

Restructuring in Arizona  
School Restructuring Incentives Program

A Summative Evaluation Report

Excerpt

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## Executive Summary

A Joint Legislative Committee appropriated funding through Senate Bill 1552 (1990) to 15 schools in Arizona, offering appropriate incentives to restructure. Restructuring was defined by the schools through their organization of objectives and activities around six goals that were provided in the law.

External evaluators and consultants guided the schools through a self-study process and offered technical assistance for both the evaluative process and appropriate activities for restructuring. The purpose of self-study was to encourage schools to systematically document educational practice. Data collection and analysis as well as interpretation of findings will assist schools with the purposeful implementation of practices consistent with a national perspective on restructuring. Most significantly, each school was encouraged to determine site-specific outcomes, gather appropriate data, and interpret that data so as to make meaningful changes that reflect individual school communities. No external, top-down evaluation mandates were imposed on the schools other than to prepare the self-study report.

A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that three foci are central to restructuring:

1. School-based decision making that allows those closest to the problems to pose resolutions emerged as the most appropriate governance model;
2. Examining the inextricable relationships among curriculum, instruction, and assessment will promote new instructional delivery strategies, alternative grouping patterns for students, and revised curricula; and
3. Professionalism in the workplace will assume new meanings concerning the roles and relationships of teachers, students, parents, and administrators when schools are governed differently and when curriculum, instruction, and assessment are closely examined and revised.

Restructuring among the 15 schools is evolving. Several of the schools have established goals that are commensurate with all three of the above foci. Some of the 15 schools are exploring one focus and planning for further inquiry into the other two. And a few of the schools are consumed with activities more related to traditional reform than genuine restructuring. All of the schools have undertaken activities that feature the six goals set forth in S.B. 1552.

## **Restructuring: A National Perspective**

Mounting public and political pressure to change the way schools operate and educate students has created formidable challenges for policy makers, researchers, and educators. Questions about process, definition, and the implicit relationships among reform, restructuring, and reconstruction have been largely answered by prescriptions, how-to manuals, and trial-and-error efforts in schools. The need for rich descriptions of school environments and their societal contexts is provoking researchers to examine the kinds of questions they ask about the organizational structure of schools, student achievement, the delivery of curriculum and instruction, local school governance, and the professionalism of teachers.

To restructure means to change the pattern or organization of an entity. However, for educators and policy makers, the vision of what a restructured school looks like and how it operates is not yet clear (Betteth, 1988). Without a clear and visionary focus, there can be no clear direction for schools that are committed to improving student achievement and the broader outcomes of the educational process. Although as a profession, education has inimitably tended to shroud ideas in confusing "educationese," language does create images. The clarity of the image is essential for the successful realization of any vision. Therefore, the formation of concrete images of successful education practice is a part of the definition of restructuring (National Governors Association, 1989).

### **The Language of Restructuring**

At issue in the plethora of educational jargon attempting to define current trends in reform and restructuring is clarity of language. Tyack (1990) stated that it is no accident that a vague word like restructuring has also become the vogue. The term restructuring, as it applies to schools, has frequently become synonymous with parental choice, teacher empowerment, school-based decision making, parent involvement, national standards in curriculum with tests to match, accountability, decentralization, or any combination of these concepts.

Interestingly, the term restructuring has been borrowed from American industry, as business seeks to redefine the processes of ownership in the effort to become more competitive in a global economy. The diversity of the contextual use of the term restructuring is equally evident as we observe the international implications of the reorganization of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Cibulka, 1990).

Central to defining the language of restructuring is the understanding that the crystallization of concrete images helps to form that elusive thing called vision (National Governors Association, 1989). In our quest to envision appropriate educational activities, aims, and purposes, several questions emerge. Will the current restructuring movement help create a shared vision for schools? Will clarifying the vision assist schools with defining a process for implementation? Will that vision refocus the mission of schools as we advance toward and enter the 21st century (Chandler, 1992)? To answer these questions, we must briefly examine the historical implications of political change in education.

