Essential Schools*, which served a loose network of secondary schools that included middle class as well as high-poverty schools.

In 1991, the world of comprehensive school reform was transformed by an extraordinary event. A group of business leaders led by David Kearns from Xerox and Lou Gersten from IBM created the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) to create “break the mold” school models for the 21st century. NASDC assembled more than \$100 million in corporate and foundation contributions with the active encouragement of then-President George H.W. Bush, but without any official government involvement. In response to a request for proposals, NASDC received almost 700 proposals (Kearns & Anderson, 1996). Initially, eleven “design teams” were selected, but a winnowing process left seven of the strongest carrying

forward the effort during the 1990's. Two of the seven built on the earlier CSR efforts. *Atlas Communities* was a coalition that included Sizer and Comer, although their CES and SDP models remained in separate organizations. *Roots & Wings* built on *Success for All*, adding programs in math, science, and social studies to existing reading programs. The others built on reform oriented organizations that had not previously engaged in whole-school reform. The *National Alliance for Restructuring Education* (now called *America's Choice*) was an initiative of the influential National Center for Education and the Economy, a key proponent of national standards. *Connect*, a technology-focused design, grew out of work at Bolt Beranek & Newman, a technology contractor. *Expeditionary Learning* created "learning expeditions" using concepts from its parent organization, Outward Bound. *Modern Red Schoolhouse* began at the conservative Hudson Institute, and the *Audrey Cohen College* design was affiliated with a progressive college.

NASDC had a tremendous effect on comprehensive school reform even for CSR models that never had NASDC funding. Beyond the funding itself, NASDC provided business advice and connections, and actively promoted the use of NASDC designs in several large cities and in the entire state of Kentucky. This created excitement more broadly, and by the mid-1990's, many states and districts were holding "design fairs" in which school teams would come to learn about various CSR models, NASDC as well as non-NASDC.

In 1997, Congressmen David Obey and John Porter, chair and ranking members of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, introduced legislation to provide funding for schools to adopt "proven, comprehensive" reform

designs. Schools submitted competitive proposals to receive at least \$50,000 per year for up to 3 years to adopt a comprehensive program of their choice. Obey-Porter had an electrifying effect on comprehensive school reform. Hundreds of schools received CSR funding, but even those that did not heard about CSR and knew it was a favored use of Title I and other resources. Title I itself was moving throughout the 1990's toward an emphasis on schoolwide projects, in which high-poverty schools could use Title I funds to transform their entire school instead of just targeting individuals, and this also supported the growth of CSR. Not all of CSR funding went to externally-developed programs; more than half of the grants went to support home-made models, usually collections of a variety of classroom programs. CSR funding had a strong competitive preference for high-poverty schools, so most grantees served impoverished communities.

A state-specific factor also promoting CSR was the 1997 *Abbott v. Burke* school funding equity decision in New Jersey, which required the state to provide substantial funding to schools in the 30 most impoverished districts. Over a 3-year period, "Abbott" schools had to choose a comprehensive reform model from a list provided by the state.

Throughout the 1990's, NASDC (which changed its name to New American Schools, or NAS) continued to encourage its funded programs and the larger CSR movement, and in the late '90's it began to reach out to additional programs that had never received NAS funding. At its height more than 6000 schools were implementing one of the NAS designs.

With the inauguration of George W. Bush in 2001, the CSR movement waned. For reasons that remain unclear, the Bush Administration proposed elimination of CSR funding, and discouraged use of the *Success for All* reading program in its flagship Reading First program. Congress initially resisted the attempts to eliminate CSR funding, but by 2004 it finally did so. At the same time, a wave of enthusiasm for district-driven reform and uniformity within districts undermined a key principle of CSR, school-based management, and this correspondingly cooled enthusiasm for CSR.

Research on particular CSR models began to appear in the late 1990's, and reviews by Herman (1999), Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown (2003), and the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center (CSRQ, 2006a,b) all concluded that there was moderate to strong research support for many of the CSR models. However, as so often happens in education, the pendulum had swung away from CSR, and evidence was of little consequence.

Today, CSR programs continue to exist, and some networks are quite healthy. In particular, *America's Choice* and *Success for All* continue to serve hundreds of schools in active national networks, and *Direct Instruction* and *SDP* maintain smaller but devoted followings. Other models also continue at lower levels of scale.

