# The School Turnaround
# FIELD GUIDE

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## About FSG Social Impact Advisors

At FSG, we are passionate about finding better ways to solve social problems. Originally established in 2000 as Foundation Strategy Group, today FSG works across all sectors by partnering with foundations, corporations, school systems, nonprofits, and governments in every region of the globe. Our goal is to help organizations — individually and collectively — create greater social impact.

Our approach is founded on the beliefs that
- Social sector organizations can play a catalytic role, using evidence-based strategies and strategic evaluation to solve social problems;
- Corporations can create shared value by using their core capabilities in ways that contribute to both social progress and economic success;
- Better alignment within the social sector can lead to collective impact beyond that which individual organizations alone could achieve.

Our team brings the right combination of on-the-ground experience and world-class expertise in strategy development to tackle the world's most challenging problems in three ways:
- **Creating** fresh ideas and practical tools that boost the success of change makers in all sectors.
- **Consulting** with clients to build strategies and practices that lead to powerful results in the areas they care about most.
- **Connecting** peers and communities to each other and to proven practices, so each gains from the knowledge of all.

FSG's *Education and Youth Practice* works with foundations, nonprofits, state agencies, corporations, and school districts individually and collectively to solve education and youth-related issues. We work with clients on strategy development, learning and evaluation, operational planning, research and intellectual capital development. The practice is comprised of individuals who have direct previous experience in the education sector as well as at top strategy consulting firms. The mission of our practice is to improve the academic and personal outcomes of children and youth.

For more information, see *www.fsg-impact.org*.

## About Carnegie Corporation of New York

Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to do "real and permanent good in this world." Throughout its history the Corporation has sought to promote and preserve a robust American democracy by supporting expanded opportunity through education. Carnegie Corporation's goal is to generate systemic change throughout the kindergarten to college continuum, with particular emphasis on secondary and higher education. The Corporation aims to enable many more students, including historically underserved populations and immigrants, to achieve academic success and perform at the highest levels of creative, scientific, and technical knowledge and skill.

## About The Wallace Foundation

This report was funded in part by The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices to improve learning and enrichment opportunities for children. The report's conclusions are the authors' own. The foundation's current objectives are to: improve the quality of schools, primarily by developing and placing effective principals in high-need schools; improve the quality of and access to out-of-school-time programs through coordinated city systems and by strengthening the financial management skills of providers; integrate in- and out-of-school learning by supporting efforts to reimagine and expand learning time during the traditional school day and year as well as during the summer months, helping expand access to arts learning, and using technology as a tool for teaching and promoting creativity and imagination. For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit its Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

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# List of Abbreviations

**ARRA** — American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

**AYP** — Adequate Yearly Progress

**CBO** — Community-Based Organization

**CMO** — Charter Management Organization

**ESEA** — Elementary and Secondary Education Act

**LEA** — Local Education Agency

**NCLB** — No Child Left Behind

**RTTT** — Race to the Top

**SIG** — School Improvement Grants

**SMO** — School Management Organization

# Executive Summary

Despite the tremendous level of activity in the school turnaround field over the past two years, the effort is still in its early stages. The field is growing quickly, but remains highly fragmented. Interventions are moving forward rapidly, but reformers have little knowledge of what is working and how to scale what works. This report aims to increase education reformers' awareness of turnaround issues, to prompt those in the field to think about how to most effectively do turnaround work, and to encourage members of the field to work in concert with each other. If the U.S. is to transform thousands of its chronically underperforming schools, multiple actors must work together to identify and spread effective practices, create the policies and conditions for success, build capacity, and ensure the sustainability of turnaround work at scale.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Need

More than 5,000 schools, representing 5 percent of schools in the United States, are chronically failing, according to the latest U.S. Department of Education statistics. These schools serve an estimated 2.5 million students. The number of failing schools has doubled over the last two years, and without successful interventions, could double again over the next five years.

### Bold Action

To combat this problem, the Obama administration announced its intention to use $5 billion to turn around the nation's 5,000 poorest-performing schools over the next five years. This is a bold challenge to a system that has succeeded at turning around individual schools, but has never delivered dramatic change at a national scale. To foster urgency and innovation, the federal government is providing unprecedented levels of funding and strong direction for policy changes to support school turnaround. District, state, private, and nonprofit education leaders across the country have responded with an unprecedented level of attention to school turnaround.

### The Challenge

The nation is at a critical juncture in its efforts to turn around schools. Over the past year, states and districts have been focused on policy change and planning. With turnaround strategies now in place, the announcement of the Race to the Top (RTTT) and Investing in Innovation (i3) winners, and the distribution of School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds, the emphasis is switching from planning to action. However, the field of actors is fragmented. While a large number of new organizations are entering the school turnaround field, there remain only a handful of proven providers — few of whom are operating at a meaningful scale. The capacity of state, district, and overall human capital is also limited, while little research exists to identify what works and how to succeed at scale.

### This Report

FSG's motivation in writing this report is to ensure that the school turnaround field is well-coordinated, fueled by promising practices, and guided by a focus on results. This report provides an overview of the school turnaround issue, identifies measures of success, surveys the policy and funding environment, compares the major turnaround models, and provides a guide to important actors in the field and a highly visual map of their interrelated roles and funding. We also explore early lessons learned, as well as key issues and gaps challenging the school turnaround field. Finally, we suggest a set of detailed actions that this widely divergent group of stakeholders could take — collectively and individually — to ensure that turnaround succeeds at scale. In writing this report, FSG drew upon more than 100 interviews with turnaround experts, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and funders. Our research also included an extensive review of secondary reports and articles as well as a synthesis of discussions among 275 turnaround focused actors who attended the "Driving Dramatic School Improvement Conference" on January 11, 2010, cohosted by FSG and *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Finally, FSG drew extensively on the guidance and feedback of an advisory group consisting of a broad cross-section of turnaround actors, including state and district leaders, philanthropic funders, human capital providers, school operators, education entrepreneurs, and researchers. Please note that we use the term "school operator" throughout the paper to represent charter, private and other nonprofit school operators and management organizations. The appendices list interviewees and research sources, and advisory-group members are listed on the inside cover of this report.

# TODAY'S LANDSCAPE

## Defining Turnaround

While questions remain about the term "turnaround," the definition that Mass Insight Education put forward provides a good beginning:

> "Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that: a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization."

Based on our analysis we would add to the definition those efforts that *take place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole*. The addition captures the idea that turnaround should include the work of districts and states to continually improve all schools. Finally, we would also recommend expanding this definition beyond individual schools to address the need to turn around schools at scale.

## Measuring Success

While many states and districts have established criteria to identify schools in need of turnaround, less clarity exists around how to track progress toward turnaround, knowing when a school has actually been turned around, and if that success has happened in the context of system improvement. Stakeholders also strongly emphasize that turnaround is only successful if it achieves gains with the *same* student population. We heard broad agreement about the following themes surrounding measures of success:

- **At the School Level.** Measure student outcomes and improvements in the school culture and learning environment; employ absolute and value-added measurements; set the bar for success high; and strive for meaningful improvements within two to three years.

- **At the System Level.** Set turnaround-specific goals for students, schools, and the system; track performance of all schools, not just turnaround schools; evaluate state and district self-performance in supporting turnaround efforts; identify and share best practices.

## Federal Funding

The size of the U.S. Department of Education's current investments in education, coupled with the acute need of states and districts for funding, has put the federal government in a strong position to incent policy change and to set expectations for the types of turnaround strategies that states and local education agencies (LEAs) use. While the amount of funding is significant, much of it is short term, and states and districts have expressed concerns about how to sustain their turnaround efforts in the longer term. Funding that has an impact on the school turnaround field includes:

- **Race to the Top Funds.** $4.35 billion in competitive grants to states, with turnaround being one of four focus areas. RTTT has already succeeded in driving state- and district-level policy change across the nation.

- **School Improvement Grants.** $3.55 billion allocated to states according to a formula based on Title I funding levels, to be granted out competitively to districts within each state. SIG guidelines align with those of RTTT, including the requirement that districts use the four turnaround models.

- **Investing in Innovation Fund (i3).** $0.65 billion in competitive grants awarded to nonprofits and school districts to expand innovative and evidence-based approaches that significantly improve student achievement, including those related to school turnaround.

## The Four Turnaround Models

To promote reforms that are dramatic rather than incremental, the federal government is requiring LEAs to use the following four approaches:

- **Turnarounds.** Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars, schedules, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach that substantially improves student outcomes.

- **Restarts.** Transfer control of, or close and reopen a school under a school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process.

- **School Closures.** Close the school and enroll students in higher-achieving schools within the LEA.

- **Transformations.** Replace the principal, take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

Significant debate surrounds the models. They vary in the cost, human capital, provider capacity, and political will necessary for implementation, and they also may differ in efficacy. Some observers believe the models that require the fewest changes in staff — especially the transformation model, which may be the most widely implemented — are the least effective in turning schools around. And questions have arisen about how to align the needs of a school with the appropriate model and how to implement the models successfully at scale. Although the models are each being pursued at individual schools, as of yet, little research-based evidence exists to help answer these questions.

## The Turnaround Sector

While some organizations have been providing turnaround services, or are now emerging with programs and services directed toward turnaround, the number and capacity of proven operators and providers serving the sector is still inadequate to meet demand. Additionally, the recent entry of a large number of new organizations, many of which have varying degrees of direct turnaround experience, has made it harder for states and school districts to assess and select quality turnaround providers. As a result, we found that states and districts are selecting only a small percentage of schools in need of turnaround for active interventions.

## Turnaround Actors

In addition to the federal government, whose role as a funder and a catalyst for policy change has been summarized above, key players shaping the turnaround sector include the following organizations:

- **States and Districts.** States are developing turnaround strategies, creating policies, and finding new ways to partner with and build the capacity of districts. Districts are directly implementing turnaround interventions, working with school operators and school support providers, and addressing human capital issues.

- **Unions.** Unions play a critical role in determining working conditions for teachers in many states. While they have been resistant to such approaches as replacing teachers, extending working hours, linking teacher compensation to student performance, and creating new teacher-evaluation approaches, our research and interviews show that a modest, but growing number of unions are now beginning to partner more closely with states and districts to address these issues, particularly as they apply to turnaround schools.

- **School Operators.** Several charter school operators, as well as public or private school operators, have begun to adapt their models to manage turnaround schools. In other cases, new school operators are being created specifically to turn around schools. In addition to managing individual schools, school operators that oversee networks of schools often take on many of the functions that a district traditionally fulfills and so need to think about turnaround at the systemic, as well as at the school level. When working with turnaround schools, school operators are typically granted substantial autonomy and are held accountable for results through a contract or charter.

- **Supporting Partners.** A variety of partner organizations support school reform in general and are evolving to support school turnaround specifically:

  - *Comprehensive School Redesign Specialists.* Work with schools to implement multidimensional turnaround strategies that begin with whole-school redesign and include coaching and implementation support.

  - *Human Capital and Professional Development Providers.* Work to increase the supply of quality teachers and leaders in turnaround schools, and work with districts and states to build their human resources management capacity.

  - *District and School Resource Management Specialists.* Help districts and schools institute financial and operational changes to support turnarounds.

  - *Integrated Services Providers.* Help schools to identify and address the cultural and mental-health issues of students, complementing the changes being made in the learning environment.

- *Community-Based Organizations*. Local nonprofit organizations play a variety of roles in supporting school turnarounds, ranging from providing students with out-of-school-time academic and nonacademic programs to engaging with parents and community members around advocacy issues.

- *Research and Field-Building Organizations*. These organizations conduct research and analysis, share best practices and tools, and help foster dialogue and partnerships among stakeholders to support turnaround activities.

- *Philanthropic Funders*. These organizations provide support to districts and states in formulating their turnaround plans; foster new approaches to turnaround; fund research and knowledge sharing; support collaboration among stakeholders; enhance the quality of teaching and leadership; and build the capacity of school districts, school operators, and supporting partners.

## Collective Impact

Although we have separately discussed the roles of major actors in advancing turnaround efforts, our research and interviews highlight the complexity of the turnaround ecosystem and the need for actors to work together in new ways. For example, states should define relationships with districts that go beyond compliance. For their part, districts should work with unions to establish new conditions at schools, and they should partner with school operators to create new schools. Greater alignment among key actors will help ensure that resources are best utilized, that lessons learned are shared, and that needed conditions can be put in place.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Although many turnaround efforts are in the early stages, lessons are emerging from the work of pioneering practitioners. At the school level, practitioners that have taken on turnaround schools consistently say that they were unprepared for the severity of the student needs and school issues that had to be addressed. As a result, they have had to make fundamental changes in their approaches to building school culture, training and supporting staff, and driving student performance. Exhibit 1 summarizes these school-level lessons learned.

Practitioners also emphasize that successful efforts at the school level must be supported by corresponding changes at the system level, as summarized in Exhibit 2.

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### Exhibit 1: School-Level Lessons Learned

**Planning**

- Identify school leadership early so as to build in planning time to engage the community, establish the vision, and create a new school culture.

- Prepare to meet student needs that are severe and pervasive — hire specialized staff, recruit and train teachers with specific capabilities, and engage with effective external providers, as appropriate.

**Human Capital**

- Provide strong classroom and teamwork skills and additional support to teachers.

- Empower principals and leadership teams with key autonomies over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.

- Ensure principals and school leadership teams have the will, skill, and authority to drive change in demanding environments.

**Maintaining Support and Building Sustainability**

- Signal change early and build momentum by delivering and communicating "quick wins."

- Build capacity for long-term sustainable results.

