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ABSTRACT
                This paper presents findings of a case study that
evaluated the Effective Schools process implemented in the Clarke
County (Virginia) Public School District. The district received a
Chapter 2 grant in 1993 from the Virginia Department of Education to
implement Effective Schools processes. Implemented in 1989, the
school improvement project received the U.S. Senate's Productivity
Award in 1993. Implementing the process involved the following
stages: developing awareness and building-level support; defining
school climate; and training leadership teams through a
building-by-building process. Various aspects of the program are also
described, such as curriculum and instruction, high expectations for
students, frequent monitoring of students and programs, the use of
test scores, norms for collegiality, shared decision-making and
collaboration, home-school relations, and awards and recognitions.
Five tables are included. (LMI)

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A CASE STUDY

AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK FOR
PARTNERSHIPS IN SYSTEMIC REFORM

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In the fall of 1992, a case study was conducted of the Effective Schools process in the Clarke County, Virginia, public school district. That study was a part of the required evaluation of programs supported under Chapter 2 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended in 1988 by the Hawkins-Stafford School Improvement Amendments. State departments of education that chose to use any portion of the Chapter 2 grant for state purposes were legislatively mandated to set aside a portion (20 percent) of any amount reserved to facilitate implementation of Effective Schools processes. Virginia chose to meet this mandated function through a competitive grant program wherein all 135 school districts in the state were eligible to compete annually for four or five small grants amounting to $50,000 to support implementation of an Effective Schools - school improvement process. The grants were intended to provide an incentive for change rather than full funding of the improvement process.

Over a three-year period, thirteen districts received grants, and 156 schools were involved in the school improvement process. Most of the districts that received grants were committed to organizational restructuring and instructional renewal before the competitive grant program was initiated. In some instances, the grant provided the impetus for putting the school improvement process into effect. In others it provided the means to expand processes already in place. Staff development and professional training opportunities, stipends for work beyond normal working hours, and underwriting planning team expenses were the types of activities funded by the grants.

In partnership with the Xerox Corporation, the Virginia Department of Education also awarded grants that provided Commitment to Quality training for the staffs of eight school districts during the 1991-92 school year. The Clarke County public school system, a recipient in 1993 of the U.S. Senate's Productivity Award, was one of the districts that received the Commitment to Quality training. The district's participation in that training and its commitment to Quality provided an opportunity to study the effects of Effective Schools and Quality concepts that were integrated in the school improvement process.

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The Clarke County Community

Less than 60 miles from Washington D.C., Clarke County is rural in nature and has a population of 12,202. There has been some effort recently to include the county as a part of the greater Washington metropolitan area. County residents are employed primarily in farming, cattle production, manufacturing of wood furniture products, and in agencies of the county and the federal government. To some extent the county serves as a bedroom community for the Washington metropolitan area. A large number of its residents work in business and industrial organizations located in the metropolitan area as well as in agencies of the U.S. government. While predominantly middle income, the community mix encompasses a broad economic spectrum ranging from migrant and farm workers to wealthy landholders, many of the latter derive their wealth from long-held family industrial and farming enterprises. The racial/ethnic composition of the county is 90.2 percent Anglo-European-American, 7.8 percent African American, 1.4 percent Hispanic American, .2 percent Native American, and .4 percent Asian American.

The School District

Enrollment

1,600

Males	55%
Females	45%

Schools

Elementary (K-5)	3
Middle Schools (6-8)	1
High Schools (9-12)	1

Ethnic Composition

Anglo-European-American	90.2%
African-American	7.8%
Asian American	0.4%
Hispanic American	1.4%
Native American	0.2%

Number of Staff

Administrators	11
Certified Teachers	131
Paraprofessionals	18
Instructional and Educational Support	14
Clerical Support	154

Qualifying for Free or Reduced Price Meals

20%

Student/Teacher Ratio Average Class Size:

Pre-K through 3	14:1
Grades 4 through 5	19:1
Grades 6 through 8	17:1
Grades 9 through 12	14:1