While the stage of excitement and rapid growth is over for CSR at this writing, many of the programs and principles have become part of the fabric of American education. There remain perhaps a few thousand schools (1200 using *Success for All* alone) that are using CSR models, and many have done so for a decade or more. As No Child Left Behind moves toward a focus on turning around schools that have

persistently failed to meet adequate yearly progress standards, schools and districts may turn to proven CSR models. If evidence becomes important in educational reform, this will benefit CSR as well, because many CSR models have strong and broadly replicated evidence of effectiveness. This research is discussed in the following sections.

Comprehensive School Reform Programs

Comprehensive school reform models have been evaluated more extensively than any other approach to school reform, in large-scale quantitative as well as qualitative studies. A review of experimental research on comprehensive school reform models was published by Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown (2003), who categorized programs according to the numbers of well-designed experiments on each and the consistency of positive achievement effects. A simplified adaptation of their main results appears in Table 1. Reviews using somewhat different procedures were carried out by the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center (CSRQ, 2006a, b) at the American Institutes for Research. The CSRQ reviews, summarized in Tables 2 and 3, emphasized the number of “conclusive” studies done on each program and the proportion of significantly positive findings.

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TABLES 1-3 HERE

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The following sections discuss some of the most prominent of the CSR models.

Success for All

Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001) is the most widely used and extensively evaluated of the CSR models. It provides schools with specific curriculum materials and extensive professional development in reading, writing, and language arts, along with detailed assessment, cross-grade grouping strategies, within-school facilitators, and other school organization elements. The program gives one-to-one tutoring to primary-grades children who are struggling in reading, and extensive outreach to parents. It provides detailed teacher's manuals and about 26 person-days of on-site professional development to enable schools to engage in a substantial retooling process. Originally focused on elementary school, prekindergarten to grade 6, *Success for All* now has a middle school (6-8) program as well (Chamberlain et al., 2007). Programs in mathematics, science, and social studies were also developed, and the term *Roots & Wings* was used to describe schools using all of these elements (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1994). However, most schools, including many of those categorized as "*Roots & Wings*" in the Borman et al. (2003) review, use only the reading program, and the *Roots & Wings* term is no longer used. Research on *Success for All* and *Roots & Wings* are combined for discussion in this chapter.

Borman et al. (2003) identified a total of 46 experimental-control comparisons evaluating *Success for All*, of which 31 were carried out by third-party investigators. A mean effect size of +0.20 (combining *Success for All* and *Roots & Wings*) was obtained across all studies and measures. A longitudinal study by Borman & Hewes (2003) found that students who had been in *Success for All* elementary schools were,

by eighth grade, still reading significantly better than former control group students and were about half as likely to have been retained or assigned to special education.

CSRQ (2006a) rated the strength of evidence for the *Success for All* elementary program as “moderately strong,” the highest rating given to any program (one other, *Direct Instruction*, also received this rating). A total of 34 studies were rated as “conclusive.” CSRQ (2006b) rated the evidence for the *Success for All Middle School* as “moderate,” with two conclusive studies.

Since the Borman et al. review, a number of additional studies of *Success for All* have been carried out. Most importantly, a national randomized evaluation of *Success for All* was reported by Borman et al. (in press). A total of 35 schools were randomly assigned to use *Success for All* either in grades K-2 or in grades 3-5. The primary grades in 3-5 schools were used as controls, as were the intermediate grades in K-2 schools. By the end of the study, SFA second graders were scoring significantly better than controls on all reading measures (Borman, Slavin, Cheung, Chamberlain, Madden, & Chambers, in press.). This large-scale randomized evaluation is particularly important in today’s policy environment, which is strongly supporting randomized experiments (Whitehurst, 2002). Taken together, there are now more than 50 experimental-control studies of *Success for All* involving more than 200 schools throughout the U.S. Since 1998, *Success for All* has been developed and disseminated by the non-profit Success for All Foundation, and is currently working in about 1200 schools in 48 states.

Direct Instruction

Direct Instruction (DI; Adams & Engelmann, 1996), once known as DISTAR, is an elementary school program originally designed to extend an effective early childhood curriculum into the early elementary grades, in a federal program called Follow Through. Like *Success for All*, DI is primarily intended to help high-poverty schools succeed with all students, and the program is even more systematically specified for teachers.

The DI reading and math programs have long been marketed by SRA, a division of the McGraw Hill publishing company, under the titles “Reading Mastery” and “Connecting Math Concepts.” The publisher provides limited professional development with the program, but schools can contract with providers of professional development, primarily the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) at the University of Oregon. Such schools receive approximately 32 person-days of professional development in their first year, similar to the services provided in the Follow Through studies. Research on DI has overwhelmingly focused on the model with extensive professional development, not on use of the books alone, and research findings for DI should therefore be assumed to apply only to the program with professional development. Certainly only this form could be considered a comprehensive reform model.

