

# The Impact of the School Development Program on Education Reform

by Sid Gardner and Jeanne Jehl

A Report to the Rockefeller Foundation

Children and Family Futures  
Irvine, California

May 1999

## A LETTER FROM THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

Nearly a decade ago, the Rockefeller Foundation decided that support of Jim Comer's School Development Program was an exciting, appropriate, and potentially effective long-term investment. We didn't see it as the proverbial "magic bullet", but we did identify several important and appealing factors:

- The SDP addressed *both* the developmental and educational needs of children;
- It recognized the importance of healthy relationships among adults to meeting those needs;
- It dealt with the continuity of values (or lack of it) between home and school
- It was designed and developed in the kinds of urban and stressed communities that are the Foundation's concern; and
- It was showing results in those same communities.

The Foundation's two-fold goal was ambitious: First, putting the tools and practices of the Comer Process into the hands of many, many more educators and schools at a reasonable cost. Second, infusing the principles and theory underlying the SDP—the Comer philosophy, if you will—into educational decision-making, debate, and policy-setting at the local, state, and national levels.

In late fall 1998, we asked Sid Gardner and Jeanne Jehl to undertake a retrospective review of the impact of the School Development Program on the field of school reform. It was a time-limited inquiry into the interaction of the Comer Process with school reform issues, educators, and opinion makers. No single report can fully capture years of effort by multiple actors on multiple fronts. We hope, though, that it serves to complement the growing body of knowledge from case studies and quantitative evaluations of the program's use in schools and districts. Early in the year 2000, a book synthesizing major external evaluations of the Comer SDP will be completed by Tom Cook of Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research.

Authors Gardner and Jehl approached their challenging assignment and deadline with enthusiasm and wisdom. The result is this thoughtful report which not only captures key successes and shortcomings thus far, but also provides cautionary advice on potential impacts of the School Development Program's current and future decisions. Gardner and Jehl remind us that the Comer process is as much a "belief system" about what a just society owes its children — particularly its most disadvantaged ones — as it is a "model" for improving schools. It may well be that the SDP's partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation put the label "school reform" on Jim Comer's work. Indeed, it's clear from his concluding thoughts that the real mission of the Comer process — the healthy development of all children into competent and caring adults — has been the same for some thirty years. The field is just catching up.

We at the Rockefeller Foundation are indebted to the dozens of people who agreed to be interviewed for this review, to Sid Gardner and Jeanne Jehl for their analysis and pulling it all together, to the School Development Program colleagues who have been our long-term partners, and to thousands of "Comerians" in schools and districts across the country. We hope readers find it of interest and use in their own work.

Marla Ucelli  
Associate Director  
Equal Opportunity

September 1999

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	5
Methods	8
The Big Picture: The Nature of Reform	9
Arenas of Reform	11
The Impact Within Targeted Arenas	12
The Impact Within Untargeted Arenas	18
Summarizing the Impact of SDP	22
Barriers to the Greater Dissemination of SDP	24
Features of SDP That Limit Its Impact	25
The "Belief System" of SDP	30
Self-imposed SDP Limitations	31
Barriers to Reform in the Education Field	36
The Limited Impact of Higher Education	37
The Issue of Community Change	42
Action-forcing Events, Windows of Opportunity	46
Three Scenarios for Education Reform	48
Increasing the Impact of SDP	50
Conclusion	53
Afterword from James P. Comer, M.D.	55
Bibliography	58
Interviewees	60

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SDP?

**T**he Comer School Development Program (SDP) is a school-based, human capital approach to improving the life outcomes of children, especially those of color from lower-income families. The objective of SDP is to develop the school as a system by building relationships and trust among all adults who work there, and by ensuring that parents, who are valued members of the school community, are welcomed and involved. The resources of the community can then be focused on the full and complete development of all children along six distinct developmental pathways.

SDP evolved from Dr. James Comer's work, beginning in 1968, with two New Haven elementary schools. It is rooted in psychological theory, especially models of social psychology theory, and of ecological systems, population adjustment, and social action. Dr. Comer, a child psychiatrist at the Yale Child Study Center and Associate Dean of the Medical School at Yale, described the process: "Our analysis of the two New Haven schools suggested that the key to academic achievement is to promote psychological development in students, which encourages bonding to the school. Doing so requires fostering positive interaction between parents and school staff, a task for which most staff people are not trained. Such changes cannot be mandated or sustained from outside the school. Our task, then, was to create a strategy that would overcome the staff's resistance to change, instill in them a working understanding of child development, and enable them to improve relations with parents."

### How Does SDP Work?

SDP was created against the backdrop of the 1960's struggle for equality, both social and economic. This makes it unique from the current crop of school reform "models" that reflect a more recent push to ensure that all children meet high academic standards. Instead of focusing attention on the material to be taught and the methods by which it is taught, SDP seeks to make schools more child-centered and responsive to the developmental needs of individual children. SDP is frequently described as "a process, not a model." It is an effort to build positive interactions among adults and between adults and children. The anticipated result: a school climate that promotes positive student development and nurtures academic achievement.

This process, of engaging adults and changing the climate of the school, is often a lengthy one, especially in the urban school systems that serve many low income children. By SDP's own account, it may take five years to show real change. A description of the life cycle of SDP lists five stages: Planning and Preorientation (lasting six months to a year); Orientation (beginning in year one or two); Transition (beginning in year two or three); Operation (beginning in year four or five); and, Institutionalization (beginning in year four or five). Outcomes assessment is designed in the Operations phase, and monitoring for process and outcomes begins in year five.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Comer, J. et al., (1997) *Rallying the Whole Village, The Comer Process for Reforming Education*. Teachers College Press, pg 140.

## How Has SDP Grown?

SDP has been enthusiastically received by school policy makers and practitioners as well as by leaders who are committed to improve the lives of low income children. It has been implemented throughout the United States and internationally. SDP is active in 565 schools, and many others are implementing SDP in combination with other initiatives such as Comer/Ziegler (or CoZi) or the ATLAS model for school change.

But growth has not always been consistent. A draft 1997 report of a long-term evaluation commissioned by the Foundation notes that "based on independent tracking of increasing numbers of schools implementing SDP, (both by YCSC and the Foundation), there appeared to be little depth or commitment to implementation efforts."

Efforts to expand training and technical assistance through regional professional developmental centers and partnerships with universities have had limited success.

The "spin cycle" of the 1990s is impatient with process and is seeking a faster turnaround on its investment in school reform — or, as some observers have suggested, additional justification for giving up on public education. "School-wide *reform*," not "*development*" is the cry of the moment, with proponents of competing school reform models vying for attention from school districts. They are also vying for a portion of the \$140 million the federal government has appropriated for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program to fund low-performing schools that implement comprehensive reform models.

*"It's one of the best-known and most visible reforms. Many of the [other] models incorporate aspects of Comer. Comer personally has had a huge effect: the work he does hasn't been done by anyone else. No one has more credibility than he does."*

**National education interest  
group executive**

## WHY THIS REPORT?

Since 1989, the Rockefeller Foundation has provided long-term funding and support for the School Development Program through grants to the Yale Child Study Center, universities and other institutions, researchers and evaluators, and local school districts. As the Foundation winds down its support for SDP, the authors were asked to provide a *retrospective review* of the School Development Program and its impact on education reform. This is not a traditional evaluation but rather an inquiry into the issues of school reform at all levels and of SDP's history of interacting with them.

Public school reform is a messy business — more a tangle of knotted twine than a neat package of issues to be categorized and resolved. In its 30 years, the School Development Program has confronted most of the issues at the heart of education reform, from parent involvement to teacher preparation to funding inequities. To the credit of SDP staff and the Rockefeller Foundation, it has survived and taken root in many places.

On a personal note, we undertook this assessment having already heard a good deal about SDP and with great interest in discovering how well it has succeeded. Having completed the assessment, we remain believers, but with concerns. If some of the comments in this report seem critical, it is because we have come to believe that SDP offers attributes found in no other reform model. Because of that conviction, we have taken very seriously the mixture of positive and negative comments that we have heard and read regarding its impact and future prospects.

We also recognize that we are suggesting several added tasks for SDP at a time when it is still struggling in some of its current roles. But we believe that SDP needs and deserves support from a wider set of institutions, and such assistance should be sought.

## METHODS

In mid-November 1998, we reviewed the files at the Rockefeller Foundation and conducted on-site interviews with staff in the School Development Program office at the Yale Child Study Center. We also made three site visits — to Guilford County, North Carolina; San Diego, California; and Community District 13 in Brooklyn, New York — which provided us with valuable insight from district and school staff. A discussion with faculty, administrators, and staff from the School of Education at California State University Fullerton in January helped to clarify issues in universities.

In addition, we read and reviewed books and materials developed by SDP staff, evaluations of SDP and current literature on education reform (See Bibliography for sources). Our review of written material and site visits was supplemented by 50 telephone and face-to-face interviews. We spoke with university and school district staff, as well as those from the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Congress, state education agencies, national intermediary organizations and policy experts, funders, researchers and evaluators.

During the assessment, we spoke periodically with Marla Ucelli and Jamie Jensen from the Rockefeller Foundation, who kept us on track and opened doors for interviews. Cynthia Savo was invaluable in providing information and helping us reach many of those who were involved in the program.

Nonetheless, it was not possible for us to read all that has been written about SDP, or to speak at length with individuals from all of the sites that have been involved with the process over the past 30 years. If there are omissions or shortcomings in our understanding, the errors are ours not the many people who shared their time and their thoughts.

*"SDP has created high expectations for students who were often written off, it has raised the bar on the issue of parent involvement, and it has made clear what shared responsibility in governance really means. All these concepts are entering the policy arena now. But Comer is just as threatening as the standards movement."*

**National education  
reform leader**

## THE BIG PICTURE: THE NATURE OF REFORM

**B**efore one can understand the impact of SDP on education reform, one must first understand the complex and ever-changing nature of reform itself. The education field is inherently resistant to reform, making it difficult for any single reform model to show comprehensive results. We must take this resistance into account when evaluating SDP, or any other reform model.

Education reform has been described using several very different metaphors and analogies: a medical model, a pharmaceutical model, a model of cell reproduction [Elmore], franchising, a factory model [Lemann], trying to hit big-league pitching (in which success three out of ten times is excellent), transplanting from a hothouse [Schorr], basic training drill instruction [Lemann], an invasion that requires a beachhead from which troops expand, and a diffusion of technology model [Pogrow]. Different reformers use different metaphors, at times revealing how they see the education arena: as an organism, as an organization with its own culture, as risky or hostile territory, or as a set of inputs and outputs that eventually lead to improved outcomes. (Some might even say the diverse stakeholder interests and rivalries in the world of education make the Middle East or Yugoslavia better analogies for the adoption of education reforms.) Lisbeth Schorr makes a powerful case that the franchising, mass production, and biomedical models are misleading, because reform requires localization and changes in big systems' basic rules of operating.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond the metaphors, it seems useful to consider the parallel examples of innovation that have broadly affected other fields. In recent years, the expansion of community policing, welfare "reform," and community development corporations offer instructive models. Extensive literature exists about the diffusion of innovation in education, but these other forms of innovation also provide some lessons which we will examine.

If one added up all the cautions about the barriers to education reform that have been set down on paper in the last five or ten years — or even the most thoughtful of these — it would be difficult to persuade anyone to make an effort to change the teaching and learning process in American schools. Liberal, centrist and conservative observers all agree that the education reform field does not lend itself easily to the adoption of *any* external innovation. Virtually everyone who writes about education reform includes a list of the barriers to its realization. Not only are the barriers substantial, but the strands are so interwoven that any reform attempting to address one feature of schools, such as standards or climate, inevitably encounters other strands that connect to it.

It is also important to note that there are varying levels of capacity among the targets of education reform. Several of those we interviewed for this report stressed the important fact that SDP targets the highest needs, lowest capacity districts for its reforms, which adds to the difficulty of achieving its goals. Using the pharmaceutical or medical analogies, it is as though a

<sup>2</sup> Schorr, Lisbeth, (1998) *Common Purpose*, New York: Doubleday, pg 28-9.

treatment were being tested only on the sickest, most resistant patients; using the military frame of reference, it is invading where the resistance is strongest, rather than at a vulnerable point.

## ARENAS OF REFORM

In defining how SDP has had an "impact on the field of education reform," we must break the field down into certain arenas. Some of these are national, while others are very peculiar to local settings and, thus, differ from district to district. We identified eight of these arenas as particularly important. Five of the eight were targeted by SDP as arenas in which to show an impact. The other three were indirectly affected by SDP.

### TARGETED ARENAS

1. *education from the perspective of underrepresented groups*, which is both a separable issue and a cross-cutting concern in the other arenas. Throughout the thirty years of SDP implementation, changing education from the perspective of under-represented groups was the central underlying value.
2. *literature from the field of education*, including that which is research-based, that which is more descriptive or theoretical studies and that which is more practitioner-oriented.
3. the impact of policy changes on the *schools of education* that are the primary sites for teacher training.
4. *decisions made by each district* about the models of reform they will implement district-wide and in their own schools.
5. the individual *school as a unit of change* with its own unique culture and organizational dynamics.

### UNTARGETED ARENAS

1. *federal policy* regarding education reform, including the related area of federal policy that touches on the purposes of education for lower-income students (especially the renewal of Title I which is up for reauthorization in 1999-2000).
2. *political currents of debate*, extending beyond formal legislation but including the way national and state elected officials discuss what is needed to improve schools.
3. *state policy*, especially in those states that have adopted a formal approach to education reform that includes dissemination of multiple models of reform. Also within the states are the issues of teacher education and teacher quality, in which state legislation seeks to change teaching rather than to address education reform itself.

*"The Comer Program caused positive changes in two outcomes that have been the cause of much social concern—in generalized test scores and in beliefs and behaviors that threaten social stability."*

Cook Evaluation of Chicago

While SDP's impact is better documented in some arenas than in others, we have sought to summarize what is known about SDP's impact in each of the eight.