Per Pupil Expenditure

1989 - 1990	$4,788
1990 - 1991	$5,309
1991 - 1992	$5,392
1992 - 1993	$5,075

College-Bound (Approximately

80%

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Structural Characteristics of the Educational System

The structure of the educational system in the United States has been described by Bowman and Deal (1991) as loosely coupled and comprised of multiple layers of semi-autonomous, sociopolitical organizations, groups, and individuals combined tenuously into a system, the purpose of which is to form, fund, and implement educational policy. Within that loosely coupled structure there are at least three formal organizational levels of control, the U. S. Department of Education, the Departments of Education of the fifty plus states and outlying areas, and the thousands of individual local school boards. At the federal level, the U. S. Constitution does not specifically mention education; however, the general welfare clause is interpreted to provide a basis for Congress to enact legislation that establishes educational policy and to provide funds for its implementation. In recent years, the role and functions of the U. S. Department of Education have been extended, as have been the nature and areas of its control and influence. In no sense, however, is that department a national ministry of education as that term is understood in many countries (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand and Usdan, 1975).

Each of the fifty states has a body of school laws comprised of constitutional and statutory provisions, court decisions, and administrative regulations. These laws, which specify or imply the powers and duties of legislatures, state departments of education, state and local school boards, and other official bodies, are consistent with the historical assumption underlying the organization of education in the United states. That assumption is that, "Each state should be responsible for the education of its citizens, but school districts should be organized as needed, and the responsibility for providing, organizing, administering, and operating schools and programs of education in accordance with state policies and requirements should be delegated to them" (Morphet, Johns, and Reller, 1974, p. 282). The extreme localism implied in this assumption is increasingly rare today. However, few if any citizens of the United States would suggest that the actual operation of schools should be placed in the hands of the federal

government, or suggest that operational control should rest with the state. Yet a growing number, perhaps most, would agree that the loosely coupled, tenuously combined, traditional system that had served the country in the past could no longer meet the changing educational needs of society, thereby necessitating that new relationships be forged within the system.

In 1983, a landmark study, A Nation at Risk, warned Americans that the quality of education in the nation was "perched precariously on the brink of disaster" (Cetron and Gayle, 1991, xi). For the first time, citizens of the United States were told that their children did significantly less well than students in other industrial nations, and could not hope to compete academically with them unless there were dramatic changes in the educational system. Americans were faced with the dire prediction that their children would very likely become the unskilled labor pool of the global market, inheritors of a nation in social and economic decline.

Various school reform efforts were initiated throughout the early- and mid-eighties in an attempt to reverse the direction of public education. It was a period of searching for innovative programs and practices in an effort to promote excellence--a time of tinkering with the edges of the educational system. A Nation at Risk had warned of systemic failure. The reform efforts of the early eighties, however, failed to address systemic problems.

Changing Assumptions: A Need for Partnerships

The pressure for change in the educational system came from a variety of sources--the federal government, state legislatures, the business community, concerned citizens, and professional educational organizations. Jobs for unskilled workers disappeared in alarming numbers throughout the 1980's, many of them transferred to countries where labor costs were much cheaper. States in the industrial and agrarian heartland were left devoid of many of the jobs on which their economic health depended. In addition, as the cold war threat receded, downsizing of the armed forces had a deleterious impact on state economies. The exodus of private sector and defense-related

jobs hastened the realization that the country's future would depend on whether education could provide the highly educated, skilled workers that a rapidly expanding technology-based economic system demanded.

There had always been the question of how balance could be effected that would address local concerns about education, state responsibility for it, and the achievement of national goals within it. At issue were assumptions based on tradition and law about the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of all the agencies, boards, and individuals that combined to form the system of public education. The codification of the Effective Schools Research school improvement process into federal law in 1988, in the Hawkins-Stafford Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, provided a means for forging new and more cooperative relationships among the formal organizational levels of public education. Another event within the same relative time frame was the recognition of the work of Edwards W. Deming in the area of Total Quality Management. Turn-around successes of some of the major business concerns in the country were credited to the use of Deming's organizational philosophy and problem-solving strategies.

