

# INTEGRATING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS FOR SUCCESSFUL REFORM IN DIVERSE CONTEXTS

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## **Integrating Educational Systems for Successful Reform in Diverse Contexts**

Linguistic, ethnic, and economic diversity are major factors influencing how school reform ought to be accomplished at local, state, and government levels. This book examines the issue of educational reform in diverse communities. It is the first to synthesize educational research on educational reform pertaining to racially and linguistically diverse students. It examines what is needed at the teacher, school, district, state, and federal levels for educational reform to be successful in multicultural, multilingual settings. Conclusions are based on a careful review of hundreds of recent quantitative and qualitative studies relating to educational reform in diverse communities. The authors conceptualize education as an interconnected and interdependent policy system and discuss the key policy, relational, political, and resource linkages that assist in achieving sustainable improvement in schools serving at-risk students.

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## Introduction

### PURPOSE

This book reports the findings of an extensive review of literature of research on educational reform in school systems serving racially and linguistic minority youth. Our aim is to identify strategies for supporting reform in educational settings serving these students. In doing so, we place particular emphasis on identifying the linkages between systemic levels (e.g., school, district, community) that are important in the process of school improvement.

Thus, the purpose of the volume is to develop an understanding of what might be needed at the teacher, school, district, state, and federal levels for educational reform to be successful in multicultural, multilingual settings. We define reform as an innovation intended to improve education (e.g., standards-based reform, site-based management, school reconstitution), rather than simply a change for change sake. We know from prior research that reform will rarely succeed without coordinated support from multiple levels (e.g., school, district, state), and that reform is rarely sustained if built on technical models alone. Political support and belief changes are required at multiple levels of the system. Instead of trying to identify “one best system,” the goal of this volume is to identify approaches that are adaptable and contextually sensitive. In particular, our aim is to identify strategies for supporting reform in school systems serving culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

## RULES OF EVIDENCE AND INCLUSION

This review of research covers studies that were conducted between 1983 and 2004. However, the majority of research reviewed was conducted between the mid-1990s and 2003. We chose 1983 as the beginning point because that is the year in which *A Nation At Risk* was published, a report that placed school reform on national, state, and local agendas. Another significant marker for the research we are reviewing is O'Day and Smith's (1993) proposal for systemic reform, which sparked a significant amount of research and policy change across the country. We include primarily research conducted in the United States.

We reviewed both quantitative and qualitative research. We attempted to apply rigorous, yet practical standards for inclusion. In terms of quantitative research, we attempted to focus on quasi-experimental studies of student achievement that use matched control group designs. However, the number of studies that fit this criterion is limited, and we have also included a limited number of other quantitative studies that meet relatively high standards of quality. We have also included survey research, where applicable.

In terms of qualitative research, we included longitudinal case studies or shorter but rigorous ethnographic studies. We did not include qualitative studies that involve very limited time spent in schools or with very limited numbers of interviews and/or observations or those that were journalistic in nature. We did not include purely theoretical or opinion pieces, but included thoroughly researched historical studies.

Finally, some of the scholarship that addresses policy-level issues, particularly regarding federal policy, is primarily descriptive. For example, the creation of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), including Titles I and VII, the series of federal special education suits, and their historic funding levels are simply matters of public record.

Given that we are seeking to focus on reform in multilingual or multicultural contexts, we only included research that took place in settings that are racially and/or linguistically diverse. Most urban areas in the United States are racially diverse; thus, we did not find our criteria for racial diversity to be a limiting factor. However, the

research on reform in linguistically diverse settings is much more limited. As Goldenberg (1996) pointed out in his review of effective schooling for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students,

