



GOOD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TAKES HOLD IN CSRD SCHOOLS

Key Findings from the Statewide Evaluation of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program

New research on the Comprehensive Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program in New York suggests that conventional forms of staff development—generic one-shot workshops, far removed from teachers' ongoing work—are rapidly fading in CSRD schools. These schools have become alive with strategies to increase professionalism among teachers, giving them a renewed sense of craft and commitment to educational reform. The changing face of professional development in CSRD schools is detailed in this first issue of the *CSRD Communicator*, which will periodically update audiences on how well schools are implementing comprehensive reform. Subsequent issues will focus on the fidelity of CSRD "model" implementation, changes in instructional practice, and changes in student achievement, with particular attention on understanding the link between school reform processes and improvements in teaching and learning.

IMPROVING THE EXTENT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Research has shown that large-scale school improvement efforts live or die by the amount of professional development teachers receive. But carving out sufficient time to provide the ongoing, interactive professional development necessary to implement and sustain school reform is no easy task. Scheduling constraints and other logistics typically limit the amount of professional development teachers receive to less than 30 hours per year. Indeed, this is what the Westchester Institute found in recent studies of two other comprehensive reform efforts, Title I Schoolwide Programs and the School-to-Work Initiative. The current study, however, painted a very different picture:

- ◆ Teachers in CSRD schools received an average of **50 hours** of professional development, which is 66% more than national estimates.
- ◆ Moreover, 92% of CSRD school principals reported that this professional development was **continuous and ongoing**.
- ◆ Teachers echoed this sentiment, with 53% saying that they had received follow-up assistance for further learning—including **support from sources external to the school**—bi-monthly or more frequently.

About the Research

The New York State independent evaluator for CSRD, Westchester Institute for Human Services Research, Inc., conducted the research; it is part of a three-year evaluation study of the CSRD.

Information for the first-year study was obtained from the following sources:

- ◆ Program Survey, completed by principals from 41 of the 47 first-round CSRD schools;
- ◆ Teacher Survey, completed by 350 teachers from these schools;
- ◆ Developer Survey, completed by all model developers adopted by these schools (N=11);
- ◆ Technical Assistance Survey, completed by 20 TA resources serving these schools;
- ◆ Site visits with a small sample of schools (N=5); and
- ◆ Review of State databases.

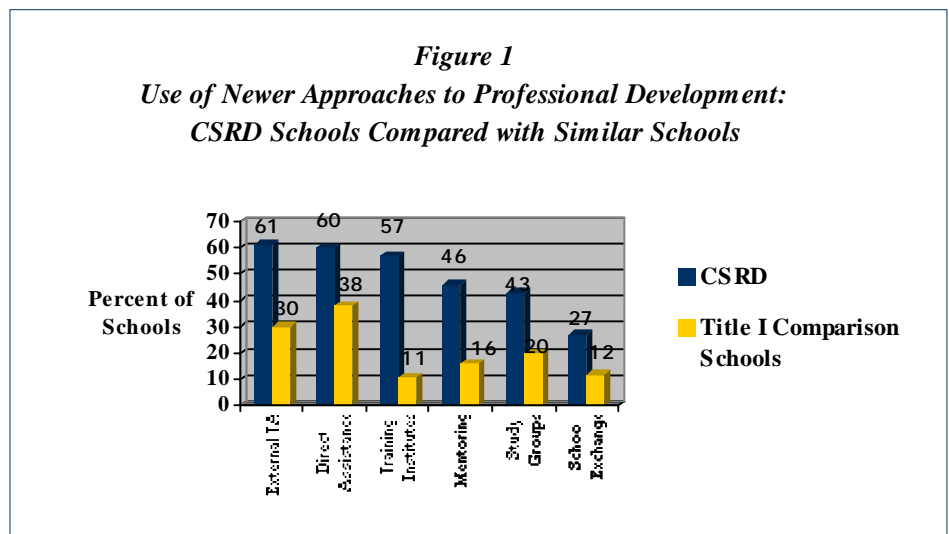
IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Providing the necessary time for professional development means little if the quality has not improved. On this front, we found far greater usage of “new” approaches to professional development in CSRD schools—approaches that, according to the research, expose teachers to more powerful and professionalized learning. For example, CSRD principals and teachers reported significant experiences with the following strategies:

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- ◆ Consultation with external resources
- ◆ Direct classroom/one-on-one assistance
- ◆ Intensive training institutes
- ◆ Mentoring and peer coaching
- ◆ Teacher study groups
- ◆ Inter-schools exchange programs

The percentage of CSRD schools using each strategy to a “moderate” or “great” extent far surpassed percentages reported by similar schools involved in the 1996 evaluation of New York State Title I Schoolwide Programs (see **Figure 1**).



We also found that professional development in CSRD schools was “in sync” with research-identified *best practice*. Eight out of 10 or more CSRD principals, for example, characterized professional development as...