Researchers of the Effective Schools process began to develop strategies for integrating Deming's work into the school improvement process (Stampen, 1987). Leaders in the business world recognized that a skilled work force was essential to the survival of business in the United States and formed partnerships with education to assure that lessons learned in either domain were shared by both. The partnerships formed may presage a new and less tenuously combined structure for the country's educational system--perhaps, a coordinated and collaborative structure that supports and sustains systemic educational reform.

Effective Schools: A Framework for Systemic Change

The characteristics of effective schools codified into law in the Hawkins-Stafford Amendments came directly from the work of Ronald Edmonds. In his characterization of effective schools, Edmonds said:

(a) They have strong administrative leadership without which the

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disparate elements of good schooling can neither be brought together
nor kept together;

(b) Schools that are instructionally effective for poor children have a
climate of expectation in which no children are permitted to fall
below minimum but efficacious levels of achievement;

(c) The school's atmosphere is orderly without being rigid, quiet
without being oppressive, and generally conducive to the instructional
business at hand;

(d) Effective schools get that way partly by making it clear that pupil
acquisition of basic school skills takes precedence over all other school
activities;

(e) When necessary, school energy and resources can be diverted from
other business in furtherance of the fundamental objectives; and

(f) There must be some means by which pupil progress can be
frequently monitored. These means may be as traditional as
classroom testing on the day's lesson or as advanced as criterion-
referenced system-wide standardized measures. The point is that
some means must exist in the school by which the principal and the
teachers remain constantly aware of pupil progress in relationship to
instructional objectives (Edmonds, 1979, p. 8).

These characteristics are listed frequently without clarifying or exemplifying
statements, and are referred to as the correlates of effective schools--a term used to
suggest an interrelatedness among the characteristics. In general, Edmonds' work was
considered to have delineated only five correlates; however, it is apparent that at least six
of the seven correlates usually listed in the literature about effective schools are indicated
in his work. The seven most frequently referenced correlates are listed as: (1) Strong
administrative and instructional leadership; (2) A clear and focused mission; (3) A safe
and orderly environment conducive to learning; (4) High expectations for student
success; (5) Opportunity to learn and time on task; (6) Frequent monitoring of student
progress; and (7) Positive home-school relationships. Edmonds indicated that he
believed that a positive home-school relationship was important and desirable in the
effective school. However, he insisted that improved academic performance was more
directly affected by what occurred in the school than by relationships that may exist
between it and the parents or the community from which its students came (National
Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, 1989).

Earlier work in the study of effective schools had indicated that the locus of

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improvement was the individual school. Thus, when early researchers talked about instructional or administrative leadership they referred primarily to the school principal. However, prior to Edmond's death in 1983, he, his close associate Lawrence W. Lezotte, and a cadre of researchers had begun to look more closely at the processes employed in schools where improved achievement gains where sustained as opposed to those where gains where lost over a period of time, or where a change of leadership had occurred and gains were dramatically reversed. They discovered that long-term school improvement required a systemic approach, that gains were sustained when school and district-level commitment was secured, and when resources were directed specifically to the improvement process. These studies set in motion an evolutionary phase in effective schools-school improvement research that continued throughout the eighties, and into the nineties. This phase of the research has used and developed strategies for integrating into the Effective Schools process those methods and practices applied in effective organizations in domains other than education. Thus the Effective Schools Research model embraces a systemic change approach that, (1) involves the study and application of organizational theory and strategies that include the concept of continuous improvement, and (2) that, when defined in the context of the educational organization and in the effective school, refers to increased and continuously improving achievement.

Implementing the Improvement Process

The Virginia State Department of Education chose to facilitate the federal, state, and local school improvement partnership that was mandated in the 1988 Hawkins-Stafford Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by encouraging districts, through the competitive grant program, to accept the Effective Schools improvement model as a systemic change process. In applying for grants, districts were required to indicate what students in their schools would be expected to know and be able to do; how issues of equity would be addressed, and what assessment methods would be used to determine the extent to which students achieved expected outcomes at acceptable levels of mastery. All districts and schools that received grants were required to develop

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a process to collect, analyze, and use disaggregated achievement data, and in that data to show, over time, a decrease in, or no significant difference in, the proportional representation of students at any academic achievement level based on race, sex, or socioeconomic status. There was also the expectation that once the district's schools achieved evidence of quality and equity, they would maintain or improve on those achievement levels for a period of three to five years. School districts were required to be data driven, focused on academic achievement, and to utilize a research-based approach to support the efficacy of practices and processes implemented in their restructuring and reform efforts.

