

A Response to D'Amico: Not a Recipe But a Framework

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Since my work forms a portion of the effective schools research base for D'Amico's article, I would like to make additional comments, some in support of his conclusions and others in criticism.

In general, I agree with his observation that the effective schools research has become a popular basis for a large and increasing number of school improvement initiatives. My own efforts at school improvement in several Michigan school districts illustrate his point. I support D'Amico when he asks that we be cautious about this or any evolving body of research. Clearly, more research is needed before this work could ever hope to meet the standards of a "recipe." But when he suggests that effective schools research should not influence school improvement initiatives, I must take exception. I believe the evidence that effective schools re-

search is useful as a framework for school improvement programs is increasing. The results are impressive. I appreciate the magnitude of the step from descriptions of effective practices to prescriptions for improving practices. I believe we should look to the evidence found in planned programs of school improvement as the basis for assessing the usefulness of the research.

I also ask, "Who suggested that effective schools research be viewed as a *recipe* in the first place?" Researchers regard it as a broad framework for school improvement planning but not as an explicit recipe. I feel schools are gravitating toward the research for three reasons. First, it is clearly "student outcomes" oriented, which schools need given the increased pressure for accountability. Second, the number of alternative research-based approaches to

school improvement are few or nonexistent. The effective schools research framework may be seen by educators as the "only game in town." Third, practitioners find the research sensible because it looks at the whole school, recognizes roles and role relationships, and acknowledges the subtle yet powerful interactions that exist between and among the members of the school social system. To the practitioner, the effective schools research framework has face validity.

If I thought the critics of public education would refrain from further criticism while additional studies were completed and explicit recipes developed, I would be more supportive of a "wait and see" attitude. Unfortunately, I believe the 1980s are the critical decade in our unprecedented experiment in mass public education. □

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