## Impact Within Targeted Arenas

### *Education from the Perspective of Under-represented Groups*

Educators and writers from the African American and Hispanic communities bring a new perspective to education reform: education for empowerment, both of the individual and the community. For many parents and members of the minority community, public schools serve principally to sift and sort students for success and failure, thus ensuring that students of color most often end up with second-class status. SDP, with a strong emphasis on including parents in all aspects of the school, validates the importance of parents and community for the success of the school. It also seeks to develop the school as a system that can ensure the success of all students. Understanding the way in which community leaders, parents and school decision-makers view their schools is essential to understanding the dynamics of the districts and schools with the greatest problems.

The appeal of SDP to districts and schools in predominantly African American communities is strong. In districts where the SDP thrives, it is visible in increased parent involvement and empowerment to connect with and influence the life of the school; in student leadership activities and student participation in school governance; and in promoting parent leaders into volunteer and paid leaders in the school. These impacts are most visible in districts such as Prince Georges County and Guilford County where desegregation was a part of the original context for SDP.

### *Education Literature*

In the education literature of the past few years, the SDP is nearly always mentioned when there is a "comprehensive" list of education models. Several articles have compared SDP with the best-known reform models. While some of the references to SDP in articles and books have been positive, [Darling-Hammond (1998), Schorr (1998), Ferguson (1998)], others have criticized it [Finn] or mentioned it very briefly in-passing [Ravitch et al].

A more recent study by American Institutes of Research (AIR) ranked SDP in a "second tier" of five "promising" reforms, contrasted with the first tier of three "proven" reforms.<sup>3</sup> The study was commissioned by five national education associations<sup>4</sup> to assess the major reform models which are mentioned in the Obey-Porter legislation (1977), that set up the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant program. AIR was asked to rate each model's effectiveness in raising student achievement and to describe the approaches along a number of dimensions. As a result, *quantitative* achievement measures are highlighted. While

---

<sup>3</sup>The first tier group included those ranked "strong" for achievement results: Success for All, Direct Instruction, and High Schools That Work; the other models which ranked in the promising, second tier were Expeditionary Learning, Different Ways of Knowing, Core Knowledge, and Community for Learning. On the second rated criterion—support provided to sites—SDP was also ranked in the second tier, while twelve programs were rated in the first tier.

<sup>4</sup> These included the American Association of School Administrators, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Education Association.

*qualitative* research and outcomes such as a more positive school atmosphere or increased student satisfaction are certainly valid, it is through measurable achievement outcomes — test scores, grades and graduation rates — that students and their schools are held accountable. Thus, before agreeing to launch a large-scale reform, most school staffs, parents and policymakers want to know the probability that students will benefit in measurable ways.

This review found that only a few approaches have documented their positive effects on student achievement. Several approaches appear to hold promise, but lack evidence to verify this conclusion. In some cases, this lack of evidence is understandable: the approach is just too new to have collected the necessary data. In other cases, the approach's developers and the school systems that use it never got around to conducting a systematic evaluation. These approaches may still be effective; and if so, we can only hope that rigorous evaluations of their effectiveness occur soon.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that several sources have criticized the AIR assessment, noting that it does not include all the studies of the various models and that comparison groups are used as the only standard of effectiveness.

*"SDP adherents are really zealots, but it just hasn't produced the achievement results that everyone is looking for."*

Regional office  
education  
consultant

*"James Comer's highly successful School Development Program . . . illustrates how building a shared base of knowledge about child development among parents, teachers, and other school staff can create settings in which children can flourish."*

Linda Darling-Hammond,  
*The Right to Learn*

In 1998, the Brookings Institution issued a report, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, that raises some fundamental issues about academic achievement. Given that the Brookings report was focusing on urban, lower-income minority students, it relates directly to SDP. Perhaps the most relevant chapter in this excellent work is Ron Ferguson's "Can Schools Narrow the Test Score Gap?" Ferguson concludes that "there is evidence from a recent crop of highly touted interventions for students at risk of failure that makes one hopeful." He mentions Success for All, the Accelerated Schools Program, and SDP as examples, and concludes that "evidence of effectiveness is

most extensive for Success for All."<sup>6</sup>

In November 1998, Nicholas Lemann reviewed the education reform field in the *Atlantic Monthly*, especially the tension between centralized and local control of education. Lemann referred to SDP and Success for All as prominent models of whole school reform, and described Accelerated Schools and SDP as "planning and organization tools that give individual schools great latitude in choosing instructional methods." Lemann, however, devotes most of his article to

<sup>5</sup> Associations' comments at website [www.aasa.org/Reform/overview](http://www.aasa.org/Reform/overview).

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, R. "Can Schools Narrow the Test Score Gap?" in Jencks, C. and Phillips, M, eds. (1998) *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Brookings Institution: Washington, D.C. p. 345.

Success for All, and describes how a more prescriptive approach to instruction has helped to transform a school, rather than further discussing the merits of SDP.

Lisbeth Schorr refers to SDP in very positive terms in her 1998 summary of the lessons of effective programs, "Common Purpose." She is particularly positive about how SDP actively involves parents and with efforts to link SDP with early childhood programs. She stresses the importance of adequate investment in staff development, and cites the Consortium for Policy Research in Education finding that "the best training occurs in settings that allow staff to function as a strong professional, collaborative community."<sup>7</sup>

The education literature, at least in the views of academics in the education policy field, consists of those articles published in reputable journals and more popular writing such as that by Schorr and Lemann. It also includes material published by national organizations in the education field that is not scholarly but draws on both popular and scholarly sources. For example, in its review of SDP, the Education Commission of the States in 1998 stated

*"We invested in SDP because more than all the other reforms we looked at, it had a real sense of urgency about urban schools. We also bought their argument that in a chaotic urban school where there was almost no communication between the administration, teachers, and parents, you first needed to establish those lines of communication and then talk about curriculum."*

**Regional foundation  
officer**

*"SDP is a process, not a packaged program. As a process, it is dependent on a continuous commitment of time, trust and communication between all stakeholders. There are no specific curriculum materials or pedagogies advanced by SDP developers. The focus of dissemination of the model is to "train-the-trainers," placing responsibility for implementation of the model into the hands of school districts and school sites, in collaboration with the developers and the Regional Professional Development Centers.*

*Two observations should also be noted. First, gains in student achievement have occurred in SDP schools regardless of whether SDP was chosen by the school and/or district or mandated by the courts. Second, SDP has not designed tests specific to the model; achievement has been noted with standard testing instruments currently in use throughout the country."<sup>8</sup>*

Evaluations — both the more rigorous of those sponsored by the Foundation and SDP itself and others that have assessed the methodological strength of the SDP evaluations — have

---

<sup>7</sup> Schorr, L. (1998) *Common Purpose* New York: Doubleday. p. 255.

<sup>8</sup> ECS website, "Considerations."

generally found that SDP has had positive effects, though with less backing for its claims of academic achievement than its impact on school climate. As these evaluations-of-evaluations find their way into the popular press, in documents such as the recent AIR review, it is possible that the impact of SDP may be somewhat weakened among that segment of the education reform world that values standardized test scores first and foremost.

### ***Schools of Education***

Aside from the education literature generated in schools of education, the most visible attention to SDP has come in those colleges and universities that have become formal sites in support of SDP implementation. A presentation on SDP implementation at the 1998 AERA conference featured some of these universities in a panel on education reform issues.

What impact has SDP had on teacher education as practiced by these schools? We found evidence of significant changes resulting from SDP (or any other variations of education reform) in only a few of the institutions supported by the Foundation.

As discussed below in *The Limited Impact of Higher Education*, work on district- and school-level reform is conducted mostly by individual faculty members as personal

projects or in institutes that have been created and operate separately from the school of education. This is largely true even in those universities that have been funded to support SDP. K-12 reform has thus far had little impact on basic curriculum and practice, with the exception of the few universities that have sponsored their own versions of reform models.

***"... in deeply troubled schools, with inadequately prepared teachers, you can't expect them to write curriculum."***

**National interest  
group executive**

### ***District Policy***

Reviewing district policy choices regarding SDP requires a more detailed description of the different ways in which districts and schools have responded to the concepts and the model of SDP. The SDP staff has developed a *spectrum of impact* that ranges from full adoption on one end to partial use of SDP concepts without attribution on the other. Since only four districts at present have fully adopted SDP as their preferred model of reform, using that criterion alone without refinement would leave SDP looking like a very minor player in education reform. The more graduated spectrum of adoption as defined by SDP staff includes:

Type 1 — "Full systemic;"

Type 2 — "Modified systemic;"

Type 3 — Schools doing full SDP but without any central district influence;

Type 4 — Partial adaptation of some SDP elements; and,

Type 5 — Using some SDP elements without attribution.

• Type 1 means "involvement in a full way by both schools and district central office." This category includes Guilford County in its fifth year, District 13 in New York City also in its fifth

year, and Dayton. Dayton did leadership training for two years, and spent last year with a significant reform activity at its central office. "The Comer name is not broadcast, it is the Dayton Model, but the source is directly acknowledged."

- Type 2 includes a cluster of schools doing SDP with significant influence on the district and/or state structures as a result of SDP work with central office staff.
  - In Detroit, for example, the entire design of their adaptation of Comer's Student and Staff Support Teams, called Resource Coordinating Teams, is as a direct influence of SDP. Further, SDP staff helped create a new "central office culture" based on collaboration on the District Planning Team.
  - SDP staff also include in Type 2 Prince Georges County, with systemic changes including a district wide roll-out of the SST and the Developmental Pathways. "We created a mechanism to manage whole district change — our Comer Steering Committee that has been adopted by the School Improvement Division . . . the Comer contact in the district was influential in writing the Maryland State Comprehensive School Planning process — [a] direct descendant from SDP."
  - Finally, SDP staff suggest that Type 2 could include New Orleans, as it recently reshaped its entire Title One office around SDP.
- Type 3 addresses the many examples of sites with schools doing full SDP without central office influence. They refer to Topeka, Chicago, Dade County, New Jersey, sites in the Bay Area, and San Diego.
- Type 4, in which only some parts of SDP are adapted, best refers to Dallas. Dallas took parts of SDP and made it their own School Centered Education program.
- Type 5, in which some of the concepts of SDP are used in some schools without attribution, is seen most frequently. The SDP staff, in *Village*, acknowledge this partial mode of adoption in pointed language: "As with other successful approaches, one of the best compliments for SDP is that the concepts are often borrowed without recognition of their origin." These concepts include several ideas that are in practice in different ways.
  - "Whole school change" was a powerful notion from Comer before anyone else was proposing more than separate projects. Involvement of parents in decisions about the school is another strong SDP principle and a feature of Head Start (in its pre-Comer origins) which is now legislated in many states and districts.
  - Collaborations among teaching staff and counseling professionals to help teachers deal with challenging students is less a part of the "conventional wisdom." However, North Carolina has legislated that schools have such a team, although as part of a school safety initiative rather than education reform.
  - Data-driven decision making is not a visible feature of early SDP, but is more visible now, and an important part of the current dialogue. The importance of balanced, healthy child development is more difficult to track into schools, with the exception of the CoZi sites.

Further refinement of this spectrum of impact may be possible, treating three variables as the key indicators of SDP impact and district "buy-in":

- the degree to which all SDP principles are "faithfully replicated;"
- the extent of parent involvement in the model, using SDP's categories of parent involvement; and
- the district's level of investment of its own general fund and discretionary resources in the model (i.e. the extent to which the model is funded by internal funding vs external "soft" money).

What this spectrum of impact suggests is that SDP was visible at all points along the spectrum in a small number of districts and schools as of March 1999. We emphasize, however, that in the past four years SDP's own policy shifted from school emphasis to district-wide implementation, as discussed below.

*"There is a process going on in the school that enables it to handle all this stuff. In schools, they don't say this is because of Comer. They think they are doing it themselves."*

Urban superintendent

### ***From School to District Adoption***

How many districts in the nation have adopted SDP? The Education Commission of the States' 1998 summary of progress in education reform estimates that 3000 schools across the nation are using "whole" or "comprehensive" school reform designs, with the number expected to double over the next few years as a result of CSRD and other reform activities. There are 15,000 urban schools out of 85,000 nationally. If 565 of these in fact are using SDP, that represents a 4 percent "market penetration," which is significant in a market as disaggregated as school policy.

But if the focus is shifted from schools to districts, the penetration is seen as very minor. SDP staff have said "seven to nine districts" is their current capacity, and that they believe that doing an in-depth job in those districts will be a persuasive demonstration to other districts. One staff member said "having the full Comer model in a few places makes a tremendous difference. . . eight or nine very powerful districts [is our goal]."

The trick, obviously, is balancing, with limited SDP staff, these different roles in support of different kinds of districts. A shift appears to be under way in response to New Jersey and CSRD, in which, in the words of one staff member, SDP Central seeks "to say yes enough to stay in the game, and no enough to keep from getting into trouble."

## Impact Within Untargeted Arenas

### *Federal Policy*

One of the clearest signals of SDP's impact on education reform has been the inclusion of SDP in the Obey-Porter legislation that began the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant program. The antecedents to CSRSD include the changes in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act made in 1994, which expanded the number of schools that could participate in schoolwide reform. Some close observers of these and subsequent federal changes credit SDP with the idea of reforming whole schools, instead of focusing only on a few students.

A second indication of SDP's impact is that, as one of the models judged to be "whole school reform," SDP was described in detail in the federal materials on CSRSD and the Northwest Regional Laboratory discussion of models that is referenced prominently at federal websites and in other federal documents. A recent federal grant to SDP to develop school-community links provided a further endorsement of SDP by the U.S. Department of Education.