## KEY GAPS

Our interviews highlight significant gaps that must be addressed to ensure that school turnarounds succeed at scale. These are summarized in Exhibit 3. While the gaps apply generally to all turnaround schools, our research and interviews suggest that they are particularly difficult to address in rural schools and in high schools.

> **Exhibit 3:** Key Gaps
>
> **Capacity:** There are not enough proven turnaround experts or organizations, and existing organizations are still building capacity and infrastructure. Additionally, there is little capacity to assess the quality of the large number of new entrants to the school turnaround field.
>
> **Funding:** There may be a lack of ongoing operational funding to sustain efforts. Additionally, the requirements for the distribution of federal funds are putting pressure on states and school districts to act without adequate planning time.
>
> **Public and Political Will:** Key actors find it challenging to make the difficult decisions required for dramatic school turnaround.
>
> **Conditions:** Policies and conditions in districts and states are frequently at odds with what is necessary for success in turnaround.
>
> **Research and Knowledge Sharing:** There is not enough research or evidence to identify, share, and scale effective turnaround interventions.
>
> **High Schools and Rural Schools:** While improving the performance of any school is difficult, it is particularly challenging to implement and succeed in school turnaround at high schools and at schools in rural areas.

## CRITICAL ACTIONS

To turn around thousands of schools, actors should work collectively and individually to scale nascent efforts, build capacity, and address key gaps. The entire sector should develop common metrics for success, understand and learn from what is and is not working, build capacity and expertise, create conditions for success, and maintain urgency around turnaround efforts to sustain political will. Exhibit 4 summarizes actions that can be taken collectively to address the gaps.

Through our research, interviews and discussion with conference participants, we also identified important actions for each type of actor:

- **U.S. Department of Education.** The federal government already plays a key policy-setting and funding role, but can expand its efforts to support more research, rigorous evaluation, and knowledge sharing.

- **States.** States can focus on developing scalable solutions to human capital and operator capacity issues, creating conditions for success through policy change, assessing the quality of turnaround providers and operators, and investing in the IT and accountability infrastructure that underpins turnaround success.

## Exhibit 4: Collective Actions to Fill Gaps

| Gaps | Collective Actions |
|------|-------------------|
| **Capacity** | • Promote the entry of new quality providers and scale proven operators.<br>• Create training and recruitment approaches to attract and develop turnaround talent.<br>• Create and staff distinct turnaround offices or divisions. |
| **Funding** | • As possible, repurpose current ongoing funding sources to address turnaround needs.<br>• Ensure that specific turnaround funding streams are included in ESEA reauthorization.<br>• Promote the use of one-time funding to build long-term capacity and infrastructure. |
| **Public and Political Will** | • Build awareness of the need for change among students, parents, educators, policy makers, and communities.<br>• Engage and mobilize stakeholders, and build public demand to advocate for needed changes.<br>• Establish laws and policies that support those making difficult decisions. |
| **Conditions** | • Change the culture of engagement between schools, districts, and states from compliance to cooperation.<br>• Establish laws and policies that ensure needed school and district autonomies and capacity.<br>• Develop and implement shared accountability systems at the system and school levels. |
| **Research and Knowledge Sharing** | • Ensure funding and attention are directed to rigorously studying and comparing the efficacy of turnaround interventions.<br>• Document and share turnaround successes and challenges to improve implementation.<br>• Create opportunities and infrastructure to collect, organize, and share research and best practices. |

- **Districts.** Districts need to create strong talent pipelines, build their accountability and school support capacity, and ensure the availability of critical, high-quality partners, particularly to fill human capital needs and operate schools.

- **Unions.** Unions can consider turnaround schools as a "laboratory" in which they are more willing to experiment with new types of contracts, new ways of collaboratively partnering with districts, new work rules, and new teacher-evaluation and pay-for-performance approaches.

- **School Operators.** School operators can scale existing successful models, identify and train turnaround professionals, and build organizational capacity to run turnaround schools.

- **Supporting Partners.** Supporting partners can build turnaround-specific services. The most pressing need is for greater action from human capital providers. University and alternate-certification programs should focus on developing turnaround-specific training approaches and recruiting and training teachers and school leaders who can drive success in turnaround situations.

- **Community-Based Organizations.** Community-based organizations (CBOs) focused on parent engagement can mobilize community support for turnaround efforts and the difficult political decisions that often need to be made for those initiatives to succeed. CBOs focused on providing out-of-school-time supports should partner with turnaround schools to improve access to academic and personal support programs that help students catch up academically.

- **Research and Field-Building Organizations.** Research and field-building organizations are vital to studying and evaluating existing efforts, identifying tools and effective practices, filling important knowledge gaps, and disseminating findings.

- **Philanthropic Funders.** Foundations can seed innovative models in leadership, teaching, curriculum, support services, community engagement, and other areas vital to turnaround work, as well as invest in partnerships with states and districts in applying these practices at scale.

# Introduction

*"Instead of funding the status quo, we only invest in reform — reform that raises student achievement …
and turns around failing schools that steal the future of too many young Americans, from rural communities
to the inner city."*

*— President Barack Obama, State of the Union Address, January 27, 2010*

In early 2009, the Obama administration announced its intention to use $5 billion to turn around the nation's 5,000 poorest-performing schools over the next five years. This was a bold challenge to an education sector that has had some success at turning around individual schools, but has not yet delivered dramatic change at a large scale.

A year and a half later, the school turnaround field is at a critical juncture. A great deal of debate, dialogue, and planning has taken place. Now with federal funds being distributed, as well as turnaround strategies developed at most states and in many districts, the emphasis is switching from planning to action. FSG's motivation in releasing this report at this moment in time is to help ensure that actions taken will be coordinated, fueled by promising practices, and guided by the evaluation of results.

To those ends, this report provides a guide to the emerging school turnaround field. It includes an assessment of the need; a snapshot of key areas of debate, such as how to measure success; a summary of the policy and funding environment; and an assessment of the sector's capacity, including a map of turnaround actors and the roles they play. The report explores early lessons learned from turnaround practitioners, summarizes key issues challenging the field, and identifies critical gaps that will need to be filled. Finally, the report recommends actions that hold promise for increasing the likelihood that turnaround efforts can succeed at scale.

In writing this report, FSG drew upon more than 100 interviews with turnaround experts, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and funders. Our research also included an extensive review of secondary reports and articles as well as a synthesis of discussions among 275 turnaround focused actors who attended the "Driving Dramatic School Improvement Conference" that FSG cohosted with *Stanford Social Innovation Review* on January 11, 2010. The event

included representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, state and district superintendents and staff, policymakers, education practitioners, human capital providers, school principals, researchers, and philanthropic funders.

Finally, we drew extensively on the guidance and feedback of an advisory group consisting of a cross-section of turnaround actors, including district and state leaders, philanthropic funders, human capital providers, school operators, and education entrepreneurs and experts. The appendices list the interviewees and research sources, and the advisory-group members are listed on the inside cover of this report.

Given how rapidly the turnaround sector is growing and evolving, parts of this report will likely become out of date immediately after it is published. Regardless, we believe that the main themes, gaps, and lessons identified can serve the field in three ways:

- We hope that for new actors poised to enter the turnaround space — school districts, school operators, education entrepreneurs, funders — the report highlights the importance of the work and illustrates the state of the field, and as a result encourages and eases new entrants.

- We hope that for existing organizations focused on the difficult work of turning around schools, the report provides new ideas, leads them to identify new partners, and helps strengthen their knowledge and capacity.

- Finally, we hope that this report helps the turnaround field as a whole as it spurs additional dialogue and connections, facilitates the creation and sharing of knowledge, and helps multiple actors better understand their own roles and how they most effectively work in concert with others — a prerequisite if the field is to succeed in turning around thousands of failing schools.

"At the end of the day, who can argue with holding schools accountable for all children?" asks Paul Vallas, head of the Recovery School District in New Orleans. "Who can argue with not tolerating failing schools or with giving poor kids the kinds of choices that wealthier kids have?"[1]

# Part I:
## Understanding the Landscape

In the first part of this report, we paint a picture of the existing landscape of turnaround efforts around the country. Part I covers four major topics:

- The scope of the turnaround challenge and areas of debate,

- Measures for gauging success in school turnaround at the school and system levels,

- The role of the federal government and a comparison of four turnaround models, and

- The roles of key actors and a snapshot of recent activities.

Since the No Child Left Behind Act was passed in 2001, districts have been identifying failing schools as those that do not demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in improving their performance. These schools face an escalating process of corrective action, which ultimately might lead to replacing the school's leadership or restructuring the school itself. School failure is a persistent and pervasive reality, as the U.S. Department of Education's data show.[2] With more than 5,000 schools in the restructuring stage in 2010, Mass Insight Education recently estimated that more than 2.5 million students — particularly high-poverty students and students of color — are at risk of or are already receiving a woefully inadequate education.[3] Out of more than 100,000 schools nationwide, this bottom 5 percent of schools have failed to make AYP for five or more years and often have high staff turnover, high rates of violence, and low graduation rates. The severe impact of school failure on students and on the nation is well documented. Lack of educational attainment is highly correlated with lower lifetime earnings, higher incidences of substance abuse, higher rates of incarceration, and poorer health outcomes.[4] As a society, citizens pay the price in lost tax revenue, forgone GDP growth,  and increased costs related to health care, crime, and social services.[5] As President Obama said in his January 2010 State of the Union address, "In the 21st century, the best antipoverty program around is a world-class education."

This is also a growing crisis. In the 2008-2009 school year, the number of schools in restructuring increased 26 percent from the previous year, and jumped an alarming 325 percent over the number from five years earlier, as shown in Exhibit 5.[6]

Since the number of schools that enter "school improvement" each year is well over 5,500, combined with low success rates in turning around schools, more schools will continue to fall into restructuring. Extrapolating from the latest trends from 2006 to 2009, Exhibit 6 shows that without successful interventions, the number of schools in restructuring could grow 143 percent over the next five years, reaching more than 12,000 by 2014-2015.

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1   Tehrani, Alex, "How to Fix No Child Left Behind," *Time*, May 24, 2007.
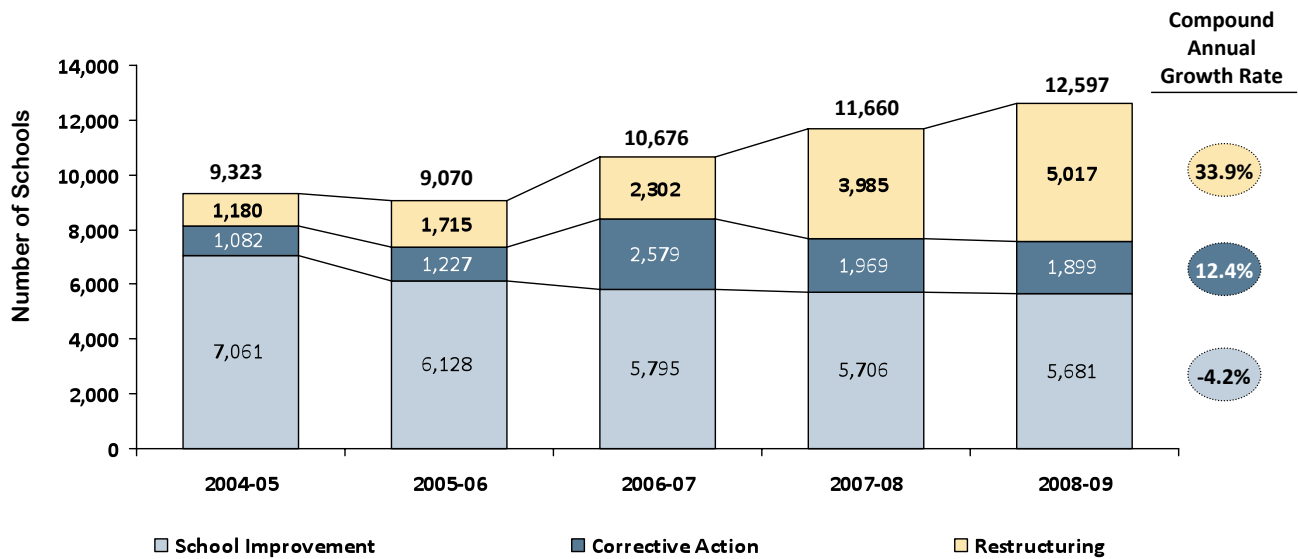
2   U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts.

3   Mass Insight Education, "The Turnaround Challenge," 2007.

4   Cheeseman Day, Jennifer, and Eric C. Newberger, "The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings," U.S. Census Current Population Reports, July 2002; Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse, and Mental Health Statistics Web site; Department of Justice Web site; Maynard, Rebecca A., ed., *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1996).

