# THE RESULTS FIELDBOOK

Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools

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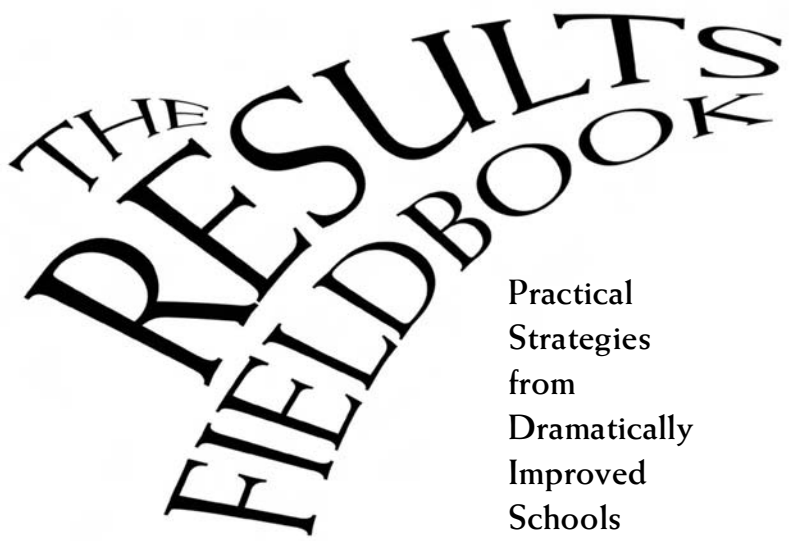


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Printed in the United States of America.

September 2001 member book (pcr). ASCD Premium, Comprehensive, and Regular members periodically receive ASCD books as part of their membership benefits. No. FY02-01.

ASCD Product No. 101001 ASCD member price: $20.95 nonmember price: $24.95
e-books ($24.95): Retail PDF ISBN 1-4166-0130-9

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Schmoker, Michael J.
The results fieldbook : practical strategies from dramatically improved schools / Mike Schmoker.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.
ISBN 0-87120-521-1 (alk. paper)
1. School improvement programs—United States—Case studies. 2. School management and organization—United States—Case studies. I. Title: Results fieldbook. II. Title.
LB2822.82 .S354 2001
371.2'00973—dc21
2001004223

09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

# THE RESULTS FIELDBOOK

## Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools

*This book is dedicated to the day when we regard TEACHERS and their organized expertise as the center of school improvement*

*and*

*to the teachers, administrators, and consultants whose obsession with student learning made this book possible.*

# Introduction: How Organized Teacher Expertise Is Redefining Reform

> How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of all children?
>
> —Ron Edmonds

The simple, core practices employed by the schools and five school systems in this book virtually cannot fail. Such processes, including the many creative extensions and adaptations described here, practically guarantee substantive and measurable school improvement. Eminently replicable, eminently adaptable, they produce results in both the short and long term. Like its predecessor, *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* (Schmoker, 1996, 1999), *The Results Fieldbook* shows how to cultivate and capture teacher expertise—one of the most grossly underused assets in education.

In this book we get a close, detailed look at how entire systems use these simple methods to succeed and spawn myriad other great ideas. Goal-oriented, data-driven collaboration, plus ongoing assessment in these school systems, led to an array of effective innovations and strategies. We can all learn from their collective treasury of methods to increase the effectiveness of schools everywhere.

A rapidly growing number of schools have made a momentous discovery: When teachers regularly and collaboratively review assessment data for the purpose of improving practice to reach measurable achievement goals, something magical happens. As we examine the individual schools and systems, it is significant to note that the core concepts employed by the schools are diverse and yet surprisingly similar.

The essential components described in *The Results Fieldbook* are hardly original. Other researchers, such as Michael Fullan, Susan Rosenholtz, and Judith Warren Little, to mention only a few, previously established the priority of practices like collaboration and data collection. As the key to wide-scale school improvement, however, these components both constitute and perpetuate a focus on results. Although they do not fully account for every improvement described here, collaboration, data collection, and goal-setting unlock and foster the emergence of a host

of improvement ideas and the implementation of the best "proven" programs and initiatives.

No process described in this book is beyond the ken of any school district. Moreover, the five core chapters and the individual school vignettes demonstrate that even early attempts at implementing these practices have a high probability of success.

I only wish I had space for all the schools and districts that I could have included here. Consider the findings of the now-famous EdTrust study, which identified 366 high-poverty schools in 21 states. These states beat the odds and reached exceptional levels of achievement by using "monitoring systems . . . for providing ongoing analysis of student achievement data" (Barth et al., 1999, p. 9). Equally important, teachers at these schools met regularly—monthly or more often—to discuss student performance against state standards in order to reach measurable achievement goals (Richardson, 1999).

Consider a recent article in *The Los Angeles Times*, which described the three most improved schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Helfand & Sahagun, 1999). What school practices and procedures made the difference?