### CSRSD's Nine Elements and SDP

*The nine elements emphasized by CSRSD as the indicators of comprehensive reform can all be found in SDP written materials. Of the nine, those which most closely correspond to SDP's concepts are (1) effective, research-based methods and strategies, (3) professional development, (4) measurable goals and benchmarks, (5) support within the school, (6) parental and community involvement, (7) external technical support and assistance, and (8) evaluation strategies. The two which are less emphasized in SDP are (2) comprehensive design with aligned components and (9) coordination of resources.*

\* *"It was really Comer that got us started on CSRSD."*

**Congressional staff member**

The more recent, and parallel, emphasis in federal policy on after-school programs that are linked to school reform — primarily in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools program — is also credited by some SDP proponents to Dr. Comer's perspective on child developmental needs and his role in the Carnegie Commission that addressed leisure time activities by youth.

Finally, it is important to underscore the realities of the federal role in education finance. About 7 percent of the average district's budget comes from the federal government, but the amount can be considerably higher in urban districts. Clearly, however, states and localities have primary responsibility for financing and delivering educational services. The amount of funding, and the mix between state and local financing and control, will differ widely from state to state.

*"What Comer was initially on to is much more in the consciousness of local school districts than in the federal context."*

Urban superintendent

It is not yet clear what role SDP will play in Title I reauthorization. Other education reform models, notably Success for All, have been explicit about the use of Title I funds, but SDP has also tapped Title I funds in some sites. Safe and Drug-Free Schools legislation has been used as a funding source for some Student and Staff Support Teams. But the general lack of focus of these programs — despite recent amendments that emphasize use of research-based prevention programs — suggests that these funds have not yet been effectively tapped for coherent development programs. Some close observers of federal policy link the prospect of competitive Title I funding to SDP and other models that emphasize district-level decision-making about the lowest-performing schools.

### ***Political Debate about Education Reform***

One arena in which education reform can be assessed is political debates. How often and to what extent do reform issues enter into such debate? This is not to say that campaigns are the best fora in which to raise and resolve ideas about institutional reforms — especially since reforms are inherently complex and require very different timetables than 2- to 4-year election cycles. But it seems fair to say that the political arena is an important area for assessing education reform (especially in light of recent changes made in welfare systems that reversed sixty years of social policy).

The reality is that the ideas of SDP seem to have made little impact in political debates — in contrast with the “quicker fixes” that rhetorically address the demand for greater accountability. Ending teacher tenure, graduation tests, parent contracts, ending “social promotion,” charter schools, vouchers, privatization, and technology changes such as assuring that each school is “wired to the Internet” are among the most popular “quick fixes.” Most of these are not inconsistent with the deeper ideas of SDP, but they do not address its underlying principles of child development or student-centered collaboration in any overt way.

Some of the people we interviewed who are familiar with federal education policy expressed concern that the drive on social promotion verges on “blaming the kids” in ways that are very negative. To the extent that this is true, of course, it is directly opposed to SDP principles that emphasize the developmental potential of all students and the institutional responsibility to meet kids where they are. There is also a concern that most states will use federal flexibility to do just enough reform to show movement without seriously addressing the issues of teacher quality and classroom instructional methods. We should note that the attempt

to hold teachers and administrators accountable for the performance of schools, without any reference to the fact that students spend only 9 percent of their lives in school from the time they are born until they turn 18, ignores the collaborative responsibility for child development outcomes.

### *State Policy*

No states have adopted whole-school reforms across the board, although New Jersey has taken steps to place a greater spotlight on particular models. The New Jersey summary of reform models refers to SDP very favorably, citing Comer's writings and articles that stress the value of the developmental approach and the importance of school culture. In California, which did not seek CSRD funding when it first became available (due to a veto by then-Governor Wilson), state staff intend to make no special effort to go beyond the national materials on education reform models and referred districts to the recently published AIR assessment of reform models.

Most states are currently referring districts to the CSRD national websites, the federal application material, and the federal regional educational laboratories' discussion of the several endorsed models, including SDP. None appear to be going beyond these referrals to actual "endorsement" of any of the specific models or efforts to customize the models to the needs of their states.

### State Policy on Teacher Quality and Training

A special case of state policy, and another indicator of impact, is the extent to which the renewed attention to the quality of teachers and teacher training reflects the emphases and principles of the SDP. Here the evidence seems mixed at best. While there are at least 51 different versions of this indicator — all the states and the federal government having separate approaches to teacher training and quality issues — it is possible to discern some broad trends that relate to SDP. Recent changes in New York State have included new emphases in draft teacher training requirements that some people familiar with SDP view as SDP-inspired, although the references are generic and do not mention SDP at all.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has convened the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), which includes state education agencies, higher education institutions, and national education organizations dedicated to the reform of education licensing and ongoing professional development of teachers. The consortium has developed core standards for new teachers, including two that support the values of the SDP:

- The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development; and,
- The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.

The consortium encourages teachers to act as an advocate for students.

Of course, these are model standards and no state has yet adopted them or modified its own licensing requirements to incorporate the standards. It is also clear that most of the national

discussion of the past several years about teacher quality issues focuses far more upon curriculum and assessment of teaching, with little discussion of the developmental issues that are missing in teacher training or how to assess for them in teacher performance.

The detailed discussion of teacher-quality issues at the American Federation of Teachers website includes no reference to anything that could be construed as SDP concepts. The "What Matters Most" report refers to the need for a portfolio for teachers that would include *documentation of their accomplishments outside the classroom, with colleagues, parents, and the community.* [emphasis added]. But consistent with the sparse treatment of school-community partnerships in Darling-Hammond's *The Right to Learn*, the report refers to the need to reduce spending on non-teaching personnel. Moreover, only one of the model programs cited had a significant component of community and agency roles in working with teachers.

Further evidence of the outlook of these groups on the concepts of SDP may be deduced from a recent announcement of the Holmes Partnership, a network of nearly 80 higher ed/school/community partnerships. The partners include the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education as well as the AFT and the NEA. The Partnership is committed to high-quality, professional preparation for public school educators; the simultaneous renewal of K-12 schools and the education of beginning and experienced educators; equity, diversity, and cultural competence in K-12 schools and higher education; scholarly inquiry and research to improve teaching and learning; school-based and university-based faculty development; and policy initiation.

## SUMMARIZING THE IMPACT OF SDP

**S**DP has had significant impact on the field of education reform. To be specific:

• SDP is widely known and respected as a model for changing whole schools. It provided members of Congress with the original idea for the Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Grant program.

• The major principles of SDP — including the need for change across all functions of the school; deep involvement of lower-income, minority parents in the life of the school; and, governance teams that involve parents, teachers, and other school staff in making decisions about school programs and policies — have been widely adopted and feature prominently in many models of school reform. Although this broader application certainly does not reflect “faithful replication” of the SDP model, many policy experts and education observers give credit to the work of Dr. Comer and SDP staff. These principles of the SDP are central to school reform legislation, program regulations, and policies at the federal, state, and local levels.

• SDP is included in nearly all of the recent compilations of school reforms created as part of the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Grants (CSR), and in materials that individual states have developed for implementing that program.

• In New Jersey, where the SDP has a strong history of implementation, it has been adopted by 16 of the 72 first-round projects as a result of the Abbott decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court to increase funding for the lowest-performing districts.

• Writers and scholars of education reform who consider the variety of reform models from a neutral stance are generally favorable in their comments about SDP.

• Administrators and teachers who use SDP most faithfully in their schools and districts endorse it enthusiastically. These individuals form a cadre of experienced SDP implementers and advocates who see test scores as only one part of school reform and the broader equity issues that are inseparable from school reform.

• SDP has achieved important partnerships with a limited number of universities, state departments of education, and community-based nonprofit organizations.

It is important to distinguish between purposeful application of the principles of SDP and simply using ideas that have been in the *zeitgeist* of good schools for some time. There are school site governance teams composed of teachers and parents and chaired by a principal which

may look like a School Planning and Management Team as set forth by SDP, but which have never sought to apply SDP principles to their work. It is difficult to tell whether it is SDP principles or thoughtful local leaders that are creating impact in districts that are not formally applying SDP to their problems. The personalities and operating styles of individual school and district leaders lead some of them to use the process and principles of SDP — while others may be using some of the concepts without any link to SDP simply because they are good principles. Still others may simply use the labels and a “lite version” of the principles.

As one interviewee put it, “the field has caught up to SDP in some areas, which may make it less unique now.” Pointing to school-based management in particular, which was very new in 1968, this person said there were many “Comer-like elements in lots of schools now.” In his view, this leads to a greater tendency to compare SDP with other school-based management models in terms of academic results, since the other elements are converging on a body of common practices. While we would disagree about the extent of full parent and community involvement and the developmental themes in SDP being “picked up widely,” it is clear that other features have been adopted — both because SDP stressed them and because they became widely viewed as good practice.

## BARRIERS TO THE GREATER DISSEMINATION OF SDP

**B**ased on the comments of those we interviewed and the material we reviewed, the impact of SDP has been limited in three important ways:

- . by the nature of the SDP model itself, since its own unique features can limit its replicability and dissemination,
- . by the choices made by the SDP implementation team; and,
- . by the nature of the education reform field as an arena very resistant to external changes taken to scale.

SDP unquestionably sits on the “short list” of reforms that are respected in the “reform field.” But this does not translate to replication, adoption, or power to overcome institutional resistance. That requires a “theory of reform” that operates at many levels, including:

- . a meta-strategy level, with marketing far beyond that of most of the current reforms;
- . an operational level in working with districts, with the ability to build partnerships, monitor implementation, and design interventions that build in quality. This is combined with issues of intermediary power and commitment to SDP, determining who else beyond the staff at Yale is committed to and skilled at carrying out the ideas of SDP; and,
- . the micro-level with nuts and bolts — what Pogrow calls a “technology”<sup>9</sup> — that is accessible and attractive to individual schools.

---

<sup>9</sup> Pogrow, S. “Reforming the Wannabe Reformers” *PDKappan* June 1996.

## FEATURES OF SDP THAT LIMIT ITS IMPACT

Some of the features of the SDP appear to have limited its impact:

- its emphasis on building a process over a longer span of time than other reforms,
- its past lack of clarity about whether it includes or could be linked with curriculum reform,
- its interdisciplinary nature, and
- its lack of clarity about its funding and resources assumptions.

Its unique configuration among reform models as a “belief system,” to use a phrase from several of our interviews, appears to add further difficulty to its adoption, while at the same time increasing its appeal to some educators who see the need for going beyond a narrow focus on achievement outcomes.

Yet it is important to assess SDP against what it has tried to do, rather than against goals and measures of progress that have not been the goals of SDP. It is clear that SDP has not sought national replication as a goal, since it restricted its intended impact to only a few school districts as of early 1999. Furthermore, SDP has also limited its impact by its own choices by approaching the national reform climate created by CSRD and state-level reforms with considerable ambivalence about the competitive environment and the achievement-centered nature of those reform efforts. Other decisions made, or not made, by SDP staff that have limited its impact on education reform include uncertainty about dissemination strategies and vehicles, the off-and-on nature of the effort to build a national network of SDP intermediaries and “national faculty,” and questions about the role of universities vs other methods of staff development for teachers.

Again, context matters. As noted above, the field of education reform does not lend itself easily to the adoption of principles that spring from external innovation. In addition to the K-12 system, the *higher* education community has been resistant to reform and has presented barriers to the dissemination SDP and its ideas. There are some solid examples of higher education partnerships with SDP, but less evidence of substantive changes in teacher education that reinforce the goals of SDP. The issues of the potential of higher education to serve as a consistent intermediary for SDP principles are dealt with below in *The Limited Impact of Higher Education*.

### Constraints

SDP implementation appears to have been constrained, based on its design and its definitions of mission, in the following areas:

#### • *Lead time required to change values, beliefs and relationships*

SDP proponents have been honest about the five years or more it takes to implement this model in depth. This feature of SDP is not only an obstacle to political quick-fixers, but daunting to some district leaders. Not only is the time required for real change seen as a barrier, but the

seeming fuzziness of emphasis on process and relationships appears to put off some hard-nosed education leaders. They prefer to see results emphasized over process, which some believe can degenerate into endless meetings in lieu of progress. At the same time, this honesty and reality about how long it takes to achieve significant change are both SDP assets, since they also serve to screen out some districts and schools that want the quick fix.

This challenge is made greater by the realities of public schools in disadvantaged areas. Change is constant, with high turnover among students, parents, teachers. A growing number of the teachers in some of these districts are not qualified to teach – at all, or in their subject areas – based on credential requirements. It takes an extraordinary commitment, extra effort, and time to stabilize such a school in order for these ideas to take root.

*"The SDP process has given us a framework for assessing the value of curriculum changes we are considering. It is the value of that framework, not a model of academic achievement, that we have gained the most from. SDP is not reform as such, it is a template for reform.."*

Urban district  
administrator

#### • *Relationship between SDP and curriculum reform*

SDP has devoted a great deal of effort to clarifying how its emphasis on process, relationships, and child development principles lead to changes in curriculum and instruction. SDP unquestionably takes an approach different from most reforms: it argues that the affective needs of children are critically important to their academic achievement, in an era when most reformers take an "academics only" approach. SDP, however, seems to have sent different messages about the importance of academic achievement, especially when it is narrowly equated with standardized test scores.

In the words of one recent evaluation of SDP, "it is a program about parent participation, decentralized governance, coping with difficult students, and improving staff relationships".<sup>10</sup> Changes in curriculum and achievement are expected to follow the emphasis given to process and developmental issues. Another observer very familiar with SDP implementation issues, places SDP in the context of all urban education reform, concluding that "none of them (Comer, TOM, Coalition of Essential Schools) fully anticipate the realities of low-capacity schools. Comer has never had a clear curricular component or method for supporting teachers in the classroom."