The biggest gap seems to be in studies that examine processes, substance, and outcomes of strategies for making schools more effective and successful for LEP students. The paucity of such research is striking, particularly if we consider the vast literature on effective schools and school change that has emerged since the 1970s and the concomitant rise in LEP students in U.S. schools. Even studies with the potential to shed light on issues of successful schooling for LEP students often do not do so. For example, Chasin and Levin (1995) provide a case study of an “Accelerated School” (elementary level) where 13 different languages were spoken, but they do not report students’ English-learning status, address concerns that are specific to their educational experiences, nor report changes in any outcomes for these students. Similarly, Wilson and Corcoran (1988) report on secondary schools that are successful with “at risk” – poor and minority – students. Since the schools had sizable Asian and Latino populations, it is almost certain that many of these students were LEP, but again, language backgrounds and English-learning status of students are not addressed. (Goldenberg 1996, p. 1)

We found the same to be true in this review of literature a decade later. Goldenberg (1996) said, “However, findings from the more ‘generic’ effective schools research are probably applicable to LEP students, even if LEP issues are not specifically highlighted nor directly addressed. Indeed, these findings probably serve as reasonable starting points, although obviously a number of other factors related to language, culture, or immigration experience are also likely to come into play for LEP students” (p. 1). We proceeded with our review in a similar fashion, highlighting the diverse contexts in which the research took place, even if the authors of the studies did not see them as salient to their findings.

We have generally limited our review to research that focuses on *reform*, with the exception of research focused on the school level because we believed there was important research on school effectiveness that needed to be included. Also, the chapter on the role of the reform design team addresses issues of school-level reform. We also tried to find as many studies as possible that deal with at least two levels of the system (e.g., state and district, district and school). Our focus is such because our synthesis team

activity focused on identifying linkages between levels; hence, we reviewed research that speaks to these linkages. The linkages are perhaps most explicit in the chapters that address the state, district, and community, where the majority of studies were found.

We hypothesize that examining linkages across policy domains will provide insights that can inform the fields of educational research, policy development, and evaluation. However, in trying to identify the linkages between the domains that make up the policy system, it became readily apparent that there is a dearth of empirical research that has as its primary goal identifying or describing such linkages. This gap in the reform literature reflects a systemic weakness in understanding why reform efforts have not been more successfully sustained.

A linkage is in essence a bridge between at least two policy domains. It creates the connection between two otherwise disconnected points. It is an expression of existing capacity, while also being a potential aspect of capacity building. Linkages can be formal, as in official mandates or policies, or informal, as in telephone communications or e-mails between colleagues. Linkages can also be structural, as with funding that comes from states or the federal government to support schools. They can also be relational, as when district leaders work with friends or professional colleagues in the community as a way to develop partnerships.

Linkages can be ideological. This is especially important when reform stakeholders hold different beliefs or ideologies about the purposes of reform, how reform should look, or how it should be achieved. Linkages can be created, destroyed, or simply not used when implementing reform. Coordination of the movement of human and material resources across the linkage is as important as the linkage between two policy domains. A linkage is only a passageway or pathway between two or more policy domains; it is not necessarily reflective of how it is (or is not) used, nor is it reflective of the quality of the resources or communications that cross it.

Our volume begins with a conceptual framework. We then proceed to a review of research on reform by level (e.g., school, district, community, state, design team, federal). In each case, we use the particular level as a lens through which to review linkages with other



levels and to identify key areas of capacity building to support reform implementation. In all cases, the effect on the school level is highlighted because this is the arena of central interest. We then discuss the methodological issues in the study of systemic integration for effective reform and close with a review of key points, implications, and directions for future research.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This review presumes that educational reform is a co-constructed process (Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan 2002). Clearly, educational reform involves formal structures. We propose that it also involves both formal and informal linkages among those structures. Yet, reform involves a dynamic relationship, not just among structures but also among cultures and people's actions in many interlocking settings. In the following paragraphs, we first will present a model of formal structure and then a discussion of the more complex sense of the co-constructive processes of reform adaptation and implementation.

### FORMAL STRUCTURES LINKING LEVELS OF EDUCATION

We begin with a static model of the systemic-school-teacher space. The model does not explain change or reform but provides a series of reference points for each of the levels of review (e.g., federal, school, classroom) that follow. The model also demonstrates the complexity of the task of reform, underscoring the importance of a human organizational/creative role in creating and sustaining any change from stasis.

