

The logo for Region III Comprehensive Center features the text "REGION III" in a large, gold, serif font, with "COMPREHENSIVE CENTER" in a smaller, dark blue, serif font below it. The text is set against a gold circular background with a gradient, which is itself centered within a larger gold rectangular area.

REGION III  
COMPREHENSIVE  
CENTER

# *CSR Briefs*

---

## **Integrating Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program Models into Data- Driven School Improvement**

---

Carolyn C. Vincent  
George Washington University

February 1999

**The George Washington University  
Center for Equity and Excellence  
in Education**

*in partnership with*

**RMC Research Corporation  
Research for Better Schools  
ESCORT, SUNY at Oneonta**

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program (CSRDP) provides funding on a competitive basis to school districts for schools to adopt research-based comprehensive school reform models. Data should play a part throughout the process of selecting, implementing and evaluating a model in order to effectively guide a school's improvement processes. This brief will explain how schools that are already using data-driven improvement processes can incorporate CSRDP models into their programs while maintaining the use of data as a guiding force in decision-making.

### Data-Driven Improvement Approaches

Two approaches to data driven improvement are *performance measurement* (Newcomer, 1997) and *action research* (Calhoun, 1994; Sagor, 1992). Performance measurement consists of a five-stage process:

- (1) the development of a vision and performance goals and objectives;
- (2) comparison of a current performance to the vision and goals;
- (3) strategic planning;
- (4) implementation of improvement strategies; and,
- (5) measurement of the effect of strategies, and then starting all over again with new strategies in a continuous effort to meet organizational goals.

This kind of data use is the basis of continuous improvement efforts that are carried out in

---

***Good needs assessment and strategic planning is the first step in using data for school improvement.***

---

organizations of all types, from for-profit businesses to non-profit organizations, including schools and district offices. On the other hand, action research is carried out by teachers and consists of systematic, reflective evaluation of their own "action" (i.e., instructional practices) for the purpose of improving student achievement. Action research overlaps with stage (4) of performance assessment mentioned earlier, but adds sharp focus on teacher instructional

practices by incorporating systematic data collection and analysis, guided by teacher reflection. It is these changes in instructional practice that lead to increased student achievement.

In implementing a CSRDP model, or in any other whole school reform initiative, performance measurement can be used to set up and evaluate an improvement effort while action research can serve as an engine to drive change in teaching and learning environments. School personnel should consider how to integrate a CSRDP model at each of the following stages of their data-driven improvement process which include needs assessment, modifying instructional practices and evaluation.

### Determining Needs

Good needs assessment and strategic planning is the first step in using data for school improvement. This initial step consists of developing a vision and setting goals and then gathering data on the current performance status with reference to those goals. Any gaps between goals and current performance should be further investigated by asking such questions as: Why is there a gap? Is the gap more pronounced for some demographic groups than for others? Close investigation of performance gaps results in the definition of needs around which improvement strategies, such as CSRDP models, can be built. Having a sharply defined set of needs and on-target strategies is crucial for successful school improvement. Improvement effects will only be as good as the strategies that underlie them. Therefore, schools considering the use of CSRDP models must investigate the capacity of the various models to meet the needs that they have defined:

*What evidence is there that the model's strategies will meet the school's needs?*

A school should look for models that have a track record in meeting the kinds of needs that it has documented and determine which portion of the school's needs the model will address.

Schools should bear in mind that the model used in a CSRDP program may address only a portion of a school’s needs. It is important to remember that other strategies may be required in addition to the CSRDP model to meet all of the school’s needs.

### **Implementing and Fine-Tuning New Instructional Practices**

It is in the implementation and fine-tuning of improvement strategies that an improvement initiative will succeed or fail. Goals, needs and models alone will not raise student achievement. Improvement is the result of teachers doing things differently in their classrooms. It is here that the reflective components of action research come into play: as teachers try new strategies, they gather data on the effect of the strategies on their students and ask themselves what they could do differently to get closer to the desired student performance level (action research). Models may differ in the extent to which they incorporate teacher reflection and data use. Therefore, at the time that a school is selecting a model, the following questions should be considered:

*How does action research fit with this model?  
How do teachers change instructional practices based on their own data?*

There are several legitimate foci of action research in the implementation of a CSRDP model. For example, in the first year of implementation the focus may be on fidelity and completeness of implementation and initial feedback on the effectiveness of the model, while the second year may focus more closely on student performance and fine-tuning of classroom practice. If the CSRDP model is only a part of the school’s improvement initiative, how the model interacts with other school programs, or the larger school context, may also be investigated.

### **Evaluating Progress Over Time**

Although teachers will continuously use informal classroom assessment data to fine-tune their practice, on a periodic basis (typically once a year) schools should step back to see the big picture by

again referring to annual assessments that are aligned with standards. Checking on progress toward meeting goals at the end of one cycle forms the basis for needs assessment and planning for the next. Progress toward all of the goals in a school’s improvement plan should be evaluated. Therefore, in selecting a model, school personnel should ask:

*What are the evaluation components of this model?*

The presence of a vigorous evaluation design, including implementation and outcome components is an indication that the model takes a data-driven

---

### ***Improvement is the result of teachers doing things differently in their classrooms.***

---

approach to school improvement. However, if a model does not contain these components, a school should carry out its own evaluation for use in the performance measurement cycle. CSRDP holds great promise in bringing about instructional improvement, and consequently, in student achievement. This promise is strengthened by incorporating the model into a larger data driven improvement cycle that incorporates both performance assessment and action research. Thoughtful use of data throughout the selection, implementation and evaluation stages can only increase the potential of research-based school improvement initiatives.

### **References**

- Calhoun, E. (1994). *How to use action research in the self-renewing school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Newcomer, K. (Ed.). (1997). *Using performance measurement to improve public and nonprofit programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Sagor, R. (1992). *How to conduct collaborative action research*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## About the Author

Dr. Carolyn C. Vincent is a Research Scientist at the George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education.

She can be reached at:

800.925.3223

or

[cvincent@ceee.gwu.edu](mailto:cvincent@ceee.gwu.edu)

## 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
- Readiness for CSRD
- How Well Do Models Meet the Requirements of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program
- CSRD: The Importance of Parents and the Community
- The Right fit: Finding a CSRD Model to Meet School Needs

## 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:***

**<http://r3cc.ceee.gwu.edu>**

© 1999 Region III Comprehensive Comprehensive Center

This brief was prepared with funding from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, under Cooperative Agreement #S283A50040. The views expressed in this document are those of the author and do not represent an official position of the U.S. Department of Education. Permission is granted to copy and disseminate this CSR Brief.

SKR