This barrier arises from past ambiguity about whether SDP is a curriculum reform, is a prerequisite to curriculum reform, can lead to achievement gains by itself without curriculum reform links, or depends upon curriculum links for full effects. Some of the practitioners who were deeply involved with SDP described it as a "template" or "framework" into which curriculum reform and achievement emphasis can be fit by a cooperative school team. Others perceive SDP as trying in the last 3-4 years to add to its own capacity to provide curriculum and instruction components. Ambiguity about SDP's role in curriculum reform stems partly from the subtlety of the SDP argument about affective needs of children and how they affect academic

<sup>10</sup> Cook, Thomas D., et.al, (1998). *Comer's School Development Program in Chicago: A Theory-Based Evaluation*, pg. 54.

achievement (especially in an era of simplistic sloganeering), and partly from different messages about it by SDP over its long tenure as a reform strategy.

It can be argued that SDP's unique strength is its desire to blend academic achievement and social development. We agree that balancing the two is crucial, and that SDP should continue to build on its conceptual capacity to combine the two perspectives in unique ways. It is also clear that the SDP staff has addressed this balancing task in depth.

Rejecting test scores as a measure of student achievement is not an option. Making a case for broader and deeper measures of student progress and child well-being *in addition to* test scores that seems to be the strategy that fits SDP's unique strengths. Test scores are not a wrong measure, but an insufficient one. The issue is whether children's success should be judged by a single criterion — academic achievement — or through a variety of indicators, including social skills, talents, and service to the community. SDP emphasizes a positive social climate as a prerequisite to achieving those indicators — not as an end in itself. The task, then, is to be much more explicit about what those additional measures should be, and to help districts gather that data to build the evidence for SDP's total impact.

### ***The personalization of SDP***

One of the more obvious idiosyncrasies of the SDP model is that it takes on the personality of its founder to an extraordinary degree. Not only is it the only reform model that is commonly referred to by the name of its originator, but some close observers commented that Dr. Comer's humility has had a definite impact in the marketing of SDP. Some said that his humility — "what makes him Jim Comer," as one put it — is very appealing to some education leaders. But it may also be problematic when coming head-to-head with other models whose marketing and proponents are considerably less humble about their results and the time it takes to achieve those results. It also raises questions about succession planning and the future of the SDP organization as Dr. Comer moves toward a less active role.

### ***The preconditions for reform***

Comer notes that SDP "required a pre-existing base for reform that included a dynamic principal, faculty unity, and a perception of the need to reform." How widespread are these preconditions, especially in urban schools? The answer is important in determining how widely SDP can be implemented. Many of the best leaders in the hardest-impacted schools will respond well to SDP as a process for reform. However, the question of how large and how expandable this group is remains far from resolved, and has more to do with the nature of schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods than with SDP itself. This is an issue for all schools, but especially for SDP with its emphasis upon collaboration and consensus.

This issue seems closely linked to the question of whether SDP seeks to convert faculty members who are resistant, or to replace them. While SDP philosophy holds that ordinary teachers can become extraordinary, it seems possible that extraordinary teachers are required to make SDP successful. To the extent that this is true, the breadth and pace of expansion depend upon teacher quality improvement, which has been treated as a largely separate issue.

• *"What do you think we ought to do?"*

The community and parent-centered nature of SDP means that a deliberate effort is made *not* to impose an external curriculum. Listening to parents and building genuine consensus among sometimes-warring factions in schools and communities takes time. It also requires a willingness not to impose an external curriculum, however important the externally developed structure and process may be.

These ideas have an inevitable ambivalence to them, as captured by the weak catch phrase "top-down *and* bottom-up." The desire to include both external knowledge and internal consensus is unquestionably genuine, both in SDP staff and leadership and in the schools that select SDP as their approach to achieving better outcomes for students. But

*"We had to develop many of the detailed materials we needed ourselves."*

Urban school  
administrator

everyone who has been a consultant knows there comes a moment when the client, if they are at all interested in change, asks the consultant, in effect, "Just tell us what to do." SDP resists that yearning for certainty and directiveness, which is one of its greatest strengths. At the same time, it seems clear to us that not all school leaders or staff will be comfortable with such ambivalence about "best practices", nor with the great emphasis placed upon the need to develop consensus *at the school level* rather than being driven by district and state mandates. Again, Pogrow's point about the importance of "technology" — the nuts and bolts of what happens in a classroom in reform — seems relevant. The lack of such specifics seems in at least some districts to constitute a barrier to SDP's goals.

• *The interdisciplinary nature and origins of SDP*

Inevitably, the impact of SDP upon education is affected by a perception that it comes from

*"Certainly from our perspective, Comer has attracted public interest, but the work has not had a substantive impact on making learning supports a primary and essential component of school reform thinking."*

Director of  
national center on  
school-based  
services

outside education. As Noblit and his colleagues point out, "using paradigms from the fields of child psychiatry and public health, Comer designed SDP. . ." This cross-fertilization from other fields into education was a remarkable conceptual leap — one certain to leave behind those who are comfortable working only within their own discipline, and for whom education paradigms, as understood at the local level, were the only ballpark in which they wanted to play.

The question then becomes: if SDP arose outside the education arena and is still seen as a child development/mental health effort, how does it persuade people deep inside education that this broader view of schools and children is essential? As an outside perspective on schools, targeting *development* rather than *reform*, SDP's impact on education is a low-grade miracle,

since it was not conceived or carried out from within the educational establishment. It goes far deeper, into ideas about how children develop and how communities change. Its challenge today is to impact an education reform world in which many practitioners and policy leaders do not fundamentally value either of these perspectives, but need both.

• *Defining the developmental pathways*

This element of SDP's principles in some ways most clearly embodies its roots in developmental concepts, and was mentioned favorably by virtually all those familiar with SDP. But the actual content of what schools and districts are meant to do to address those pathways seemed vague. In discussing this with SDP staff, they acknowledged that implementing the pathways in concrete terms has been difficult, but went on to explain what they felt it meant using a frame of reference that extended far outside the boundaries of the school. This issue is closely linked to the discussion of the community impact of SDP which is addressed in *Issues of Community Change*, below.

• *Challenges of involving parents in urban schools*

One of the hallmarks of the SDP has been its emphasis on enhancing children's development by bridging the gap between the school and home. Comer describes three levels of involvement for parents:

- *supporting* the school's program by attending parent-teacher conferences,
- becoming *actively engaged* in daily life of the school by being present on school sites and assisting with learning activities, and
- *participating* in decision-making through the School Project Management Team (SPMT).<sup>11</sup>

Many activities and suggestions for classroom instruction assume the involvement of parents as volunteers or paid teacher assistants. In some districts it has been used primarily as a model for engaging parents.

The current situation for children and families in low-income communities has weakened the effectiveness of traditional parent involvement. Some children are transported across the school district to attend school far from home, not easily accessible to their parents. Many low-income parents themselves were unsuccessful in schools or rejected by "the system," and are understandably reluctant to re-engage with the schools on behalf of their children. More neighborhoods are more ethnically and linguistically diverse, leaving parents isolated from other adults they can talk to. As a result of welfare reform, in some communities where a sizable proportion of adults formerly received public assistance, all able-bodied adults are now working — or working at finding work. Even in schools where parent involvement once thrived, it is now much more difficult to engage low-income parents in the life of the school. While employment may have stabilized the income of these families, it should be noted that the emerging studies of the early results of welfare reform suggest that many of those who are working are in low-paying jobs which may not include health benefits and thus increases some of the economic uncertainties facing these families.

---

<sup>11</sup> Comer, J. et al. (1997) *Rallying the Whole Village, The Comer Process for Reforming Education*. Teachers College Press, pg.48.

To summarize the inherent barriers which make SDP difficult to extend to a wide audience, one interviewee who was intimately familiar with the recent and earlier history of SDP said, "Some aspects of SDP may be too complex for ordinary mortals." What this means, in our view, is that implementing SDP is difficult and nuanced at the same time. It is a balancing act between flexibility and faithfulness to the model, between local decision-making and clear methods and processes, and between a broad conceptual framework and a detailed set of actions needed to bring change. Not only is a sizable tolerance for ambiguity necessary to work along all of these continua, but it also takes a long-term view of institutional change that may seem like a great luxury to hard-pressed school and district administrators who have an average tenure of three years.

### **The "Belief System" of SDP**

The question of the "belief system" nature of SDP is a difficult one. SDP attempts to address openly the values questions that are often submerged in "system reform" work. In other settings, we have found that the technical, managerial, and budgetary elements of systems reform often tend to obscure the deeper, underlying questions about values. Reformers either take these questions for granted or avoid raising them to side-step conflict. Yet in changing schools in more than token ways (as with nearly any other large, bureaucratic system), underlying questions of values matter: Which children shall receive priority? Which children should get special help? What to do about well-intentioned, but ineffective programs that consume scarce resources? Which teachers in a system with increased accountability need a second chance and which are hopeless and should be encouraged to leave?

In our view, avoiding issue of values is avoiding the fundamentals of reform. It may go too far to demand that a new principal adhere to a belief system as a convert, but the child-centered and parent-centered qualities of SDP rest on some important values. It is to SDP's credit that these values are made explicit. As one SDP staff member put it, "It is the belief system that has given these districts purpose and a sense of direction." As with other features that make SDP more daunting, this helps screen out the quick-fixers.

The line that needs watching, perhaps, is the line between making sure that SDP implementation is based on certain core beliefs and values and demanding that there be little deviation from those values. Attending to values also requires addressing the question of how those values are to be transmitted to practitioners whose values may differ. This is in part a training question, and in part a staffing question. If only converts to a belief system can make reform happen, what happens to the teachers and administrators who want better schools but do not believe SDP methods are always the best ways to get them? The prevailing answer in SDP implementation seems to be "show them the evidence." But the distance between beliefs and evidence may be a long one, and honest skeptics might not be persuaded. Whether they should then be abandoned as "not getting it" or approached in different ways is an open question which seems to us to affect SDP dissemination in important ways. The expectation that a ready-made model for curriculum and instruction can be a "silver bullet" for improving academic achievement may be misplaced, but it leaves open the issue of how to deal with sites and local education leaders who may buy some of SDP's values but fall short of subscribing to the whole belief system.

## Self-imposed SDP Limitations

### • *The lack of a marketing strategy*

In reviewing some of SDP's written and video presentations, there is further evidence that strategic marketing on a national basis has not been a priority for the SDP staff. This is in part a positive observation, because it reflects the genuine priority given to implementation in depth and support for the limited number of districts and schools that SDP has been able to help. But it also limits the message that can get out to those interested in schoolwide reform.

The style of presentation in SDP material is mostly that of "talking heads," accompanied by a few overhead charts that use dense print and small type. The presentations used for CSRSD include little information on evaluation results other than verbal anecdotes about results in a few schools. SDP staff did not utilize the opportunity to comment in writing on the AIR report's ranking of SDP in the second tier of "promising" strategies, which a number of the other models chose to do. There appears to be a conviction that the SDP model "sells itself." In their comments on the national competition within the CSRSD awards, this low priority given to the need to "sell" SDP comes through.

*"Our approach has been to put the model out there and hope that enough people would grab it and run."*

SDP staff member

The merits of any reform — its bottom line results — ought to matter more than its marketing. But the extensive and growing literature on the marketing of public social programs is instructive, underscoring the importance of the message as well as the merits. There is no question that Success For All is the most visible (and, many would add, the best-promoted) model of reform. But SDP, with a much less explicit marketing strategy and fewer resources devoted to intermediary cultivation, has managed to hold its own in the national visibility sweepstakes. The question is whether a more deliberate marketing strategy is needed for those districts beyond the seven to nine that are currently treated as priorities.

### • *Ambivalence about national competitions and CSRSD*

As mentioned earlier, it is clear that SDP has not actively sought national replication as a goal, as evidenced by its restricted focus on only a few school districts. Its ambivalence about the competitive environment and achievement-centered nature of reforms put forth by CSRSD and state-level policies further limit SDP's impact. One staff member referred to CSRSD as having "taken us off of our game," referring to the seven-to-nine district goal set by SDP staff.

It is important not to make too much of the first round of CSRSD awards, since only 20 states have released funding thus far. But the pattern of awards may suggest some cause for concern and be a reflection of SDP's unwillingness to participate actively in CSRSD. With 16 of 442 awards, SDP may be compared with the other programs that "ran ahead" of it: Accelerated Schools (41), America's Choice (21), DePaul University (3 different models — 41), and Success for All (71). To be sure, the merits of SDP clearly had impressed some districts and schools. But for the reform model that one congressional staff member described as the inspiration for CSRSD

to have received less than 4 percent of the initial awards may require a clearer explanation of why this is not the SDP "game." What seems least clear in talking with SDP staff is what happens *after* the seven-to-nine districts that are its current focus. The national arena of CSRSD is certainly one of the arenas in which that question might be answered.

At the same time, we should note that SDP staff has a critique of CSRSD that is definitely shared with some of our other interviewees. CSRSD is "just enough money to get in trouble," in the views of one school administrator. Others have voiced concerns about the small funding available from CSRSD — a minimum of \$50,000 for three years — that may relegate it to one more "Washington TSG (tiny, symbolic gesture)" in an era of all-too-categorical and often token levels of funding.

The SDP staff have been very direct about their conviction that CSRSD creates a school-focused approach to education reform, ignoring the need for *district-level* reform. SDP staff has deliberately taken a pass on participating in some of the state-level processes set up in response to CSRSD, especially where it perceived that states were not serious about seeking reform that included districts as well as schools. It also avoided some of the states that required locked-in commitments of resources from national developers. So the low number of SDP sites chosen in the first round reflects some of these decisions as well — which are clearly defensible in light of SDP's priorities. Yet the broader issue of how to respond to the broadest national spotlight on national education reform remains unresolved.

• *Lack of decisiveness about the use of national intermediaries*

The off-and-on nature of the effort to build a national network of SDP intermediaries, a national advisory group, and "national faculty," and the role of universities vs other methods of staff development for teachers have all been a difficult set of challenges for SDP staff. To be sure, the barriers to university involvement (described at greater length in *The Limited Impact of Higher Education*) are a major factor. But some interviewees perceived SDP as less concerned than they should be about the need for a national organization to market SDP beyond those sites that the Yale-based staff can handle. One funder who has worked closely with SDP observed that the Yale-based staff are "not committed to building a national network. They have never been serious about building a national network of trainers."

