



## **Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Programs: Preliminary Findings From the First Three Years of Implementation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**

by

William Evans & Alison McCray, Laboratory for Student Success

Since the inception of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRSD) program, \$770 million has been provided to approximately 3,000 schools across the nation implementing comprehensive school reform. The program, now entitled the Comprehensive School Reform program, was recently reauthorized in the No Child Left Behind Act (Part F, Title I of P.L. 107-110). The CSRSD program was a portion of the 1998 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Act. Cosponsored by Congressmen David R. Obey (WI) and John E. Porter (IL), the CSRSD program provides financial assistance to support schools in implementing effective, research-based comprehensive school reform models. The program makes resources accessible to state educational agencies offering competitive incentive grants to schools implementing comprehensive reform and improvement programs. Schools are eligible to receive grants of no less than \$50,000 per year (and renewable for two additional years). The intent of the CSRSD program is to enhance student achievement by utilizing whole-school approaches to restructuring, rather than using more piecemeal or isolated programs.

### **CSRSD Program Components**

Under CSRSD guidelines, schools are encouraged to adopt and implement an externally developed whole-school reform model. These research-based

models become the guide for school-wide change as part of the comprehensive nature of school reform. They are characterized by several components addressed in the legislation; these include the assimilation, in a consistent and coherent manner, of the following key program features into the school: professional development, measurable goals and benchmarks, school support, parental involvement, technical assistance, evaluation plans, and resource coordination.

Based on the results of local school needs assessments and a review of the available CSRSD models, the school first selects a research-based model that complements the school's strengths and addresses its weaknesses and is compatible with both the local school and district philosophy. Once the model has been adopted, the developers of the model are to ensure, through expert trainers and facilitators, that the program elements are integrated into the culture of the school and support the attainment of student outcomes.

### **CSRSD Programs in Pennsylvania**

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) issued a request for proposals from local schools to apply for CSRSD funding. The proposals submitted to PDE were reviewed, and, based on the degree to which schools demonstrated the readiness to implement an appropriate whole-school reform model and related program components,

grants were made to the chosen schools. The first grants were awarded during the 1998–99 school year, and those schools received at least \$50,000 per year for the maximum of 3 years of funding. In Pennsylvania, 113 schools in 21 districts received CSRSD funding during this 3-year funding cycle. Of these schools, 67 were elementary schools, 33 were middle schools, and 13 were high schools.

### **Methodology**

The two primary purposes for evaluating schools involved in the CSRSD program process are:

- to document the degree to which the CSRSD program and the associated school reform model are being successfully implemented; and
- to provide evidence that, as a result of the successful implementation of the CSRSD program and model, anticipated improvements in student performance and other related outcomes are being supported and attained.

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, and the PDE have developed a set of guidelines to determine the level of implementation of CSRSD programs. These guidelines are designed to provide a systematic review of the progress a funded district/school is making in terms of the CSRSD program

and model implementation. The elements and the associated criteria contained in the guidelines are seen as realistic expectations for districts or schools practicing comprehensive educational reform.

Fundamental among the guidelines is progress in student achievement. To measure anticipated improvements in student performance, the results of the annual Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) were examined. The PSSA is a standards-based, criterion-referenced assessment designed to measure a student's attainment of the academic standards while also determining the degree to which school programs enable students to attain the proficiency of the standards. Every student in Pennsylvania in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades undergoes assessment in reading and math. With respect to CSRD programs, it was hypothesized by PDE staff that these programs would help students in the lower quartiles move to the upper quartiles on the PSSA assessments.

### **CSRD Implementation**

A preliminary assessment of CSRD program implementation, conducted for a sample of schools, indicated that PDE monitors rated about 60% of the schools as having a functional CSRD program. For these schools, the findings from the review indicated that the program was operational, institutionalized, and part of the school culture. The programs in the other 40% of the schools were rated at the implementation level, indicating that the process had at least been initiated for all aspects of the CSRD program. In examining the results across type of school (elementary, middle, and high school), there do not appear to be any trends in terms of the degree of implementation.

### **Student Achievement Results**

The actual number of CSRD school sites demonstrating positive or neutral trends in PSSA reading scores across Pennsylvania is significantly greater than the number expected due to chance alone; and the number of schools showing negative trends is significantly

lower than that expected ( $\chi^2 = 12.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The chi-square analysis results of math scores for all Pennsylvania CSRD schools are similar to those for reading. There are fewer schools in the negative category and more than expected in the neutral and positive categories ( $\chi^2 = 9.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The data suggest that schools in Pennsylvania receiving CSRD funding during this 3-year period demonstrate a positive trend toward moving more students from the bottom scoring quartile on PSSA tests each year. It is important to note that no schools exhibited a trend of three consecutive years of decreases; thus each CSRD school has increased the number of students moved from the bottom quartile at some point during the funding period. Further analysis examined the frequency distribution within each testing grade (5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup>) and then compared them across grade levels. The comparison reveals that these trends become less significant as the grade level increases. This suggests that the impact of variables such as CSRD funding on PSSA scores could be greater in elementary and middle schools than it is in high schools.

### **School District of Philadelphia Analysis**

The next step in understanding these trends involved a more comprehensive analysis of 24 schools in the School District of Philadelphia (McCray, Evans, Clark, Molock, & Offenber, 2002). This particular evaluation examined PDE implementation data as well as self-reported survey data of perceptions of the degree of program implementation. The analysis of student achievement data included analyses of PSSA scores and, additionally, SAT-9 scores. Results showed that, on average, schools that used CSRD models had lower initial baseline mean achievement scores than schools without models. The analyses showed that the poverty of school communities tended to affect the PSSA scores at the beginning of the study but did not significantly affect the rate of growth in achievement. Similarly, SAT-9 analyses

showed that the organizational level of the school (i.e., K-3, middle school, etc.) helped to explain the differences among the schools in their rate of growth in achievement scores. The results of this pilot study support the general trends exhibited across the state: Student test scores improved in both reading and math in schools that had adopted CSRD models. Perhaps this comprehensive evaluation approach, conducted statewide, would offer additional compelling evidence as to the impact of CSRD on student achievement in Pennsylvania.

### **Conclusion**

The findings described above are preliminary results. Additional data analysis needs to be conducted to allow for studies of magnitude of differences to supplement trend analysis. Also, a more comprehensive analysis of implementation data, including all the CSRD schools, as well as an examination of additional variables, may provide further insights into the ways in which CSRD programs were implemented and the relationship between degree of implementation and student achievement. That said, the findings suggest that CSRD programs were fully implemented in the majority of the schools and at least partially implemented in the remainder of the schools. The student achievement results suggest that there are now fewer students in schools with CSRD programs scoring in the lower quartiles on the PSSA and more students scoring in the upper quartiles than before adoption of the reform models. These results should be encouraging to the PDE and the schools that successfully implemented CSRD programs.

### **References**

- McCray, A., Evans, W., Clark, T., Molock, J., & Offenber, R. (March 2002). *Evaluating Program Implementation and Student Achievement in Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Schools: The Philadelphia Case Study*. Paper presented at the PA/Title I Assessment Congress in Pittsburgh, PA.