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Evaluating Comprehensive School Reform Models at Scale. Focus on Implementation

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Abstract :

Largely widespread across the United States, the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) aims at higher academic achievement for all students. The reform calls for changes at the school level. For the most part, research seeking to assess its effectiveness has shown very few positive effects on student achievement. Perhaps the problem lies in the implementation level of initiatives undertaken as part of this reform. How can these initiatives affect achievement if they are not implemented, or only half-implemented?

Study Goals

The goals of this study were as follows: (1) To develop a methodology for a quantitative measure of the implementation level of various CSR models; and (2) To apply this methodology to a group of CSR schools. Comparisons were made among these schools and then with other non-CSR schools.

Methodology

A total of 250 Florida and Texas schools were selected, each applying one of the four following CSR models: Accelerate Schools (AS), Core Knowledge (CK), Direct Instruction (DI) and Success For All (SFA). In total, 190 comparison schools were also selected.

An in-depth understanding of the philosophy and main components underlying these models was first required to determine a series of practices that schools ought to have implemented. Then, questionnaires administered to school administrators and teachers enabled the researchers of this study to determine what practices existed within the schools and the extent to which they were applied.

Implementation

Results showed that none of the schools accurately established all the components of the adopted model. It was also observed that the degree of implementation varied significantly among schools that had adopted the same model. In general, the worst-established components involved teaching practices prescribed by the model and, above all, the measures aimed at encouraging parental engagement. Schools having applied the same model for several years did not exhibit a greater degree of implementation than that of other schools.

Staff Adherence

Teachers felt more or less engaged in the implementation, while school administrators overestimated teacher engagement. This discrepancy may be explained in part by the fact that in general, teachers were excluded from the decision-making process with regard to determining what model should be selected.

Required Support

The successful implementation of a reform is based primarily on support, both external (e.g., basic training offered to teachers) and internal (e.g., resource-person within the school responsible for coordinating activities). Results revealed that schools did not receive necessary support. Among teachers surveyed, only half received basic training essential to applying the model adequately, and fewer than a quarter received recommended further training. Schools did not seem to have enough human resources, time, flexibility or motivation.

Comparing Schools

Regardless of whether they applied the CSR or not, the schools tended to engage in the same type of activities, such as

curriculum, teaching methods and parental engagement. However, some activities such as teacher participation in the annual planning process, students' group work and daily homework signed by parents were established to a higher degree when prescribed by the reform model. Parental engagement did not appear more significant in CSR schools. Non-CSR schools were those where individual tutoring was used the most, perhaps because the application of the CSR reduced the need for it.

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Key Words :

Comprehensive School Reform, Implementation, School Administration, Teachers, Staff Adherence, Support, Parent Engagement, Quantitative Analysis, Newsletter7

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