One source linked this to the SDP decision to develop its own approach to curriculum models and the higher priority given to academic achievement in recent years in SDP, as opposed to forming alliances with other models which were stronger in these areas. Noting the "strong egos and appropriate pride" characteristic of SDP and all national model developers, this person felt it would be difficult for SDP to achieve such links in developing curriculum models.

In this connection, we should note that interviewees mentioned three other national models of reform which they felt would not survive the CSRSD process. Interviewees felt that these models also lacked the infrastructure and intermediary alliances to carry out adequate support for sites that might want to choose their approach.

More recently, it appears that SDP staff may be responding to these concerns in renewed attempts to build a network of regional training centers. As we note later in the report, the question of what the intermediary strategy should be is still very much open.

• *Ambiguity about fiscal and sustainability strategies*

SDP is not completely consistent about its cost and how it is to be supported over time. In part, this is based on the distinction between SDP as a process and SDP as a model of reform. A process is obviously harder to cost out, since it involves making decisions about resources during the process, rather than a pre-designed, cookie-cutter model with a set price.

On one hand, SDP staff refer to a specific set of fees for the support of the national staff in what they describe as a "turnkey" model. But at the same time, buy-in and "faithful replication" are often based on staff commitment and non-reimbursed time. "SDP does not require a heavy infusion of material or financial resources..." but staff "meet weekly..." "work tirelessly. . .," and are involved in "breakfast meetings for staff and parents." This suggests strongly that in effect, SDP requires the unpaid time of teachers, which appears as though it may be 10 to 20 percent above norms.

There are also a wide range of costs associated with the facilitators, who are full-time in some sites and quarter-time in others. A funder referred to "the potential variability in implementation costs [being] huge from District 13 to Guilford to the 'Cadillac' model in Detroit." In the AIR report, the cost of SDP was placed at \$45,000 for a hypothetical school of 500; with cost assumed to be \$32,000 if existing staff is re-allocated to SDP functions.

An article on the "Economics of School Reform: Three Promising Models" in the Brookings Institution's *Holding Schools Accountable* (1996), although written as of 1994-5, refers to the fact that there was less data available from SDP on fiscal assumptions and sustainability, which is consistent with our findings. In Jennifer King's review of the costs of the three models, SDP, Success For All, and Accelerated Schools, she placed SDP in the middle of the models, but noted that it was difficult to get estimates of costs from SDP. She noted that it required the most time from parents, underscoring the point above about subsidies that are not reflected in the budgets but which still represent real resources.<sup>12</sup>

The point is not that SDP is expensive. As Linda Darling-Hammond and others have pointed out, the current allocation of financial resources to schools creates a system that is very expensive and almost certainly has room for sizable re-allocation. (Charter schools with full school budget flexibility have been able to demonstrate this in some sites.) The point is that human capital is a financial resource, in the form of the willingness of some teachers, administrators and staff to put in extra time because they believe in the process and the potential of their students. Fully accounting for this cost and this resource seems more consistent with the honesty about time that is described as a "costly asset" above. Honesty about *both* time and money may be needed.

A related issue is the question of how SDP's cost is to be sustained over time. In recent work by the Aspen Institute on the "theory of change" approach to evaluating comprehensive community initiatives, participants in the discussion have urged adding a "theory of resources" that would make clear how the initiative is to be funded over the long run after external

---

<sup>12</sup> King, J. "Meeting the Educational Needs of At-risk Students: A Cost Analysis of Three Models," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Spring 1994; vol.16 no. 1 pp 1-19.

foundation funding disappears or decreases.<sup>13</sup> SDP appears to face some of these same issues. Assumptions about future funding drive the implementation of innovation, since future funders usually make clear what outcomes they are willing to pay for. The connection between outcomes and sustainability is thus a very close one. Going to scale demands clarity about these issues, a clarity that is not present in most SDP sites.

While some examples exist of projects that have been picked up by school district funding and other reform models that have been able to tap Title I funding (notably SFA), what is lacking is the development at the front end of implementation of an explicit inventory of local *institutionalized* funding sources that are "tappable" and a strategy as to how they can be tapped. One interviewee noted that a great deal of time and energy had been expended by a local intermediary working with SDP in seeking grant funding from a wide variety of sources that resulted in several small grants. This observer noted that when SDP says that it is a process for organizing the whole school, then logically the implication is that the school budget itself must eventually be the primary source of funding for SDP — that is if the district (or the principal in a school-based budgeting system) really believes that SDP is a priority and that all the fragmented categorical funding for at-risk students should be focused on SDP and its outcomes. But SDP has lacked detailed material that set out these sustainability strategies and tactics, making it more difficult to explain to potential adaptors how future funding might work.

• *The multicultural nature of inner city and lower-income schools*

Observers of SDP readily acknowledge that its staff is highly sensitive to multicultural issues in their application of SDP principles. But a number of those we spoke with also noted that the major sites and staffing of SDP do not fully reflect this sensitivity. Over time, this may become an even more important issue affecting SDP's impact on a national basis: of the 5.5 million poor children under age six in 1996, 1.9 million (34 percent) were non-Hispanic white, 1.7 million were Hispanic (31 percent), and 1.6 million were non-Hispanic African-American (29 percent).

Evaluators with whom we spoke said there was no evidence of any problems that SDP implementors faced in dealing with Latino or Asian students, although there were only a few sites where multi-cultural issues were relevant. But a few commented on the possible screening-out effects of what some perceived as SDP's lack of emphasis upon the diversity among lower-income, lower-performing students. Yet one national organizing leader in hispanic communities with was very complimentary of SDP, stressing how helpful it had been for his community organizing work. He said "their theory helped us organize our experience and explained the problems we were having getting schools to perform better for our students."

*"The SDP model does not seem to have a really multicultural focus; it is an Eastern model."*

**Regional  
foundation officer**

<sup>13</sup> Briefly, a theory of resources addresses the underlying assumptions about how an innovation can be sustained and expanded, using resources available to the sponsoring organization rather than relying upon external grant funds. The Aspen Institute has developed a background paper on such a theory as it affects comprehensive community initiatives.

• *The SDP model's variability over time*

The changes in the content of the SDP reforms from 1968 to 1999, although necessary and desirable, make it more difficult to pin down what the reforms actually were, since the model kept evolving. This adaptability was clearly a strength of the model, compared with a more rigid and inflexible approach to reform — but it appears to have had a downside in terms of dissemination, making it more difficult to explain what SDP may have been and what it has become. As Cook notes in the Chicago evaluation, "SDP is no cookie-cutter program, in fact SDP's emphasis on process guarantees this."

What was disseminated as "good reform" in 1995 may be quite different from what will be disseminated five years later. "Capturing the lessons" is definitely harder when the lessons must be absorbed from a moving target. The shift toward talking more about achievement goals and curriculum, the need for sites to "fill in the blanks" by developing their own localized materials, the increasing emphasis on evaluation, and changes in the student support function that added outside agencies to school staffing — all of these were mid-course adjustments that made sense, but that made the model different.

We call special attention to the differences in implementation of SDP in different sites. As one evaluator stressed to us, "Comer projects differ so much in the way that they are implemented from city to city; in Prince Georges County, they see the facilitator a couple of times a month. In Chicago, they see the facilitator two days a week. These differences are so substantial that I am not comfortable calling all of it Comer."

Some observers of SDP feel that they have been more insistent on faithful replication than hard-pressed urban schools would suggest is reasonable. This has led, in the views of some, to a reluctance to partner with intermediaries who are seen by SDP staff as unlikely to do a thorough job in implementing SDP. Some district staff and universities that sought to work with SDP felt that their efforts were spurned, their calls simply not returned. This was interpreted by some as arrogance, although it seems more likely that it reflected a limitation of resources than unwillingness to cooperate.

Finally, we should re-emphasize the realities of trying to run a national program with a staff that has limited time and resources. One close observer of the Yale staff said "they give a whole new meaning to the word under-staffed." Another said, in effect, that it was understandable that they had shown little capacity for reflective practice and the ability to digest the lessons of what they do in sites, because they have been unable to devote the time to this vital task. While the published materials from SDP staff, especially *Rallying the Whole Village*, may be seen as a convincing answer to some of this concern about self-reflection, some of these observers said they were disappointed that more sessions were not held between SDP staff and its most knowledgeable external partners to explore these issues.

*"SDP is a soft, Clintonesque model; it doesn't change the power, it doesn't change the resources; it doesn't change the ground rules, who's in charge, or consequences you need for real change."*

National  
education reform  
leader

## Barriers to Reform in the Education Field

A wealth of education reform literature can make the point that SDP and all other school reform models are up against significant odds. The paper developed by Foundation staff for a session at the American Education Research Association in 1997 included a clear summation of several barriers: "chaos, budget cuts, leadership turnover, flavor-of-the-month approaches to school improvement." The website of the USDE's CSR program, the regional education laboratories funded by the federal government, the Learning Network supported by the Foundation, and national interest groups have all set forth the barriers in depth.

What does seem important to emphasize, however, are those features of urban education and education for students of color from lower-income families that are not only barriers to education reform in general, but particular barriers to implementing the SDP model. These include:

- Instability of urban schools with their turnover of staff and students. The depth of family and neighborhood problems, combined with the instability of reform and of progress itself, leads to precarious, shifting ground for reform to take hold. As Noblit observed: "In these urban schools, reform and success are fragile and the schools believe they must be forever vigilant." The challenges of going to scale with any innovation, as Schorr and others point out, are sizable; those in education arenas are formidable. Trying to go to scale *in non-accountable education systems in highly stressed, under-resourced schools in low-income communities* is all the more difficult, and this where SDP is being carried out.

- Waves of "reform" that overlap simultaneously. When stressed districts and schools *are* trying to improve things they are usually doing so by trying several things at once. The "reform *du jour*" approach is easy to criticize; to teachers and staff in an urban school it means continuing to cope with top-down reforms that take little account of the success or failure of the last wave, since insufficient time has passed to determine its success. A new analysis of school reform by the Brookings Institution, *Spinning Wheels*, describes "reform as the norm" and explains the symbolic political functions of reform as "policy churn." This assessment discusses in depth the paradox of education being viewed as a system resistant to change and at the same time subject to successive waves of reform. It forms a useful backdrop for thinking about education reform in the late 1990's.<sup>14</sup>

As the Abt report points out, this penchant for reform means that SDP has often been a train running on tracks parallel to several others, with built-in potential for conflict: "Unless joint ventures. . . are arranged in advance, the Comer SDP ultimately competes with other major school reform efforts."

Yet for some of its practitioners, SDP actually appears to be more compatible with other reforms, especially curriculum and instruction reforms, than other models. The evidence for this is side-by-side implementation of SFA and other achievement-driven models in some Comer schools. Others, however, cite evidence suggesting that SFA, in particular, is incompatible with SDP due to its centralized curriculum approach. SFA has a very

---

<sup>14</sup> Hess, F. (1999) *Spinning Wheels*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

prescriptive governance structure that seems quite different from SDP's facilitative, inclusive approach. Thus the prospects for joint operation with SFA are mixed. Some districts have sought to resolve the need for deeper curriculum content by using SDP as a framework for governance, *in tandem with* a clearly specified instructional model for that side of reform. Yet it has seemed difficult for the SDP staff to set out this option, lest they appear to be downgrading SDP's own curriculum content in the context of growing emphasis on curriculum models.

- Teacher quality in urban schools. Teachers with the least experience end up in the schools with the greatest needs, as documented by Darling-Hammond and others. In California, it is possible to get from the Internet rankings of all schools in a given county by free and reduced-lunch percentages, percentage of limited English-speaking students, test scores, and percentage of teachers with emergency credentials. The correlations are exactly what Darling-Hammond would predict: the lowest-income schools have the highest percentages of unqualified teachers. In District 13, 50 percent of the teachers are certified and 20 percent more are "ready to take the test." This represents a further resource disparity that forces SDP or any model that targets these schools to cope with both the general resistance to reform and the difficulty of improving *these* teachers' performance.

A reality base is important. In some urban districts, the question of teacher quality is subordinate to the question of getting *anyone* to teach in some schools; Detroit at present has 800 teacher vacancies.

- Race and poverty. As obvious as it may seem, the impact of race and poverty on these schools may become so accepted as a major factor that it becomes the factor taken for granted and thus little discussed. We believe that Noblit and his colleagues are right in approaching their assessment of SDP schools under the rubric of "education, race, and reform." All three of these weighty topics interact in SDP in ways that make it easy to confuse one with the other. Clearly, the resistance to education reform has more than a little to do with the racial composition of the lowest-performing schools, and affects the resource allocations mentioned in the prior point. Reforming any large institutions is uphill work; reforming those that primarily serve parents and children with little power is much harder.

## **The Limited Impact of Higher Education**

Beyond the barriers in K-12 education are the barriers in higher education, which is a necessary component of dissemination for SDP and other reforms. University involvement seems to be an unavoidable element in spreading the impact of SDP, but at the same time very difficult. The issue is unavoidable because teachers are such crucial stakeholders in implementing SDP, and thus their training and professional development becomes a key leverage point for change. The issue is difficult because many of the ideas that have sprung from SDP have not been acknowledged by those in higher education. This is especially true of those ideas that come from disciplines other than education, those that challenge the basic incentive systems of schools of education, and

those that demand fundamentally different working relations between urban schools and universities.

For SDP to expand its impact beyond the districts with which it is now working most intensely requires effective intermediaries. A small number of universities have demonstrated that they can carry part of that burden. But larger impact on university policy and practices demands more. For universities, that means greater academic attention to research on the effects of SDP models. It also means changes in the curriculum and methods that schools of education use to move teacher training in the direction of SDP concepts.