The U.S. education system is nothing if not colorfully complex. The federal Department of Education is intended to support the education of young people. These include, but are certainly not limited to, Title I (known as "No Child Left Behind"), migrant and bilingual education, special education legislation and court rulings, Perkins-III funding to support career and technical education (formerly known as vocational education), and Head Start. The latter two programs illustrate that complexity: Head Start is funded and administered through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, while

career and technical education are funded through the Department of Education. A third example of the complexity of federal involvement in the education system is special education. Federal courts have ruled on several special education issues, in effect making special education a very substantial source of required action for local educators.

Fifty state governments as well as the educational governing bodies of the District of Columbia, the schools of the U.S. military, and the schools in various U.S. protectorates all have separate governance organizations. For simplicity's sake, we will discuss these as "state government," while noting that other structures exist within the United States. The term "state department of education" has a range of meanings. For example, in terms of geographic size and number of students, Rhode Island could fit inside Dade County, Florida; yet, the latter is one school district. There are fewer students in all of Wyoming than in the Denver school system, and fewer students in all of Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana combined than in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Hawaii operates all of its schools within a single, unified school district spread across several islands. Montana, like Hawaii, has fewer than 1 million residents, but more than 700 school districts.

Local school districts (or local education authorities, LEAs) are even more diverse than state education agencies (or SEAs). There are more than fifteen thousand LEAs in the United States. Some are reputed to have more school board members than employees and serve under 100 students, while New York City's school system serves over 1 million students. Within the United States, approximately twenty-five LEAs each serve more than one hundred thousand students. Some districts serve only elementary schools, others only high schools, and a few serve pre-K through community college populations. Many districts serve entire counties, while others serve carefully gerrymandered, very small communities. There are more than ninety thousand public schools in the United States. They range from one-room, K–12 facilities to campuses serving several thousand students in only two to four grades.

The most cursory examination of Figure 1 makes clear that while each of over a half-dozen sources of influence on students' education affect their achievement, no single source can lay rational claim to

