

By legislating school/community partnerships, South Carolina has taken a major initiative in ensuring that school improvement will be long lasting.



## Can the School Reform Effort Be Sustained?

RICHARD W. RILEY

Educational reform is a major national movement that cannot be permitted to founder for lack of continued long-term support. To ensure sustained support, the *South Carolina Education Improvement Act of 1984* provides a legislated role for the community.

The act has created, for instance, partnerships with community business and industry leaders at both the local school district and state department of education levels. In addition, through the formation of a Division of Public Accountability, business leaders have been given a major responsibility for implementing the *Education Improvement Act*. Their influence assures us that community support for reform will continue.

The private sector's role in education is written into several portions of the act:

- The Business Partnership and the Committee on Financing Excellence in Public Education are to receive an assessment of the act every year. Responsible to these blue-ribbon committees, the General Assembly will then recommend modifications in the law if necessary.

- A subcommittee of the Business Partnership and Financing Committees, the Joint Subcommittee, assisted in selecting the new deputy superintendent of public accountability. The subcommittee also approves all products developed by the Division of Public Accountability: the assessment report, incentive pay programs, quality assessment criteria, regulations, and other products produced by the new unit.

- The Business Partnership and Financing Committees may be called into session by the state superintendent or governor whenever their advice and assistance are needed. The important point is that the act allies state leaders to the reform movement *in law* on a continuing rather than on a one-time basis.

- An additional section of the law specifies that schools form partnerships with business and industry, establish adopt-a-school programs, and seek out the advice of business leaders in the community.

Schools are encouraged to have representatives of the private sector on school improvement councils, whose tasks are to develop plans for school improvement and to correct

existing deficiencies. Business leaders can also assist schools to improve school district operations, financial management, personnel evaluation, long-range planning, and so on.

During the 1984-85 school year (the first year of the act's implementation) the private sector was a strong ally in translating the law into educational programs. Chambers of commerce were aggressive in forming partnerships with school districts and in budgeting significant amounts of money to assist public education. Major firms have adopted hundreds of local schools. More and more strategies are being created whereby businesses and schools can work together.

A group of business leaders have formed a foundation to fund "innovative and exemplary projects." The

foundation's board of directors is made up of influential citizens whose responsibility is to make education a high priority for everyone in the state. The foundation will also sponsor programs to reward schools that establish extremely effective educational programs.

Working in cooperation with schools, business and industry leaders provide a strong basis for effective implementation of reform. This collaboration—well-received by both private sector and school leaders—will continue to work well as long as the law remains in force. Leaders on both sides have taken their legal responsibilities seriously and have devoted time, energy, and resources to implementing the act.

School reform is not unique to our

state; it is a national movement. What is unique in South Carolina is our determined and aggressive effort to forge public/private sector partnerships and to give them authority in law. It is our major contribution to improving public education in South Carolina, but it may also be a model for other states. □

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