Yet, evidence suggests that such changes are not likely to occur. In fact, nearly everyone we interviewed, including a number of academics from schools of education, agreed that higher education appears considerably more resistant to reform than K-12 systems. However, there was a wider spread of opinion on the question of how open higher education *might be* to a more strenuous effort to change teacher education at its core.

Problems arise from the different agendas of universities and urban school systems. Schools want all kinds of help, and universities want opportunities for research. These agendas are simply not compatible at times. In one model, the Eastern Michigan University experience in Detroit, the people whom we interviewed felt that the university had been successful in responding first to the needs of the school system — with tutoring by preservice students — and then moving on to larger, deeper topics. This set of connections echoes the core ideas of SDP in building relationships and trust over time, but it may not fit the academic timetables of many universities.

*"The University has to be in a certain level of turmoil for the partnership to work. If they don't have that, then they won't make the changes."*

SDP staff member

is working actively with schools in a suburban district with heavy concentrations of lower-income families.

These examples above show impressive penetrations into the central mission of schools of education. But it is not clear how either SDP staff or higher education leaders intend to spread this impact beyond these enclaves. Nor does it appear that these sites, which are the ones most

*"Most schools of education wouldn't have a clue about how to help Jim Comer."*

National  
education reform  
leader

The acid test of university change to support principles of education reform seems to us to be changes in its curriculum and field placement activities — which are at the heart of what schools of education do. At EMU, courses have been changed to incorporate ideas from SDP, according to the Abt report. At San Diego State, an entire cohort of master's level students was exposed to SDP ideas and was able to use these ideas in teaching, since most students were already teaching at the time they received their MA's. At C.W.Post, the faculty

actively involved with SDP, have much contact with each other on an on-going basis, despite facing many of the same issues in their SDP-related work.

Nonetheless some of the people we interviewed felt that "no fair test" has yet been made of the capacity of schools of education. One former foundation official who is familiar with SDP said that the entire issue of the role of universities in education reform and specifically in their promotion of SDP was a "war zone yet to be engaged."

### ***What Happens When SDP and Schools of Education Work Together?***

Will the widespread evidence of barriers to change in higher education become a self-fulfilling prophecy in which no serious effort is made to engage resistant institutions? What *has* happened in SDP's limited links to higher education? Without doubt, there have been some excellent examples of university support of SDP in the decade of the Foundation's support. But most of these have come with considerable external funding from RF and other national and regional foundations, rather than as a re-allocation of resources and priorities within schools of education or other segments of universities. They have also taken place at the margins of the university, rather than in the work of its full-time tenured faculty who do the great majority of the teacher training that goes on in schools of education.

Going beyond the origins of SDP at Yale University's Child Study Center, the most extensive involvement of universities with SDP has come at Cleveland State, Southern University at New Orleans, San Francisco State, San Diego State, Eastern Michigan University, and C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University. According to SDP staff and the Foundation, in the early and mid-90s there was a conception of universities as "surrogates" for SDP in extending its impact on a national basis. As of the late 90s, however, there is far less discussion of this role. In 1993, there were 10 active university partnerships with SDP; in 1998-9, a smaller number seem to be actively engaged in direct partnerships, with EMU and C.W. Post the prime remaining examples.

***"I'm not aware of any other schools of education that have done what we have tried to do to change how we work with kids."***

**Dean, School of  
Education**

### ***Focus on Achievement/Curriculum vs Focus on Social Development***

We should note that a number of the other national reform models have their home bases in universities, though it is significant that they are commonly in separate institutes for education reform. Success for All at Johns Hopkins University and the Community for Learning at Temple University are two of the best-known examples. But the greater emphasis that these models place on academic achievement and curriculum reform reflects what most schools of education would see as their appropriate involvement, in contrast with SDP's ideas of social development that extend well beyond education as a discipline.

Even scholars such as Linda Darling-Hammond, who are especially thoughtful about the need to re-professionalize teaching and to support new teachers in creative ways, make few references to the social development of students and the other elements of learning support.

Howard Adelman of UCLA's School of Mental Health Program has been perhaps the most important exception to this rule, outside Yale that is, setting forth a detailed rationale for learning supports as a vital third sector co-equal to curriculum and governance. (Harvard's Family Research Project which focuses a good deal of its work on family-school-community connections operates with a loose connection to its School of Education.) But for the most part, schools of education continue to define education reform as a focus on the content of pedagogy, which is defined as what happens in the classroom, ignoring or greatly subordinating most of the lessons of SDP about the role of family, community, and the critical web of relationships within the school that take place outside the classroom. The involvement of most schools of education with school districts tends to be limited to one professor at a time, usually is research-related, and, for the most part, involves classroom activities.

There is also an important distinction to be made between pre-service education for under-graduates and M.A. candidates and in-service education. One faculty member with whom we spoke commented that the idea of collaborating with other agencies and disciplines was just "too big a picture" for her undergraduates, but she found it much more appealing to older students with teaching experience who knew they needed outside help with some of their students.

### ***The Search for Broader Higher Education Involvement***

SDP is not alone in its lack of higher education partners. In a painfully direct assessment, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's review of its middle school reform efforts in 1996 stated: "No group was more conspicuously absent from the middle grades improvement table during the Clark initiative than higher education." The Clark evaluation concluded that as urban middle schools expand their support network to include the community, urban universities have the resources across many relevant departments to help teachers and administrators acquire collaborative understanding and skills. The report's authors noted that such an approach would mean that responsibility for providing the professional resources educators would need to move out of isolated education programs and into a university-wide commitment. But the authors felt that this commitment has been absent in most of their sites.<sup>15</sup>

The Abt report concluded that interdisciplinary support was what was most needed by SDP, not the involvement of education schools alone. Several dozen universities have taken the lead in interprofessional education and university-community involvement.<sup>16</sup> Lester Young, superintendent of New York Community School District 13 sought a partnership with New York University that was focused across different professional areas. This enabled him to have an impact on the training of nurses and social workers, rather than being restricted to education alone. Work at EMU has also cut across disciplinary lines, going beyond the school of

---

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, A. (1996). *Believing in Ourselves: Progress and Struggle in Urban Middle School Reform, 1989-1995*. New York: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

<sup>16</sup> Brandon, R. and Knapp, M. (1999) "Interprofessional education and training." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 42, No. 5. McCroskey, J. and Einbinder, S. (eds.) (1998) *Universities and communities: Remaking professional and interprofessional education for the next century*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. Lawson, H. and Hooper-Briar, K. (1994) *Expanding partnerships: involving colleges and universities in interprofessional collaboration and service integration*. Oxford, OH: Danforth Foundation. Casto, R.M. and Julia, M.C. (1994) *Interprofessional care and collaborative practice*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

education and beginning with interdisciplinary support. The superintendent of Dayton Public Schools deals directly with the University of Dayton president and several departments.

To summarize, we are a good deal less sanguine than the Abt report which sounded a hopeful note in stating, "the Comer process complements reform efforts already underway in many teacher training institutions." We concur, for the most part, with the Clark assessment of higher education. To return to the core question of the impact of SDP in education reform, there appears to be far more lasting impact in the K-12 arenas of reform than in higher education. It is possible that a more intense effort by SDP staff or higher education leaders familiar with SDP would result in wider impact, and we reiterate that the small number of universities that remain actively involved with SDP are doing very impressive work. But they do not appear to be the norm, and we cannot find evidence of a trend in their direction.

### **Other Models for Training and Dissemination**

With all the barriers to deeper university involvement, the prospects of alternative training models must be addressed. If universities *aren't* a credible or responsive source for sustained training in SDP principles and support to SDP sites, an effective alternative is needed if SDP is to expand. Schorr's discussion of the critical need for intermediaries in going to scale is powerfully suggestive of the need to search for alternatives.

In our interviews, some of these options began to emerge. Some of the most successful schools and districts have developed extensive supplementary training material. This raises the possibility of a "university of peers" who train other sites and could be a highly credible source of expert, experienced trainers. The national faculty of SDP sought such "horizontal technical assistance," and it may still develop into a broader institutional base for dissemination and on-call help. However, there does not appear to be adequate interchange among the districts. For example, one major SDP district did not seem aware of the research programs under way in other districts or sites.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy has developed peer-to-peer technical assistance matches "designed to enable leading practitioners to provide practical, usable consultation to their peers who are engaged in similar work." This approach would appear to hold much promise for spreading and deepening the work of the SDP across districts.<sup>17</sup>

Union-based training is another option for developing training consortia. The Learning Community intermediaries set up under the Building Infrastructure grants of the Foundation, provide interesting models, especially in the collaborations among six different stakeholders in Albuquerque. While these models make almost no reference to SDP principles, such alternative consortia of intermediaries and potential intermediaries could constitute a development network that might include universities, SDP model sites, and other nonprofits that have been involved in SDP such as the Youth Guidance staff in Chicago.

---

<sup>17</sup> "Learning From Colleagues: The Experience of the Peer Technical Assistance Network." (1997) Washington, D.C.: The Center for the Study of Social Policy.

## THE ISSUE OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

In much of the current writing about "school reform," the school is seen as an institution standing alone, without meaningful connections to the community. Although the criteria for "comprehensive" models in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project include "parental and community involvement," the proposed involvement is focused almost exclusively on parents, and on supporting academic achievement.

But schools *don't* stand alone. They reside in the midst of communities where they may be the only visible facility with a mission to serve all children. Parents and other community residents have a stake in the schools, and the schools have a stake in what goes on outside — from the safety of a child's walk to kindergarten to the employment that ultimately will be available when he or she completes high school. From birth to the time they are 18-years-of-age, children spend 91 percent of the time *outside* of school. To pretend that school reform can take place in disadvantaged communities without attention to the community context ignores this reality. It also ignores the critical impact that community resources have on children's opportunities to develop.

Of the currently popular models of education reform, only SDP speaks powerfully to the needs of communities and has the potential to promote equity for children living in disadvantaged communities. Noblit writes that "SDP has implications for much more than the simple reform of schools. It is part of [a] larger struggle for the values that education will serve."<sup>18</sup>

Beginning with the SDP hallmark values of *relationships and trust*, parents and school staff develop the ability to focus on the needs of children in the school, to make changes that respond to those needs, and to use the process of assessment and modification to continue to develop the school as a child-centered system within the community. In *Rallying the Whole Village*, SDP staff stress the need for change outside the schools, in which community members join the Student and Staff Support Team:

*"The school must become an important, integral service component of the community. The mission of the school changes from being the only purveyor of knowledge to being a central, coalescing agent where vital services for children and families are provided in an integrated way. . . . The Comprehensive School plan in all of our schools includes goals that address the relationship between the school and the community. Also, activities are designed that promote an interface between services and school programs. Thus the school becomes a true part of the community." [pg. 23].*

---

<sup>18</sup> Noblit, G., Malloy, C., Malloy, W., Villenas, S., Gróves, P., Jennings, M., Patterson, J., & Rayle, J. (1998). *Creating Successful Urban Schools: The School Development Program and School Improvement*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, pg. 14.

This process is consistent with several of the most visible state and local efforts to improve outcomes for children and families through community-based, school-linked services.

Some keen observers of education reform and advocates for children see the current move to extend the school day through after-school programs as an opportunity to use SDP to provide a more informal program to enhance children's social development in the after-school hours, leaving the regular school day for the "real" business of school. Our concern is that this arrangement could circumvent one of the major reasons that SDP was created — to make the school itself more responsive to the developmental needs of the children it serves. However, if after-school programs are developed through SDP to extend the positive climate of the school day, and use both formal and informal resources from the community, they can help connect the school to the life of the community.

Through SDP, parents and community members can also tackle larger challenges. For example, in Brooklyn's District 13, parents and community members have recognized that the high school (operated by a separate entity within the New York City school bureaucracy) is not preparing students to compete for new jobs in the redeveloped Brooklyn Navy Yard, which sits within the district's boundaries. The parents are advocating for a new high school, operated by District 13, to help students prepare for well-paying jobs and complete the link to the community's economic development.

Community-building efforts are gaining ground in many cities across the country, spurred in part by the federal Empowerment Zone and Enterprise communities effort and efforts of several national and regional foundations. But comparatively few of these have used their resources to reform the public schools in their communities. "We don't know where to begin," they say. "The bureaucracy is too big, too impenetrable"; or "We would like to use the schools for community center activities at night and on the weekend, but the principal (or the custodian or the district) won't let us."

Otis Johnson, in his work in Savannah's Youth Futures Authority, has commented that the schools were the most resistant of all the institutions in the community. But it was not possible to take on school reform until parents had built their own relationships and could talk about what their children needed from the schools. This underscores an important opportunity for SDP: enabling community members to build relationships and trust with school staff. SDP could move communities and schools toward the principles of consensus, collaboration and no-fault as a basic operating procedure, as well as provide a model for joint enterprises to help the school see its mission as positive development for all children. This goes beyond simply a school focus to one of helping the community itself work to reform its schools from the outside in.

But this new possibility for SDP incorporates an old challenge — ensuring that implementation is comprehensive and consistent. As SDP has moved in focus from the local school to the school district to forming partnerships with universities and other intermediary organizations, it has sometimes encountered difficulties in ensuring quality. The world of community development is even more complex and chaotic. SDP will need advocates who have well-developed skills. It may also require new partnerships with community development-oriented reform groups, and new connections among the sites that have developed these ideas the most. The logic of SDP seems to dictate the need for more attention to this arena of impact, even though it extends beyond education reform as such.