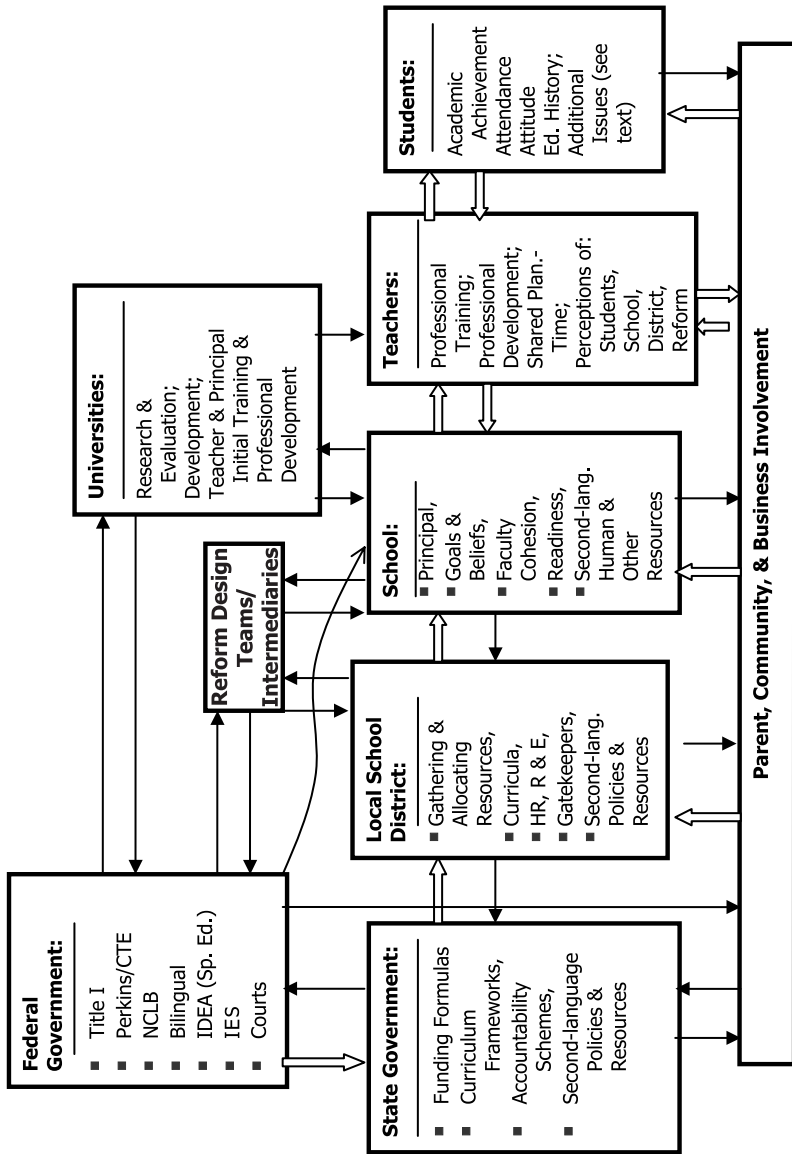


FIGURE 1. A Static Representation of the Relationships of Educational Organization Types and Their Potential Influences on Students

being “the major” or “controlling” influence.<sup>1</sup> Rather, as will be discussed below, virtually any educational change process that is likely to be long-lived is, in part, negotiated among multiple levels of our educational system.

At each “level” of this review, we will return to both the formal structure and the research indicating that reform stakeholders co-construct actual reforms, both within and among levels. Borrowing from the work of Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002), we believe that formulating educational reform as a co-constructed process is helpful in making sense of the complex, and often messy, process of school change. Educators’ actions in schools shape and are shaped by actions simultaneously occurring in diverse contexts, including the classroom, school, district, reform design team, state, and federal levels. Interactions at one policy level can generate “outcomes,” such as policy statements, new rules, or new procedures, which in turn potentially condition the interactions of other actors in other contexts in the policy chain (Hall and McGinty 1997). This book looks at the possibilities enabled by and the constraints imposed on school reform by conditions in these various settings.

Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) emphasized the relationship between structure, culture, and agency and illustrated how this dynamic works in the implementation of school reform. They took the premise that social structures are the contingent outcomes of practical activities of individuals. Real people – confronting real problems in classrooms, school board meetings, and reform design labs – interact together and produce the texts, the rules, and the guidelines that are essential in the school change process. Reform implementation is not an exclusively linear process by which design teams, districts, or states “insert” reforms or policies into schools. Rather, educators in schools, policy makers in districts, and design teams

<sup>1</sup> Before examining the major components in Figure 1, we should be clear that this review is not intended to be definitive regarding each plausible component of school reform in the context of multicultural and multilingual education. There were seven “synthesis team” reviews within the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence (see [www.crede.org](http://www.crede.org)). The other six focus primarily on relationships between students and either curriculum, instruction, or family/community. Therefore, none of those areas will be examined in this review. Rather, we examine the institutional and organizational effects on students and teachers, and how people working within those organizations create, or fail to create, meaningful reforms.

co-construct reform adoption, implementation, and sustainability. Whether reforms “succeed” is a joint accomplishment of actors at various levels, operating within their own particular constraints.

The theoretical framework guiding the work of Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) was somewhat similar to Fullan’s (1999) use of complexity theory as a vehicle for understanding school change, as well as Helsby’s (1999) use of structure, culture, and agency as a vehicle for addressing how reforms change teachers’ work. Both Fullan and Helsby argued that change unfolds in unpredictable and nonlinear ways through the interaction of individuals in different settings under conditions of uncertainty, diversity, and instability.

