



Association for Effective Schools, Inc.

*"Setting the course for learning by all"*

## WHAT IS EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS RESEARCH?

**OVER 25 YEARS AGO** a federal paper was written to discuss the effectiveness of American education. The paper was funded by the U.S. Office of Education and written by James Coleman, a prominent education researcher. Effective Schools Research emerged in response to this controversial paper.

Concluding that public schools didn't make a significant difference, Coleman's report credited the student's family background as the main reason for student success in school. His findings proposed that children from poor families and homes, lacking the prime conditions or values to support education, could not learn, regardless of what the school did.

Ronald Edmonds, then Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, responded vigorously. Edmonds, and others, refused to accept Coleman's report as conclusive, although they acknowledged that family background does indeed make a difference. They set out to find schools where kids from low income families were highly successful, and thereby prove that schools can and do make a difference.

Edmonds, and other researchers, looked at achievement data from schools in several major cities -- schools where student populations were comprised of those from poverty backgrounds. Nationwide, they found schools where poor children were learning. Though these findings contradicted Coleman's conclusion, they (Edmonds, Brookover, Lezotte plus other school effectiveness researchers) were left without an answer as to why certain schools made a difference and others did not.

To answer this puzzling question, successful schools were compared with similar schools, in like neighborhoods, where children were not learning, or learning at a low level. Characteristics describing both types of schools were observed and documented. The basic conclusion of this comparative research was (is):

- Public schools can and do make a difference, even those comprised of students from poverty backgrounds.
- Children from poverty backgrounds can learn at high levels as a result of public schools.
- There are unique characteristics and processes common to schools where all children are learning, regardless of family background. Because these characteristics, found in schools where all students learn, are correlated with

student success -- they are called "correlates". This body of correlated information began what is now referred to as Effective Schools Research.

- Replication research conducted in recent years reaffirms these findings and the fact that these correlates describe schools where children are learning and do not describe schools where children are learning at a much lower level.. This replication research has been conducted in all types of schools: suburban, rural, urban; high schools, middle schools, elementary schools; high socio-economic communities, middle class communities, and low socio-economic communities.

## CORRELATES OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

**THE CORRELATES ARE THE MEANS** to achieving high and equitable levels of student learning. It is expected that all children (whether they be male or female, rich or poor, black or white) will learn at least the essential knowledge, concepts and skills needed so that they can be successful at the next level next year. Further, it has been found that when school improvement processes based upon the effective schools research are implemented, the proportions of students that achieve academic excellence either improves, or at the very least, remains the same.

While the seven correlates continue to appear in the replication research, it should be noted that our knowledge and understanding of each correlate is deeper and broader than it was in the early 1980's.

The correlates were defined as follows:

**Clear School Mission** - In the effective school, there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability. Staff accept responsibility for students' learning of the school's essential curricular goals.

**High Expectations for Success** - In the effective school, there is a climate of expectation in which the staff believe and demonstrate that all students can attain mastery of the essential content and school skills, and the staff also believe that they have the capability to help all students achieve that mastery.

**Instructional Leadership** - In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates that mission to the staff, parents, and students. The principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program.

**Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress** - In the effective school, student academic progress is measured frequently. A variety of assessment procedures are used. The results of the assessments are used to improve individual student performance and also to improve the instructional program.

**Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task** - In the effective school, teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential content and skills. For a high percentage of this time students are engaged in whole class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activities.

**Safe and Orderly Environment** - In the effective school, there is an orderly, purposeful, businesslike atmosphere which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

**Home - School Relations** - In the effective school, parents understand and support the school's basic mission and are given the opportunity to play an important role in helping the school to achieve that mission.

What is unique about the correlates is that they are the only set of research based characteristics of a school's climate associated with improved, better student learning. They are the only set of research identified constructs with which to analyze that complex social organization called a school in order to cause the school as a whole to improve.

Source: <http://www.mes.org/esr.html>