## Restructuring the Vision

Kearns (1988) offered that American scholars, who were once the envy of the world, are perhaps best suited to the economic and social needs of an earlier time. He asserted that the public school system is an outgrowth of the scientific management movement of the early twentieth century. Goodlad (1988) also commented on the anachronistic nature of the principles and models applied in education. He outlined five goals aimed at raising the level of discourse about education.

1. Each child should acquire a meaningful grasp of his culture and develop the kinds of intellectual tools that will enable him to deal with it.
2. Schools must have a real relationship to basic human values.
3. Schools must learn to deal with individual differences.
4. Individually, we must develop a sense of personal identity, to overcome problems of alienation.
5. And societally, we must consider the emerging problems resulting from the possibilities of intervening in human evolution.

Embedded in Goodlad's challenge of creating a vision for education is the change process. Banathy (1990) acknowledged that over a dozen national reports have raised the level of consciousness about a national education crisis. Yet, few of the reports have offered clear means to a distinct end. Moreover, few, if any, of the reports have questioned the basic premises about the educative functions of society. Most significantly, none of the reports has examined the process for change.

## Systemic Change

The National Governors Association (1989) recognized the need for long-range strategic planning and management in education. The participants foretold the need for creative thinking about how to reorganize the entire system in fundamental ways (restructuring), not simply to strengthen a few of its parts (reform). Cibulka (1990) affirms that restructuring is an encouraging step beyond the nation's previous preoccupation with incremental educational reform.

Systemic change implies a comprehensive view of the educational system undergoing the proposed change. Argyris and Schon (1978) posed a basic question for initiating such a comprehensive examination: How can the organization, through its structures, processes, and interactions, develop the capacity and capability to engage in meaningful inquiry about itself? To respond is to understand the fundamental relationship between the organization and the individuals within it.

Tye (1992) stated that institutions undergoing change rarely institutionalize the new behaviors that employees have to exhibit in order for the change to successfully occur. He postures that the behaviors must be identified and long-term training must be provided for the stakeholders.

The problem of institutionalizing a process of change is an awesome undertaking (Alexander, 1991). State constitutions speak to education in general terms, implying "a measure of orderliness and uniformity...unitary cohesiveness, not intended to create merely a conglomeration of locally independent school agencies" (Alexander, 1991, p. 27). If the obstacles emanate from constitutional provisions, the lawmakers' roles assume new proportions of importance, particularly if restructuring translates to market choice and school-based decision making.

### From Vision to Practice

Cibulka (1990) defined restructuring as a process intended to lead to important improvement in the outcomes of the educational system through dramatic changes in instruction as well as in management and governance. Tinkering with reforms in scheduling or with newly aligned curricula or purchasing costly technology simply does not constitute genuine restructuring. Concrete images of restructured practice focus on three inclusive areas (Cook and Haladyna, 1992).

Decision making. Teachers, parents, and students make substantive decisions about the problems and issues that confront their local schools. Principals are facilitators and conveners rather than authoritative leaders (Bank and Williams, 1989). Those closest to the academic and social problems of the school seek and implement solutions without interference from central units, i.e. districts, states, and federal bureaucracies.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment. A thoughtful examination of the inextricable relationship among these three entities should offer altered delivery strategies, changes in the structure of the school day, week, and year, meaningful ways of measuring student achievement and performance, alternative grouping patterns for students such as multi-age settings or vertical movement of teachers with students through grade levels, interdisciplinary studies, and a meaningful use of technology that allows students to access information.

Professionalism in the work place. Redefining school governance and changes in curriculum and pedagogy generate new roles and relationships among teachers, parents, students, and school leaders. Supporting the learning environment means that teachers have time for committee work, conflict resolution, consensus-building, planning, and reflection with colleagues. Central offices become support and service agencies; students and the community are placed at the top of the organizational chart; lines of authority are reconfigured; power is no longer in the hands of a few. With new roles and rights comes responsibility. Teachers must aggressively pursue professional growth and development opportunities designed to maximize their potential as adult learners.