In addition to finding a defense for these tenets of change, Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) paid attention to the role of power and perspective in shaping reform implementation. They acknowledged that educators in schools must sometimes respond to realities that are created among powerful people and organizations – some who may have accrued power due to their institutional, race, class, or gender position (Erickson and Shultz 1982; Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihls 1986). They also acknowledged that the meaning of reform varies according to a person’s or organization’s perspective (Bakhtin 1981; Garfinkel 1967).

Contexts are inevitably connected to other contexts (Sarason 1997) *throughout* the social system. By necessity, in this review and in most studies of reform, the interaction among social actors in one context is foregrounded, and by necessity, the other contexts are backgrounded. In the sections that follow, we foreground particular levels of the system – school, district, community, state, federal, and design team – while backgrounding the linkages at other levels.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

This volume is organized into nine chapters. Chapter 2, which was written primarily by Charles Teddlie, foregrounds the school level and identifies what we mean by effective school practices for racially and linguistically diverse students. Chapter 3, authored primarily by Sue Lasky, focuses on the district as a policy domain and explores linkages across the policy system from a district perspective. Chapter 4, also written primarily by Lasky, examines the community context

and community linkages that can affect school reform processes. Chapter 5, also written primarily by Lasky, foregrounds the state as a policy domain and explores linkages across the policy system through a state lens. Chapter 6, written primarily by Amanda Datnow, highlights comprehensive school reform designs as key linkages between the federal government and schools. Chapter 7, written primarily by Sam Stringfield, foregrounds the role of the federal government in directing and supporting school reform and discusses linkages through the federal lens. Chapter 8, authored primarily by Charles Teddlie, focuses on methodological issues in the study of systemic integration for effective school reform. Chapter 9 provides a final discussion and identifies areas for future research.

## School Effectiveness and Improvement

This chapter presents research specifically related to how factors at the school level affect education in schools serving racially and linguistically diverse students. Although there has been little research devoted exclusively to this topic, we review three bodies of research that speak to this issue in a variety of ways: (1) generic school effectiveness research (SER); (2) contextually sensitive school effectiveness research; and (3) school and classroom research conducted with an equity orientation.

Figure 2 shows the school at the center of many important linkages in our framework.

We propose that practices associated with the creation of equity in schooling are likely to be closely related to those factors that produce good learning environments for racially and linguistically diverse students. There have been more effective schools research studies conducted in low socioeconomic status (SES) and urban settings than in environments serving culturally and linguistically diverse students, although there is obviously an overlap between the sets of research.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, findings from research conducted in low-SES

<sup>1</sup> The similarity between the two groups of students (low-SES, urban students; linguistically and culturally diverse students) is twofold: (1) there is an obvious overlap in that African American students are part of the culturally diverse student group in the United States, and much of the SER conducted in low-SES urban environments has been in schools with a high percentage of African American students, and (2) many linguistically and culturally diverse students come from homes that would be classified as disadvantaged or low-SES.