Developing Awareness and Building Level Support

An initial step in any change process is developing awareness and readiness on the part of stakeholders. In the Clarke County district, the awareness and readiness stage began in 1989. A new superintendent had been appointed who understood that the future of public education would depend on the ability of that institution to provide quality education for all children--quality education defined as concurrent evidence of excellence and equity.

Aware that change could neither occur, nor be sustained without the active commitment of the local school board and support of tne administrative and instructional leadership in the county's schools, the newly appointed school superintendent made an effort to insure that stakeholder in the district would be able to approach the change process with a common understanding of what was involved and a common language that could be used in that involvement. School board members, central office staff, and building principals were introduced to Effective Schools Research through published materials, video tapes, and discussion groups. In September of 1989, following an initial introduction to the research, a district leadership team was appointed and study of the process continued. By January 1990, plans were developed for implementing the process and the entire leadership team composed of the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the director of instructional services, a principal, and six teachers

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attended a five-day effective schools seminar.

The seminar provided further training for team members on the processes and practices used in implementing the Effective Schools improvement model. In turn, team members were able to provide training for all professional and nonprofessional school personnel, including school bus drivers, and cafeteria, custodial, clerical, and paraprofessional staffs. Underlying the broad-based staff training was the belief that all who came into contact with children in the district's schools had an important role to play in the teaching and learning process. School improvement teams were then formed in each school.

School Climate and Culture. In its mission statement, the district leadership team defined effective schooling in Clarke County as schooling to, "maximize student learning in an environment that promotes staff involvement and parental and community cooperation." The team established system goals that were proposed to facilitate the achievement of that mission. Those goals were; (1) to promote involvement and enhance professional development of all staff; (2) to promote outstanding student achievement, high standards and expectations; (3) to promote student personal growth so that each student would become a responsible, contributing member of society; (4) to promote community support and involvement in schools; and (5) to develop a communications plan that would ensure that the mission and goals of the district were accomplished.

Leadership in a Building by Building Process

Research has suggested that school improvement is a "building by building" process. It is not a process that can be implemented or sustained when imposed top-down. Most research, however, recognizes that the building-level school improvement process is sustained best when the central administration provides leadership and support for the school-based improvement team. In such instances, central office personnel serve a supportive rather than a directive role that allows the building-level team to assess and address its improvement needs in an environment free of the fear of failure. The Clarke County superintendent and the school board chose to assume a supportive role as they prepared to provide the staff with information about and

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research on effective schools and the school improvement process in readiness for district-wide implementation.

In August 1990, after the leadership team had trained staff in all schoc's, building-level teams were formed. During the 1990-91 academic year the schoo-based teams began the development of their individual, school improvement plans. In the early stages of implementing the process, the districts "all point" implementation strategy caused some difficulties. It also provided some valuable lessons. Quickly, the leadership team realized that each school's state of readiness and approach to the improvement process could not be hurried and that progress toward implementation would invariably differ, sometimes dramatically, from one school to another.

Needs assessments were conducted in each building to determine the extent to which staff perceived the effective schools correlates to exist. Results of the assessment were used to guide the school's change process. Even after general acceptance of the notion in each of the district's schools that change was warranted, there were different degrees of willingness to recognize and give priority to problems, to accept the responsibility for planning the improvement process, to establish goals and benchmarks, and, ultimately, to set realistic time lines for achievement. Despite these differences, each of the five schools in the district developed improvement plans that were reviewed by the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, and the director of instructional services prior to implementation. Although all plans were accepted as submitted, the review process provided an opportunity for consultation on, and if needed, for revision of the plans.

