

# NCCSR *good schools need good information* Benchmarks

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## Inaugural Issue

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## The Face of Change: NCCSR's Director, Arthur W. Gosling, Shares an Experience with School-wide Reform

*She stood in the hallway, watching the crowds of adolescents stream around her. All shades of skins. Muslim headdress. Latino music. Some white kids from middle class homes. Black kids, some from families here for generations, others recent arrivals from Africa and elsewhere. Survivors from the wars in Indochina. And they were streaming into classrooms manned by teachers holding onto their traditional college prep program. She knew that, while it was working for some of them, the program wasn't effectively reaching hundreds of students. Change had to occur. She reveled in the challenge before her. It was time to move.*

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## Discover NCCSR

NCCSR collects and disseminates information that builds the capacity of schools to raise the academic achievement of all students. Through the web site, reference and retrieval services and publications NCCSR strives to be the nation's main source of information on comprehensive school reform (CSR).

### What is NCCSR?

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education awarded NCCSR to the George Washington University (GWU) in partnership with the Council for Basic Education (CBE) and the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL). Together these three organizations have expertise in school reform, clearinghouse management, providing technical assistance to states and school districts, preparing leaders at the local, state and national levels, and developing networks of leaders.

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## About this Issue

The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR) welcomes you to the inaugural issue of **Benchmarks**. This issue will introduce you to NCCSR's mission, activities and services.

Experiences in the past two years have taught practitioners and policy makers many lessons about CSR. Three of the most salient are that more evaluation needs to be done, schools need more technical assistance and more middle and high school models need to be developed. In response to the first lesson, NCCSR has taken on evaluation as one of its critical issues. For the first edition of **Benchmarks**, NCCSR provides an overview of what schools must do in order to document their success and a list of resources for conducting a high quality evaluation (see page 3). In response to the second and third lessons, **Benchmarks** includes information from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education. OERI has funded technical assistance providers to "scale-up" so that they can serve more schools and model developers to test CSR designs for older students. For information on which organizations received funding and what they are doing, refer to page 5.

## Services and Products

Although the web site is still under construction, it will contain CSR models and research literature databases with many full text documents. All of the materials in these databases will be carefully reviewed for quality, accuracy and relevance. These databases will be searchable by keyword, title, author and the nine model components outlined in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR-D) legislation (Public Law 105-78, commonly known as Obey - Porter after the Congressmen who sponsored the comprehensive school reform bill). The web site will also feature

- information booths for parents, teachers, principals, superintendents and policy makers,
- links to CSR resources,
- archives of NCCSR newsletters, and
- tools and other resources for evaluating CSR initiatives.

NCCSR's reference and retrieval services are designed to ensure that clients have easy access to information on CSR. For those without Internet access or who are in need of an expert searching service, NCCSR has information specialists ready to respond to inquiries by phone, fax, email or regular mail.

NCCSR is also developing a variety of publications to keep educators, parents and policy makers up-to-date on CSR research, lessons from the field and events. **NCCSR Bookmark**, a monthly electronic newsletter, begins a series this month on the nine components in the CSR-D legislation. Future issues of **NCCSR Benchmarks** will examine specific issues in-depth and contain articles by guest writers. Both newsletters will also contain resources for further information and key announcements. Major trends and issues in CSR will be covered in occasional papers called **NCCSR Issue Briefs**. With a summary and topical bibliography, **NCCSR Issue Briefs** will serve those looking for a quick overview of a topic or a starting place for more extensive research.

## Technical Working Group

To ensure that NCCSR gathers relevant, high quality information in a timely manner and consistently provides good information, a

Technical Working Group (TWG) is being formed. The following school reform leaders have agreed to serve on the TWG:

- Sue Bodilly, RAND Corporation;
- Denise Borders, The McKenzie Group;
- Judy Bray, Education Commission of the States;
- Gina Burkhardt, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory;
- Steve Couture, School Principal in Minnesota;
- Steven Fleischman, American Federation of Teachers;
- Libia Gil, Superintendent in Chula Vista, CA;
- Burton “Scott” Jones, Wisconsin Department of Instruction;
- Raynette Sanchez, California State University in Long Beach, CA;
- Warren Simmons, The Annenberg Foundation; and
- Len Simutis, Eisenhower National Clearinghouse.

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## CSR Evaluation: Demonstrating Your Success

Once they win CSR grants, schools feel immense pressure to demonstrate that their school-wide initiative is successful. During implementation schools are torn between allocating all available resources to the implementation and reserving some time and money for the evaluation. Some schools reason that the plan has to be implemented before it can be evaluated and thus do not formulate their evaluation plans until it is too late to gather critical data. Although it is true that the overall impact of schools’ CSR initiatives can not be known until they are fully implemented, it is also true that high quality evaluations begin *before* implementation. In brief, demonstrating that a reform is effective entails comparing what the school is like after implementation to what it was like before implementation.