- ◆ aligned with the State learning standards (100%)
- ◆ aligned with the school’s vision for educational reform (95%)
- ◆ driven by data on student needs (95%)
- ◆ evaluated on the basis of its impact on teaching and learning (92%)
- ◆ based on a formal assessment of staff needs (84%)
- ◆ designed by teachers (84%)
- ◆ part of teachers’ regular work (82%)

That teachers had a voice in the design of professional development is significant considering that a recent U.S. Education Department study found that less than two-thirds of teachers have a say in how or what they learn on the job.

One other important finding concerns the role of the school district in professional development. About half of the principals (51%) reported that professional development in their schools was “dictated by the central administration.” Given that centralized professional development offerings are the norm in most schools (80%-90%), and are generally ineffective, some might consider the 51% finding as quite positive. But it would be cynical to conclude that the district “dictated” professional development in CSRD schools was off-mark. As we have reported, both principals and teachers described professional development in their schools in positive ways that placed teachers clearly at the center of design. In fact, districts received high marks from nearly 80% of CSRD schools for their efforts to support and sustain professional development at the site level.

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CHANGING STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

Initiating effective professional development is not simply a matter of imagination and will. School leaders must purposely create the structures and opportunities necessary to foster good professional development. Our findings revealed that CSRD schools made a strong attempt in this area through two vital strategies. First, leaders clearly communicated the importance and priority of the CSRD, thereby signaling to teachers that their efforts at planning, collaborating, experimenting, and problem-solving would be encouraged and supported in the long-run. On this score,

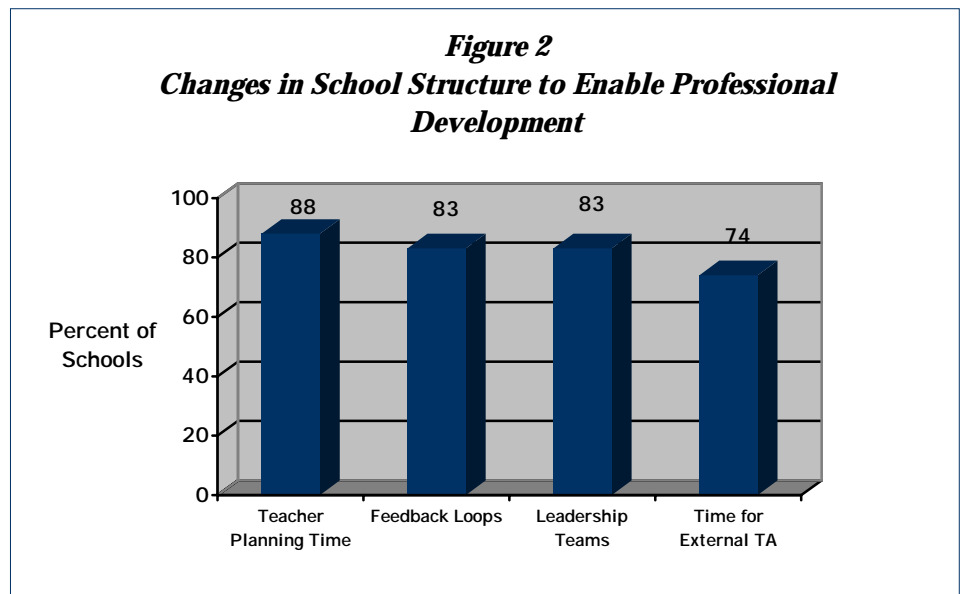
- ◆ 84% of the teachers reported that relative to other educational reforms, CSRD was top priority—the main menu—in their school.
- ◆ 95% said that the school principal encouraged them to experiment with new ideas and teaching methods.
- ◆ 67% reported that they collaborated with their colleagues several times a month or more frequently to address issues and solve problems directly related to CSRD goals and values.
- ◆ 71% reported that they regularly collaborated with the school principal in making decisions about schoolwide reform.

...I have had the opportunity to try so many new things in my classroom. Most helpful has been the collaboration and coaching with my peers.

Second, school leaders made changes in structures and opportunities to enable ongoing professional development. We found, for example, that

- ◆ 88% of the schools restructured teacher planning time to encourage greater follow-through on reform activities.
- ◆ 83% established structures for teachers to provide specific feedback on school reform activities.
- ◆ 74% realigned time for teachers to receive ongoing technical assistance from external resources.
- ◆ 83% established leadership teams, enabling teachers to move outside their classrooms and address issues of school reform as part of a faculty.

The majority of principals and teachers felt that the changes in professional development were a direct result of the CSRD initiative.



These efforts all functioned to cultivate and support collegial interactions and professional growth. At the same time, this organizational restructuring did not buffer all of the constraints to effective professional development. A large number of principals and teachers (50-65%) still reported that time and scheduling difficulties impeded teachers' efforts to change. Despite these obstacles, we were struck by the ability of many CSRD schools to tackle problems head-on, without the usual complaints of work overload and feelings of frustration. These schools seemed to be guided by the maxim, "problems are our friends. As one teacher commented—a remark that does not stand alone— "Although we faced many obstacles in our first year, we collaborated to solve our problems and move ahead. This program has become a way of life in our building and the success is evident."



In summary, professional development has become more "professionalized" in CSRD schools. And in the opinion of 88% of CSRD principals and 77% of the teachers, this change has been a direct result of the CSRD initiative.

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