

Evaluating District Initiatives: Understanding How and Why Change Happens

***Robert E. Floden
Michigan State University
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Overview

- Changes in national context for education research and evaluation
- New IES leadership, with school district roots
- Chicago Consortium as model?
- Other large scale initiatives
- How Michigan is different
- Possibilities

Prior National Context

- Scientific Research in Education
- Possible questions
 - What's happening
 - Is there a systematic effect?
 - Why or how is it happening?
- US Department of Education
 - Focus on what works
 - IES goals move toward scale up
 - Accountability data

Changing National Context

- National Academy of Education White Papers -- engineering design and research cycles
- ARRA What Works and Innovation emphasize district practices
- NSF DRL continues to work from cycle of innovation and learning
- Carnegie Foundation Design, Educational Engineering, and Development (D-EE-D)
- SERP
- Stokes, *Pasteur's Quadrant* – *use-inspired basic research*

New Leadership for Research in US Department of Education

- John Easton vetted for nomination to head IES
- Chicago Public Schools Director of Research, Analysis, and Assessment 1994-97, 2001-2
- Executive Director Consortium on Chicago School Research 2002-9
- Work with Arne Duncan since early 1990s
- Will oversee NCES, NCER, NCSEER, and NCEE (includes WWC, Regional Labs, ERIC)

Consortium on Chicago School Research

- Research topics
 - School decentralization
 - Retention policies
 - Truancy
 - Family-school relationships
 - Intellectual challenge of assignments
 - Professional development & induction
 - Use of technology
 - Plans for post-secondary education

Sample Study: Freshman Year Indicators

- Grades and attendance are better indicators of success than 8th grade test scores
- More than 95 percent of students with a B average or better graduate
- Freshmen with less than a C average are more likely to drop out than graduate
- Nearly 90 percent of freshmen who miss less than a week of school per semester graduate, regardless of their 8th grade test scores
- Grades and attendance are better where students trust their teachers to help them and where students see their coursework as meaningful for their future

Features of CCSR Work

- Achievement data, but more
- Theory of influences: five essential supports
- Data collection with consistency over time
- Link student data to schools
- Connection to problems currently faced
- Attend to how adults use information
- Build capacity of local practitioners

Five Essential Supports

- Leadership
- Parent-community ties
- Professional capacity of the faculty and staff
- Student-centered learning climate
- Ambitious instruction.

Consistent Data Collection

- Student administrative records
- High school transcripts
- Student achievement data
- College enrollment and attainment (NSC)
- Census data
- Survey every two years
 - Principals
 - Teachers
 - Students in grades 6-12

Engagement and Capacity Building

- Steering committee of individuals and institutional representatives
- “No surprises” reporting
- Maintain rigor and balance
- Build coherence across studies
- Individualized school reports
- Systematic engagement with practitioners and community

Indicators

- Program coherence (survey self report)
- Value added by schools
- Relational trust

Program Coherence

- Once we start a new program, we follow-up to make sure that it's working
- We have so many different programs in this school that I can't keep track of them all.
- Many special programs come and go at this school.
- Curriculum, instruction, and learning materials are well coordinated across the different grade levels at this school.

Teacher Personal Support

- In my school this year, there is at least ONE teacher who: Would be willing to help me with a personal problem
- In my school this year, there is at least ONE teacher who: Really cares about how I am doing in school
- In my school this year, there is at least ONE teacher who: Knows who my friends are

Other Suggestions for Data

- Classroom observations (representative sample)
- Analysis academic tasks (sample)
- Interviews to supplement surveys (sample; focus groups)

Spread of Model

- Research Alliance for New York City Schools
 - Located at NYU
 - Jim Kemple, Executive Director
 - Topics to include barriers to graduation and achievement and development in middle grades
- CCSR reports that a dozen other districts have visited to whether they can create something similar

Challenges for Michigan Districts

- Smaller districts
 - Fewer schools
 - Smaller district staff
 - Small changes have larger effect on average
- Less access to external financial support

Possibilities for Adaptation

- Use existing surveys, rather than developing new
- Work toward valued indicators, not proof of associations
- Tap local community foundations
- Federal funds for innovation
- Partner with others using common measures
- Collaborate with higher education

Shift In Research Questions: Well Suited to What's Feasible

- Shift away from measuring impact of particular initiatives
- Develop data archive to reveal what is happening
 - Test scores
 - Essential supports
 - Indicators of student engagement
- Evidence of why or how?

Robert E. Floden

floden@msu.edu

<http://floden.wiki.educ.msu.edu>