5   Cohen, Mark A., "The Monetary Value of Saving High Risk Youth," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1998; McKinsey & Company, Social Sector Office, "The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools," 2009; Maynard, Rebecca A., ed., *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1996); Department of Justice Web site.
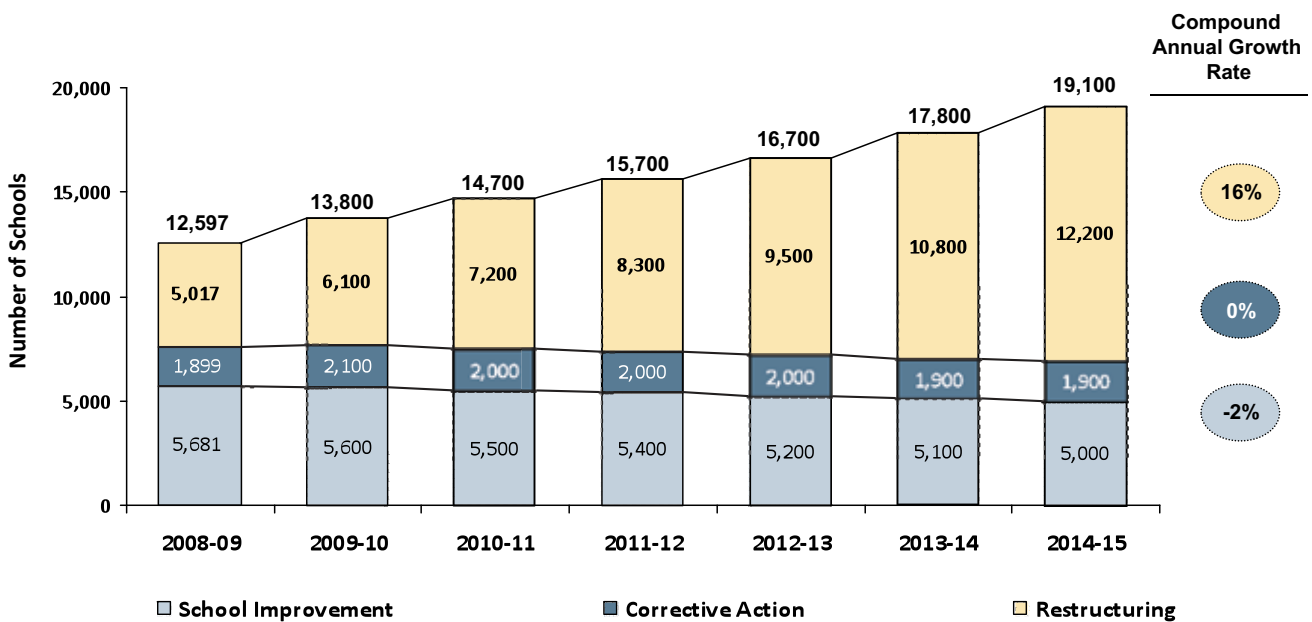
6   U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts.

## Exhibit 5: Number of Schools in Need of Improvement, 2004-2009



Compound Annual Growth Rate

| | |
|---|---|
| Restructuring | 33.9% |
| Corrective Action | 12.4% |
| School Improvement | -4.2% |

Legend: School Improvement | Corrective Action | Restructuring

Source: U.S. Department of Education, EdFacts.

## Exhibit 6: Projected Number of Schools in need of Improvement, Corrective Action, and Restructuring, 2008-2015



Compound Annual Growth Rate

| | |
|---|---|
| Restructuring | 16% |
| Corrective Action | 0% |
| School Improvement | -2% |

Legend: School Improvement | Corrective Action | Restructuring

**Key Assumptions:**
- Schools enter school-improvement status at a slightly declining rate, reflecting the 2005-2006 to 2008-2009 CAGR of -2 percent.
- An estimated 37 percent of schools progress from improvement to corrective action every year, reflecting the average rate from 2005 to 2009.
- Fewer and fewer schools exit the restructuring category, reflecting the 2005 to 2009 trends.
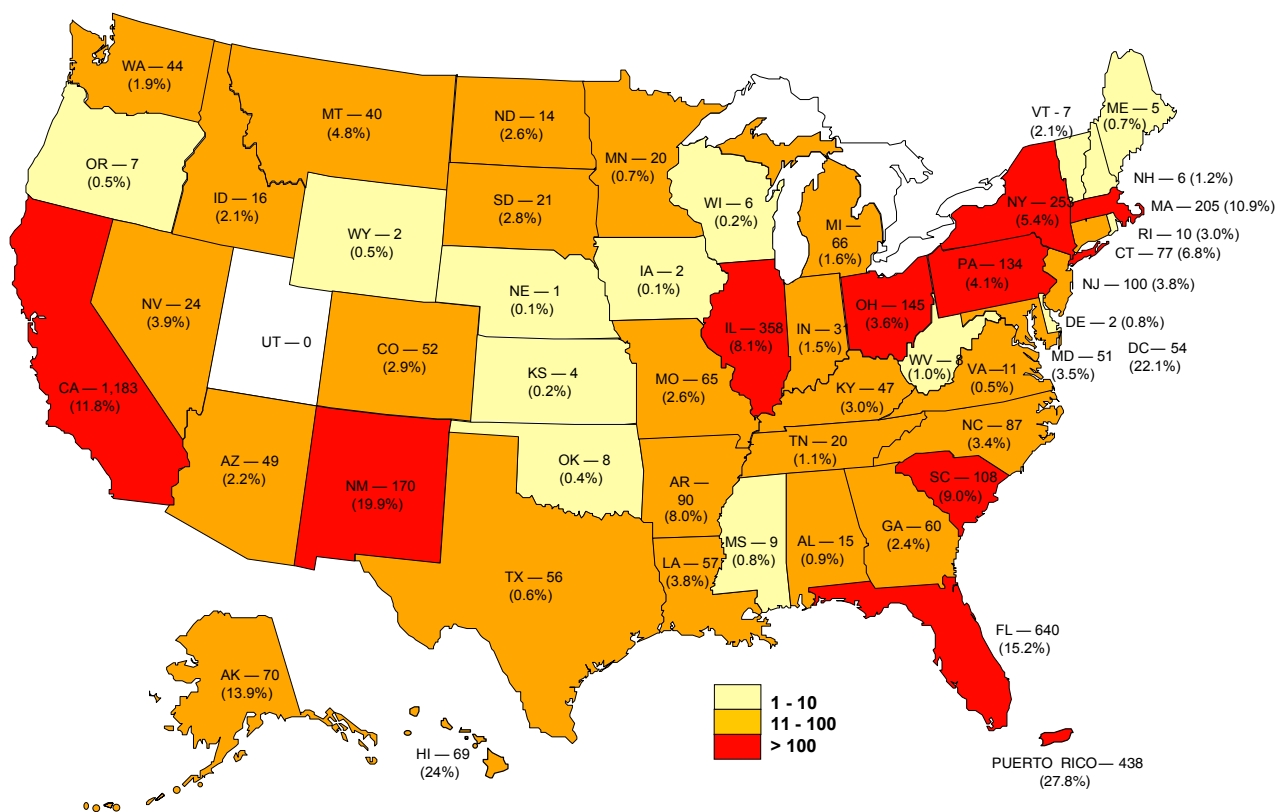
Source: FSG analysis.

Of the 5,017 schools currently in restructuring, 72 percent are concentrated in 11 states or territories: California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and South Carolina. At least 100 schools in each of these states, shown in Exhibit 7, have failed to meet AYP for five or more consecutive years, with California topping the list with 1,183 schools. Four other areas, while having lower absolute numbers, have high densities of failing schools: Hawaii (24 percent), the District of Columbia (22 percent), New Mexico (20 percent), and Alaska (14 percent).

# DEFINING TURNAROUND

The word *turnaround* is used broadly and means different things to different people. Confusingly, it is currently applied to both the discipline of improving school systems and individual schools, as well as to a particular approach that the U.S. Department of Education calls the "turnaround model." Some observers question the very applicability of this term to describe schools that have never been highly performing in the first place.[7] Others are skeptical about the comparison to turnarounds in the private sector, where low rates of success are the expected norm.[8]

**Exhibit 7:** Number of Schools in Need of Restructuring, 2008-2009



| | |
|---|---|
| ▢ | 1 - 10 |
| ▢ | 11 - 100 |
| ▢ | > 100 |

Source: U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts.

WA — 44 (1.9%)
MT — 40 (4.8%)
ND — 14 (2.6%)
MN — 20 (0.7%)
VT - 7 (2.1%)
ME — 5 (0.7%)
OR — 7 (0.5%)
ID — 16 (2.1%)
SD — 21 (2.8%)
WI — 6 (0.2%)
NH — 6 (1.2%)
NY — 259 (5.4%)
MA — 205 (10.9%)
WY — 2 (0.5%)
MI — 66 (1.6%)
RI — 10 (3.0%)
CT — 77 (6.8%)
NV — 24 (3.9%)
IA — 2 (0.1%)
NE — 1 (0.1%)
PA — 134 (4.1%)
NJ — 100 (3.8%)
UT — 0
CO — 52 (2.9%)
IL — 358 (8.1%)
IN — 31 (1.5%)
OH — 145 (3.6%)
DE — 2 (0.8%)
CA — 1,183 (11.8%)
KS — 4 (0.2%)
MO — 65 (2.6%)
WV — 8 (1.0%)
VA — 11 (0.5%)
MD — 51 (3.5%)
DC — 54 (22.1%)
KY — 47 (3.0%)
AZ — 49 (2.2%)
NM — 170 (19.9%)
OK — 8 (0.4%)
TN — 20 (1.1%)
NC — 87 (3.4%)
AR — 90 (8.0%)
SC — 108 (9.0%)
TX — 56 (0.6%)
MS — 9 (0.8%)
AL — 15 (0.9%)
GA — 60 (2.4%)
LA — 57 (3.8%)
AK — 70 (13.9%)
FL — 640 (15.2%)
HI — 69 (24%)
PUERTO RICO — 438 (27.8%)

7  FSG interviews.

8  Hess, Frederic, and Thomas Gift, "School Turnarounds: Resisting the Hype, Giving Them Hope," *Education Outlook*, February 2009.

Some have even called turnaround a "fallacy," at least at the school level.[9] "The history of urban education tells us emphatically that turnarounds are not a reliable strategy for improving our very worst schools," writes Andy Smarick, a former distinguished visiting fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.[10] He suggests that the best way to ensure an effective, well-functioning school is to start one from scratch. Justin Cohen, president of the turnaround division at Mass Insight Education, believes schools can be turned around with strategies that create clusters of schools within a district that operate with charterlike conditions and are managed through lead partners. Brian Hassel, codirector of Public Impact, argues that the key to success is to deploy multiple strategies and intervene quickly if early indicators fail to show promising signs of success.

Even as the means continue to be debated, the term "turnaround" has quickly gained traction and is now used broadly to describe a movement to positively transform the performance of chronically failing school systems and schools.

To ensure that we are collectively working to solve the same problem, FSG tested Mass Insight Education's definition of turnaround with interviewees:[11]

"Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that: a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performing organization."

While we heard general support for this definition, interviewees also identified areas where debate exists about particular components (see Exhibit 8). Additionally, based on our interviews and research findings, we would add this phrase to the Mass Insight Education definition:

"c) takes place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole."

The addition captures the emerging consensus that turnaround should not be a zero-sum game in which one school succeeds at the expense of others. Districts and states must focus continually on improving all schools. Finally, we would also recommend expanding this definition beyond individual schools to address the need to turn around schools at scale.

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**Exhibit 8:** The Definition of Turnaround

*"Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that: a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and, b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization."*

How do you determine what is significant?

Will a focus on quick results overshadow capacity building to sustain improvements?

Is turnaround part of an ongoing performance-management system at the district level?

Is the time frame longer? Does it vary by type of school?

Should building district and state capacity also be addressed?

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[9] Smarick, Andy, "The Turnaround Fallacy," *EducationNext*, Winter 2010, Vol. 10, No. 1, http://educationnext.org/the-turnaround-fallacy/.

[10] Ibid.

[11] See appendices for a list of all interviewees.

While the debate continues, the current set of prevailing perspectives can be summarized into the following set of questions and suggested answers:

- *Is turnaround part of an ongoing performance-management system at the district level?* Yes. Turnaround strategies are at the extreme end of, but nevertheless a part of, a continuum of school improvement. Districts need to turn around failing schools, ensure low-performing schools don't fall into turnaround status, and improve the quality of every school.

- *Should building district and state capacity also be addressed?* Yes. Although focused on school-level interventions, turnarounds must be supported with increased capacity at the district and state levels. Otherwise, the underlying conditions that led to chronically underperforming schools will continue to result in repeated failures.

- *How do you determine what are significant gains?* We are not sure yet. This is an area currently generating significant debate in the field. There is agreement that the ultimate indicator of turnaround success is student academic results. Stakeholders also agree that measuring both growth rates and absolute results are important. However, indicators of progress and the end point at which a school can be considered to be turned around are still being broadly discussed. The next section on measuring success explores this debate more fully.

- *Is the time frame longer? Does it vary by school type?* We are not sure yet. Many people argue that academic improvements should be seen in the first two years of a turnaround for an elementary or middle school, and within three years for a high school. However, the absolute performance of the school may still take an additional two to three years to reach district and state standards (depending on the rigor of the standards). Many believe that the insistence on a shorter time frame lies at the heart of differentiating turnaround from other, slower improvement strategies and is a key step in maintaining political will and funding for turnaround efforts.

- *Will a focus on quick results overshadow capacity building to sustain improvements?* Hopefully not, but interviewees cited this as a danger the field is paying close attention to. Most stakeholders believed that quick results are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of funding, political will, and community support.

# Measuring Success

While many states and districts have established criteria to identify schools in need of turnaround, there is less clarity around how to track progress toward turnaround, knowing when a school has actually been turned around, and if that success has happened in the context of system improvement. The field should identify clear interim and long-term success metrics at the school, district, and state levels. Without expectations for success at both the school and system levels, resources may be withdrawn before gains are made or solidified.

## DEFINING SUCCESS FOR SCHOOLS

Our interviews unearthed four themes around measuring school-level success:

- **Determining *What* to Measure**. Schools should track interim progress and ultimate outcomes related to both school environment (including school culture, connectivity, and teacher and leader engagement and effectiveness) and student performance (including student progress and student outcomes). Stakeholders emphasize that a turnaround is only successful if it achieves gains with the same student population.

  Examples of school environment metrics that demonstrate progress include lower rates of violence or suspension, increased student and faculty attendance, lower dropout rates, and higher retention of effective staff. Examples of student performance metrics that demonstrate progress include increases in student performance on formative assessments, improved standardized test results, and higher graduation rates.