Borman et al. (2003) identified 40 experimental-control studies of DI, of which 38 were third party. The mean effect size was +0.15. CSRQ (2006a) rated DI’s evidence of positive effects as “moderately strong,” with 11 “conclusive” studies.

School Development Program

James Comer developed one of the earliest of the comprehensive reform models, the *School Development Program* (SDP; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). The focus of SDP is on the whole child. Rather than focusing on specified curricula and instructional methods, SDP concentrates on building a sense of common purpose among school staff, parents, and community, working through a set of teams in each school that develop, carry out, and monitor reforms tailored to the needs of each school. A School Planning and Management team develops an overall plan, and Mental Health and Parent teams focus on issues beyond the classroom.

Borman et al. (2003) listed SDP as one of three CSR programs with “strongest evidence of effectiveness.” A set of three high-quality third-party evaluations described mixed evidence of the program’s impact. One, a randomized evaluation in Prince George’s County, MD, found poor implementation and no achievement effects (Cook et al., 1999), but a partially randomized study in Chicago (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000) and a matched study in Detroit (Millsap, Chase, Obeidallah, Perez-Smith, & Brigham, 2000) found small but positive impacts on achievement. CSRQ (2006a, b) rated the evidence for SDP as “moderate,” with three “conclusive” studies at the elementary level and two at the secondary level.

America's Choice

America's Choice (NCEE, 2003) is a comprehensive reform model that focuses on standards and assessments, instruction aligned with standards, extensive professional development, and parent involvement. In particular, the program mandates a core curriculum in literacy and mathematics, tutoring for struggling students, and a school leadership team to coordinate implementation.

Borman et al. (2003) included only one study of the *America's Choice* (AC) design, but more recently researchers at the Center for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania have carried out several evaluations. A longitudinal matched study in Rochester, NY, found that *America's Choice* students made greater gains than other students from 1998 to 2003 in reading and math (May, Supovitz, & Perda, 2004). A matched study in Duval Co., Florida (Supovitz, Taylor, & May, 2002) compared *America's Choice* and other schools on state tests, and results favored the AC schools in writing and, to a small degree, in math (but not reading). A one-year matched study (Supovitz, Poglinco, & Snyder, 2001) also compared matched AC and control schools in Plainfield, NJ, and found greater gains for the AC students on the state English Language Arts test. CSRQ (2006a) rated the evidence of positive effects for *America's Choice* as “moderate” at the elementary level, with 6 “conclusive” studies, and also “moderate” at the secondary level, with 5 “conclusive” studies (CSRQ, 2006b).

Modern Red Schoolhouse

Modern Red Schoolhouse (Heady & Kilgore, 1996) is a program that emphasizes standards-based teaching, appropriate uses of technology, and frequent assessment. It provides customized professional development to help schools build coherent curriculum aligned with state standards and then implement aligned practices. In recent years, *Modern Red Schoolhouse* has begun to focus more on district reform and leadership.

Borman et al. (2003) identified four experimental-control studies of *Modern Red Schoolhouse*, with an average effect size of +0.17. CSRQ (2006a) rated the evidence for *Modern Red Schoolhouse* as “limited” at the elementary level.

Accelerated Schools

Accelerated Schools (Hopfenberg, Levin, & Chase, 1993; Levin, 1987) is a process-oriented school reform model that emphasizes high expectations for children and giving students complex and engaging instruction. Each school staff designs its own means of putting into practice the basic principles: High expectations, powerful learning based on constructivist principles, and avoidance of remediation.

Borman et al. (2003) identified three studies of *Accelerated Schools* with a mean effect size of +0.21. CSRQ (2006a) rated *Accelerated Schools* as “moderate” in research evidence, with 3 studies rated “conclusive.”

Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound

Expeditionary Learning (Campbell et al., 1996) is a design built around “learning expeditions,” which are “explorations within and beyond school walls.” The program is affiliated with Outward Bound and incorporates its principles of active learning, challenge, and teamwork. It makes extensive use of project-based learning, cooperative learning, and performance assessments.

Borman et al. (2003) identified four experimental-control evaluations of *Expeditionary Learning*, which had positive effects. However, CSRQ (2006a, b) did not rate any studies of *Expeditionary Learning* as “conclusive.”