That added attention seems likely to be included in the US Department of Education grant received by SDP, creating an opportunity to give further detailed meaning to the concept of developmental pathways. In discussions with SDP staff, we were struck by how clearly its concepts of developmental pathways corresponded to the ideas in a body of work supported by national and local foundations, including the written products of The Finance Project in Washington. This body of work emphasizes children's budgets, community-wide "scorecards" that publish annual indicators of positive youth development, and the need for a strategic children and family policy in local government decision-making with wide community involvement. There are numerous models of such work in communities around the nation, and SDP needs much closer links to the organizations doing this work.<sup>19</sup>

Both under the rubric of youth development and that of community development or community-building, the focus on positive outcomes for children and families has progressed considerably in the past 5 to 10 years. But often schools are left out of these processes, and that is where SDP might become a major bridge-builder. To document the strongest connections among SDP schools and the community coalitions in neighborhoods around them would make it clear that schools need not be left out of these larger youth and community development activities.<sup>20</sup>

The schools themselves define some urban neighborhoods and are still the arena in which some residents will decide whether public institutions will ever work for them and their children. This is an equal opportunity issue, as well as an education issue. Lisbeth Schorr and others have pointed out the inextricable link between the future of public education and the future of urban neighborhoods, and SDP is surely the only reform model that has explicitly addressed such connections, albeit in all too few sites.

## Education Reform and Equal Opportunity

Since this assessment is retrospective, we should make one conclusion explicit: making a bet ten years ago on SDP was a great bet — this has proved the best horse to ride by far. It is more responsive to the realities in urban schools than others. It is less narrowly focused on test scores than some others — far more aware of the full range of student, family, and community need (though not going as far as other reformers would with co-equal attention to learning supports, to use Howard Adelman's phrase.) It is an *equal opportunity* reform, which may not be entirely the same thing as an education reform. Some would say, as Linda Darling-Hammond does, that issues of teaching and learning and issues of education equity are inseparable. But much of the decision-making apparatus for equity issues lies outside the control of *either* schools or districts. In fact, one could make the case that trying to fit SDP's future into an education reform pigeonhole may miss the point; it is the equity issues (the focus on *these* students and neighborhoods, the community and parent-mindedness of the reforms, and the potential links with community

---

<sup>19</sup> Again, Lisbeth Schorr's *Common Purpose* is an excellent source of references to some of this material, as is The Finance Project's list of publications. The Institute for Educational Leadership has developed some of these products, along with the Institute for Child and Family Studies in Iowa, the Georgia Academy, the Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, the Foundation Consortium for School-linked Services in Sacramento, California, and the Center for Child and Family Policy at Vanderbilt University.

<sup>20</sup> McLaville, A. (1999) *Learning Together, The Developing Field of School-Community Initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Center for Community Education.

change strategies) which all arise in fundamental values and goals that go far beyond education reform.

## ACTION-FORCING EVENTS, WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

The past adoption and dissemination of SDP may be less critical to its impact than the decisions to be made by schools, funders, and universities in the next two to three years. This appears likely to be a period of wider consideration for the national models of education reform designs. Several action-forcing events and key opportunities appear to be on the near horizon:

- *The funding of first and second-round CSR D grants.* This should reveal the extent to which SDP is adopted by these sites and the degree to which districts and states provide support to ensure successful adoption.
- *New Jersey's choice of education finance investments: "the Abbott decision districts."* With an initial "market share" of 16 out of 72 sites, the prognosis for future funding would seem good. The question remains whether SDP-Yale's limited staff will be able to give these new sites adequate support.
- *Title I reauthorization in 1999-2000.* It appears that options for making a portion of Title I grants competitive will be renewed. Here SDP's theory of resources again comes into play, in the need for a strategy of sustainability that goes beyond SDP's current material and message about financing.
- *The use of SDP's recent grant from the US Department of Education for systems-building* and the decisions to be made about what kind of system SDP seeks to build and what alliances it seeks with other intermediaries.
- *Funding to be made available from the U.S. Department of Education to build capacity for developers of systemic reform models* will provide an opportunity for SDP to think about a strategy for working with the demand from districts that apply for CSR D support. The SDP staff is clear that SDP principles are best implemented through systemwide adoption strategies. But the CSR D provides a major opportunity to keep the goals and principles of SDP visible and accessible to school communities across the country, and many states are adding support for districts implementing CSR D. Since SDP staff is spread thin with the districts it currently supports, there may be an opportunity to employ another strategy for the federal program. The Yale-based staff could develop partnerships with districts, universities, and nonprofit organizations that have considerable knowledge of SDP to provide part of the outreach, marketing and training for potential CSR D sites and for schools selected to receive CSR D support.
- *In the longer run, the hiring of two million new teachers over the next ten years* raises questions about the content of their education, including possible federal involvement in

hiring and providing training curricula. We believe what one interviewee called the split between “school-based reform models” and “teacher quality reform models” is an artificial distinction. If new teachers are not exposed in depth to SDP concepts, their energies and their commitment to teaching will obviously not be linked with developmental attitudes and openness to parents and community members as resources. This might just be a significant missed opportunity.

- Finally, we would note that the *evaluation investments* made in SDP have produced a wide array of qualitative and quantitative data that is persuasive as far as it goes, but raises questions about longitudinal tracking of the most affected students — those who got the biggest “dosages” of SDP — as they move into higher grades. The large numbers of students in some sites argues for further investment to determine whether the small annual changes of SDP will yield significant long-term effects. As one evaluator noted, a 1 percent change sustained over 12 years would wipe out two-thirds of the gap between black and white students on test scores. To leave this field before it is known whether such an impact is being achieved, when some of the research infrastructure appears to be in place to do this work, would be a loss.

## THREE SCENARIOS FOR EDUCATION REFORM

**P**redicting changes in the environment of policy reform is risky business, as those who argued for incremental change in welfare programs found in 1996. Sometimes the whole climate changes rapidly and makes larger innovation suddenly possible. Sometimes options that seemed viable only a few years before are closed off. But taking that risk, here are three possible scenarios for the future of education reform, with potential impacts on SDP:

### **An Optimistic Scenario**

A larger demand for SDP concepts comes with the growing realization that reform models that measure achievement by test scores have not produced the results desired. Dr. Comer himself seems an adherent to this perspective, predicting in our interview with him a “swing back of the pendulum” toward social development outcomes. This “swing” may be in part based on a realization by businesses that qualified employees need to be able to do more than score well on tests — that they need discipline and the skills of collaboration with others in the workplace. Greater research on the full range of needs of lower-income students of color would document the benefits of a social development approach. Links with after-school youth development programs would begin to reinforce what happens during the “9 percent window” when students are in school. Reforms aimed at improving the quality of teachers would address SDP concepts in depth, seeking to produce teachers who can work as part of a full team of development-oriented professionals who measure outcomes through a full range of student and family indicators. An annual “report card” that included these indicators will measure much more than test results.

### **A Pessimistic Scenario**

Not only would the “swing back” described in the first option not develop, but the pressure for test score increases would grow. The preconditions required for successful implementation of SDP would simply not be in place. Urban districts would increasingly meet the Washington and Detroit fate of various forms of de facto takeover, and SDP would be relegated to a very small number of districts with the leadership or the luxury of time to make deeper changes. Increases in educational spending would be devoted entirely to curriculum changes and special education. Preventive programs would increasingly be sacrificed to the goals of raising test scores. Expanded voucher experiments and for-profit schools would further “cream” some of the students and families who define educational success in achievement terms, and these schools would “cut out the frills,” defining SDP-like programs as non-essential add-ons.

### **A Mixed Prognosis**

SDP would have proven itself in enough districts to appeal to a critical number of districts and schools that seek results beyond achievement. Universities and nonprofits that recognize the value of SDP would network with each other more closely, developing a strategic set of

centers around the nation that are less dependent on "SDP Central" but committed to sustaining the concepts of SDP.

These scenarios omit several key factors: the future of education finance and efforts to achieve greater equity in urban and lower-income districts; the prospects of federal leadership from Congress or an administration committed to going beyond small, add-on programs; and, the prospects for leadership from teachers' organizations that emphasizes collaborative working conditions and social development themes.

## INCREASING THE IMPACT OF SDP

Observers of SDP's history say there are few easy changes that can be made to enhance its impact. The ones mentioned most frequently include:

- **Expanding dissemination efforts.**

Several local sites (including Guilford County, Detroit, and Prince George's County) have made substantial investment in professional development and systemic change, but SDP has not developed consistent strategies to encourage sites to share the material and strategies they have developed. Several experienced SDP implementers and staff from intermediary organizations have commented that SDP training could be enhanced by acknowledging the considerable expertise of local school and district staff, as well as staff from universities and local intermediary organizations. A horizontal networking strategy in which experienced staff from well-developed sites provide training and technical assistance builds commitment and a sense of shared expertise across sites. It also reduces the demands on SDP core staff.

Expanded dissemination could also include a renewed effort to attract university involvement in education and training that emphasizes the SDP core principles, as well as a deeper effort to deal with issues of finance. This could also include a more specific response to the issues raised by CSRD and its state counterpart processes. SDP's limiting itself to the districts and schools where it is already working seems a not-too-well-timed "micro-strategy." To play "the small game" just as the policy spotlight is moving toward whole school change with district support seems to risk the relevance that SDP has justifiably won over the past 30 years.

How should SDP approach CSRD and the state-level reforms? This is perhaps the most difficult arena in which to assess the future impact of SDP. SDP staff described how it intends to deal with CSRD: as a limited environment for dissemination of SDP with reservations about the depth of its potential for real change in districts and schools. But how SDP will allocate its own limited resources and those of its partners to these multiple sites does not appear to be decided. What SDP expects of the districts, how it will approach achievement issues vs social development and climate issues, and which intermediaries will play which roles all appear to be open questions.

\* SDP, in our view, cannot sit out this dance. For all its flaws, CSRD is the widest national spotlight on education reform that is likely to be available in the foreseeable future. The unique features of SDP need to be cited more prominently in the considerations of which options to use, and SDP and its intermediaries are the only way to get these ideas into view. The more important these ideas are seen to be, the more important it becomes to assure that they are visible, credible, and actively promoted.

Greater clarity is needed concerning the partnerships that SDP intends to achieve with its intermediaries. Which partners are strategic and why? Which partners are to be the focus of renewed efforts to enlist their help in disseminating SDP? Which partners will be encouraged to

join SDP in explaining the SDP model to districts interested in pursuing it under CSRD or state reform rubrics?

CSRD provides an additional opportunity for SDP: to move from a demonstration phase to dissemination. This calls for changes in SDP/Yale or a different kind of organization — one that is more fluid and more likely to seek partnerships and alliances with other organizations, both local and national. In part, this is about the kind of organization that can take the SDP message to a broader audience of schools, districts, communities, and higher education institutions than are currently involved. It is, in effect, what SDP staff have tried to do with their intermediary strategy from the first, but has not yet resulted in a network of intermediaries who can spread the word about SDP as widely as it should be heard.

#### • Putting greater emphasis upon achievement results.

This could come either by citing schools that have persisted with SDP for a long enough period to have moved from climate changes to achievement changes, or by including curriculum reforms and testing as a larger part of the design from the first, as pointed out by Cook in his Chicago evaluation [p 49]. The long-term tracking of a significant number of students could also help expand the definition of academic achievement as evidence builds, hopefully, for the later-life successes of students exposed to SDP in depth.

The timing issues and SDP's links to achievement results must be made clearer. If it takes five-to-seven years to move from governance to climate to achievement, this should be said more clearly. The "prerequisite argument," i.e. climate must precede achievement, may win points for honesty, but it must be made explicit. SDP staff and sites must also recognize that it may be in conflict with CSRD and other reform timetables that force choices about an instructional focus by the end of the first year.

### Prospective SDP Changes

*In discussions with SDP staff, a number of changes that they are making or considering were cited as responses to several of the concerns expressed in this report. These include: (1) a planned summer institute for "key decision-makers" on federal and state policy issues raised by SDP, (2) further discussions with universities about their potential expanded role as intermediaries, and, (3) the development of a new social skills curriculum that provides a clearer answer to the question of how the developmental pathways should be made concrete in implementing SDP. SDP staff also intend to continue an ongoing dialogue with academic leaders in the education reform field who value pedagogical content over child development content in teacher training, in an attempt to persuade them of the co-equality of the two topics.*

- **Making a greater effort to link SDP with community change strategies.**

These strategies are set forth by a number of funders, some practitioners, and Dr. Comer in *Waiting for a Miracle*. This should not mean a shift of the SDP core staff into another newer arena, however logically linked it may be. It may mean building new partnerships and more strategic alliances with the several organizations that are addressing community-building, neighborhood development, and youth development issues in depth. It also argues for stronger documentation of the sites where those connections are being made at the local level.

As we noted in the introduction, we recognize that we are suggesting several added tasks for SDP at a time when its resources are limited and it needs to focus on what it does well to make sure that its core strengths are well understood by potential SDP adaptors. ~~But we believe, that SDP needs and deserves help from a wider set of institutions, and should seek that help. In many ways, that is the most important implication of these recommendations about impact on education reform: the impact would be wider if the effort to seek help were more strategic in going beyond what the Yale-based staff can accomplish. Here the trade-off between faithful replication and wider impact is clearest, thus the effort to get more allies who are faithful to the long-term goals of SDP seems most important.~~

## CONCLUSION

As we have noted in this report, SDP succeeds to the extent that it does a good job of maintaining a balance between several tensions. At this point, we believe the most important of these is SDP's balancing between a) the current drive toward a narrowed definition of achievement in the form of test scores and b) making clearer how much it differs from other reforms through emphasis upon developmental concepts within schools as well as through strengthened efforts to reach out to the wider community.

We re-emphasize that the equal-opportunity origins of SDP suggest a question about the target we were asked to assess: the impact of SDP on education reform. The question is whether this is the *only* appropriate arena in which the results of SDP should be assessed. Some of the clearest results of SDP and some of the comments of its practitioners and observers suggest that the concepts and goals of SDP go so far beyond schooling, arguing strongly for a renewed emphasis upon the ways that SDP has impacted and could impact further the deep issues of equity and community change around schools. If governance is a critical element in community-building, the governance principles of SDP may be an important link between education reform and community-building. While this has not always been explicit in SDP material, its practitioners at times stress these broader arenas as part of SDP's impact beyond education reform.