  Interviewees also emphasized that results not only should be evaluated in absolute terms, but also should be benchmarked against past performance and expected performance using value-added measures. Exhibit 9 summarizes commonly referenced measures of school improvement.[12]

- **Identifying *How* to Measure**. A school undergoing turnaround needs timely access to information about student performance and turnaround implementation. "Annual achievement data comes out too late," says Eileen Reed, deputy executive director of the Region XIII Education Service Center at the Texas Education Agency. "We need to invest in early-warning systems to get data along the way to see if students are making progress. Are they advancing at a fast enough rate to catch up on their deficits? Are they on track to make graduation requirements?"

Timely feedback can be collected through classroom observation and through tools — often electronic — that provide interim assessments of whether students are mastering course content. Nontraditional methods are often used in turnarounds to re-engage students in learning and address long-standing deficits, so the field needs new cross-content measures that go beyond test scores to evaluate such areas as student work and performance, interactions between teachers and students, and improvements in critical thinking. Information about the progress of implementation can be collected through staff, parent, and student surveys and measures of observed behavior.

States and districts, meanwhile, need efficient assessment processes that enable comparisons and allow them to learn about what works in turning around schools. This is a challenge, as interviewees noted that known measures have variable levels of sophistication and are often inconsistently collected across schools, districts, and states.

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[12] Sources of these measures include scorecards from Chicago Public Schools and the Texas Education Agency, as well as discussions among "Driving Dramatic School Improvement" conference attendees.

## Exhibit 9: Measures of School Improvement

### I. School Environment

**School Culture**

- Student attendance rates

- Rates of serious misconduct and violence

- Assessments of follow-through on implementation plans by school administration and staff

- Infrastructure improvement (such as dollars invested and response time to maintenance problems)

**School Connectivity**

- Parent engagement and satisfaction metrics (such as participation in meetings)

- Partnerships (such as funding raised from philanthropy and community satisfaction survey metrics)

**Teacher and School Leader Engagement and Effectiveness**

- Teacher attendance and retention rates of effective staff

- Rates of participation in collaborative decision making and planning time

- Desire for and implementation of targeted professional development

- Focus on student learning based on content and time on task

- Value-added academic measures based on interim assessments of student progress

- Use of data to improve the quality of teaching

- Amount of principal's time spent on improving teaching and learning

### II. Student Performance

**Measures of Student Progress**

- Rates of earning credits and grade-level advancement

- Absenteeism and dropout rates

**Outcomes for Students**

- Rates of students performing at grade level by subject area

- Rates of proficiency on state assessments

- Graduation and college-going rates

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- **Setting the Bar**. How high to set the standard for whether a school has been turned around is an area of ongoing debate. Some people fear that if the bar is set too high, not enough schools will succeed and the entire turnaround movement will be viewed as a failure.[13] Others fear that an insufficiently ambitious definition will lead to efforts that are not aggressive enough to achieve meaningful results.[14]

There are a number of options for setting the bar. For some, making AYP is a good starting point. However, many actors spoke more ambitiously about goals for dramatic improvement, such as a 50 percent improvement in graduation rates or double-digit gains on state performance tests. As one of its goals, Mastery Charter Schools aims for at least 85 percent of graduates to enroll in

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[13] "Driving Dramatic School Improvement" conference discussion.
[14] Ibid.

higher education.[15] Many interviewees went so far as to say that even large gains were not enough — a school was not truly turned around until it had completely closed the achievement gap when compared with other schools in the state. Closing the gap used such measures as exit exams, standardized assessments, ACT/SAT scores, and graduation rates.

- **Timeline to Success.** In general, interviewees believed schools can be turned around in two to four years, with improvement in the school environment and culture occurring within two years and improvements in student performance starting by the second or third year. However, this timeline will vary and is expected to be longer in high schools.

  Practitioners urge patience in the first year or two of turnaround, as some performance indicators may actually decline once significant changes are enacted in a school. "We have seen a school look quantitatively worse before it improves," says Don Fraynd, turnaround officer at the Chicago Public Schools. "We have seen huge spikes in suspensions while discipline in the building was being reset. We aren't going to expect a jump in test scores in the first year." Some signs of progress may also look counterintuitive. For example, increased attendance and participation, which in the long term will improve student performance, may in the short term lead to a decline in average test scores, as students with poor attendance, who are often far behind their peers academically, begin to regularly attend school.

Beyond the importance of defining, tracking, and learning from measurable indicators, many experienced practitioners note that a successful turnaround can be palpably sensed upon entering the school. Practitioners note visible changes in students, who positively interact with their peers, are more fully engaged in classroom activities, and express optimism and pride in their conversations with teachers and other adults in the building. They describe hallways and lunchrooms that are peaceful and ordered. They see evidence of a positive culture and high expectations for students in posted goals and progress reports, in classroom-management systems, and in how teachers speak about their students.

# DEFINING SUCCESS FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS

We heard broad agreement around the importance of tracking success at the system level. Still, few states and districts have established specific goals. Emerging themes include:

- **Setting Turnaround-Specific Goals for the System.** Districts should set specific goals and affiliated measures of progress and success for students and schools, as described in the previous section. At the system level, districts and states need to set improvement goals for themselves, along with corresponding milestones and timelines across their portfolio of schools, and then compare results across schools and districts.

  The Massachusetts Department of Education is sending a clear message to its districts, for example. "Our idea about turnaround is that the district has ultimate responsibility to turn around its schools," says Karla Baehr, deputy commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. "For us, a district earns the label of its lowest-performing school — clearly sending the message that each district is only as strong as its weakest school."

- **Tracking the Performance of All Schools, Not Just Turnaround Schools.** Districts need to ensure that while some schools are being turned around, others do not themselves become turnaround candidates. Additionally, districts should be careful that interventions at turnaround schools, such as teacher replacement, do not adversely affect other schools in the system. Interviewees consistently stated that turnaround schools need to be managed within the context of overall district performance and that districts need to track performance across and between all schools.

- **Evaluating the District's Performance in Supporting Turnaround Efforts.** Districts and states need to evaluate themselves on their ability to lay the foundation for turnaround success with governance, financial, human resources, and leadership systems that enable schools to achieve sustained improvement. "Fixing individual schools is not going to fix the issue," says Cohen of Mass Insight Education. "We need to measure system performance and conditions."

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[15] Mastery Charter Schools, "2008-2009 Mastery Charter School Overview."

While not a supporter of turnaround, Smarick argues that success at the systems level includes closing low-performing schools and providing high-performing alternatives to replace them.[16] Exhibit 10 provides an example of measures that one state department of education has used to evaluate district turnaround capacity.

- **Finding and Sharing Best Practices.** It is clear from stakeholder interviews that practitioners in the field do not feel they know enough about how to do turnaround work at scale. To compound the challenge, turnaround work requires new behaviors and capabilities.

These two challenges are fueling a strong imperative for finding and sharing effective practices, as well as comparing results of different interventions to identify what is and is not working and why. This should happen at the local level, at the state level, and across geographic boundaries.

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### Exhibit 10: Sample Measures of Success at the District Level

**Criteria for a District to Exit Turnaround from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

#### # 1: Improved Student Achievement

Evidence that student achievement has been on the rise for three years for students overall and for each subgroup of students:

- Increased student achievement as measured by state testing (such as average student growth, third-grade reading, eight grade mathematics, first-time 10th-grade proficiency rate)
- Higher graduation and higher-education-enrollment rates

#### # 2: District Systems and Practices That Meet State Standards

Evidence that the district can continue to improve student achievement, because it has well-functioning and sustainable district systems and practices in the areas of:

- Curriculum and instruction
- Leadership and governance
- Human-resource development
- Financial and operational management
- Student support.

#### # 3: School Conditions That Support Student Learning

Evidence that the district will continue to improve student achievement, because the conditions for school effectiveness are in place in schools and classrooms, with particularly strong evidence of:

- Effective leadership
- Effective instruction
- An aligned taught curriculum

Source: Massachusetts DESE District Standards and Indicators, http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/

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[16] Smarick, Andy, "The Turnaround Fallacy," *EducationNext*.

# Federal Funding and the Four Turnaround Models

The federal government — with significant funding and strong policy direction — is setting the pace for school turnaround. This section outlines the sources of federal funding for school turnaround efforts, as well as the four approaches to turnaround that the U.S. Department of Education expects LEAs to follow as they put RTTT and SIG funds to work.

## FEDERAL FUNDING

Education-reform efforts are hardly new (see Exhibit 11). However, the Obama administration's unprecedented investment in education reform through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 has significantly, if temporarily, expanded the federal role in education. The sheer size of the investment, coupled with the magnitude of the budget deficits facing states and districts, has put the federal government in a position to incent policy change at the state level and to set guidelines for the turnaround strategies of states and LEAs. Funding that has an impact on turnaround efforts includes:

- **Race to the Top Fund.** $4.35 billion in competitive grants to states, with turnaround being a key focus. Guidelines for the turnaround section specify that LEAs must implement at least one of the four turnaround models outlined below. LEAs with nine or more turnaround schools must use multiple models. Of the 41 applications submitted in the first phase of RTTT, 16 applicants proceeded to the final round: Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Of the 16 finalists, Delaware and Tennessee were the winners of the first phase of RTTT. The three states with the highest scores on the turnaround section of the application were Washington, D.C. (50.0), Illinois (49.4), and Tennessee (48.0).[17] Thirty-six states submitted Round 2 applications. Of the 19 states that were selected as second-round finalists, 10 were awarded grants, including the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island.

- **School Improvement Grants.** $3.55 billion allocated to states according to a Title I formula, with the funds to be granted out competitively to districts. Guidelines align with RTTT, including the need to use the four turnaround models. SIG funds may be awarded to all Title I schools, as well as schools that are eligible for but do not receive Title I, Part A funds, if those schools have not made AYP for at least two years or are in the state's lowest-performance quintile. States decide the amount of SIG funding an individual school receives, based on district applications, and funding can range from $50,000 to $2 million.

- **Investing in Innovation Fund (i3).** $650 million in competitive grants awarded to nonprofit-LEA partnerships to expand innovative and evidence-based approaches that improve student achievement, close achievement gaps, and improve teacher and principal effectiveness — all areas related to turnaround. Of nearly 1,700 applicants, 49 were chosen as winners – four at the up-to-$50 million "scale-up" level, 15 at the up-to-$30 million "validation" level, and 30 at the up-to-$5 million "development" level. Of the winners, 13 were primarily focused on turning around the lowest-performing schools.

All told as a result of ARRA, schools received approximately $14 billion over their regular Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) appropriation. School-improvement funding received an additional $5 billion boost in 2009 due to RTTT and i3 funding. However, ESEA funding in 2010 is expected to drop to its previous levels.

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[17] U.S. Department of Education.

This speaks to the concerns that states and districts express about the "funding cliff" that will follow the sudden and significant infusion of federal education dollars in 2009, as well as the urgent need for this funding to be invested in developing long-term capacity rather than being allocated to ongoing operational costs. An additional concern is that the federally mandated timing for distributing and employing SIG and other turnaround-related funding does not provide states and school districts with adequate time to develop and implement thoughtful turnaround plans for high-need schools.

Schools may receive another infusion of funding in 2011 from a potential increase in i3 and SIG funds and a proposed $1.35 billion extension of RTTT, with competition extended to include districts.[18] President Obama is also seeking an additional $900 million for School Turnaround Grants available for the districts that are home to the 2,000 schools which produce more than half of the nation's dropouts. "We know that the success of every American will be tied more closely than ever to the level of education that they achieve," Obama said in March 2010 at an America's Promise Alliance event.[19]

The sizable federal-government investment in education, as well as the competition for RTTT (where turnaround accounts for 10 percent of the RTTT application-scoring rubric), has already driven state- and district-level policy change across the nation. Many states, such as California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and Tennessee, have passed legislation to link teacher evaluation and student data. Illinois raised its charter cap.[20]

Lawmakers in Massachusetts passed a major bill granting the state education commissioner authority to intervene in low-performing schools when local district and union leaders are unable to agree on issues, such as replacing teachers and lengthening the school day.[21] Illinois has created 12 "super LEAs" in which superintendents and union leaders have agreed to work around existing collective-bargaining agreements to adopt new evaluation systems and implement more aggressive reform in low-performing schools.[22]

[18] McNeil, Michele, "Obama to Seek $1.35 Billion Race to Top Expansion," *Education Week*, January 19, 2010, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/01/19/19rtttbudget.h29.html?tkn=ZLWFbhgvmHK9uODtQEYiVGhxmOdOs5npKgH6.

[19] "Remarks by the President at the America's Promise Alliance Education Event," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 1, 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-americas-promise-alliance-education-event.

[20] Maxwell, Lesli, "Digging Through States' Race to Top Bids," State EdWatch blog, *Education Week*, January 27, 2010, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2010/01/from_my_notebook_colleague_stephen.html; Robelen, Eric W., "'Race to Top' Driving Policy Action Across States," *Education Week*, December 23, 2009, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/12/23/16states.h29.html?qs=race+to+top; Sawchuk, Stephen, and Lesli A. Maxwell, "States Vie to Stand Out in Race to Top Proposals," *Education Week*, January 27, 2010, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/01/27/19rtt_ep2.h29.html?tkn=NMPF6aXGRAGbnWrCck%2FtVrl0kQ2YiqlVFQf3.

[21] Maxwell, Lesli, "Digging Through States' Race to Top Bids," State EdWatch blog, *Education Week*, January 27, 2010, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2010/01/from_my_notebook_colleague_stephen.html.

[22] Race to the Top Fund, "Applicant Info: States' Applications, Scores, and Comments for Phase 1," http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/index.html.