### The Mission of Schools

Restructuring efforts in public schools will fail without unencumbered national, state and district sanctions. The scope of proposed change is so far-reaching, that without deregulation and waivers from legislated mandates, local schools cannot surmount the barriers and successfully deliver improved outcomes (Olson, 1992). Moreover, restructuring cannot be mandated in the traditional, hierarchical genre to which education typically gravitates.

The educational stakeholders, parents, teachers, students, and school leaders, must generate restructuring in the context of the local ethos. Clearly, however, there must be accompanying incentives and procedures provided by policy makers so that the genesis of sweeping change occurs within a research-based framework. The stakeholders ought not be willing to go down the long road of change for merely the sake of change and deal again with the tragedy of wasted time and wasted lives.

The restructuring of schools is becoming a compelling force in American public education. Only the stakeholders can define the mission of local schools, the outcomes to be accomplished, the local impediments to attainment, and the appropriate educational practices that form the concrete images necessary for implementation. Researchers are responsible for richly describing learning environments and producing a guiding set of principles. The state lawmakers can provide monetary incentives and bureaucratic procedures that facilitate genuine restructuring. And the national politicians must "reaffirm the value of public education to our democratic way of life" (Tye, 1992, p. 13).

## How is Arizona Doing?

With the passage of Senate Bill 1552 (1990), a joint legislative committee established monetary incentives for Arizona schools to restructure. Fifteen schools received funding to explore restructuring efforts defined within the six goals described on page one of this report.

Consistent with the national tenets of restructuring, Arizona lawmakers provided incentives without wholesale mandate. Encouraging local control and school level design, the legislators confine communication with the projects to building level personnel. Teachers, parents, and school administrators are invited to share their successes and their projected needs and activities directly with the Joint Legislative Committee. Circumventing district personnel for purposes of establishing a direct communication link between the legislature and schools is clearly worthy of distinction from legislative efforts in other states.

The Joint Legislative Committee approved the use of external evaluators who were committed to self-study. Each of the 15 project schools determined their project outcomes, collected appropriate data, and reported their findings. Each school, in turn, received an analysis of its self-study with recommendations for improving data collection and analysis. Technical assistance will follow to assist schools with learning about and valuing the process of documenting educational practice. The self-study model of program evaluation is in accordance with the national perspective that favors school-based decision making and promotes participation by the stakeholders in project design, implementation, and evaluation.

The 15 restructuring sites in Arizona have undertaken restructuring efforts in varying degrees relative to a continuum that represents the spectrum of reform to reconstruction. Understandably, the extent of genuine restructuring seemed to be a function of the level of reform activities undertaken prior to project implementation. However, regardless of the levels of sophistication at the outset of the projects, some schools progressed much farther than others, suggesting a developmental view of success (Neibur, 1992). That is, progress toward becoming a restructured school is at least as commendable as maintaining a restructured school. Notably, those schools that demonstrated restructuring efforts consistent with a national perspective were those that inclusively embraced all six goals with a clear vision. Likewise, schools that didn't show evidence of significant progress seemed to view the six goals as mutually exclusive. While the most successful projects showed progress in all six areas, there was qualitative evidence that the six goals do not account for all of the elements essential for success nor do they account for the intrinsic driving forces of restructuring (Neibur, 1992).

Arizona hosts at least 15 school sites that have pioneered restructuring efforts. The most immediate effects are already being felt in the lives of students and communities. An examination of the barriers, transportability of the innovations, and review of the policies affecting restructuring will encourage more schools in Arizona to undertake substantive change.