The District Role

The $50,000 Effective Schools competitive grant received by the district was proposed to support its effort to (1) achieve improved home-school and community relationships; (2) bring about acceptance of the concept of shared responsibility for learning; (3) provide instructional development programs that emphasized high

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expectations for teachers, staff, parents, and students; (4) increase the level of student academic achievement; and (5) develop an evaluation program to measure student success and attitudes about school.

The funds were used primarily to support supplemental academic and complementary educational services for a group of approximately sixty students in grade levels six through ten in a project designed to decrease the incidence of school dropouts, increase academic performance, and bolster students' self-esteem. This component of the county's effort to address the needs of students considered at risk of failure or dropping out of school was initiated in January 1992, and entitled, "Learning in Networks with Caring Support," or L.I.N.C.S.

Expanding Learning Opportunities

Curriculum and Instruction. In the Effective Schools Research, the primary purpose of the school is "teaching for learning." Reflected in that statement is the fact that the core technology of elementary and secondary education is instruction and that teaching occurs within a community of learners whose needs and skills will vary widely; whose backgrounds may differ radically; and whose moods may fluctuate dramatically depending upon a host of variables (Bowman and Deal, 1991). The Clarke County district attempted to address the improvement needs of those in the entire school community. Professional personnel were offered opportunities to seek advanced degrees in core subject areas as well as in pedagogical areas. Teaching personnel were offered opportunities to acquire in-service training designed to acquaint and equip them with a variety of innovative and/or validated instructional strategies. Professional and nonprofessional personnel were involved in acquiring problem-solving skills and strategies for diagnosing and solving problems of organizational structure, environment, and/or, culture that affect the teaching-learning process.

The district was innovative in securing funding for some of the staff training and development opportunities it provided. Working cooperatively with neighboring Shenandoah University, it sponsored and made available to school personnel in surrounding districts training on organizational and instructional effectiveness. Monies

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derived from these activities were used to fund enrollment in the cooperatively offered courses for Clarke County teachers and administrators. In addition to the funds generated through the cooperative effort with Shenandoah University, approximately two percent of the district budget was used to support staff development.

The district provided incentives to professional staff that allowed them to pursue educational advancement, and offered a wide variety of staff development activities. During the 1991-92 school year, the district established a contractual relationship with a nationally known consultant who worked with the staff in each of the district's schools, and provided strategies designed to help sustain and renew the Effective Schools process through integration with the Quality Commitment principles. That same school year, 1991-92, the Virginia Department of Education entered into a partnership with the Xerox Corporation, which provided a grant for training state and local school personnel on the Commitment to Quality principles. As a grant recipient, Clarke County sent a cadre of staff for training and the district gained an arsenal of diagnostic and problem-solving tools that complemented the Effective Schools process. In selecting personnel to participate in the Quality training program, the district again reflected it's belief that every adult in the school was important to the school improvement process. Representatives of all occupational areas and staff levels were involved in the Commitment to Quality Trainers Training.

High Expectations for Student Success. The district's effort to adopt innovative strategies responsive to the needs of its students was exemplified in the L.I.N.C.S. project that was designed and implemented for students whose prior academic background might have predicted that they would drop out of school or experience failure. The project employed a variety of strategies to preclude either of those events from occurring. Originally initiated to serve approximately sixty students in grades six through ten, the program was extended in the second year of operation into the elementary schools to serve fifth-grade students. Academic class grades, scores on standardized tests and teacher referrals were used as the bases for recruitment of students to participate in the program. The after-school project engaged participants in academically and socially supportive activities geared to address individual needs. Not initiated as a tutorial project

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in the strictest sense, the project offered students assistance from caring adults in a wide range of areas and provided them with a safe and orderly after-school educational alternative. Students who might not have been members of the "in crowd" in the larger student body, were given "a place to go where they counted, and people with whom they could communicate that cared."

As more data become available on this project, its effectiveness as an intervention strategy will need to be validated. Data collected after nearly two years of operation suggest that the strategy may yield more positive results when it is introduced and used as an early intervention strategy in the upper elementary and middle school grades.