# **Exhibit 11:** The Link to Past Reform Efforts

The Obama administration is attempting to both build on the lessons of past education reforms and to distinguish itself from them. The current reform effort has differentiated itself from previous initiatives through its use of large pools of funding (RTTT, SIG, i3), a competitive process to allocate education dollars to states and districts, and more prescriptive guidelines to dictate the reform strategy. At the "Driving Dramatic School Improvement" conference, Joanne Weiss, former director of RTTT, summarized the current approach: "[The federal government] is thinking about competition as a force for change — as a way to maximize impact."

The major previous reform efforts since the influential 1983 "A Nation at Risk" report are listed below, along with examples of how they have shaped today's thinking:

- **Effective Schools Research**. In the 1980s, a team of researchers led by Ronald Edmonds, director of the Center of Urban Studies at Harvard University, identified seven "correlates" that determine a school's success: clear mission; high expectations; instructional leadership; frequent monitoring of student progress; opportunity to learn and student time on task; safe and orderly environment; and home-school relations. Edmonds' research helped shape current thinking about what makes schools effective and provided an early basis for many of the requirements of the current reform initiative.

- **School Choice**. The school choice program gained momentum in the 1990s and empowered students and parents with options that in turn raised the standard of education. It introduced a philosophy of competition to the effort and a belief that students should have compelling options for education. These ideas have carried through to the development of the four current turnaround models and the use of charter, private and public contract, and district providers to serve as turnaround operators.

- **Charter School Movement**. Charter schools are free from the staffing, curriculum, and programmatic restrictions imposed on most traditional district schools. They are viewed as prime candidates to take over and turn around failing schools, given the autonomy and flexibility they bring to budget, staffing, curriculum, and schedule.

- **Small Schools**. The Small Schools Movement was predicated upon the belief that a personalized learning environment in small schools can make a significant difference in the academic achievement of high-needs students. When implemented effectively, this personal attention can have positive results. Operators like Green Dot demonstrated the approach when it broke up Locke High School in Los Angeles into smaller units as part of its turnaround plan for the school, for example.

- **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**. The federal government's NCLB Act of 2001 required all public schools to administer statewide standardized tests annually to students in certain grades and subjects. NCLB represented the most sweeping changes to ESEA since its 1965 enactment. In addition to a focus on stronger accountability, the act increased school choice and local control, and placed an emphasis on proven teaching methods.

- **Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)**. The federally backed CSR Program began in 1998. It helps public schools raise student achievement as they implement effective, comprehensive models. The current reform initiative builds on the CSR Program's strengths: its philosophy of dramatic and systemic reform; and its expectation that districts integrate specific components into their reform plans to qualify for funding. At the same time, the current effort provides states and districts with more detailed guidance about turnaround approaches, and significantly more funding to support reform efforts — two areas where critics of the CSR Program have often focused.

Source: FSG research and analysis.

# THE FOUR
# TURNAROUND MODELS

The federal government is requiring LEAs to use the following four turnaround models in order to qualify for RTTT and SIG funding:

- **Turnarounds**. Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school's staff; adopt a new governance structure; provide job-embedded professional development; offer staff financial and career-advancement incentives; implement a research-based, aligned instructional program; extend learning and teacher planning time; create a community-orientation; and provide operating flexibility.

  *Case Example: Highland Elementary School in Montgomery County, Maryland, replaced its principal and half its staff, as well as introduced new instruction methods, data analysis for student instruction, and staff accountability for student achievement. As a result of this intervention, the school performed strongly enough to receive the 2009 National Blue Ribbon awarded for placement in the top 10 percent of state assessments or dramatic improvement in assessment scores over a five-year period.*[23]

- **Restarts**. Transfer control of, or close and reopen, a school under a school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process. A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend.

  *Case Example: Mastery Charter School Shoemaker Campus in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was taken over by Mastery Public Charter Schools in 2006. Mastery's model includes a strong focus on individualized instruction, teacher coaching and professional development, a culture of high expectations, rigorous academic standards, and problem-solving and social-emotional skills. In three years, the school more than tripled reading scores from 20 percent proficient to 71 percent proficient and raised math*

*scores from 15 percent proficient to 88 percent proficient — completely closing the achievement gap and even outperforming state averages.*[24]

- **Transformations**. Replace the principal (no requirement for staff replacement); provide job-embedded professional development; implement a rigorous teacher-evaluation and reward system; offer financial and career advancement incentives; implement comprehensive instructional reform; extend learning- and teacher-planning time; create a community-orientation; and provide operating flexibility and sustained support.

  *Case Example: Benwood Schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee, introduced merit-pay plans, teacher-linked data collection, teacher evaluation, embedded professional development, teacher coaching on using student data, and leadership development. As a result, the percentage of third-graders scoring proficient or advanced in reading jumped from 53 percent in 2003 to 81 percent in 2007, and the Benwood schools outgained 90 percent of all schools on the state's value-added test scores.*[25]

- **School Closures**. Close the school and enroll students in other, higher-achieving schools.

  *Case Example: In 2007, the Denver Public School District (DPS) closed eight schools due to underenrollment and poor student performance, relocating 2,000 students to three schools within DPS. The closures generated $3.5 million in savings, of which $2 million was directed to the three middle schools where students were relocated. The 2008-2009 Colorado Student Assessment Program indicates that the relocated students are showing increased academic growth in their new schools, although not to the extent the school district had hoped.*[26]

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[23] FSG research.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

## Comparing the Models

The federal government introduced these four models so as to ensure that RTTT and SIG funding is spent on dramatic rather than incremental reform.[27] However, significant debate surrounds the models — and around school closure, in particular, as summarized in Exhibit 12. Concerns have been raised that the overall framework of options does not adequately address the operating constraints of rural states and does not reflect other important elements of a turnaround strategy, such as the need for parent and community involvement.[28] Also, interviewees said the timetable for the distribution and use of SIG funds is causing states and school districts to employ less dramatic turnaround approaches.

Many questions also surround the use of the models: How to implement them, how effective they are in turning around schools, and how to choose the right model to fit school and local conditions. Little research-based evidence exists to answer any of these questions, representing a significant gap for the field.[29] When comparing the models, at this time we can only offer observations based on their specifications and on a limited number of experiences that interviewees shared:

By definition, he four models have different requirements for new principals and teachers:

- *Turnarounds* and *restarts* require the replacement of the principal and many teachers.

- *Transformations* require replacement of the principal.

- *School closures* do not necessitate new staff on site.

In addition, the four models also have different requirements for providers and school operators:

- *Restarts* depend on outside providers who can take over the school.

- *Transformations* and *turnarounds* rely on organizations that can provide professional development tailored to the severity of the turnaround situation.

- *School closures* do not depend on outside providers, but do depend on the availability of higher-performing schools.

- The four models may differ in start-up and ongoing operating costs:

- *Restarts* can be costly, as districts may need to do capital improvement and perhaps even donate property, as well as pass on potentially augmentedper-student funding to the school operator brought in to run the turnaround school. The district incurs the cost of planning for the transfer and may pay the school operator ongoing management fees. However, the same operator may have the ability to attract additional resources to the school from philanthropic or private funding and may contract with the district and pay for some district services.

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[27] U.S. Department of Education.
[28] Klein, Alyson, "School Turnaround Models Draw Bipartisan Concern," *Education Week*, May 21, 2010.
[29] See the appendices for a list of research reports that specifically address turnaround options.

- *Turnaround* costs are largely the responsibility of districts, including compensation for new principals and teachers, costs connected with the release of current tenured teachers (which depend on the terms of collective-bargaining agreements), capital-improvement costs for site renovation, and other supports for new staff in the building. In the near term, SIG funding is expected to cover a large portion of these costs, which allows districts to do this work in-house. Over time, districts that choose this model must realize economies of scale to lower their costs.

- *Transformations* require districts to provide professional development to teachers (paying for the expert advice and compensating teachers for time spent on professional development), as well as to change evaluation systems and implement instructional reform.

- *School closures* have the lowest cost in the long term and may conserve district resources if consolidation is needed based on enrollment trends. However, initial costs to release tenured teachers as part of school closure could be significant and could linger two to three years, depending on the specific terms of a district's collective-bargaining agreements. Another hidden cost is the need to guard against theft and ensure that school resources are liquidated or distributed. Finally, districts may incur significant transportation costs if higher-performing schools are not available in the neighborhood of the school to be closed.

- The cost to implement each of the models will vary state to state and even district to district due to different labor costs, labor contract terms, agreements with school operators and service providers, and facilities and renovation costs.

The four models differ, as well, in the need for political will to overcome resistance to implementation:

- *School closures*, for many community stakeholders, signal that the district has given up on that school's staff, students, families, and community, and causes students to transfer and travel to new schools.

- *Restarts* involve transferring control of a school outside of district control, frequently to a charter operator.

- *Turnarounds* generate resistance given the requirement for staff replacement.

- Transformations are less controversial because they require the least disruption to school operations or staff.

Finally, the models may vary in how quickly and deeply they affect school culture, and ultimately, student achievement:

- *Restarts* may have the greatest potential for rapid impact in terms of culture and academic achievement, because a third-party school operator brings with it an entirely new staff, a fresh culture, and in the case of experienced operators, tested techniques for improving school and student performance.

- *Turnarounds* may potentially generate the second-highest level of impact, due to the large changes in staff and the ability to reset the culture of the school.

- *Transformations* are perceived to have lower potential for impact than other models. They are seen as most similar to many of the restructuring reforms tried, unsuccessfully, under NCLB, and many observers do not view them as a dramatic enough intervention to achieve significant results.

- *School closures'* impact is entirely dependent on the ability to relocate students to more highly performing schools.

The models requiring fewer resources are also the ones perceived to have lower potential for impact.[30] This relationship is troubling, if the evidence collected in the future substantiates it, because transformations are the most commonly implemented strategy among states and districts. Currently, this choice is being made largely based on resource constraints, such as the availability of new principals or high-quality school operators, and on the need to quickly employ SIG funds. In their RTTT applications, many states — particularly rural states like Idaho, Iowa, Oregon, and West Virginia — wrote that human capital challenges limit their ability to pursue turnaround and restart models. Closure is likely not an option, given the limited number of schools in rural areas.

In spite of these limitations, some rural states have proposed to leverage all of the models. Georgia is entering into partnerships with Teach for America, the New Teachers Project, and UTeach to build its teacher pipeline specifically to help rural areas adopt the turnaround and restart models.[31] Our interviewees consistently cited a desire to build enough capacity and to perform enough evaluation so that in the future they could choose a model for individual schools based on its potential for impact.

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[30] FSG interviews.
[31] Ibid.

# Turnaround Actors

While a number of actors are working in the field, not enough proven organizations exist to meet demand. Nor do the existing actors have enough capacity to turn around schools at scale. This section assesses the landscape of key players shaping the turnaround sector.

## THE SECTOR

The vast majority of states and districts are just beginning to develop the infrastructure, accountability systems, and partnerships to launch and implement turnaround strategies. A handful of school operators and supporting partners already provide school turnaround services, and new organizations are now emerging to offer their services, as well.

However, the number and capacity of proven operators and providers serving the turnaround sector is still inadequate to meet the demand. For example, our research and interviews identified fewer than 15 turnaround-focused school operators managing multiple schools, none of which were managing more than 10 schools.[32] Finally, the recent entry of many new organizations with varying degrees of turnaround experience is making it more complicated for states and districts to assess and identify high-quality partners and providers.

Given limited internal and external capacity, states and districts are targeting only a small subset of schools for turnaround. Based on our interviews, FSG found that states and districts are currently selecting few schools in need of turnaround for active interventions. At Chicago Public Schools, just 13 of the district's 241 schools in restructuring have been selected for turnaround, and in South Carolina, only four of the state's 108 schools in restructuring have been selected for turnaround in the 2009-2010 school year.[33]

## THE ACTORS

In addition to funding and catalyzing policy change, the federal government has recently indicated that it may play a role in vetting the quality of the many new entrants to the school turnaround space. Other key players shaping the turnaround sector include states and districts, unions, school operators, supporting partners, research and field-building organizations, and philanthropic funders.

The sections that follow provide a high-level summary of activities under way among these groups. As you read through the examples, please keep in mind that the field is rapidly evolving and the effectiveness of highlighted and emerging efforts will need to be assessed over time.

## States and Districts

Across the country, state and district education leaders are playing central roles in school turnaround. Increases in funding are fueling greater momentum among established efforts in cities like Baltimore, Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C., as well as in states like Colorado, Delaware, Louisiana, and Texas.

In addition, many states and school districts are launching new efforts and mobilizing in response to federal priorities and funding. States are developing turnaround strategies, creating policy (see Exhibit 13), and finding new ways to partner with and build the capacity of districts. Districts are directly implementing turnaround interventions; addressing human capital issues; and working with school operators and school support providers. Notably, states with large rural populations, such as Mississippi and South Carolina, are playing more of a "districtlike" role. They are engaging directly with schools to determine approaches and provide individualized support, as well as partnering with providers to develop statewide human capital solutions.

What follows are specific examples of actions states and districts have taken:

- **Creating a Supportive Policy and Political Environment for Turnaround Work.** The promise of federal funding has prompted a number of states to pass new legislation to create more favorable conditions for turnaround, which in turn affects district-level policies and conditions. For example, in Colorado, the Innovation Schools Act of 2008 strengthens school-based decision making and offers more autonomy from district and state education regulations. The act allows schools to apply for innovation-school or innovation-school-zone status, which enables them to make their own decisions on spending, the length of the school day and year, course content, hiring, and teacher compensation. "These schools and districts of innovation will have the potential to instruct students in exciting new ways," said Peter Groff, then-president of the Colorado State Senate, after the legislation passed. "We have the potential to improve student achievement by offering

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[32] Secondary research on organizations highlighted by the U.S. Department of Education.
[33] 2008 Illinois District Report Card, City of Chicago SD 299.

flexibility in the way education is administered."[34] While any school may apply for status as an innovation school or zone, the act was designed to enable low-performing schools to act swiftly and with greater autonomy, as well as to attract capable leaders.

