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Stellar schools
for a new century

New American Schools

Building the “CSR Quality Institute”

A Concept Paper

Background and Importance

Comprehensive school reform (CSR) is a promising strategy for significantly improving student achievement through the identification and effective use of research-based school models (or designs). While past reform efforts have been responsible for creating a few “lighthouse” schools that serve as models of educational excellence, CSR has shown the potential to set in motion a national process of research, development, evaluation, and dissemination of effective school change models that affect the entire school.

Information, not regulation, will create a “savvy consumer” at the local level – where decisions about public education should be made. Local buy-in and understanding of reform is essential to fully implementing and receiving the benefits of CSR. Better information (built on high-quality evaluations of programs) will result in more responsible decision-making when it comes to schools choosing a CSR design that can meet their needs. In a consumer-based arena, standards of quality for designs are needed. And designs need to be measured by these standards on an ongoing basis.

New American Schools (with the support of the American Productivity and Quality Center) has convened a Blue Ribbon Panel (BRP) of experts in both education and business to support the development of a rigorous set of standards of quality for national design-based assistance organizations. The panel, chaired by the Chancellor of Vanderbilt University, Joe Wyatt, is scheduled to release these standards (in the form of a practical, user-friendly tool for schools and districts) by August 2000. We have initiated discussions with the panel regarding the idea of a “CSR Quality Institute” and an annual consumer guide on CSR. The panel welcomes the opportunity to discuss a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education (USED) during its next meeting on June 1, 2000.

The Mission

To establish a framework and infrastructure to guide, promote, and encourage more rigorous evaluations of CSR and to support the widespread dissemination of CSR research findings, leading to the implementation of more effective school improvement strategies and, ultimately, to improved student achievement results.

The Strategy

NAS proposes to partner with USED and other leading education and business groups to establish an independent organization (or an *Institute* located within an existing organization) comprised of experts and key stakeholders that would promote high-quality CSR evaluations and accurate and widely disseminated consumer information on CSR. Specifically, the *CSR Institute* would:

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- Set/promote standards related to evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of all CSR designs, including (1) the kinds of benchmarks needed to gauge implementation over time; (2) the kinds of student achievement data necessary to compare progress across comprehensive school designs and schools; (3) the kinds of data required to compare student achievement over time; and (4) the kinds of data needed to attribute student progress over time to a comprehensive school design.
- In partnership with the National Academy of Sciences, establish a nationally renowned expert review process, building on the experience of the American Institutes on Research work on CSR and the concept of the Campbell Collaborative, to judge the validity of independent research conducted on CSR programs, determine the statistical significance of findings, and prepare summary reports for public distribution.
- Create and disseminate an annual CSR Consumer Guide, providing educators with an independent source of information on the effectiveness and track record of available CSR designs and the environments in which they tend to work best.
- Support (with matching funds) high-quality third party evaluations of CSR models, as well as collaboration and coordination among selected evaluation organizations.

Establishing the *Institute* – Next Steps

The *Institute* would be created and funded as a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, foundations, the business community, national (international) education and research organizations, and New American Schools.

We propose the following next steps to help launch this endeavor:

- (1) USED participation in the June 1 meeting of the Blue Ribbon Panel to discuss the concept of a *CSR Quality Institute* and obtain commitment of the panel to pursue this strategy.
- (2) NAS participation in the June 12 Smith Richardson meeting at USED on evaluation to discuss the concept and obtain feedback from assembled evaluators regarding the concept.
- (3) Create a formal working group with clear support of leadership from partnership organizations.
- (4) Schedule the first official meeting of this group to finalize the concept paper and develop a work plan.

- (5) Reach out to a target list of potential funding partners to determine interest in support for both planning and implementation of this strategy.

Blue Ribbon Panel

Chair

Joe B. Wyatt

Vanderbilt University

Members

Anne Bryant

National School Boards Association

Gaston Caperton

The College Board

Robert Chase

National Education Association

Sandra Feldman

American Federation of Teachers

Vincent Ferrandino

National Association of Elementary
School Principals

Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

James Guthrie

Peabody Center for Education Policy

Kati Haycock

The Education Trust

Roberts T. Jones

National Alliance of Business

Diana Lam

Providence School District

Floretta Dukes McKenzie

The McKenzie Group

Raymond G. Scheppach

National Governors' Association

Gerald Tirozzi

National Association of Secondary School
Principals

Jane Walters

Former Tennessee Commissioner of
Education

William Wulf

National Academy of Engineering