- First, teachers aimed their efforts explicitly at the achievement of measurable learning goals.
- Second, they worked in teams to reach their goals. Teachers talked to one another about their work, got together regularly to analyze successes and failures, shared materials, and refined their instruction.
- Third, teachers made regular use of achievement data to identify and address areas of concern. Teacher teams "routinely assess student progress to target deficiencies and buttress strengths" (Helfand & Sahagun, 1999).

None of this is beyond imitation or adaptation in almost any setting. In the main, their procedures are simple and straightforward. Each chapter contains a sampling of teacher-designed instructional strategies that made a difference in each respective district. The discoveries you will make include the following:

- How Adlai Stevenson High School District near Chicago, Illinois, evolved from "already adequate" to world-class status—through leadership practices that any school leader could immediately benefit from and by making a religion of teamwork and teacher leadership.
- How the large, urban Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Public School District made remarkably rapid strides toward its ambitious goal of becoming "the first urban school district where all students reach high standards." You will hear about one of the jewels in their crown, a fast-growing set of schools known as the "90/90/90" schools. Ninety percent or more of the kids live below the poverty line, and 90 percent or more of the students are from minority populations. But 90 percent or more of them read at or above grade level, as measured by the Wisconsin Reading Assessment.
- How largely African American Oak Park schools near Detroit, Michigan, became a Michigan success story and why Governor John Engler touts them as an example of how a low-achieving school can experience a dramatic turnaround. Still a work in progress, Oak Park has attained its most exceptional achievements at the high school level.
- At Glendale Union High School District, near Phoenix, Arizona, you will see something exceedingly rare and urgently needed. It is a stunningly simple and mature system for implementing and refining data-driven *performance assessment* in every course—from art to physics to physical education.
- Finally, the Brazosport School District, near Houston, Texas, gives us a glimpse of a possible future. They achieved what all schools have every chance of someday becoming. It is a system where demographics exert no discernible influence on student performance. Disadvantage is transcended

by the force of an organized and optimistic effort to bring every child to grade level—no matter what.

Between the chapters on these five school systems, you will find brief vignettes—first-person, practitioner accounts of successful schools and districts that I had the privilege to work with or whose success was influenced by *Results*.

These systems and schools—and many others like them—argue for a new and much simplified conception of school "reform," a somewhat unfortunate term for the sense of failure it now evokes. They urge a far simpler, more direct—and therefore hopeful—model for school improvement. This new model is described in detail in the concluding chapter and illustrated graphically in Appendix G. The model is a synthesis of the best we can learn from all the schools and systems included in this book. It relies far more on internal expertise and on the fruits of teamwork to capture and multiply the effect of teacher collaboration through topical, continuously offered teacher-taught seminars. This model shows how to better address manifestly challenging skills and content. Other important themes include the following:

• The replication or adaptation of best practice still needs to be demystified. The notion that good strategies or systems do not travel well is too often overblown (Elmore, 2000, pp. 28–29). Almost any school could imitate or adapt the best features and techniques developed by these successful systems.

• Test-driven, measurable improvement—some caveats notwithstanding—is in fact almost always substantive improvement. A strident rejection of state and standardized tests has a shaky basis. It is counterproductive and ultimately harmful to both teacher morale and student learning (Schmoker, 2000).

• Like Stigler and Hiebert's "lesson fairs" (1999, p. 116), these processes showcase teachers' collaborative efforts to create and refine lessons and units. Such work results in immediate benefits for improved teaching and should be scheduled into the summer and school year without delay. These processes would replace much of what is now known as "staff development."

• *Leadership is as leadership does.* When it comes to defining effective leadership, we still flounder (Elmore, 2000; Gewertz, 2000). We need to build leadership around certain core questions and simple procedures that any leader could use to immediately improve the performance of schools.

• We need to put feckless, anemic teacher leadership efforts behind us to get *results-oriented* teacher leadership out of the blocks. Schools, districts, and states need to create and fund more opportunities for both leadership and responsibility for results.

Much depends on our willingness to engage rather than avoid such issues and opportunities. And time does matter. Right now, the life chances of many thousands of children hang on the actions we take. Their options, their ability to participate fully in the life of their communities depend on how soon and how vigorously we implement the best methods that these schools and systems graciously share in this book.

# Vignettes 1 and 2

## Vignette 1

Cuyamaca Elementary School and Crest Elementary School are located in the Cajon Valley Union School District, near San Diego, California. I visited in 1998, to consult with them on ways to work toward school improvement. One year later, nearly all 27 of Cajon Valley's K–8 schools realized gains on the Stanford 9 assessment, with especially significant advances in the early elementary grades.

Alice Rodriguez, former principal of Cuyamaca Elementary School and now coordinator of English language programs at the El Cajon Valley Union School District, reported on the progress made at Cuyamaca Elementary School. At Cuyamaca, 75 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

Between 1998 and 1999, Cuyamaca's students made gains in every area of the Stanford 9, with especially significant gains in their focus areas, reading, and writing. Their 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades averaged a 12-point national percentile gain in reading. The increase in the percentage of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile in writing between 1998 and 1999 can be seen in the following table:

| *Grade* | *1998* | *1999* | *Gain* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 2 | 47% | 60% | +13 |
| Grade 3 | 33% | 50% | +17 |
| Grade 4 | 26% | 37% | +11 |

Students improved their writing at each grade level. Third-grade writing gains brought them to first place among 22 elementary schools—higher than 11 non-Title I schools!