Some states and districts are responding to a growing recognition in the field that turnaround will not succeed unless accountability structures and relationships, which have been traditionally focused on compliance, shift instead to a focus on building strong partnerships, developing capacity, and using data to drive improved performance.

For example, the Center for School and District Accountability of the Massachusetts Department of Education recently created a new accountability framework that assesses school effectiveness and reviews district performance. For districts in need of intervention, the center collaborates with districts and the assistance units of state school boards to develop recovery plans. It also monitors plan implementation. In addition, the center plans to train districts to analyze and compare practices and outcomes according to a common set of standards. "We want to build the capacity of districts so that they are leading the work," explains Deputy Commissioner Baehr.

- **Building the Capacity to Do Turnaround Work.** State and district leaders agree that developing a human capital pipeline for teachers and principals is one of the keys to achieving turnaround success. Developing that talent pipeline requires a coordinated effort at the state and district levels. As RAND found in a recent study about school leadership, "A cohesive leadership system (CLS), defined as well-coordinated policies and initiatives across state agencies and between the state and its districts, appears to be a promising approach to developing school leaders engaged in improving instruction."[35] Talent development also requires preparation for the challenges of a turnaround situation.

Yet few human capital providers — universities or nonprofit organizations — are set up to train the large number of teachers, principals, and support staff needed to succeed in chronically low-performing schools. As a result, some districts and states have integrated professional development programs into their local turnaround strategies, while others have partnered with external human capital providers.

For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools launched in 2008-2009 its Strategic Staffing Initiative, which provides a mix of financial and hiring incentives for principals and their staffs to build highly effective leadership teams in seven of the district's lowest-performing schools. The principals make a three-year commitment to their new schools, and receive a 10 percent merit-pay supplement and bonus if their school shows high growth by the second year. "Effective leadership at the school level is essential," says district Superintendent Peter Gorman. "We can't raise student achievement without strong leadership."[36]

In addition to strengthening human capital within schools, states and districts are also building their own, currently limited, capacity to support turnaround efforts and work directly with schools. As a specific example, Virginia's Department of Education requires its districts to develop a plan for supporting their lowest-performing schools. The department partners with each district to monitor implementation of the plan.

To aid this effort, the state has brought in administrative coaches to work with districts, and has built a learning community for turnaround principals to discuss issues and best practices across districts. "We won't just work with the schools — we require the districts to be a partner," says Kathleen Smith, director of Virginia's Office of School Improvement. "And I think it's made all the difference."

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[34] Office of Gov. Bill Ritter of Colorado, "Gov. Ritter Signs Innovation Zones Bill Into Law," press release, May 28, 2008, http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/GovRitter/GOVR/1211966060528.

[35] RAND, "Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems," 2009.

[36] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, "CMS Names New Leadership at Seven Schools," press release, February 10, 2009, http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/news/Pages/CMSnamesnewleadershipatsevenschools.aspx.

## Exhibit 13: State Policy Changes to Support School Turnarounds

Over the past year, dramatic changes have taken place in state and local policies related to school turnaround. The Obama administration's education priorities and Race to the Top guidelines precipitated many of these policy changes, which include an expectation that states will create policies that improve the conditions for school turnaround to take place. The turnaround-related reforms largely fall into two categories: teacher-tenure and evaluation policies, and implementation policies.

### Policies on Teacher Tenure and Evaluation

- **Florida's** bill, which did not pass, would have put all teachers on annual contracts. After a teacher's fifth year in the district, a further annual contract would only be awarded if the teacher was ranked within the top-two performance tiers. The legislation would also have required districts to establish performance-pay plans.

- **Colorado's** SB 10-191, which passed, requires tenured teachers earning multiple consecutive "unsatisfactory" ratings to revert to probationary status, as well as stipulates mutual consent for teacher placement in schools. It bases more than half of a principal's evaluation and 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation on student-achievement gains.

- **Rhode Island** passed legislation that allows schools to select their teachers, demands that no child be taught for two consecutive years by teachers rated ineffective, and requires that teachers who are rated ineffective two years in a row be released from employment.

- **Maryland**, **Ohio**, and **Washington** passed laws extending the time before a teacher could receive tenure. **Delaware** and **Tennessee** passed laws requiring that student achievement form a significant portion of a teacher's evaluation.

### Policies Governing Implementation

- **Colorado's** SB 09-163 (Education Accountability Act) creates a new accountability system for the state's schools. Districts will be accredited at different levels, with improvement plans required and state turnaround assistance offered to districts at the lowest levels. Over time, new performance measures — such as student and school improvement, dropout rates, student performance on precollegiate tests, and other measures — will determine a district's accreditation, as well as what's reported to the public. Additionally, Colorado's SB 08-130 (Innovative Schools Act) allows schools to petition the local school board for increased autonomy in turnaround schools.

- **California's** Open Enrollment and Parent Empowerment Act requires that a turnaround model be implemented if a school is in corrective action, if it has an API of less than 800, and if at least 50 percent of the parents at the school request the change.

- **Illinois** established its authority to set up a series of "Partnership Zones," through which the state will partner with outside organizations and allow new evaluation systems and staffing autonomy in failing schools.

- **Massachusetts'** SB 2247 increases school-level autonomy in failing schools and doubles the number of charter schools in its lowest-performing districts.

- **Tennessee** passed legislation to create an "Achievement School District" akin to the Recovery School District in **Louisiana**. Low-performing schools would be removed from their home districts and placed under the state's authority.

Additional information on recent state education policies can be found on the Education Commission of the States Web site at www.ecs.org.

## Unions

Both unionized and nonunionized states have large numbers of schools in need of turnaround. The presence or absence of unions does not in and of itself lead to the failure of schools. However, unions have been resistant to many of the changes that are seen as core to turnaround solutions — changes such as replacing teachers, extending working hours, linking teacher compensation to student performance, and creating new teacher evaluation approaches. Union support for RTTT applications varied greatly. Some states, like Delaware, were able to secure broad-based union support, while other unionized states like Florida had less success.

Despite this, our interviews and research revealed that unions and districts can and are beginning to find creative approaches to creating the conditions needed for turnaround success. For example, in October 2009, teachers in New Haven, Connecticut, ratified a new contract for the district's lowest-performing schools. According to the agreement, "Schools deemed 'turnarounds' would be reconstituted with new leadership and staff. Teachers would have to reapply, and principals would select those to be hired. These schools would also be freed from most contract provisions and could be operated by third-party management organizations, including charter school operators."[37]

The contract provisions have been criticized for not tackling tenure and pay-for-performance issues, but many observers believe that this was a breakthrough in the dialogue between management and unions. "This is an incredibly progressive contract," says Joan Devlin, senior associate director for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). "It addresses teacher voice, and it gives the district the flexibility it needs to make [these reforms] work."[38]

Unions are also beginning to examine other central issues of high-needs schools, such as teacher evaluation. The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and New York State United Teachers have been awarded an AFT grant to establish a multidistrict approach for more rigorous teacher evaluation, in partnership with state education leaders and local unions. According to the AFT, the grant will help Rhode Island and New York to "design an educator-evaluation system based on state teaching standards, evidence of student learning, and measures of learning environment conditions."[39]

As seen in the selection of Delaware and Tennessee as first-round RTTT winners, the U.S. Department of Education is placing a premium on union and district buy-in for school turnaround and other reform approaches. And states, districts, and unions are responding with an unprecedented level of dialogue. However, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's clear message to states as they developed their second-round RTTT applications was that bold reform takes precedence over district and union consensus. In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, Secretary Duncan said, "Watered-down proposals with lots of consensus won't win, and proposals that drive real reform will win."[40]

## School Operators

Outside of the traditional district-managed public schools, turnaround schools can be run by school operators, including single-school operators and school management organizations (SMOs). The latter group includes for-profit and nonprofit education management organizations (EMOs) and charter management organizations (CMOs) that deliver to a network of schools such management services as curriculum development, assessment design, professional development, systems implementation, back-office services, teacher recruitment, and facility services.

For example, Mastery Charter Schools (Mastery) currently operates four charter schools in Philadelphia, three of which are district turnarounds. Mastery's model integrates management and educational practices to drive student achievement. It includes continuous training for teachers; assessments linked to direct instruction; and problem-solving, social-emotional, and workplace skills training for students. Other school operators, such as AUSL, are not converting schools to charters, but rather contracting with the district to run turnaround schools on their behalf. When working with turnaround schools, operators are typically granted some level of autonomy, assume responsibility for student results, and are held accountable through a contract or charter signed with the district or state agency.

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[37] Sawchuk, Stephen, "Teacher Contract Called Potential Model for Nation," *Education Week*, October 21, 2009, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/21/09union.h29.html?r=829946276.

[38] Ibid.

[39] American Federation of Teachers, AFT Innovation Fund, http://www.aft.org/innovate/ny-ri.htm.

[40] King, Neal Jr., and Stephanie Banchero, "Unions, States Clash in Race to Top," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2010.

## Supporting Partners

A variety of partner organizations help support school-reform efforts, and they are evolving to support school turnaround specifically at the school, district, and state levels. The range of supporting partners currently working in both school reform and turnaround include:

- **Comprehensive School Redesign Specialists.** These organizations work with schools to implement turnaround strategies. For example, the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) partners with underperforming high schools for a five-year planning and implementation period, which begins with the development of a comprehensive school-design plan and continues with ongoing coaching and professional development for faculty and administrators and implementation support. "We have a wraparound turnaround model," explains Gerry House, CEO of ISA. "ISA provides extensive, customized professional development and on-the-ground support for districts, principals, and teachers engaged in school turnaround."

  Similarly, Partners in School Innovation (PSI) brings together teams of experienced educators to collaborate with principals and teacher leaders to improve core instructional programs in high-needs public schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. PSI works side by side with turnaround leaders and teachers on-site and in cross-school networks for three to five years to drive continuous improvement adapted to each school's needs.

  These approaches trace their origins back to the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. The program identified the qualities of effective schools and then provided $50,000 annual grants to Title I schools to help them align with effective qualities. In the District of Columbia Public Schools, several comprehensive school-redesign providers partner with the district to run turnaround schools, as well as six other types of whole-school reform models. Additionally, organizations like Cambridge Education, B&D Consulting, and SchoolWorks provide consulting services to districts and school operators that range from diagnostics to planning to implementation support.

- **Human Capital and Professional Development Providers.** These organizations and programs work to increase the supply of quality educators in turnaround schools through recruiting, training, and supporting turnaround principals and teachers. Human capital and professional development organizations working in the turnaround space include university and district-based programs, as well as independent nonprofits.

  For example, the University of Virginia developed a comprehensive two-year School Turnaround Specialists Program to provide executive education and support for leaders in turnaround schools. The New York City Leadership Academy was launched as a 501(c)(3) with the explicit purpose of training leaders to serve the New York City Department of Education's low-performing schools. New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) is a national nonprofit that partners with school districts in 20 cities to train, place, and support principals. NLNS requires its partners to provide high levels of autonomy and flexibility to its candidates. What these programs have in common is their focus on providing not just training, but also induction support, mentoring, networking opportunities, and ongoing professional development to their graduates.

  In addition to training candidates, some of these organizations have also begun to conduct and publish research to understand what makes their teachers and leaders successful in turnaround environments. For example, Teach for America (TFA) recently published its first book, *Teaching As Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher's Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap*, which presents the organization's findings on what distinguishes the TFA teachers who are most effective at driving dramatic student gains. The book and its accompanying Web site, www.teachingasleadership.org, serve as a how-to guide for new teachers in low-income communities.[41] NLNS published similar research on what distinguishes those principals who achieve "breakthrough gains" in its report "Principal Effectiveness: A New Principalship to Drive Student Achievement, Teacher Effectiveness, and School Turnarounds."[42]

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[41] Teach for America, "Teaching As Leadership Framework," http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/teaching/teaching_leadership_framework.htm.

[42] New Leaders for New Schools, "Principal Effectiveness: A New Principalship to Drive Student Achievement, Teacher Effectiveness, and School Turnarounds with Key Insights from the UEFTM," http://www.nlns.org/uef.jsp.

Many of these organizations have evolved from focusing on school leader or teacher training and support to also building the capacity of districts and states to manage the human capital pipeline and to ensure that conditions are in place to support the success of trained educators. The University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialists Program has now collaborated in this way with over 40 school districts across 10 states and major cities. It most recently partnered at the state level to work with the Missouri Department of Education on 29 urban and rural schools across the state. "Our approach has really evolved over time," says Executive Director Leann Buntrock. "We are now working with not only districts and schools, but also with states and regional centers."

Human capital providers focused on professional development for teachers entering high-needs schools have also expanded their models. For example, the New Teacher Project not only offers programs to train teachers, but also works with school districts to develop new-teacher recruitment and hiring strategies for underperforming schools.

- **District and School Resource Management Specialists**. District and school resource management organizations help districts and schools institute financial and operational policies and practices to support turnaround. These organizations offer services that include diagnostic analyses tailored to district needs, Web-based tools developed to assess school performance, and research and training for improved instruction.

  For example, Education Resource Strategies works closely with leaders of urban public-school systems to rethink the use of district and school-level resources so as to provide targeted assistance and increased autonomy to failing schools. Alvarez and Marsel has worked with multiple districts across the U.S. since 2003 to support system-level turnaround through resource mapping and operations management.

