

A few decades ago, leaders in the field of school reform introduced the concept of "effective schools" as a way to identify what works best in educating children and to provide models for struggling schools to use for improvement. The effective schools movement is frequently attributed to the work of the late Ronald Edmonds. In a speech delivered to the National Conference of the Teacher Corps in 1978, Edmonds defined the five characteristics consistently evident in effective schools: strong leadership, clear emphasis on learning, positive school climate, regular and appropriate monitoring of student progress, and high expectations for students and staff. However, the effective schools movement, like most other reform efforts, has developed philosophical and political schisms along its major fault line: the central tenet that children's learning can be improved if schools adopt effective practices. From these straightforward principles, an entire belief system has evolved that offers a variety of solutions that are designed to improve schools. If we as a society can summon the courage and will to do these things, then maybe all children can learn at higher levels and the gap between low-income and more-privileged children can really be narrowed. At its heart, this belief is positive, useful, and practical—but it does engender strong opinions and political reactions.