Conclusion

The experience of comprehensive school reform shows the great potential of whole-school reform, but it also illustrates fundamental problems in the environment for reform in America’s schools. On one hand, research on CSR has clearly established that fundamental reforms can be introduced, implemented with quality, and maintained over many years. The longstanding belief dating back to the Rand Change Agent study of the 1970s (McLaughlin, 1990) that every school has to create its own approach to reform was conclusively disproved. Not all CSR approaches have been adequately researched, but in particular those with well-specified designs, clear expectations for what teachers and students will do, and extensive teacher and student materials, have been repeatedly found to be effective, scalable, and sustainable in a broad range of circumstances. Quality of implementation matters, of course (Aladjem & Borman, 2006), but it has been demonstrated that high-quality implementations of CSR can be achieved and that in such schools, children benefit.

On the other hand, the experience of CSR demonstrates the faddishness of educational innovation. With a few exceptions, CSR programs did not have strong evidence of effectiveness in the early to mid 1990's, yet schools, districts, and policymakers were eager to adopt and implement the models on a grand scale. When high-quality evidence did begin to accumulate, it generally supported the effectiveness of many of the CSR models, but nevertheless, educators and policymakers moved on to other strategies. The lessons learned from CSR are of value in understanding how change happens in schools, and they will surely have influence in reform efforts of the future that may or may not resemble CSR.

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Table 1
Summary of Research on Comprehensive School Reform Models

	Number of Studies	(Third Party)
<i>Strongest Evidence of Effectiveness</i>		
Success for All	41	(25)
Direct Instruction	40	(38)
School Development Program	9	(5)
<i>Highly Promising Evidence of Effectiveness</i>		
Roots & Wings	5	(4)
Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound	4	(3)
Modern Red Schoolhouse	4	(3)
<i>Promising Evidence of Effectiveness</i>		
Accelerated Schools	3	(2)
America's Choice	1	(1)
ATLAS Communities	2	(2)
Montessori	2	(2)
Paideia	3	(3)
The Learning Network	1	(1)
<i>Greatest Need for Additional Research</i>		
Audrey Cohen	1	(1)
Center for Effective Schools	0	(0)
Child Development Project	2	(0)
Coalition for Essential Schools	1	(1)
Community for Learning	0	(0)
Community Learning Centers	1	(1)
Co-Nect	5	(4)
Core Knowledge	6	(6)
Different Ways of Knowing	1	(1)
Edison	3	(3)
High Schools That Work	4	(0)
High/Scope	3	(2)
Integrated Thematic Instruction	1	(1)
MicroSociety	1	(0)
Onward to Excellence II	0	(0)
Talent Development High School	1	(0)
Urban Learning Centers	0	(0)
All CSR Models	145	(109)

Adapted from Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown (2003)

Table 2

CSRQ Center Report on Elementary School Comprehensive Reform Models

Model	Number of studies rated “conclusive”
Moderately Strong Evidence of Positive Effects	
Success for All	34
Direct Instruction (full immersion)	11
Moderate Evidence of Positive Effects	
America’s Choice	6
Accelerated Schools PLUS	3
Core Knowledge	3
School Development Program	3
School Renaissance	1
Limited Evidence of Positive Effects	
National Writing Projects	5
Literacy Collaborative	2
Co-nect	2
ATLAS Communities	1
Integrated Thematic Instruction	1
Different Ways of Knowing	0
Modern Red Schoolhouse	0
Ventures Initiative and Focus System	0
Zero Evidence of Positive Effects	
Breakthrough to Literacy	0
Coalition of Essential Schools	0
Community for Learning	0
Comprehensive Early Literacy Learning	0
Expeditionary Learning	0
First Steps	0
Onward to Excellence II	0

Adapted from CSRQ, 2006a

Table 3

CSRQ Center Report on Middle and High School Comprehensive School Reform Models

Model	Number of studies rated “conclusive”
Moderate Evidence of Positive Effects	
America’s Choice	5
Success for All Middle School	2
School Development Program	2
Talent Development High School	2
First Things First	1
Limited Evidence of Positive Effects	
KIPP	1
Middle Start	1
Project GRAD	1
More Effective Schools	0
Expeditionary Learning	0
Zero Evidence of Positive Effects	
Accelerated Schools PLUS	0
Atlas Communities	0
Coalition of Essential Schools	0
High Schools That Work	0
Making Middle Grades Work	0
Modern Red Schoolhouse	0
Onward to Excellence II	0
Turning Points	0

Adapted from CSRQ, 2006b

Robert Slavin is Director of the Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University and Director of the Institute for Effective Education at the University of York, England. He is also the Chairman of the Success for All Foundation. Dr. Slavin's research focuses on comprehensive school reform, cooperative learning, school and classroom organization, and research review.