- **Integrated Services Providers**. Turnaround schools often have high rates of student violence and disruptive behavioral issues. Integrated services providers help schools identify and address the cultural and mental-health factors that drive chronically poor performance. Organizations such as Turnaround (formerly Turnaround USA) work with school staff to help them understand child development and to integrate social and behavioral support directly into the learning environment. Turnaround's model is based on four mechanisms to help students with the highest needs: partnering with principals to hire social workers; developing student intervention and instructional support teams; accessing resources for extensive case management; and knowledge and skill building around child development. The organization works at the individual teacher level, providing them with training, coaching, and on-site observation. "Our model looks at the complex demands in these schools that lead to astoundingly poor performance," says Greg Greicius, senior vice president for education initiatives at Turnaround. "We address behavioral issues by addressing student needs — socially, emotionally, and academically."

## Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations can aid turnaround efforts in a number of important ways. Most students in turnaround schools are significantly behind academically. After-school tutoring, summer academic programs, and mentoring programs can help accelerate a student's academic progress. For example, Boston Public Schools works with Citizen Schools to implement after-school programs at seven of its lowest-performing schools. Independent research on the program suggests that, although participants enter the program behind their peers on state exam results, by the end of seventh grade, they outperform their peers on those same tests.[43]

CBOs can also play an important role in working with the community to build support, or mobilize pressure, for the district to make difficult decisions like replacing principals and teachers, or even closing schools. Parent Revolution has built a parent union in Los Angeles to advocate for dramatic reform. The group was instrumental in lobbying L.A. Unified to turn over 250 of the district's worst-performing schools to outside operators. America's Promise has organized 105 summits across the country to raise parent and CBO awareness of the local dropout crisis and to help local partners develop community-action plans to address the issue. "Engaging the parents and community deeply is the way to make turnaround efforts sustainable," explains Carmita Vaughn, chief strategy officer at America's Promise.

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[43] Citizen Schools Web site.

## Research and Field-Building Organizations

These organizations analyze data, extract lessons and effective practices, and provide tools to support turnaround work. They also foster partnerships and dialogue among education decision makers. The research base to guide the field is limited, given that many efforts are still in early stages of development. But some research groups are now turning their attention to school turnaround. Organizations such as Mass Insight Education, Public Impact, the Center on Education Policy, NewSchools Venture Fund, the Aspen Institute, and the U.S. Department of Education have been researching and writing about school turnaround. An appendix lists the turnaround-specific reports and articles we collected as part of our research.

## Philanthropic Funders

Private, corporate, and community foundations play a key role in driving education reform, and turnaround is no exception. To date, funders have been involved in the following areas:

- **Supporting Research and Knowledge-Sharing**. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was a lead funder for "The Turnaround Challenge" report from Mass Insight Education. Similarly, a collaboration of funders, including The Wallace Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Stuart Foundation, the Rainwater Charitable Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, funded this report and the "Driving Dramatic School Improvement" conference. Carnegie Corporation of New York and a number of other funders supported a recently released study from MDRC about New York City's small schools of choice, which have replaced traditional comprehensive high schools in historically disadvantaged communities.[44]

- **Providing Support to Districts and States**. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded 15 states to employ consulting firms to help complete RTTT applications. Several foundations supported state applications in their regions, including the Joyce Foundation in Indiana, the Kauffman Foundation in Missouri, and the Donnell-Key Foundation in Colorado.

- **Supporting New Turnaround Approaches**. Carnegie Corporation of New York announced plans in January 2010 to fund Mass Insight Education's Partnership Zone Initiative with a $1.5 million, two-year grant that was partially matched by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The funding will support Mass Insight Education and a group of national collaborators to create scalable and sustainable strategies for turning around clusters of the lowest-performing schools in six states: Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and New York.

- **Enhancing the Quality of Teaching and School Leadership**. The Wallace Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and the Rainwater Charitable Foundation have all made significant investments in improving the quality of school leadership, supporting highly effective training programs, and working to identify and create systemic conditions that support school leader success. "As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership," says Ken Leithwood, professor of educational leadership and policy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.[45]  In line with research findings on the vital role that quality teaching plays in student achievement, foundations are making major investments in improving teacher effectiveness. The most prominent example is a $335 million investment announced by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2009 to fund experiments in tenure, evaluation, compensation, training, and mentoring.[46]

- **Funding the Capacity of School Districts and Human Capital and Technical Assistance Providers**. The Los Angeles Unified School District received funding for staff positions from private foundations, including the Wasserman Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, including one position to oversee the takeover of low-performing turnaround schools. In Chicago, Boeing has funded a variety of partners working on districtwide initiatives, including AUSL, NLNS, and Renaissance 2010. "We have focused our giving on a model or idea that will ultimately lead to a systemic or impactful change," says Nora Moreno Cargie, director of global corporate citizenship at the Boeing Company.

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[44] MDRC, "Transforming the High School Experience: How New York City's New Small Schools Are Boosting Student Achievement and Graduation Rates," June 2010.

[45] Leithwood, K., K. Louis, S. Anderson, and K. Wahlstrom, "How Leadership Influences Student Learning," Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, September 2004, http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocusEducationLeadership/Pages/HowLeadershipInfluencesStudentLearning.aspx.

[46] Anderson, Nick, "Gates Foundation Gives $335 Million to Raise Teacher Effectiveness," *The Washington Post*, November 20, 2009.
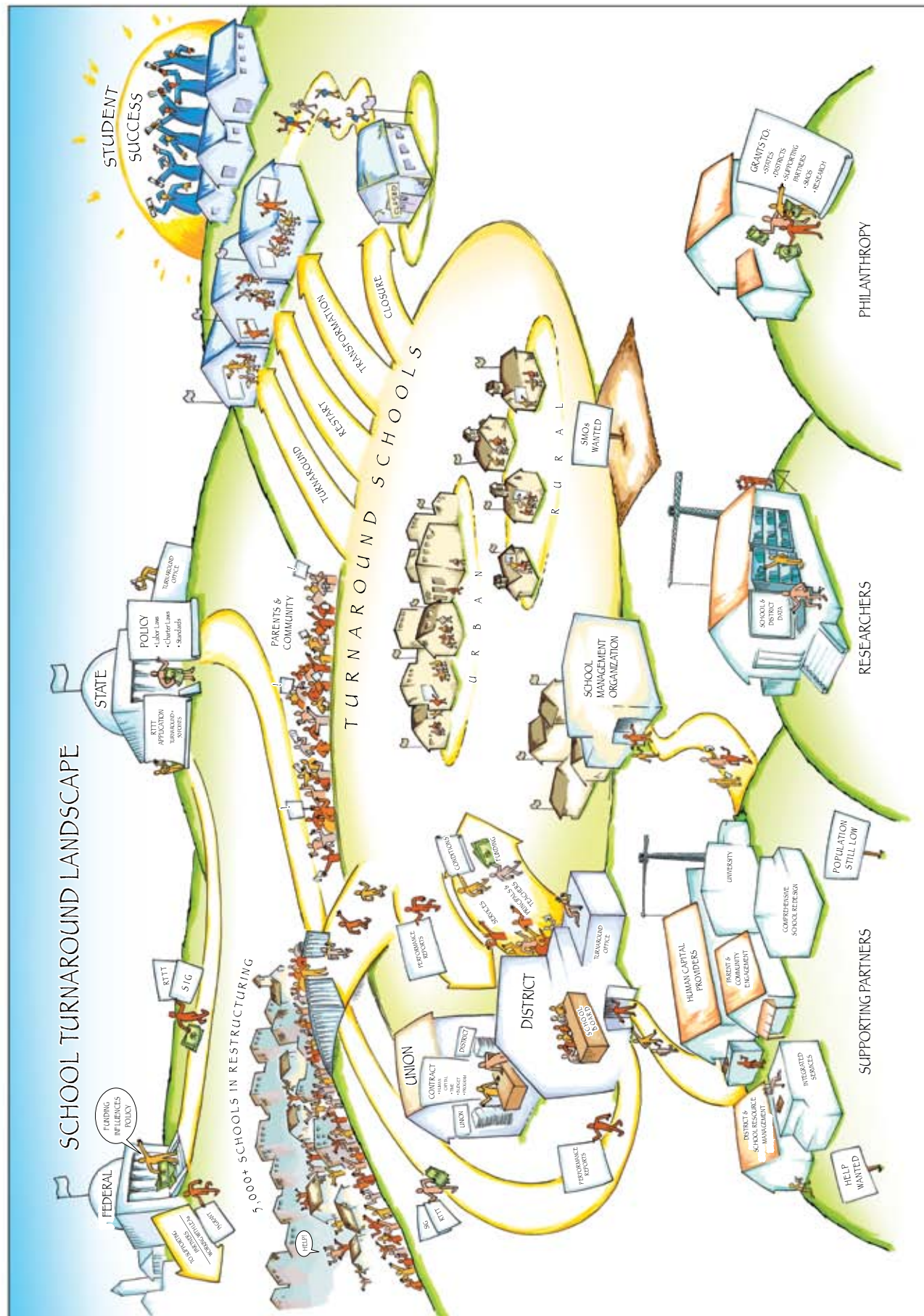
Despite the individual grants outlined above, relatively few foundations have prioritized school turnaround as a major area of investment or program area. This may change as federal funding decisions are made and turnaround work continues to build momentum.

## THE LANDSCAPE OF TURNAROUND ACTORS

Although we have discussed the roles that major actors play in advancing school-turnaround efforts separately, these actors are working in close relationships with each other. Our turnaround landscape map (see Exhibit 14) depicts this ecosystem of activity. The map shows the significant actors and how they relate in terms of their roles and how funds flow between them:

- *Federal funding* is flowing to states in the form of RTTT and SIG, as well as to districts and nonprofits in the form of i3 grants and SIG. The SIG and district funding then flows to school operators. Philanthropic funding is currently supporting the work of school operators, states, and districts, as well as an array of support providers.

- *Accountability relationships* are reflected by the flow of data from schools to districts, and from districts to states. Additionally, district and state accountability systems analyze that data and return reports and findings to schools so that they can understand and improve on their work.

- *Conditions at schools* are being determined by school operators, state and district policies, and the collective-bargaining agreements negotiated between districts and teachers' unions.

- Districts and school operators (labeled as school management organizations on Exhibit 14) need to build *complementary capacity and accountability systems* for turnaround schools. Districts can either build their own capacity to do turnaround work or buy that capacity through partnerships with school operators.

- CBOs and parents can *rally to support turnaround efforts* in the school and build public will for dramatic reform efforts. Districts must work to engage parents and community groups and raise their awareness of the opportunity that significant funding from the federal government presents.

- Philanthropic funders can *invest in individual actors in the ecosystem* — states, districts, school operators, CBOs — who all need to build capacity for turnaround. Philanthropic funders can also support the ecosystem as a whole through funding research and efforts to bring actors together and share lessons across stakeholders and geographies.

While we have used the map in this section to highlight relationships between actors, we also encourage readers to reference the map later in the report, when we call attention to issues and capacity gaps.

**Exhibit 14**

SCHOOL TURNAROUND LANDSCAPE

# Part II:
## Shaping the Future of Turnaround

In the second part of this report, we assess the strategies needed to direct the trajectory of school turnaround toward success. Part II covers three major topics:

- Lessons learned from existing efforts at schools and systems,

- Issues to be addressed for turnaround to succeed at scale, and

- Activities that could increase the likelihood of success

## Lessons Learned from Early Efforts

Although most school turnaround efforts are at an early stage, FSG spoke with pioneering practitioners — at the school and system levels — to identify conditions that drive success and common lessons learned for effective turnarounds. There have been pockets of demonstrated success in turning around individual schools, with signs of promise that districts and states are making significant changes in their processes, structures, and strategies that will support the work of turning around large numbers of schools. While not a comprehensive list of *all* lessons learned from early efforts, the insights we present are those that resonated most strongly with stakeholders across the sector.

### SCHOOL-LEVEL LESSONS LEARNED

Practitioners that have taken on schools in need of turnaround, even the school operators that have previously been successful at managing schools with high-need populations of students, consistently say that they were unprepared for the severity of the student need and the school issues that had to be addressed.

As a result, they have had to make fundamental changes in their approaches to building school culture, training and supporting staff, and driving improved student performance. What follows is an overview of some of the lessons that school operators, districts, states, and their partners have learned for successful turnaround at the school level. (For a summary, see Exhibit 15.)

## Planning

*Build in planning time to engage the community, establish the vision, and create a new school culture.*

- Most interviewees, including turnaround principals and those working in districts and state central offices, agreed that a full "planning year" in advance of a school's reopening yields the greatest likelihood of success, particularly when changing a large percentage of staff, as in the turnaround and restart models. NLNS recommends that turnaround leaders be hired and placed "as early as possible, preferably at least several months prior to the end of the school year preceding their formal adoption of the principalship."[47] Kenyatta Stansberry-Butler, principal of Harper High School in Chicago, points out that the amount of planning time required may vary "depending on how the turnaround looks. If the principal is not being replaced, six months ahead works. But when the entire staff is changing, including the principal, and you're working in a high school situation, you may need a full year." In the near term, the timeline for the distribution of SIG funds may make it difficult or impossible to build in this planning time.

- Successful turnaround principals use this planning time to build community support, hire staff, create a vision for change, and align the staff and leadership team behind that vision, according to the providers and principals we interviewed. Interviewees also pointed out that transforming a school's culture requires the development of a coherent and inspirational vision for success and strong alignment between all adults in the building to consistently execute, day in and day out, on the concrete actions needed to instill a new culture. Frequently cited actions include modeling behavior, setting high expectations, and enforcing discipline codes effectively and positively. "Our biggest success has been based on our ability to change the culture from day one," says Marco Petruzzi, CEO at Green Dot Public Schools. "Removing an incredibly toxic culture, and creating a culture of respect, has to do with professional development for the adults in the building and consistent discipline."