Frequent Monitoring of Students and Programs. The district used a variety of statistical measures to assess and compare the degree to which achievement goals were met. Statistics were kept on student attendance, suspension rates, student dropout rates, achievement on standardized tests, and other issues related to overall school effectiveness. The data were used to monitor and assess trends, whether positive or negative, and to establish priorities in the school improvement process. In addition to frequent monitoring of student performance and program effectiveness, the district regularly conducted surveys to determine the level of satisfaction with the educational process. Teachers, parents, professional, and nonprofessional employees, as well as students were surveyed to assess and monitor the impact of the district's programs and activities.

Indicative of its belief in the concept of continuous improvement, the district established yearly benchmarks based on analysis of internal achievement data as goals toward which the district would strive. In addition to the internally established benchmarks, the district identified another high-performing district in the state, investigated factors that contributed to its success, and established benchmarks for district performance against the achievement levels of the selected higher performing district.

Use of Test Scores. Test scores were used in the district for a variety of purposes: to identify students in need of programs of instructional intervention; to identify areas of

misalignment between taught and tested curriculum; to assess effectiveness of programs and intervention strategies; and to establish benchmarks for continuous improvement or higher levels of performance. In order for the district to determine whether the programs and practices it employed addressed issues of quality and equity adequately, all student achievement data were disaggregated by race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The disaggregation of data allowed the district to assess whether overall student achievement data masked instructional or programmatic needs among student sub-population groups, and allowed them, when necessary, to develop strategies to address the identified needs.

A Literacy Passport Test (LPT) comprised of three, annually revised, criterion-referenced test components is required for matriculation as a high school student in Virginia. These test components are designed to identify students in the sixth grade who have not acquired skills in reading, math, and writing sufficient to predict successful mastery of academic requirements that will confront students in high school. A scale score of 250 or more is required for passing each test component. A student who does not pass the tests in the sixth grade may take them again in the seventh and eighth grades. A student must pass all three test components to be classified as a ninth-grade student.

The district adopted and implemented a language arts program that used a whole language approach in an effort to better prepare students in the skill and competency areas included in the Literacy Passport. It also dedicated the time of a teacher to provide instructional services to students who did not pass th~ ¹est. These actions exemplify how test data are used in making curriculum, instruction, or resource allocation decisions, and how the district has attempted to assure an alignment between taught and tested curriculum.

Literacy Passport Test results from 1990 through 1993 that were the basis of these instructional and curricular actions are shown in the tables that follow. Generally, as shown in Table 1, the district's students fared well on the Passport when their pass percentages were compared with those of students across the state.

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Table 1.--The Virginia Literacy Passport, Grade 6, All test components, 1990-1993

	State				Clarke				
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1990	1991	1992	1993	1993 N/H *
Total	65%	72%	64%	69%	55%	79%	74%	76%	79%
Male	60%	68%	58%	65%	57%	71%	67%	76%	77%
Female	71%	76%	69%	74%	64%	85%	85%	76%	80%
Black	46%	53%	43%	48%	58%	69%	80%	54%	70%
White	72%	79%	71%	77%	62%	82%	73%	78%	79%
Handicapped	24%	30%	26%	29%	7%	n/a	31%	62%	

*Indicates pass percentage with scores of handicapped students excluded

Over the four-year period, 1990 through 1993, when data for Clarke County students were disaggregated by gender and race and compared with statewide data from 1990 through 1993, only in 1990 did statewide pass percentages exceed those of students in Clarke County. The exception in 1990 was the pass rate of black students in Clarke County which exceeded that of black students statewide.

In 1993, 76 percent of the district's sixth-grade students passed all three components of the test compared to a statewide percentage rate of 69 percent. The percentage of Clarke County students who passed all components of the test within each of the population sub-groups also exceeded statewide within sub-group pass percentages, although the pass percentages of Clarke County female and black students did decline in 1993. However, when pass percentages were calculated for Clarke County students to exclude scores of handicapped students, pass percentages increased for all population sub-groups and the increase was most notable in the female and the black student sub-groups.

Tables 2 - 4 respectively provide data comparing the performance of Clarke County students over the four-year period, 1990 through 1993, on each of the three component parts of the testing program: mathematics, reading, and writing. Table 2, shows that the percentage rate of students in Clarke County who passed the mathematics portion of the test exceeded that of students across the state in each of the four years.

