

## **INFORMATION SHARING SESSION OCTOBER 11, 2004 SESSION 1**

### **PRESENTATION BY DR. STEVE FLEISCHMAN**

#### **School Improvement and Effectiveness**

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed by Congress in 2001, schools are being held increasingly accountable for the academic achievement of their students, including those with disabilities. In order to document this achievement, the law requires annual testing of children in grades 3 through 8 (at a minimum) in reading and math. States are allowed to design and select their own tests. While some states have already developed such tests, the law gives states until the 2005–2006 school year to develop and implement the math and reading tests in grades 3 through 8; science must be assessed by the 2007–2008 school year.

In addition, NCLB requires schools to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward meeting the goal of 100% proficiency in reading, math, and science for ALL students by 2012. If a school does not show annual progress toward meeting this requirement, the Education Department classifies it as a “Low Performing School,” and certain changes in programming or personnel must be made. Although NCLB authorizes financial and technical assistance to school districts to help them improve student achievement at low performing schools, how does a school avoid that classification altogether?

The answer is to implement strategies that “really work, and that are sustainable” in more than one setting, according to a representative of the Comprehensive School Reform Quality (CSRQ) Center. “We need to make sure that, for any school reform program, there is empirical evidence that the program works,” says Steve Fleischman, CSRQ Center Director, during his presentation on School Improvement and Effectiveness. The evidence that a program is effective must be based on scientifically designed research combined with professional wisdom. Without these two factors, Fleischman explained, education cannot adapt to local circumstances, or operate intelligently in the many areas in which research evidence is absent or incomplete.

Districts that are successful in the area of school reform exhibit several common identifying qualities:

- They focus first and foremost on student achievement and learning;
- They enact comprehensive, coherent reform policies;
- They have a theory of action for how to effect improvements and establish clear goals;
- They have educators that accept personal responsibility for improving student learning, and receive support to help them succeed;
- They commit to professional learning at all levels and provide multiple, meaningful learning opportunities;
- They monitor student progress regularly and intervene if necessary; and
- They use data to guide their improvement strategies.



In addition, successful districts focus their attention on:

- Partnership/stakeholder involvement
- District-school collaboration/shared responsibility and autonomy
- Resource acquisition and allocation
- Customized/tailored support for schools

Fleischman identified a variety of Internet-based resources on effective programs, including the *Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform*, from the American Association of School Administrators; the Florida Center for Reading Research; the *What Works Clearinghouse*, from the U.S. Department of Education; and information on substance abuse from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

However, he added, we need to know more about how these resources evaluate effectiveness. Are the assessments based on the impact these programs have? Is the quality of research noted and rated? How do we know these programs are effective? According to Fleischman, the research must exhibit evidence of the following:

- To allow replication, there should be sufficient detail on the implementation of the intervention. “The approach is only practical if it can be conducted by you in your school.”
- A detailed description of the study sample should be available so one can decide, “Is the sample that was studied relevant to you?”
- An indication that the program—and not some other factor—is the likely source of change in students’ outcome should be apparent.
- There should be an indication that the findings reported are based on appropriate methods of statistical analysis. “What is the margin of error for the study?” “How is the statistical significant reported? How does this finding fit into the body of other findings? What is the study’s theoretical framework?”
- There should be an explanation of the research findings.

When judging the effectiveness of a program, Fleischman explained, we need to look at a set of factors that can influence the casual relationship between the intervention and the outcomes, including the fidelity of the implementation; whether the groups are roughly equivalent at the beginning and end of the study; evidence of contamination or disruption to the study; the timing of the testing—improvement can take time...it may take several years for results to be shown; and the properties of the measures.

Fleischman discussed several resources for judging the efficacy of research that has been conducted, as well as resources on school improvement that AIR has developed.

Following Fleischman’s presentation, several meeting participants pointed out that most teachers are not researchers and do not have the time to do program evaluation on each strategy they are presented with. The challenge is to give teachers dependable sources of information they can use that scientifically reviews the research available on a given topic.



