

Effective Schools Studies to Create
Effective Schools:
Schools No Recipes Yet
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Recipes Yet **Using Effective**
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Each effective school may be one of a kind.

JOSEPH D'AMICO

The conclusions of four school effectiveness studies typically underlie most school improvement efforts. These studies are the ones reported by Brookover and Lezotte (1979), Edmonds and Frederiksen (1979), Phi Delta Kappa (Duckett and others, 1980), and Rutter and others (1979).

Although these authors' conclusions about the characteristics of effectiveness seem similar, they do not match. Not only is the number of characteristics different in each study, but also the characteristics that seem similar are expressed differently.

Finally, some characteristics seen as "indispensable" by some authors—for example, strong administrative leadership—are not included at all by the others.

This discordance from study to study presents an obstacle for practitioners who attempt to use these conclusions as a recipe. Without more unanimity about which characteristics contribute to a school's effectiveness, it is difficult to know which characteristics to use as a focus for improvement. And the studies offer little guidance for selecting the most appropriate.

A more serious obstacle is the low degree of match between some studies' conclusions and their specific findings. A careful comparison shows that Brookover and Lezotte, Edmonds and Frederiksen, and the Phi Delta Kappa authors seem to have done quite a bit of interpretation when translating their findings into conclusions.

For example, both Brookover and Lezotte and the Phi Delta Kappa authors based their conclusions on specific findings from a variety of data sources—interviews, questionnaires, case studies, expert opinions, and the like. Taken as a whole, the specific findings of these different data sources indicate literally dozens of characteristics associated with school effectiveness. Even accounting for repetition, the specific findings of these studies show many more characteristics than those listed in the studies' summaries. Also, the characteristics listed as the findings of each data source are much more specific and detailed than the characteristics in either set of conclusions. Moreover, there is no indication in either study that explains how

the summary statements were distilled from the larger, more detailed body of results. The conclusions are interpretations of results, but the authors do not explain how they made them.¹

Edmonds and Frederiksen present another kind of problem regarding the match between specific results and general conclusions. They conclude their study with 21 eclectic characteristics that describe a variety of phenomena from number of guidance counselors to number of land acres. These apparently reflect their research findings and, in this study, there are no further conclusions. In an earlier work, however, Edmonds lists five "indispensable" characteristics of effective schools.² These five characteristics appear again in two more recent discussions.³ They are the ones listed in Figure 1 and are probably the most well-known characteristics of effectiveness.

These characteristics are not the ones that Edmonds and Frederiksen list in their 1979 study. In the 1979 study, they list more specific characteristics; they also list more of them and cover more dimensions of schooling. These five do not seem to come from the longer 1979 list. It is unclear what research was used to arrive at these five characteristics.

In sum, the degree to which the overall conclusions of these four studies match each other, match their specific

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findings, and are derived from the specific findings deserves attention, particularly if they are to be used as a basis for creating effective schools.

Effective schools exist. Hundreds of them have been described. Each one's effectiveness, however, seems to represent an intricate, perhaps idiosyncratic, phenomenon that, in turn, is probably the result of intricate, perhaps idiosyncratic, processes. As yet, there are no recipes for creating effective schools. □

More recently, Brookover (1981) has gone further and named 21 characteristics of schools with "effective school learning climates" divided into three categories—ideology, organization, and instructional practices. Although this new list draws on both the specific findings and general conclusions of the 1979 study, some characteristics have been dropped (for example, the one involving teacher selection of Comp-Ed students) and others added (such as presence of cooperative team learning).

²Ron Edmonds, "A Discussion of the Literature and Issues Related to Effective Schooling," paper prepared for the National Conference on Urban Education, CEM-REL, St. Louis, Mo., July 1978.

³Ron Edmonds, "Schools Count: New York City's School Improvement Project," *Harvard Graduate School of Education Association Bulletin* 25, 1 (1980): 33-35; and Ron Edmonds, "The Characteristics of Effective Schools: Research and Implementation," unpublished manuscript, Michigan State University, 1981.

Figure 1. Characteristics of "Effective" Schools.

Brookover and Lezotte (1979)	Edmonds* (1981)	Phi Delta Kappa (1980)	Rutter and others (1979)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improving schools accept and emphasize the importance of basic skills mastery as prime goals and objectives ● Staff of improving schools believe <i>all</i> students can master the basic skills objectives and they believe the principal shares this belief ● Staff of improving schools expect their students will go on with their education ● Staff of improving schools do not make excuses: they assume responsibility for teaching basic skills and are committed to do so ● Staff of improving schools spend more time on achieving basic skills objectives ● Principals at improving schools are assertive instructional leaders and disciplinarians, and they assume responsibility for the evaluation of the achievement of basic skills objectives ● Staff at improving schools accept the concept of accountability and are involved in developing (or using) accountability models ● Teachers at improving schools are not very satisfied or complacent about the status quo ● There is more parent-initiated contact and involvement at improving schools (even though the overall amount of parent involvement is less) ● The compensatory education programs in improving schools de-emphasize para-professional involvement and teacher involvement in the selection of Comp-Ed-bound students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clarity that pupil acquisition of the basic school skills takes precedence over all other school activities ● There is a climate of expectation in which no children are permitted to fall below minimum but efficacious levels of achievement ● Administrative leadership is strong and without it the disparate elements of good schooling can be neither brought together nor kept together ● A means is present by which pupil progress can be frequently monitored ● There is an atmosphere that is orderly without being rigid, quiet without being oppressive, and generally conducive to the instructional business at hand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Successful schools are characterized by clearly stated curricular goals and objectives ● The leaders' attitudes toward urban education and expectations for school or program success determine the impact of the leader on exceptional schools ● The behavior of the designated school or program leader is crucial in determining school success ● Successful urban schools frequently employ techniques of individualized instruction ● Structured learning environments are particularly successful in urban classrooms ● Reductions in adult/child ratios are associated with positive school performance ● Successful schools are often supported with special project funds from federal, state, and local sources ● Successful urban schools are characterized by high levels of parental contact with the school and parental involvement with school activities ● Successful schools frequently use staff development or inservice training programs to realize their objectives ● The greater the specificity or focus of the training program in terms of goals or processes, the greater the likelihood of its success ● Resource and facility manipulations alone are insufficient to affect school outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Outcomes were better in schools where teachers expected the children to achieve well ● Outcomes were better in schools that provided pleasant working conditions for the pupils ● Outcomes were better in schools where immediate, direct praise and approval were the prevalent means of classroom feedback ● Outcomes were better in schools where teachers presented themselves as positive role models demonstrating punctuality, concern for the physical well-being of the school building, concern for the emotional well-being of the pupils, and restraint in the use of physical punishment ● Children's behavior was better in schools where teachers were readily available to be consulted by children about problems and where many children consulted with teachers ● Outcomes were better in schools where a high proportion of children held some kind of position of responsibility in the school system ● A school's atmosphere is influenced positively by the degree to which it functions as a coherent whole, with agreed ways of doing things that are consistent throughout the school and that have the general support of all staff

*Edmonds' characteristics are drawn from a later report. They do not come from his and Frederiksen's 1979 study.

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