A strength of SDP is that it raises issues that are in several ways more fundamental than those currently in the field of education reform: what is equity when schools still reflect their communities' wealth in most states? What is the appropriate role of a community in guiding its schools? How can students from lower-income families benefit from school-based, classroom-focused reform if that reform does not directly address the conditions in those students' lives, families, and neighborhoods? The third question raises another, familiar but unresolved issue: are test scores on standardized tests the best indicators of students' progress in preparing to lead productive, useful lives?

Dr. Comer's answer to this question is clearest:

*"...the...emphasis on testing is very rapidly and powerfully driving curriculum and instruction in the opposite direction from what is needed to address the concerns of employers. They want people who have a good knowledge base and skills; but equally important, they want people who can get along and work collaboratively with others, think creatively and solve problems, and work in a disciplined and responsible way." [WFM 224-5]*

Again, Dr. Comer during SDP's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary remarked:

*"There are still too many people who...believe that test scores are the true measures of the quality of schooling, and yet we know that's not true. We must have children who are capable of scoring well, but the most important thing to succeed in life is to be disciplined, to be responsible, and also to have good*

*academic and social skills. Preparing children for life while they are still little children is what school is really all about and must be all about."*

Another version of this answer is echoed by a more conservative educator, Chester Finn, who has written "the great project of public education in America should not be the creation of skilled workers but the formation of Americans." Neither of these focuses as heavily and exclusively upon test scores as does much of current education reform.

At the same time, recent changes in SDP's message have emphasized achievement goals more than earlier materials tended to, in ways that suggest a shift toward the achievement agenda as the true "bottom line" of education reform. The intended relationship between achievement and the broader goals of SDP needs re-emphasis in the context of the new choices being made by state and local education leaders about which models they will follow. SDP has shown that it can link with compatible models that stress the academic achievement dimension in a way that is not at all inconsistent with SDP — but requires a balance of attention to both sides of the equation.

SDP appears to face important choices in the near term in its work in the few districts where it has concentrated its efforts. It must make important decisions about its response to the state and national environment of competition among achievement-focused reform models. Finally, it must also choose how it will define and grow its relationships with its current and prospective intermediaries. As rich as its recent history has been, the paths chosen in its near-term future appear to be very important to continuing and widening its impact on education reform. The choices of what kind of an organization SDP wishes to become — and which other organizations it wishes to have along with it on that journey — will also affect its impact on education reform.

## AFTERWORD FROM JAMES P. COMER, M.D.

It has been a rare privilege to be able to spend my entire career addressing the American education challenge in the way that I strongly believe it must be done. Also, I am fortunate that the impact of my work has been considered and reported in this document by Sid Garner and Jeanne Jehl. They have a deep and comprehensive understanding of school reform issues, educators and opinion makers.

About 32 years ago I sat in my cubicle while serving as a Program Officer at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and decided that the largely experimental research design of the proposals coming in could not tell policy makers much, or help the target groups — low income minority children and their families. The cities were burning, the economy was changing, and matters could only get worse without adequate understanding and meaningful intervention. I believed that the focus had to be on children, and I wanted to get directly involved in a local intervention site and work in a way that would eventually have national impact.

In 1968 Dr. Albert Solnit, the Director of the Yale University Child Study Center, asked me to return to Yale and the Child Study Center — the place where I did my general and child psychiatry training — to direct a school intervention program. The idea was to work collaboratively with the New Haven School System in developing a successful intervention model that could then be moved to other places in and beyond New Haven — a portal model. Importantly, we began our work with no preconceived notions about the nature of dysfunction in schools. We were able to use an action research approach that is much more useful in highly dynamic, interactive environments. Indeed, one of the research proposals discussed at NIMH in 1968 was to study four cities that had fiery civil disturbances and to use four that did not as the controls. But before the study could get off the ground, all four of the control group cities had significant disturbances.

My background as a low-income minority person from a small urban setting and my training in psychiatry and public health provided my major frame of reference. Knowledge that children can't achieve at the level of their potential in a difficult and sometimes unsafe environment led to an immediate effort to create structures and processes in school that would make the environment safe and promotive of good development. From the beginning we recognized the need for a good curriculum, good teaching and assessment activities. But because these were not our area of expertise we agreed that the educators involved would address this aspect of the work. When this didn't happen, we gradually moved to create a child development based curriculum that is rich in academic content, and aligned with standards and other achievement expectations — now called our "Balanced Curriculum" approach. This process continues.

What we did and continue to do in our work is to "marry" the technology of education (curriculum, teaching, assessment) with the conditions of teaching (relationships; student, staff and organizational development). This marriage is generally missing in our culture — or no effort is made to make it work — because we have a mechanical notion of teaching and learning. We believe that teachers can just pour the information into open heads and those with the best

machines (highest intelligence) will get it and others will not, but that's okay. We got by in an economy in which only 20% of the people needed a high-level of education to meet their adult tasks and responsibilities. But it doesn't work in an economy in which 90 to 95% of the people need a high level of development and education. And the approach to schooling used to educate the 20% is not adequate for educating the 95%. But by addressing the technology and the conditions more students can be adequately educated. Our SDP work is a framework for doing the latter.

Also, growing violence, other troublesome behaviors, and a documented increase in psychopathology among young people across the socioeconomic spectrum indicates that schools must do more than improve the test scores. They must work with families to help young people be successful in school and in life. Ours is the only major school reform effort that has paid as much attention to child and youth development as to curriculum, instruction and assessment, and shown a mutually facilitative relationship. We believe that it is not possible to understand and improve development, behavior and academic achievement in interactive systems without an ecological perspective and the kind of integrative process used in our work. I believe that it is our focus on both the child and the environment that groups utilizing our approach find rewarding.

I was amused by one observer's comment that the School Development Program people and/or their clients are zealots. I suspect that he has mistaken enthusiasm and excitement (not always appreciated in Western culture) with zealotry. It would be zealotry if there were no behavioral, academic and social gains as a result of the work. But our own studies, Tom Cook's study in Chicago and other reports document significant gains. And programs we are currently field testing — Balanced Curriculum, Teachers Helping Teachers, Essentials of Literacy and others — appear to hold promise and the possibility of even more enthusiasm and excitement.

There is very little to take issue with in this report. I would only suggest that what appears to be an ambivalence about an emphasis on curriculum and teaching is probably due to our initial and deliberate effort to leave curriculum, instruction and assessment to the educators. And other changes in direction discussed in the report were generally in response to what we learned. For example, we moved from a school-by-school to a systemic strategy when it became apparent that it was necessary to sustain gains.

The charge of zealotry, however, is not mean spirited or singular. A new colleague at Yale said that she had previously thought of me as some kind of "guru-freak." It wasn't until she heard a science teacher and a math teacher in an SDP inner city school sharing teaching strategies in an uncommon way that she got the, "Uh huh, that's what all of this good climate business makes possible." When I first began my work, a senior psychiatrist colleague stopped me in the parking lot and asked, "What are you doing?! Who is the patient?" He was insisting on a one-to-one clinical treatment model rather than the ecological perspective needed in schools. Thus, it is sometimes difficult for people to understand what we are doing. But fortunately, Gardner and Jehl got it.

I fully agree with the observation that we did not adequately penetrate the consciousness of enough education opinion makers. Our work has informed discussion and education policymaking, but in an indirect and limited way. Recognizing the need to have direct and greater input, we carried out our first Summer Institute for policy makers in July 1999. Because the

experience was well received we are going to make a deliberate and significant effort to work with education and related policy makers locally and nationally.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the people who have made the work of the School Development Program and my personal privilege possible. And I would like to thank Sid Gardner and Jeanne Jehl for a report that will help us move in the most appropriate direction in the future.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Related to the School Development Program:

Anson, A. R., Cook T. D., Habib, F., Grady, M. K., Haynes, N. & Comer, J., "The Comer School Development Program: A Theoretical Analysis," *Urban Education*, v26 no.1, April 1991, pp. 56-82.

Borton, W., Preston, J., & Bippert, J., *Sustainability of Reform Implementation in Comer Schools: Measuring the Impact of Change in a Shared Decision-Making Model*. San Diego, CA: Educational Research Association.

Cook, Thomas D., et.al, (1998). *Comer's School Development Program in Chicago: A Theory-Based Evaluation*.

Comer, J. et al., (1997) *Rallying the Whole Village, The Comer Process for Reforming Education*. Teachers College Press.

Comer, J., (1997) *Waiting for a Miracle*, New York: Plume Books.

Drake, D., "Student Success and the Family Using Comer Model for Home School Connections," *Clearing House*, v.68 no.5, May/June 1995.

King, J. "Meeting the Educational Needs of At-risk Students: A Cost Analysis of Three Models," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Spring 1994: vol.16 no. 1 pp 1- 19.

Lofland, G. D., "Where Children Come First," *Educational Leadership*, v52 no4, Dec. 1994/Jan. 1995.

Millsap, M. A., Chase, A., Brigham, N., and Gamse, B., (1997) *Evaluation of the Spreading of the Comer School Development Program and Philosophy*. Executive Summary. Cambridge, MA: Abt. Associates.

Noblit, G., Malloy, C., Malloy, W., Villenas, S., Groves, P., Jennings, M., Patterson, J., & Rayle, J. (1998) *Creating Successful Urban Schools: The School Development Program and School Improvement*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina.

Neufeld, B., (1995) *Teacher Learning in the Context of SDP: What are the Opportunities? What is the Context?*, East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University.

Policy Studies Associates, (1997): *An Early Look at the Comer Process in Community School District 13*.

Squires, D. A., & Kranyik, R. D., "The Comer Program: Changing School Culture," *Educational Leadership*, v53 no.4, Dec. 1995, pp.29-32.

Turnbull, B. J., Fiester, L., & Wodatch, J. (1997) "*A Process, Not a Program*": *An Early Look at the Comer Process In Community School District 13*. Washington D. C., Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

### **Related to School Reform:**

Darling-Hammond, Linda, (1997) *The Right to Learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Drucker, P., "Innovation and Entrepreneurship," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1996.

Fashola, O. S., & Slavin, R. E., "Schoolwide Reform Models: What Works?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1998.

Hess, Frank, (1998) *Spinning Wheels*, Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution.

Lewis, A., (1996) *Believing in Ourselves: Progress and Struggle in Urban Middle School Reform, 1989-1995*. New York: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

McAdams, R., "A Systems Approach to School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan*, v79 no 2, Oct. 1997, pp. 138- 142.

Pogrow, S. "Reforming the Wannabe Reformers," *Phi Delta Kappan* June 1996.

Schorr, Lisbeth, (1998) *Common Purpose*, New York: Doubleday.

Shields, P., Knapp, M., "The Promised Limits of School Based Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan*, v79 no 4, Dec. 1997, pp. 288-294.

Tyack, D. and Cuban, L, (1995) *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

## INTERVIEWEES

*The Rockefeller Foundation and the authors of this report wish to thank the following people for sharing their time and opinions with us as a part of the SDP evaluation.*

### **Yale Child Development Center**

Dr. James Comer  
Edward Joyner  
Christine Emmons  
Jonathon Gillette  
Sherrie Joseph  
Valerie Maholmes  
Edna Negron (former staff)

### **School District Staff**

Boston, MA  
Thomas Payzant  
Dayton, OH  
James Williams  
Detroit, MI  
Minnie Mayes  
District 13, New York City  
Lester Young, Jr.  
Guilford County, NC  
Jerry Weast  
Lillie Jones  
Other Staff  
Prince George's County, MD  
Sheila Jackson  
San Diego, CA  
Jeana Preston  
Ann Van Sickle  
Deborah Beldock  
Other staff

### **State and Local Education Agencies**

Dan Holt, California Department of Education  
Joan Davies, Alameda(CA) County Office of Education

### **U. S. Department of Education**

William Kincaid  
Frank Sobol  
Kent McGuire

### **Congressional Staff**

Cheryl Smith, House Appropriations  
Sub-Committee

### **National Advocacy Organizations**

Ernesto Cortes, Texas Interfaith Education  
Fund  
Hugh Price, National Urban League

### **National Intermediary Organizations and Policy Experts**

Cynthia Brown, Council of Chief State  
School Officers  
Joyce Epstein, Johns Hopkins University  
Lisbeth Schorr, Harvard Project on Effective  
Services  
P. Michael Timpane, Rand Corporation  
Margaret Wang, Laboratory for Student  
Success  
Angela Blackwell, Policy Link

### **State and Local Intermediary Organizations**

Gordon MacInnes, New Jersey Institute for  
School Innovation

### **Postsecondary Education Institutions**

Education Department faculty Carmen Zuniga,  
Judy Ramirez, Sylvia Alva, California  
State University Fullerton  
Soraya Coley, Dean, School of Human  
Development and Community Service,  
California State University Fullerton  
Howard Adelman, University of California  
Los Angeles, Director, School Mental  
Health Program  
Judith Bippert, San Diego State University  
Allison Harmon, Eastern Michigan University  
Marilyn Stepney, San Francisco State  
University  
Jeffrey Kane, Dean, School of Education, C.W.  
Post Campus, Long Island University  
Dean Jerry H. Robbins, Eastern Michigan  
University

### **Evaluators**

Thomas Cook, Northwestern University  
Charles Payne, Duke University

### **Funders**

Paul Goren, MacArthur Foundation  
Michael Levine, Carnegie Corporation of  
New York  
Theodore Lobman, Stuart Foundations  
John Ziraldo, Skillman Foundation  
Sylvia Yee, Haas Foundation  
Ray Bachetti, Hewlett Foundation

---

## **Clinton Presidential Records Digital Records Marker**

---

This is not a presidential record. This is used as an administrative marker by the William J. Clinton Presidential Library Staff.

This marker identifies the place of a publication.

---

Publications have not been scanned in their entirety for the purpose of digitization. To see the full publication please search online or visit the Clinton Presidential Library's Research Room.

---



# **Challenging the Status Quo:**

**The Education Record  
1993-2000**