## FACILITATED DISCUSSION

### School Improvement and Effectiveness

#### North Carolina

In elementary education, there is an overrepresentation of special education students throughout the state, with over 14% of students identified as having disabilities. This is a result of achievement gaps not being addressed in regular education. The state has developed two model programs, which are funded through special education, for use in the general education classroom:

1. An instructional consultation support teaming model, designed by the University of Maryland, which has been implemented in four schools. This is an intervention based upon curriculum-based measurement.
2. A problem-solving team of regular and special education personnel, whose focus is prevention of identification

#### Ohio

**Math Initiative:** Developed model teacher training lessons in math (geometry and algebra) for K–3 and middle school teachers who were not adequately qualified.

**Reading Initiative:** The state conducted a data analysis to identify areas in which students were not achieving. Representatives strived to work more collaboratively with the Ohio Board of Regents to train teachers— especially those in the middle grades— and to redo the reading certification process. Since students are being tested to identify their reading skills in grades 3 through 8, teachers need to be trained to use diagnostic tests and other information to minimize students' identification in special education.

The Ohio Department of Special Education has liaisons in content areas who assist teaching staff in their efforts to reduce the number of students identified as needing special education, and ensure that those students who are in special education are working with the general curriculum, using standards-based instruction. The liaisons also provide assistance with identifying and implementing allowable accommodations for students who need them.

Ohio's State Improvement Grant focuses on those districts that have failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB. They target these districts through 16 regional offices. Each school must implement a reading plan that is grounded in research-based instruction and positive behavioral instructional supports. Ohio is trying to send a message that implementing standards-based reform is not a way to identify students for special education. The state needs to keep an eye on academic standards, but it also needs to find ways to close the standards and achievement gap for all children. The state is creating a CD that will help align students' IEPs with academic standards.

## North Carolina

It is critical to use diagnostic information to know a school's status in their standards-based reform (SBR) efforts. An environment needs to be created in which teachers understand what SBR is and know how to use SBR in the classroom.

## States' School Improvement Efforts

### California

In grades K through 8 (but not at the high school level), schools have a standards-aligned curriculum. Local districts are responsible for designing and implementing the new curriculum, but the state has to give its seal of approval.

The issue of access is huge in California because of a current legal case that asks how schools can test students with disabilities if they are not given access to the curriculum. About 20% of students with disabilities have postponed taking their high school exit exam. The state would like to know what other states are using as alternatives to exit exams, alternative exams, and diploma options.

California will be holding a high school summit, using Ohio's CD as a springboard to revise their IEPs to be more aligned with standards. They will be focusing on English language learners at this year's summit, on speech/language issues at next year's summit, and science and other topics in subsequent years. California also will be holding an IDEA summit, and asking 50 individuals to develop a paper on writing.

### Pennsylvania

In previous years, the message from different departments (special education, assessment, and curriculum) has been different. So, having one voice coming from the administration concerning school reform has helped. The state has developed an operating plan to focus on a unified plan for training. All departments are now required to know what other departments are doing. Video conferences have been held to share information between departments so that everyone is on the same page and speaking the same language. Pennsylvania has strong technical assistance regions and is building an umbrella of professional development that focuses on multiple areas, as well as special education. The state has been training regular and special education personnel on reading and positive behavioral instructional support (PBIS) using the train-the-trainer model. There are plans to hold a week-long conference on reading, and another conference on math.

### Kentucky

The entire state department of education got together for a week, and as a result, an atmosphere of collaboration developed.

### Washington

The state department initiated a 5-year professional development plan and offered the districts financial and logistical assistance to implement the plan. They have conducted institutes for 2 years.



More than 6,000 regular and special educators have participated in the institutes as school improvement teams. The professional development angle is key.

### **Alabama**

After conducting a pilot test, they have started training in standards-based education. The state has put together training teams of both regular and special education personnel who are teaching toward the same standards in each school. The special education department began this initiative and recruited regular education personnel. This initiative is supported from the top down and the bottom up; everyone is working together.

### **Louisiana**

They are bringing parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members together to form powerful committees that communicate well with each other.