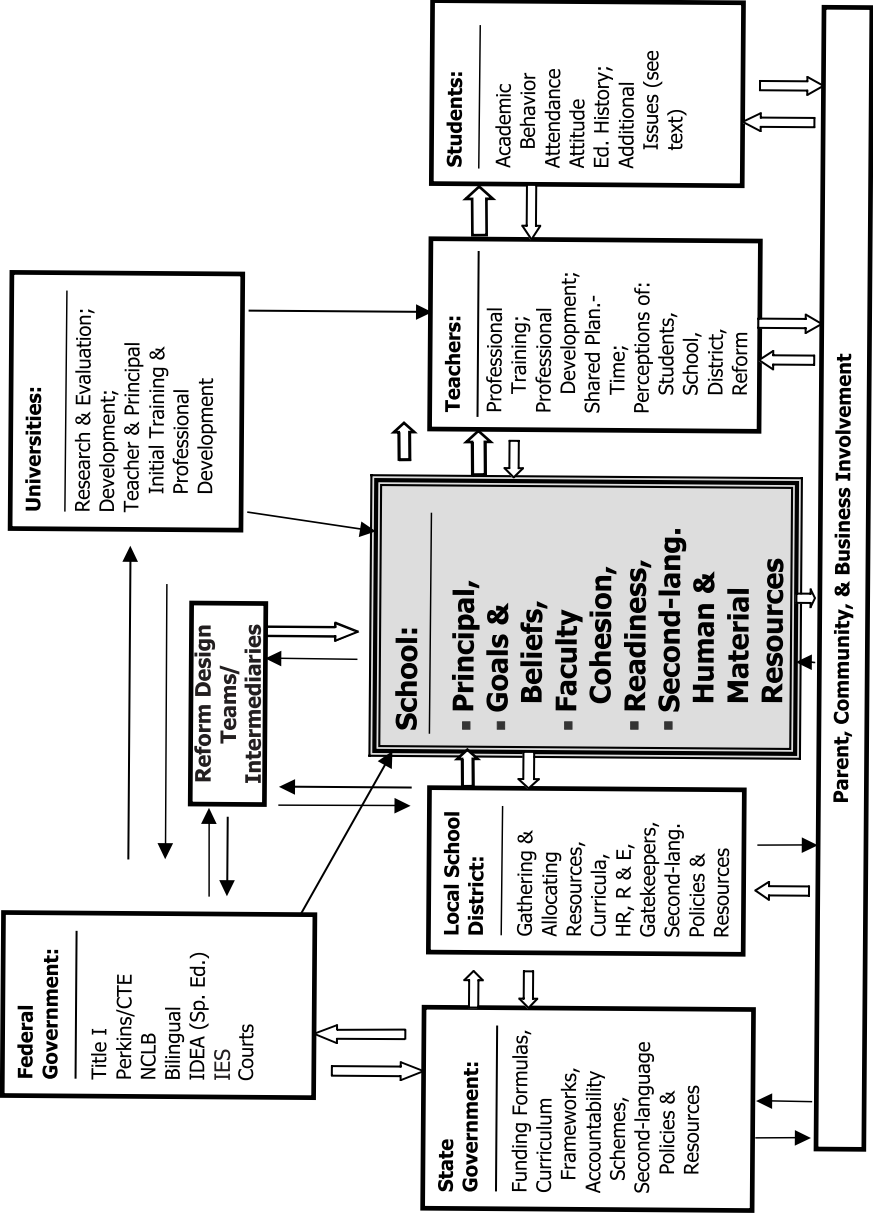


FIGURE 2. School Involvement and Connections to Educational Reform



and urban schools are applied (where appropriate) to the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students because different types of disadvantaged students often face similar educational challenges. That said, the challenges that English language learners (ELLs) face are obviously unique.

#### THE PROCESSES OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING

Much of the evidence about effective schooling has been summarized in lists of correlates (e.g., Edmonds 1979), characteristics (e.g., Levine and Lezotte 1990), or processes (e.g., Reynolds and Teddlie 2000). Although the research that initially produced these lists was severely criticized for methodological deficiencies (e.g., Ralph and Fennessey 1983; Rowan 1984; Rowan, Bossert, and Dwyer 1983), the replicability of the results, on the basis of evidence from numerous studies conducted over the past twenty years, has muted most of that criticism.

Cawelti (2003, p. 18) declared Edmonds' (1979) research to be one of the eleven studies that has had "the greatest impact on education" over the past fifty years, to a large degree because the initial results have often been replicated:

Edmonds showed that high achievement correlated very strongly with strong administration, high expectations for student achievement, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on basic skills acquisition, and frequent monitoring of student progress. Although some scholars scoffed at this research's lack of rigor, several investigators replicated the research by using these findings, and the study influenced thousands of educators working in schools in which students from low-income families tended to achieve less well than others. (p. 19)

The processes of effective schools<sup>2</sup> presented in this section have been reported from a wide variety of settings (e.g., in schools serving