## **How Can Arizona Improve Its Restructuring Efforts**

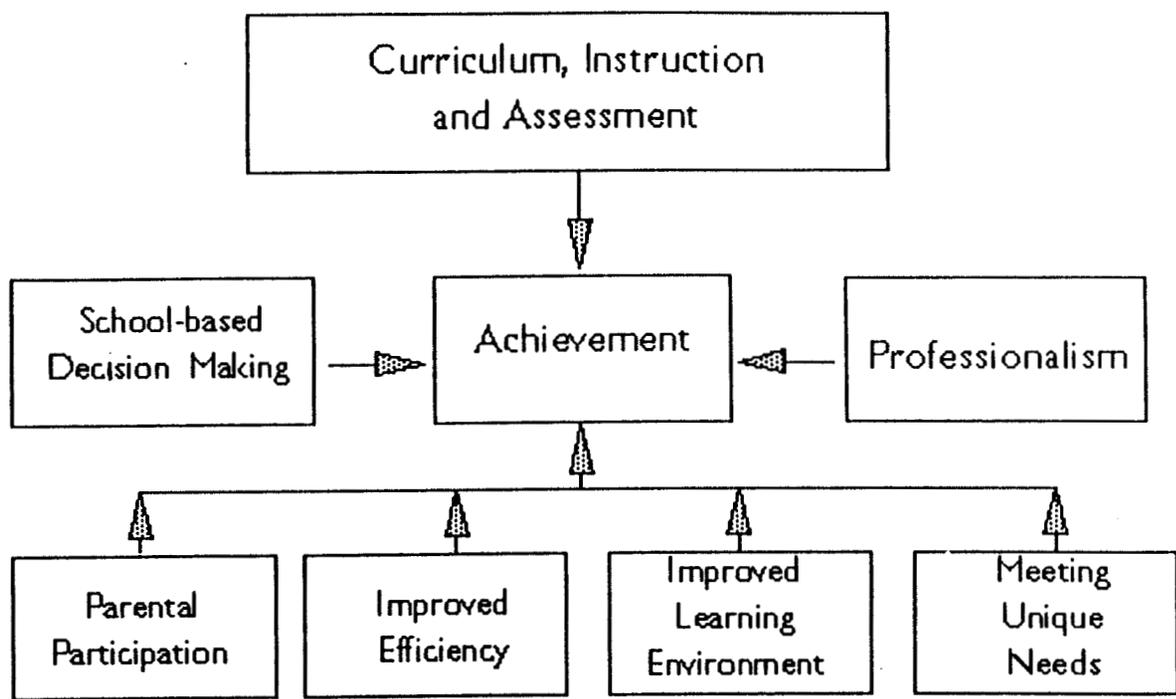
Public schools are highly regulated institutions. Binding decisions made at the federal, state, and district levels, which are intended to safeguard education, tend to have the cumulative effect of placing a chokehold on local initiative.

The complex funding formula that allocates monies to schools in Arizona dictates the funneling of dollars through central offices, i.e. districts. This channeling of resources frequently imposes varying demands and obstacles to local school teachers and administrators. It is hoped, if not proposed, that even in the absence of school district reorganization in Arizona, supplementary monies such as S.B. 1552 funding, might be allocated directly to local schools with the principal assuming fiduciary responsibilities.

Although Arizona lawmakers offered appropriate incentives to schools for restructuring, there has, as yet, been no waiver in regulations and mandates. Evidenced in the national review of literature, deregulation is central to the success of restructuring. It has been difficult for some of the project sites to fully implement their visions within the confines of a myriad of mandated programs and the host of regulations that emanate from federal funding sources, e.g. Chapter 1. Struggling to fund programs and activities, it is not uncommon for schools to become hopelessly gridlocked by too many funding sources, each demanding its own set of expectations. It is hoped that the state policy makers will continue to explore processes for loosening the complicated strings that accompany the flow of dollars to schools without mitigating the quality of services or forgoing accountability.

### **A Model For Restructuring**

In soliciting information about the projects in the pilot sites through interviews, the comments from teachers, parents, and students did not cluster evenly or naturally around the six goals outlined in S.B. 1552 (Neibur, 1992). There seemed to be little consensus across sites, or even within sites, about the definition of any given goal. The comments offered evidence that increasing student achievement surfaces as the hub of restructuring. Three goals, implementing school-based decision making, examining and significantly altering curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and improving professionalism in the work place surround the hub of student achievement. Finally, characteristics or themes of restructuring seem to include increased parental participation, greater effort to meet the unique needs of students, increased efficiency and effectiveness, and an improved school or learning environment. These findings offer support for a new model of restructuring, with commensurate definitions, to be entertained by lawmakers as reiterations of Senate Bill 1552 (1990) are drafted.