### An Overview of the Process

Two kinds of evaluation, formative and summative, are necessary in order to establish that a school’s CSR program is increasing

## With A Little Help From Knowledgeable Friends

NCCSR has been seeking the advice of practitioners, technical assistance providers, model developers and policy makers who have been involved with both the design and the implementation of CSR. Many professionals and organizations have candidly discussed experiences and shared lessons learned. Some of the most helpful information and ideas have come from the Directors of the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs). RELs are educational research and development organizations supported by the U.S. Department of Education. The discussions with the REL Directors revolved around two key questions: What is the REL’s vision of NCCSR? How can NCCSR be helpful to RELs, their constituents and their work?

Several themes emerged from the discussions. The Directors suggested that NCCSR should serve as a central repository of CSR information and advised us to concentrate on providing three types of services:

- Creating opportunities for more effective communications,
- Gathering information about schools’ experiences with CSR and lessons learned, and
- Disseminating useful information.

Specific suggestions from the REL Directors included:

#### More Effective Communications

- Provide users with resource networks and interactive access to the experts
- Provide a forum for discussions
- Create and strengthen linkages in the field; become a two-way connector
- Help users extract meaning from data and other kinds of information; keep the context in mind
- Help people navigate the information “waters”

#### Schools’ CSR Experiences – Gathering and Documenting Lessons Learned

- Harvest information to increase knowledge about what is happening in the field
- Capture “rich” stories about the 1st and 2nd wave of implementation; highlight and “unpack” common elements and themes
- Synthesize lessons learned in a variety of sites to create collective knowledge

#### Dissemination of Information

- Provide accurate data on models
- Provide ongoing feedback about what works and where
- Provide information for people

student achievement. Formative evaluations address whether a program has been implemented. Summative evaluations look at its impact.

At the end of a formative evaluation a school should know whether or not its CSR program was implemented as designed and, if not, why. Formative evaluations tend to be ongoing and are quite useful for assessing progress and laying out timelines. To facilitate formative evaluations many model developers have written implementation checklists and surveys. The checklists lay out specific behaviors and activities that the model requires. They are filled out by model staff after site visits and are used to identify model components that need more attention in the school. Surveys are also administered to determine which programmatic activities are occurring in the school. Model developers report that students are the best source of implementation information since students observe classrooms everyday. Model developers have designed surveys that include lists of desired and undesired activities such as designing experiments or reading textbooks. The students filling them out indicate how often those activities occur. Staff members are also good sources of information, but because they build relationships with model staff as the implementation progresses they may not be as critical as they should. Some model developers look for third parties to conduct interviews with school staff so that they get critical comments and can see what really needs to be changed.

Summative evaluations tend to be more difficult for schools to carry out than formative evaluations. In the summative evaluation the impact on everything from student achievement to teacher satisfaction can be assessed – but in order to be convincing the evaluation must be carefully planned and controlled. Ideally a summative evaluation would include a comparison school, baseline and longitudinal data, and several outcome measures. The comparison school is important to demonstrate that the results are a consequence of the program rather than another factor in the school or community. The comparison site also offers some sense of how students would have done if their school had not gotten involved with CSR. However, finding a school willing to serve as a comparison site is difficult since it often means administering extra assessments without getting to implement the model.

Baseline and longitudinal data on student achievement are essential to demonstrating the effects of CSR. Baseline measures of student achievement are taken before the school implements its plan and immediately upon the arrival of new students. The longitudinal data come from repetitions of the same test or comparable tests over several years. Combined, these data provide gain scores for each student. Gain scores show how much a student has improved while controlling for the level at which the student started. These data can also be combined with the implementation data to see if the level of implementation is related to the amount of gain. In addition to achievement data, model developers recommend collecting baseline and longitudinal data on a broad array of outcome measures including attendance, promotion rates, behavior and engagement in learning. These data can be used by the school on a regular basis to improve the overall CSR initiative. Because it may take two or three years of implementation to see an impact on student achievement, these extra measures can be important for maintaining buy-in and keeping staff motivation high.

In addition to resources that CSR model developers offer, schools are likely to find the following evaluation resources developed by the RELs very useful:

CSRD evaluation guide for districts and schools:

<http://www.mcrel.org/programs/csrd/tech-assistance.asp#guide>

Tools for assessing readiness, selecting models, evaluating partnerships and assessing a school's CSR initiative:

<http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/tools.html>

A guide for selecting a model that can also be used in planning an evaluation:

<http://www.ncrel.org/csri/tools/tools.htm>

at all stages of CSR – from thinking about selecting a model to implementing a model in year 4 and beyond

- Focus on serving the primary constituents – CSR schools and/or those working with CSR schools

NCCSR and the RELs have begun to build partnerships that will result in better services to constituents. To learn more about the 10 RELs and their array of CSR information, tools and support, NCCSR encourages you to visit the REL Network web site at <http://www.relnetwork.org>.

