

REGION III  
COMPREHENSIVE  
CENTER

# *CSR Briefs*

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## **Readiness for CSRD**

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The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program is a federally-funded program intended to encourage and support the adoption of whole school reform models to improve schools. A decision to apply for a CSRD grant is a commitment to comprehensive school reform and a decision to embark on school-wide implementation of a reform model.

How does a school know if it is ready for comprehensive reform?

How does a school ready itself for CSRD?

Through research on whole-school reform and organizational development, some things have been learned about what it takes to effectively implement school reform initiatives. This brief draws on these sources to provide schools with some key concepts and questions as fodder for critical thinking, dialogue, and development in the early stages of the CSRD program. Schools that address these issues early on are likely to increase their chances of effectively implementing and sustaining reform.

### Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures

A useful metaphor to keep in mind as a school considers implementing a comprehensive school reform model is the title of Saphier & King's widely read 1995 article, "Good seeds grow in strong cultures." Much like a garden, schools are places where good seeds (programs, models, innovations) can grow and flourish. For plants to grow, they must be well suited to the local environment. Gardens must be weeded, tilled, and fertilized prior to planting. With proper care, the plants will take root and grow to form their own unique shape and color. Similarly, in schools the programs, models and innovations must be appropriate for the students and the school culture.

How many programs, models, and innovations have trouble taking root in schools?

How many die on the vine?

What makes the difference?

Before venturing into comprehensive school reform, schools can benefit by taking a reading of the soil by assessing their capacity to effectively implement whole school reform. There are salient questions schools should ask regarding their readiness for reform. Readiness for whole school reform is about creating the balance necessary for effective reform.

### The Soil Test: P/PC Balance

To determine readiness for whole-school reform, schools can use Covey's concept of the P/PC balance as a framework (Covey, 1989). Simply put, readiness for reform requires a balance of P (production of desired results) and PC (production capability). The P in whole-school reform can be described as the desire to improve the school by implementing comprehensive school reform. The PC is the school's ability or capacity to implement comprehensive school reform.

Research on implementation of whole-school reform models and other systemic school reform efforts point to the critical role that organizational capacity plays in successful implementation. Using the construct of the P/PC balance, schools can ask key questions to gain a greater understanding of their level of readiness (capacity) for whole school reform. In many cases, schools spend a good deal of time creating plans for change while not spending enough time assessing the capacity to change.

The questions in the chart below draw from the norms of school culture outlined by Saphier & King, 1985 and from dimensions of capacity described by O'Day, Goertz & Floden (1995).

If a school community believes that it is lacking in many of the dimensions queried above, the chances of effective implementation of whole school reform may be compromised. The results from shared inquiry can provide a school with information and perhaps a recognition of the

need to build capacity. Some CSR models may be effective in helping to address some of these needs, but are unlikely to address all of a school's capacity building needs.

Just as in a garden, there are conditions in which reform models are likely to take root and there are conditions in which they are more likely to fail. Schools and districts can take the opportunity that CSR affords to examine their ability to make it work and to take steps to build capacity.

## To What Extent . . .

- . . . is there shared understanding of the school's mission and goals?**
- . . . do the staff work in a collegial fashion toward common goals?**
- . . . is there a shared understanding of needs and commitment to change?**
- . . . are staff willing to take risks and experiment with new methods and materials?**
- . . . do school members hold one another accountable for high performance?**
- . . . do school members (including parents) trust one another?**
- . . . do teachers reach out to gain information and new knowledge?**
- . . . do school staff engage in evaluating performance (student and school)**
- . . . to determine effectiveness and to identify needs?**
- . . . is there sustained leadership? What about shared leadership?**
- . . . is the school willing to reallocate human, physical, and fiscal resources to support the reform?**

### References

- Covey, S. (1989). *The 7 habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
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## About CSR Briefs

*CSR Briefs* is an occasional series of articles highlighting key issues related to the implementation of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. Additional articles include:

- Comprehensive School Reform and CSRD
- The Right Fit: Finding a CSRD Model to Meet School Needs
- How Well Do Models Meet the Requirements of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program
- Integrating Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program into Data-Driven School Improvement
- CSRD: The Importance of Parents and the Community

## About the Region III Comprehensive Center

The Region III Comprehensive Center defines its mission as follows: *to provide high quality technical assistance and services to states, districts, and schools to facilitate the success of comprehensive education reform and school improvement initiatives.* The most important service delivery objective of the Center is to support continuous comprehensive school improvement. The Center has chosen to proactively focus its work with clients around continuous comprehensive school improvement in three areas:

- using data to improve educational decision-making;
- improving reading instruction; and
- increasing meaningful opportunities for parents to become involved in the education of their children.

One of 15 federally funded centers, the Region III Comprehensive Center serves Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Technical assistance services are designed to improve educational programs that benefit all children, with an emphasis on districts and schools with a high percentage of children in poverty. In order to provide our clients with practical tools to promote continuous school improvement, the Center maintains staff expertise around five knowledge bases:

1. school reform and improvement;
2. standards and assessments;
3. teaching and learning;
4. parent involvement; and
5. safe and drug-free learning environments.

The Region III Comprehensive Center is operated by the George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education in partnership with RMC Research Corporation, Research for Better Schools, and ESCORT, State University New York at Oneonta.

***We invite you to visit our web site:***

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