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Comprehensive School Reform: A Longitudinal Study of School Improvement in One State

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Good, T.L., Burross, H.L., & Mccaslin (2005). Comprehensive School Reform: A Longitudinal Study of School Improvement in One State. Teachers College Record, 107(10), 2205-2226.

Abstract :

Research Objective

In the wake of studies on school effectiveness, the authors of this American research project conducted in Arizona schools looked into the effect of the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) introduced in the United States in the 1990s to foster higher achievement among all students. Indeed, the CSR applies to all students in a school, not only to a group of students considered more at risk (e.g., students with a low socio-economic status).

According to the authors, CSR funds allocated to schools may ensure better access and management of resources and have a positive influence on students' academic achievement. To be awarded financial resources, schools had to meet eleven criteria, including recourse to practices whose effectiveness was based on empirical evidence, staff professional development, the definition of clear and measurable objectives and involvement of parents and community.

Methodology

In order to determine the effect of this reform on students' academic achievement and its effect over time, the authors conducted a longitudinal study (1996-2002) comparing 24 CSR schools and 24 non-CSR schools. Each CSR school was matched with a control school with similar demographic characteristics.

Achievement in reading, mathematics and language was assessed at each grade level using Stanford 9 scores. These data were obtained through the Arizona State Department of Education.

Two comparisons were carried out by: 1) comparing students' scores from one grade to the next to see whether or not there was improvement over time (from 3rd to 9th grade) and 2) comparing scores of students in a particular grade over several years (i.e., comparing 4th graders' scores in 1998, 1999, etc.) to see whether or not the length of the program had any effect on schools and students.

Main Results

The authors' main hypothesis was invalidated, since results demonstrated that the achievement levels of CSR and non-CSR schools alike increased within six years. These two types of schools also exhibited similar paths with regard to students' achievement in the three academic subject areas studied.

Moreover, the authors demonstrated that certain schools had a higher achievement rate than the others and observed that the two schools at the top of the list had CSR and non-CSR status.

Based on these results, school achievement gains cannot be attributed to the implementation of the CSR. The authors argued that the results might be dependent on motivational factors. In fact, Arizona is a high-stakes test state (e.g. performance indicator) for students, teachers and schools. Educational players (administrators, teachers, students) do not wish to be classified as failing. The same is true for non-CSR schools that may be inspired by the CSR model in order to avoid being labelled as such and increase their levels of achievement.

Links :

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Key Words :

Educational Reform, Financial Resources, Comprehensive School Reform (CSR), Reading, Mathematics, Language, Longitudinal Study, Quantitative Analysis, Primary, Elementary, Secondary/High School, Newsletter3

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