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## Federal Support for CSR

### Technical Assistance

When the U.S. Department of Education began CSRD, there was concern that providers of reform assistance would not have the resources to meet this new level of demand. Therefore, Congress appropriated funds earmarked for increasing the capacity of providers of comprehensive school reform assistance.

In September, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) provided \$8.7 million to the

following nine CSR technical assistance organizations to provide assistance to more schools, improve their materials and create technology based means of delivering technical assistance:

- Success For All Foundation for the Success For All model;
- Co-nect Schools, Inc. for the Co-nect model;
- Educational Development Center Inc. for the ATLAS model;
- Temple University's Center for Research in Human Development and Education (CRHDE) for the Community For Learning model;
- Outward Bound, Inc. for the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound model;
- The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory for the Onward to Excellence II model;
- The Galef Institute for the Different Ways of Knowing model; and
- Johns Hopkins University's Center for Social Organization of Schools for two models, Talent Development Middle School Program and Talent Development High School Program.

For more information please contact Irene Harwarth of OERI at (202) 219-1756.

## Middle and High School Models

One of the serious gaps in CSR is the lack of models designed for middle and high schools. In an effort

*She started by calling together the best and brightest of the faculty. Look at the facts. Examine the test scores. Listen to what the kids are telling us. Be clear about who our clients are. Know our turf.*

*She expanded her working group. Teach the rest of the faculty. Help them understand the school and its students. Bring in consultants to examine student performance data. Invite the best and the brightest in the central office to take the journey with them. Bring the superintendent on board. Get planning dollars.*

*Teams fanned out to visit schools in other regions. What was working for them? What was just talk, not performance? Why did something work here but not there? Learn from others. Read and study.*

*OK, now it was time to move from talk and study to planning and action. A new team evolved consisting of that core best and brightest, new faculty recruits, central office partners. A plan was hammered out. Debate ensued. Compromises were made. More evolution occurred. A new plan emerged and gained support from the critical mass of faculty who would have to make it work.*

*Resources were marshaled. A budget was developed. Advocates pressed for it. Supplementary community funding was sought - aggressively. District staff were committed to provide technical support.*

The change process had begun in this inner metropolitan ring, urban/suburban high school serving 1,800 students. Over the next several years the principal and her staff gave birth to a reconceptualized program centered on the needs of those students streaming through the hallways. I felt fortunate to be a part of it as the superintendent whose support was needed to help make the change process work.

Here are some of the critical elements of this hard but successful change process:

1. A solid understanding of the clients to be served.
2. A clear vision, articulated by the principal and then by everyone else at the school, of where they were going and why.

3. Stable, committed leadership from the principal and her key staff.
4. Sound planning.
5. The use of human resources both within and outside the school walls.
6. Support from the district, from the School Board on down.
7. A comprehensive vision and approach — that is, an understanding by school leadership of the complexity of the change process, its need to address the entire student body and program, and to engage everyone with a stake in the school.

No school reform process can be perfect, and the principal would not claim that this one was either. Some constituents objected to the changes. Parents were engaged only at a minimal level.

Results: The school program has changed dramatically. What was once a traditionally organized high school with a traditional college prep program, is now a student centered high school with programs such as

- Student cluster houses organized by grade level
- A technology strand that supports every course in the school
- Academic blocks to support basic skill needs in mathematics and language arts
- An extended school year for students who fail to master core learning requirements that are spelled out carefully for all to see
- A required senior project that emphasizes research and presentation skills, with an emphasis on technological support, in an area of particular interest to the individual student; peer involvement in project review and evaluation; a faculty advisor for each senior project
- Use of retired faculty on special contracts to provide leadership and oversight to aspects of the school program, particularly the required senior project.
- Use of school staff and existing resources in new and focused ways to support the redesigned school program

This is school reform that works – and it will continue to work. Performance indicators are carefully monitored. Where weaknesses exist, questions are asked to find out why. What can be done to address the weakness? What support do the teachers need? How can we keep improving and learning how to do this tough job better tomorrow than today?

*The principal stands in the hallway, the students streaming pass her. She smiles to herself. She makes a difference. New challenges lie ahead.*

to fill this gap, OERI awarded \$12.7 million in contracts to the following seven organizations:

- The Education Development Center, Inc. for the *ATLAS Communities* model;
- The Galef Institute for the *Different Ways of Knowing* model;
- The Success For All Foundation for the *Success For All* model;
- Johns Hopkins University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) and the University of California-Berkeley's Career Academy Support Network for the *Talent Development* model;
- The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation for the *First-Things-First* model;
- The National Center on Education and the Economy for the *America's Choice* model; and
- The Southern Regional Education Board for the *High Schools That Work* model.

Some of these organizations are adapting their elementary school models to serve the needs of middle and high school students. Other organizations will apply these funds towards refining middle and high school models already in development. For more information contact Oliver Moles at the U.S. Department of Education at (202) 219-2211.



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