



Support for School Improvement

The e-Newsletter of the CCSSO State Support Team Network

September 2004

Welcome to the Support for School Improvement e-newsletter, a monthly publication focusing on school improvement efforts at the state and district level. Our goal is to provide a forum around school improvement efforts through national, state and district perspectives.

Support to Low Performing Schools: Learning from One Another

The Division of School Improvement from the **Georgia** Department of Education has posted a useful resource on its website: School Improvement Fieldbook: A Guide to Advancing Achievement in Georgia Schools. This guide (170 pages) is designed to assist educators with planning and implementation of research based strategies to increase the opportunity for schools to make adequate yearly progress. Retrieve a copy of this guide at: http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/documents/support/improvement/si_fieldbook.pdf

Closing the Achievement Gap

Beating the Odds in Teaching All Children to Read

<http://www.ciera.org/library/reports/inquiry-2/2-006/2-006.pdf>

What schoolwide practices characterize schools in which at-risk learners are beating the odds? What instructional practices are used by the most accomplished primary-grade teachers and by teachers in the most effective schools? The authors used quantitative and descriptive methods to investigate school and classroom factors related to primary-grade reading achievement. A combination of school and teacher factors was found to be important in the most effective schools.

Statistically significant school factors included strong links to parents, systematic assessment of pupil progress, strong building communication, and a collaborative model for the delivery of reading instruction, including early reading interventions.

Statistically significant teacher factors included time spent in small group instruction, time spent in independent reading, high pupil engagement, and strong home communication.

Examining Policies to Impact School Improvement

They Have Overcome, High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools in California
http://www.pacificresearch.org/pub/sab/educat/they_have_overcome.pdf

For lawmakers and education policymakers there are a number of lessons to be learned from these schools that have overcome high poverty to achieve high performance. First of all, excuses such as low income, family background, racial diversity, limited English proficiency, and standardized test bias are invalid and should be ignored. Schools can overcome these challenges by focusing on key factors that include:

- Empirically proven research-based curricula.
- Empirically proven research-based teaching methods.
- Comprehensive use of the state academic content standards as goals for student learning, guideposts for teaching, and tools for professional development.
- Use of frequent assessment as a diagnostic tool for identifying student and teacher strengths and weaknesses and for improving student and teacher performance.
- Standards-based professional development that emphasizes subject matter.
- Teacher quality and teacher willingness to use proven curricula and methods.
- Strong discipline policies that emphasize sanctions and rewards.
- Increased flexibility to use available funding and a reduction in bureaucratic rules.

The authors of this study conducted interviews with principals at eight high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools. The responses from these principals to questions about curriculum, teaching methods, the state academic content standards, assessment, teacher professional development, safety and discipline policies, teacher quality, and parental involvement are found to be instructive.

Publications and Sites of Interest

[*How Leadership Influences Student Learning*](#)

<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/52BC34B4-2CC3-43D0-9541-9EA37F6D2086/0/HowLeadershipInfluences.pdf>

The importance of leadership is documented in this comprehensive review of available evidence by researchers from the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto. Leadership's impact tends to be the greatest in schools where learning needs are most acute and it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning. How can leaders achieve this impact? By setting directions, establishing high expectations and using data to track progress and performance. And by making the organization work – ensuring that the entire range of conditions and incentives in districts and schools fully supports teaching and learning.

SchoolsMovingUp (<http://wested.schoolsmovingup.net>), a WestEd initiative, helps schools and districts address the immense challenge of raising student achievement in low-performing schools. In an interactive Web format, SchoolsMovingUp offers practitioners knowledge and expertise they need to make sound decisions and take tangible action in their school reform efforts.

About Support for School Improvement e-Newsletter and SSTN

Support for School Improvement, the e-newsletter of the CCSSO State Support Team Network, is a free monthly newsletter focusing on school improvement efforts at the state and district level. The purpose of the State Support Team Network (SSTN) is to assist states in developing their systems of support for turning around low-performing schools. SSTN is part of the High Poverty Schools Initiative housed at CCSSO.

To submit a news item relevant to school improvement efforts at the state or district level, provide feedback, or to subscribe/unsubscribe, send an e-mail to Susan Taylor at susant@ccsso.org. The PDF version of this newsletter is available at the following <http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/SSINewsletterSept04.pdf>.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

Our mission statement: The Council of Chief State School Officers, through Leadership, Advocacy, and Service, assists chief state school officers and their organizations in achieving the vision of an American education system that enables all children to succeed in school, work, and life.

Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue, NW • Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
voice: 202.336.7000 • fax: 202.408.8072
<http://www.ccsso.org/>