### Vision Without Barriers

As noted in the national perspective, the three driving questions focused on vision. The most striking characteristic of the successful projects was a dynamic decision making process that developed and continually refined a shared vision of what restructuring meant to the participating stakeholders. It was almost uncanny how closely the teachers, parents, and students agreed upon the goals, successes, and difficulties of their restructuring efforts when they felt they were involved in the process of defining what restructuring was to mean in their school. When participants shared a common vision of restructuring, they were able to create, modify, or dissolve programs and reallocate resources without violating the integrity of their school identity. When a site lacked that unifying identify, the participants frequently became paralyzed by trying to respond to the demanding and conflicting needs of too many programs, too many goals, and too little time (Neibur, 1992).

Perhaps as other iterations of Senate Bill 1552 (1990) are considered, policy makers will include incentives to school sites for identifying a shared vision of restructuring and for identifying processes and procedures for enactment. In so doing, the intrinsic driving forces of teachers, parents, students, and administrators to restructure will emerge and provide an even clearer picture of the restructured school.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

We have sought to characterize school restructuring in Arizona through this first year's evaluation process. What we have learned is that the state is indeed doing quite well in stimulating 15 schools to thoughtfully restructure. We believe that defining restructuring narrowly in future legislation may not be in the best interests of all schools. The peculiar, individual nature of restructuring makes it necessary to afford each school site the opportunity to uniquely define its effort in light of its individuality, particularly its students, parents, community values, teachers, and other resources.

### **How Are the Schools Doing?**

One of the most positive and uplifting features of these 15 projects, and the state's efforts to assist them, is the creativity and energy of site-based decision making. Governance teams are uniquely addressing the problems faced by schools. The site-based responsibility and authority appear to capture the best of the restructuring effort. With each of these schools, we are witnessing a unique, non-standard evolution toward effective self-governance, a worthy goal for not only schools, but for students, teachers, and parents as well. The 15 schools are effectively addressing curriculum, instruction, and assessment in various ways. And the schools have explored avenues for improving the professionalism of teachers, recognizing the need for teachers to take care of and protect their profession.

### **How Can the Schools Improve Their Restructuring Efforts?**

Planning for a vision of restructuring emerges from the literature and from the results of the schools' self-studies as critical to the success of implementing meaningful change in schools. Effectively documenting educational practice, that is, collecting and analyzing appropriate data, and interpreting the results in a meaningful way are efforts that school personnel are frequently uncomfortable in doing. Yet, within the profession, this void in program evaluation reinforces the vulnerability of educators at every level. The 15 project sites in Arizona are making significant progress toward improving their evaluation efforts. Commitment to the evaluative process as well a commitment to making changes in schools that will drastically alter the educational outcomes are consistent with the national perspective on restructuring.

### **How Is Arizona Doing?**

Arizona has made significant progress toward reducing the barriers to restructuring that have been noted in other states. Examining the laws, policies, and procedures that provide incentives to schools to restructure will provide additional clarity and focus to the educational stakeholders. Currently, 15 schools have been encouraged to design, develop, and implement programs that will affect local constituencies. Most significantly, there has been no wholesale mandate for restructuring, which is clearly the highest form of compliment that ought to be duly accorded to Arizona lawmakers.

### How Can Arizona Improve Its Restructuring Efforts?

S. B. 1552 currently directs the restructuring efforts in 15 pilot schools. As the law is revisited, perhaps a reorganization of the six goals can be considered. Based on the qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered from site visits and the self-study reports, an altered model for restructuring emerges featuring a central focus on increasing student achievement with concomitant goals of increasing decision making, altering curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and improving professionalism. This set of goals is then supported by themes or characteristics of restructuring such as meeting unique needs of students, parental involvement, improving the learning environment, and increasing efficiency.

Policy makers can be proud of their efforts to encourage genuine restructuring in Arizona schools. To the extent that the process is evolutionary, the 15 pilot sites ought to be commended for asking tough questions about schooling and responding with heartfelt activities designed to improve education in public schools in Arizona.

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