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Table 2.--The Virginia Literacy Passport, Grade 6, Math, 1990-1993

	State				Clarke			
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1990	1991	1992	1993
Total	82%	87%	85%	87%	83%	93%	96%	96%
Male	78%	84%	82%	85%	84%	90%	100%	95%
Female	85%	90%	88%	89%	93%	94%	97%	98%
Black	68%	76%	72%	74%	89%	88%	100%	90%
White	86%	90%	90%	91%	88%	93%	98%	97%
Handicapped	43%	52%	53%	56%	40%	n/a	77%	91%

The percentage of all Clarke County sixth-grade students who passed the reading component of the Literacy Passport in 1990 was less than the pass percentage statewide. In 1991 through 1993, the pass percentage of Clarke County students exceeded that of students across the state, but pass percentages of female and white students fell in 1992 and were slightly below that of students in those population sub-groups statewide. These percentages are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.--The Virginia Literacy Passport, Grade 6, Reading, 1990-1993

	State				Clarke			
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1990	1991	1992	1993
Total	82%	81%	79%	82%	76%	90%	86%	83%
Male	80%	80%	77%	80%	80%	85%	97%	89%
Female	85%	83%	81%	83%	79%	93%	86%	80%
Black	69%	66%	63%	65%	74%	94%	100%	80%
White	87%	87%	85%	88%	80%	89%	92%	85%
Handicapped	48%	47%	47%	49%	53%	n/a	41%	71%

As shown in Table 4, the percentage of Clarke County students passing the writing component of the test met or exceeded the state pass percentage for the first time in 1992, and in 1993 pass percentages in the district continued to improve.

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Table 4.--The Virginia Literacy Passport, Grade 6, Writing, 1990-1993

	State				Clarke			
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1990	1991	1992	1993
Total	77%	85%	75%	81%	68%	82%	82%	89%
Male	72%	81%	69%	75%	69%	74%	75%	84%
Female	83%	89%	81%	87%	83%	88%	95%	98%
Black	64%	76%	61%	67%	74%	65%	89%	90%
White	82%	89%	80%	86%	77%	85%	83%	90%
Handicapped	45%	55%	46%	51%	13%	n/a	69%	81%

Table 5 compares the percentages of sixth-grade students in Virginia and in Clarke County passing the reading section of the Virginia Literacy Passport Tests over the four-year period, 1990 through 1993.

Table 5:-The Virginia Literacy Passport Test, grade 6 reading, Clarke County pass percentage compared to state percentage, 1990-1993

	Clarke			
	1990	1991	1992	1993
State:	82%	81%	79%	82%
Clarke:	76%	90%	86%	83%

Norms of Collegiality. The Effective Schools process has had a major impact on how employees of the district see themselves and their roles in the educational process; how students perceive the school; and how parents and the community relate to and perceive the school. Interviews with school principals and members of the teaching staff elicited comments such as, "I never believed before that I would be allowed to make some of the changes that have occurred in this school."

"The way we do things now is not the way they were always done."

"Now I know that we can be innovative and try new things to solve our problems. We can make changes if we believe that they will benefit the children we serve and increase their opportunity to learn."

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School personnel also acknowledged that the process that gave them greater flexibility and provided them with new decision-making prerogatives did not necessarily make their work easier or their position more comfortable.

"Now, I'm expected to do right things, right. I never believed that I could do that before," said one principal. "That means that if something goes wrong, I'm responsible for it. I have to fix it. But I know that I can get help if I need it."

Another member of the instructional staff said, "I probably work harder now. But I'm not afraid that if I try to do what I think is right, I'll get in trouble for it."

Administrative and instructional personnel concurred that the empowerment that had come with the Effective Schools process stimulated them to think creatively about new ways to solve old problems, and to forestall or address new ones. They also acknowledged that their innovative efforts were not always totally successful. What was important, however, was that learning took place. For example, administrators and staff agreed that they had learned better ways to assess programs and achievement and to make corrections that would lead to continuous improvement in the instruction and achievement of students.