<sup>2</sup> The effective schools literature is based to a large degree on evidence from case studies (e.g., Brookover and Lezotte 1979; Edmonds 1979; Lezotte and Bancroft 1985; Taylor 1990; Venezky and Winfield 1979; Weber 1971). In addition to these case studies, several large-scale, longitudinal studies (using scientifically defensible sampling and analysis strategies) have confirmed the importance of the characteristics of effective schooling (e.g., Brookover et al. 1979; Mortimore et al. 1988; Reynolds et al. 2002; Rutter et al. 1979; Teddlie and Stringfield 1993).

low- and middle-SES students; in rural, suburban, and urban community types; in countries as diverse as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands), but we report primarily on U.S. findings. These processes represent the “ground zero” of effective schooling for all students. They can serve as a springboard on which to study systematically what constitutes sound schooling for racially and linguistically diverse students.

The specific list of the “processes of effective schooling” contained in this chapter was taken from the *International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (Reynolds and Teddlie 2000, p. 144). There are nine effective schools processes listed below, together with subcomponents that further delineate each process. These subcomponents may or may not appear in the results from any given study, but all of the characteristics have been found with enough frequency to be included in this summary of the effective schools research. Where possible, we have provided some detail on the specific subcomponents associated with each of the effective schools processes, but a complete discussion of each of them is beyond the scope of this review, which focuses on those factors most related to the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In describing these generic processes, which are relevant to the effective schooling of all students, it is important to remember that the original five correlates were developed from research that concentrated primarily on one specific school context: elementary schools serving low-SES students in urban areas. This early effective school research had an advocacy tone to it and was concerned with equity issues.<sup>3</sup> The original five correlates were “broadened out” and made applicable to a wider variety of school settings, as more effective schools research accumulated from an expanding literature during the 1980–2000 period. The addition of the four new effective schools processes was also made possible through the incorporation of information from allied fields (e.g., teacher effectiveness research) into SER.

<sup>3</sup> The importance of the equity ideal to early effective schools research has been detailed in Teddlie and Stringfield (1993), pp. 3–5 and Reynolds et al. (2000), pp. 10–11.

Research focused on low-SES, urban schools (which generated the original five correlate model) is more relevant to the specific education of culturally and linguistically diverse students than the generic SER. Nevertheless, both equity-driven SER and the more recent generic SER are related to the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and we thus discuss results from both throughout this review.

### *(1) The Processes of Effective Leadership*

Processes of effective leadership are one of the most ubiquitous findings across SER literature. The five subcomponents associated with the processes of effective leadership are: (a) being firm and purposeful, (b) involving others in the process, (c) exhibiting instructional leadership, (d) frequent, personal monitoring, and (e) selecting and replacing staff. Some of these subcomponents appear to be more relevant in schools with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The principal being “firm and purposeful” has been frequently cited as a requirement of effective leadership in schools serving the disadvantaged (e.g., Hallinger and Murphy 1986; Mortimore et al. 1988; Rutter et al. 1979; Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore 1995; Teddlie and Stringfield 1993). Effective principals in schools serving disadvantaged students develop a limited number of well-defined goals and communicate them effectively to the various school constituencies, instead of pursuing a large number of diverse goals simultaneously (e.g., Teddlie 2003; Teddlie and Meza 1999). Personal monitoring has emerged as an important factor in many studies, especially in schools serving disadvantaged students (e.g., Armor et al. 1976; Austin and Holowenzak 1985; Brookover et al. 1979; Mortimore et al. 1988; Teddlie, Kirby, and Stringfield 1989). Deal and Peterson (1990) conclude that this is a major technique through which principals can shape school culture. Similarly, the ability to select and replace staff is very important in schools serving disadvantaged students because it is typically difficult to recruit competent faculty members, and staff turnover is high (e.g., Austin and Holowenzak 1985; Reynolds et al. 2002). The process of effective leadership has been expanded beyond the principal in recent school reform research to include leadership teams composed of teachers (e.g., Chrispeels, Castillo, and Brown 2000; Chrispeels and Martin 2002).