Alice Rodriguez reports:

Last year, Mike Schmoker came to Cajon Valley and discussed his book, *Results* (1999) with school teams. At Cuyamaca, we decided to follow up on his ideas. Each grade-level team chose a "rapid results" goal to improve in reading or writing. We reviewed *Results* in staff meetings and then began to use the processes we had learned to achieve rapid results.

Grade-level teams met monthly and used the 30-minute meeting agenda suggested by the book. At these sessions, teachers brainstormed for ideas to improve reading and writing for their grade level. We then chose the top three or

four strategies to implement. After one month of implementing these strategies, teachers attended grade-level meetings with their students' scored reading and writing work. The grade-level teams reviewed the work and brainstormed for the next set of strategies to implement. We shared the data on progress at each team meeting.

Grades 3–5 made gains in writing. Grades 2–4 improved in reading and language on the Stanford 9. Along with these gains, our score on the Academic Performance Index (API) increased significantly from 1998 to 1999. We made 85 points of growth. [Note: California's API reflects academic gain against socioeconomic factors. Cuyamaca's progress is a remarkable achievement.]

We celebrated our success by sharing the data from the Stanford 9 and the writing assessment with all staff and parents. We plan to continue the grade-level team process to show more growth in Spring 2000. We believe these processes made the difference. As you can see, Cuyamaca teachers were able to achieve some surprisingly rapid results!

As principal of Cuyamaca for eight years, and, now as a district office administrator, I agree with Mike Schmoker's findings in *Results*. One of our primary roles as administrators should be "the collection, dissemination, analysis, and discussion of success stories from within and outside our district."

Now that I am at the district office, I am recognizing and disseminating success stories in a number of ways. I'm sending e-mails to applaud successes and great ideas, to say "Hey, this is happening over here." I have an "Applause" column for good teaching in the bulletin that goes out to the bilingual facilitators, so that they can use these great ideas. We are discriminating in our recognition; we focus the applause on collegiality, results, and the use of best practices.

► *For further information, contact Alice Rodriguez, Coordinator of English Language Programs, Cajon Valley Union School District, 189 Roanoke Rd., P.O. Box 1007, El Cajon, CA 92022-1007; phone: 619-588-3278.*

# Vignette 2

Sue Geller is the principal at Crest Elementary School, a middle-class school in the Cajon Valley School District in California. Second-grade teachers Becky Harless, Claudia Garber, and Connie Pappa piloted a continuous improvement effort at the school. Their success is shown by the national percentile gains in 2nd grade in the following Stanford 9 results:

| *Subject* | *1998* | *1999* | *Gain* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | 53% | 73% | +20 |
| Math | 73% | 87% | +14 |
| Language | 54% | 78% | +24 |

Sue Geller reports:

At the beginning of the year, the 2nd grade team reviewed 2nd grade Stanford 9 data to look for focus areas to zero in on and to improve. Since the Stanford 9 is not administered until the 2nd grade, we reviewed the data from our school's 1st grade end-of-year assessment results, which includes Cajon Valley's reading and math performance assessments.

The 2nd grade team at Crest Elementary met on a frequent basis to discuss the curriculum and instructional strategies being used in the classroom and to select appropriate tools for student assessment. During these meetings, the teachers analyzed student work samples and identified intervention strategies when needed.

These grade-level team meetings enabled the teachers to continually review their instructional pacing to make sure that students were reaching their target benchmarks for each reporting period. We conducted individualized running record and performance assessments. We gauged student progress with developmental benchmark levels set forth by our district and with levels from the Wright Group reading series.

The data also helped us to group students in the appropriate instructional reading groups and to identify students needing more teaching—a double dose of what they did not learn initially.

Data from additional classroom assessments, such as the Silver-Burdett Ginn Language Arts and Scott Foresman/Addison-Wesley Math theme/chapter tests, were also used. This gave us a basis for ongoing dialogue to help us determine areas of weakness and to inform us of areas to modify in our instructional program.

Time is always the critical challenge for most elementary teachers who have no "official" prep period. In addition, because Crest is a small school, the teachers

have many adjunct duties; there just aren't as many teachers among whom to spread the duties around. Nonetheless, the 2nd grade team scheduled meetings every other week. For the future, creating release time for grade-level planning will be a priority for Crest.

Collaboration and ongoing dialogue was and continues to be a powerful tool for the 2nd grade team at Crest. It's critical for teachers to feel supported by their administrator and each other and to have the opportunity to learn from each other as we move our students toward academic success.

➤ *For further information, contact Sue Geller, Principal, Crest Elementary School, and 2nd grade teachers, Becky Harless, Claudia Garber, and Connie Pappa, at Cajon Valley Union School District, 189 Roanoke Rd., P.O. Box 1007, El Cajon, CA 92022-1007; phone: 619-588-3128.*