Shared Decision Making and Collaboration. Staff involvement, empowerment, and participation were important elements of the school improvement process. From the inception of the process in the district, opportunities were provided for staff to have input into issues of policy and the development of procedures that might affect the teaching and learning process. The district leadership team was purposefully designed to include a majority of teachers. Their presence on the team was intended to provide assurances that as a group their needs and concerns were important, would be heard, and would be dealt with on a continuing basis.

Building-level school improvement teams were given the authority to identify instructional or organizational problems and to recommend solutions to the entire faculty. Each school was given control over a certain amount of money to be used to purchase materials and equipment or to provide for staff development and conference travel, whichever use the faculty of the school deemed more important to strengthening the teaching-learning process.

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Home-school relations. The district considered home-school relations to be one of the major components of its school improvement process. Parents were surveyed annually to determine the degree to which they perceived that district schools had responded to the needs of their children and had encouraged and welcomed parental involvement. The district received impressively high ratings from parents in response to its questionnaires. Parents of the students in the L.I.N.C.S. project, students whose overall academic achievement might place them at risk of failing or dropping out of school were surveyed separately. Although the response percentage was relatively low, only about one-third of the sample actually responded to the survey, 80 percent of the respondents agreed strongly with the statement, "When I have a question or concern about my son or daughter, I feel comfortable in calling his or her teacher for an answer." Twenty percent of the respondents indicated mild agreement with that statement. Less positive were the responses to the statement, "I feel welcomed by the school to come and visit my son's or daughter's class." Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicated strong agreement, while 45 percent indicated mild agreement.

Awards and Recognition. Intrinsic as well as extrinsic awards and recognition were given in the district. Letters that recognized achievement, or acknowledged contributions that had been made to the school program were written to schools or to individuals by the superintendent. Staff were provided opportunities to make presentations to the school board, to attend and make presentations at state and national conferences, and were encouraged and given incentives to pursue advanced degrees or engage in other professional development activities. Student achievement data were reported regularly in press releases, newsletters, and school board reports. The school board, the board of county supervisors, and the school superintendent regularly discussed in public forums the accomplishments of the school system. There were also a host of informal celebrations among professional and nonprofessional staff to recognize the contributions of individuals, teams, and schools, as well as the accomplishments of the district.

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A Framework for Systemic Change

It is obvious that the challenge facing education in the United States is very real and immediate. If the nation is to survive as an economic leader in the global market, that challenge must be met. Equally obvious is the fact that to meet the challenge, the country's educational system must undergo systemic change. Tenuous linkages between the formal organizational levels of the system must be coordinated. Also, structural controls that currently flow from regulatory provisions tied to fiscal resources must be relaxed or removed and replaced with performance goals and standards that are tied to a performance-based accountability system. At both the federal and state levels there must be a willingness to regulate less. At the local level there must be the readiness to be held more accountable for results.

No recipe can be provided for the redesign of public education, no quick fix is available--but there is a framework for school improvement in the Effective Schools Research model. There are lessons to be learned through partnerships with business and other public and private agencies. Those who have started on the journey of continuous improvement can share what they have learned--the successes and pitfalls they have faced, the processes and strategies they have employed, the methods for reallocating resources or for abandoning nonessential things in order to concentrate vital resources on the teaching-learning process--but they cannot chart the course for others. Systemic reform, requires that we recognize that in each organization, the needs and skills of people vary widely; backgrounds differ radically; and moods and readiness for change fluctuate dramatically (Bowman and Deal, 1991). Each organization involved in systemic reform must become a learning organization. It must ensure that the needs that will allow those in the system to commit to the systemic change process are met, and that opportunities are provided that will increase skills so that needed change can occur.

The Clarke County public school district implemented the Effective Schools Research model for school improvement in 1989. Four years later, it was a recipient of the U.S. Senate's Productivity Award, an honor accorded only one public agency in each of the fifty states. In four short years, the district made impressive strides toward

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accomplishing its achievement goals. Systemic change includes moments of heartbreak and moments of triumph, and in the school improvement process the Clarke County district has experienced both. In that process, however, it has made progress in improving the achievement of all of its students, and exemplifies what must be done in every school and in every district across the country.

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