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[47] New Leaders for New Schools, "Principal Effectiveness."

- While turnaround schools may appear demographically similar to other schools, years of chronic failure result in a higher level of student need. Operators that have taken on turnarounds expressed surprise about the extent of special-education needs, the level of violence, the depth of academic remediation required (particularly at high schools), and the prevalence of mental-health issues, even in comparison with other "high-need" schools they operated. Despite the fact that Mastery's turnaround schools had a similar socioeconomic profile as its nonturnaround schools, the organization had to significantly revamp its program, staff composition, and staff training to deliver meaningful results, according to CEO Scott Gordon.

- School operators note the importance of providing additional wraparound services and resources, including guidance counselors, extensive case management, mental-health services, social and emotional programming, deeper special-education services, academic remediation, and in some cases, increased security. For example, Greicius at Turnaround points to its four-pronged model for addressing social, emotional, and academic needs:[48]

  o Partnering with principals who agree to hire a social worker and allocate funds to support their work,

  o Developing systems around a student-intervention team to identify and deal with the most disruptive students, an instructional support team to look at teachers' knowledge and classroom skills, and a core team to examine organizational thinking and identify problems that may be driven by the school's procedures,

  o Providing access to resources, including extensive case management and partnering with universities to bring in social-work interns and develop a "small mental health clinic," and

  o Facilitating knowledge and skill building, with intensive training in child development for teachers, social workers, support staff, and school leaders.

## Human Capital

*Provide strong classroom and teamwork skills and additional support to teachers and leaders.*

- Interviewees agreed that the quality of the adults in the building, particularly teachers and the principal, is one of the most significant drivers of success in a turnaround situation.

- Teachers in turnaround schools must be able to meet students' acute behavioral and academic needs through effective classroom discipline and consistent classroom management, and through remediation approaches targeted at students who are often significantly below grade level.

- Teachers play an active role in creating a new school culture in concert with the principal. Turnaround teachers often work longer hours, take on additional responsibilities as part of leadership teams, and work in teams to case manage the highest-need students. School leaders must create and sustain professional learning communities for teachers that allow for mutually supportive, cross-content area dialogue.

  For example, teachers should be provided with support to ensure classroom consistency in discipline and lessons and to draw connections in skills across content areas. Particularly in the turnaround and transformation models, professional development for teachers must be aimed at breaking established routines and norms, changing entrenched expectations, providing new instructional approaches, and creating and enforcing a school culture of high expectations for all students.

- Interviewees also pointed to the importance for teachers to have more time with students through in-school extended-learning-time programs, as well as after-school and summer programs.[49]

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[48] FSG interviews.

[49] Interview with Jeff Riley, the academic superintendent for middle and K-8 schools in Boston.

### Empower with key autonomies over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.

- According to recent studies by William Ouchi, the performance of schools improves measurably when principals are given autonomy over their schools. Ouchi studied 442 schools in eight urban districts, finding a direct correlation between "how much control a principal has over his or her budget and how much that school's student performance rises." According to Ouchi, "School organization reform alone produces a more potent improvement in student performance than any other single factor."[50]

- In line with the study from William Ouchi cited above, Superintendent Pastorek says: "We believe that the fundamental underpinning [of turnaround] is to give the principal responsibility." In addition to control over the site-based budget, critical autonomies pointed out by turnaround operators and principals also include flexibility over:

  o *Staffing*, including the ability to hire and fire staff, evaluate and observe teachers, and select leadership team members,

  o *Program*, including curriculum and instruction as well as school support services used, to meet academic, social, and emotional needs,

  o *Schedule*, including how time is used throughout the day, as well as the ability to increase learning and planning time by expanding the school day or year, and

  o *Data*, including the ability to collect, analyze, and act on real-time student-performance data.

### Ensure that leaders have the will, skill, and authority to drive change.

- Many of the characteristics and behaviors necessary in turnaround schools are not very different from those of any good leader. For example, interviewees mentioned the importance of stakeholder management and relationship building, communication, and instructional leadership. "Whatever intervention they pick, they work it," says Ann Duffy, policy director of the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, about successful turnaround leaders. "They are relentless, and they don't let success deviate them from their path. They just layer on the next thing."

- Interviewees also highlightened that effective turnaround leaders must be ruthlessly consistent; willing to make difficult decisions around personnel and resource allocation; and able to maintain urgency, resolve crises, and hire and manage a new staff. Public Impact for the Chicago Public Education Fund defines four key competency clusters that turnaround school leaders must exhibit to be successful, which include: driving for results, influencing for results, problem solving, and showing the confidence to lead.[51]

- Successful turnaround leaders are not "lone rangers" — they develop and rely on leadership teams, distribute responsibility among staff, and partner with the district and the community. "The most important thing for a school to have is adults on the same page," says Josh Edelman of the District of Columbia Public Schools. "The turnaround principal, regardless of the model, has to see the importance of developing adult capacity. There are necessary competencies of developing relationships, using data, coaching people, and knowing how to hire the right people."

- The set of skills necessary for turnaround leaders may be even more pronounced at the high school level, according to Kathleen Smith of the Virginia Department of Education: "We've had one high school in turnaround that made it out last year, and it was hugely due to the culture in the building. In a high school setting, you need a larger critical mass of teachers who can move the initiative forward. You need the right leader to pull the faculty together. Fundamentally, it's school leadership that will make the difference at the high school level — someone who can lead people who are stuck in what they do to some place far more challenging."

## Maintaining Support and Building Sustainability

### Signal change early and build momentum by delivering and communicating "quick wins."

- The 2008 practice guide on turning around chronically low-performing schools from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Science (IES) highlights the need to "provide visible improvements early in the turnaround process" to " rally staff around the effort and overcome resistance and inertia."[52] Quick wins in nonacademic areas signal to students and the community that a dramatic change is under way. In the words of a successful turnaround principal, "It shows that things are different here."

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[50] Ouchi, William, The Secret of TSL, *The Revolutionary Discovery That Raises School Performance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

[51] Public Impact for the Chicago Public Education Fund, "Leaders for School Turnaround: Competencies for Success," June 2008.

[52] Herman, Rebecca, Priscilla Dawson, Thomas Dee, Jay Greene, Rebecca Maynard, Sam Redding, and Marlene Darwin, "Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools: A Practice Guide," National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2008.

- Replacing a school's leader and some staff, as in the turnaround and restart models, is a powerful way to signal a dramatic shift in culture to stakeholders inside and outside of a school, and the moves can serve as a catalyst for other changes in the school.

- Quick wins might include improving the physical condition of the building, reducing disruptive student behavior, establishing a new disciplinary plan, improving student and faculty attendance, or establishing common team processes or planning time among teachers. These wins often come before improvements in student achievement, and they can serve as leading indicators of success.

- Quick wins are also important in order to build community support for turnaround efforts. Successful turnaround principals and operators highlight nonacademic measures of school culture, such as rising student attendance, falling numbers of suspensions or expulsions, and upward movement on student and parent perception surveys as leading indicators that the turnaround is gaining commitment and support from parents and the broader community.

### *Build capacity for long-term sustainable results.*

- Proponents of turnaround at the district and state levels also encourage school leaders to systematize and build upon the culture, assessments, instructional approaches, and programs that allow schools to dramatically improve student performance. These efforts ensure that schools continue to improve and do not lapse back into failure. The IES practice guide backs this up, arguing that a "short-term focus on quick wins can establish a climate for long-term change," but cautions that short-term gains must also be maintained, or else turnarounds risk becoming "yet another example of the transience of school reform and fodder for those who resist change."

- School leaders can build on short-term momentum and urgency around a school turnaround effort by simultaneously establishing effective processes and systems for the long term. For example, a school leader might establish regular teacher meetings to allow for continued collaboration; build out parent and community groups to sustain ongoing support; strengthen relationships with the district and state to more effectively access services;

train staff in better use of data to drive improved instruction; and for independent school operators, develop a strong board to guide the school's work.

## SYSTEM-LEVEL LESSONS LEARNED

Successful school-level turnaround efforts must be sustained and supported with corresponding changes at the system level. "Turnaround efforts won't succeed if they are only school focused and are notcomplemented by systems change," says Bob Hughes, president of New Visions. "No bad school is an island; it exists in a system."

A school's ability to sustain a turnaround effort, executing upon some of the lessons learned and the promising practices mentioned earlier, depends on processes, supports, and structures to enable sets of schools to turn around successfully. Interviews with districts, states, and school operators highlighted the following lessons learned (as summarized in Exhibit 16).

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**Exhibit 16:** System-Level Lessons Learned

**Planning**

- Articulate a powerful vision for turnaround and make tough decisions.

- View turnaround as a portfolio of approaches, with closure as a viable option.

**Creating Conditions and Building System Capacity**

- Create the necessary school-based conditions for success, partnering with labor unions as relevant.

- Develop turnaround-specific capabilities and capacity.

- Build accountability and data systems to track progress and inform decisions.

- Build systems and structures that allow for sharing lessons across schools.

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# Planning

## Articulate a powerful vision for turnaround and make tough decisions.

- Promising systemic approaches to turnaround are rooted in a commitment to a powerful vision of student and school success. Without such a vision, district and state leaders believe that reform efforts will be fragmented and will not engender the political will to make needed, but difficult changes. Kathy Augustine, deputy superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, describes an example: "When [Superintendent] Hall came in 1999, she set a tone early on that she was a superintendent focusing on teaching and learning, and that is our core business. She put it right out there and tied it to the targets, making the accountability piece really clear."

- Further, stakeholders pointed out the necessity of making politically difficult decisions, such as closing failing schools, replacing principals, or negotiating with teachers' unions for needed autonomies. "A critical challenge is the political courage on the local level to really do something different in these schools," says Ann Whalen at the U.S. Department of Education. "The tendency is to do triage instead of whole-school and system change." A district or state willing to make and stand behind politically difficult decisions allows school leaders and operators on the ground to promote bold changes.

- When making difficult decisions, it is helpful to have support from businesses, philanthropy, government officials, parents, and community-based organizations. Without communitywide support, school leaders and operators cautioned that even promising reform efforts can be put at risk. For example, the IES practice guide points to a large urban high school that had recently begun the turnaround process, but after "a year in which initial progress had been made, the district decided to close the school."[53] By embarking on a public campaign and generating broad support, the principal was able to "buy more time" and persuaded the district to keep the school open — ultimately leading to gains in student achievement.

## View turnaround as a portfolio of approaches, with closure as a viable option.

- For many states and districts, the enormity and urgency of the challenge necessitates a willingness to consider all four turnaround models. "We need to be ruthless in our effort to save kids, and look at every option available to us," says Paul Pastorek, state superintendent of Louisiana. In the short term, however, districts and state interviewees choose turnaround models based on resource constraints, such as the availability of human capital and operators. Yet forward-thinking districts and states are also planning to track performance and build capacity to use models in the long term based on the needs of schools and the efficacy of the models.

- Districts and states should view school closure as a viable option at the system level, particularly when districts invest in creating new, high-performing schools. In large urban districts with issues of underutilization, closing schools and reassigning students can effectively allow districts to reallocate per-pupil dollars, offering the opportunity to "right size" the system.

  Recent research from Chicago's Consortium of School Research, which studied 18 Chicago public elementary schools closed between 2001 and 2006 due to chronically poor academic performance or enrollment significantly below capacity, found that the "success of a school-closing policy hinges on the quality of the receiving schools that accept the displaced students."[54] Students who were re-enrolled in the strongest "receiving schools" (with test scores in the top quartile of all system schools) experienced significant gains in math and reading achievement. However, displaced students who were re-enrolled in the weakest receiving schools (with test scores in the bottom quartile of all system schools) experienced an achievement loss of more than a month in reading and half a month in math, one year after school closings.

  Where high-performing options do not exist, states and districts can play a role in creating new high-quality options for students, including charter schools. Furthermore, school closures can be highly political and controversial, inciting anger and disappointment at the community level. State education departments can support districts through strategies that engage communities, provide "political cover," and deliver timely and accessible data about the chronic underperformance of schools.

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[53] Ibid.

[54] De La Torre, Marisa, and Julia Gwynne. "When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools," Consortium on Chicago School Research, October 2009.

- Viewing the system as a portfolio of schools enables decision making about the effective allocation and deployment of resources. In Montgomery County, Maryland, Superintendent Jerry Weast recognized that a "majority of low-income and minority students had been clustered in about half the district's schools, which significantly underperformed the other half." By shifting resources from low-need to high-need schools, Weast and his team enabled those schools to increase time on task, hire better-trained teachers, offer early-childhood education, and reduce class size.[55]

## Creating Conditions and Building System Capacity

*Create the necessary school conditions for success, partnering with labor unions as relevant.*

- In line with the school-level lessons learned, school leaders must have site-based autonomy over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.

- Mass Insight Education's report "The Turnaround Challenge" underscores the key levers for autonomy.[56] The six states partnering with Mass Insight Education in its Partnership Zone Initiative — Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and New York — are required to provide lead partners with the authority to select principals in their schools, the power to supervise every program or provider that brings in support services, accountability for student outcomes in their cluster of schools, and a staff member on-site at each of the schools.

- But greater autonomy requires people in place who can use that autonomy successfully. That said, districts and state interviewees believed a major challenge for turnaround is attracting, developing, and retaining the necessary talent. Central to effective human capital strategies is the ability to directly put in place policies or partner with labor unions and negotiate agreements that affect staff hiring and turnover, performance pay, teacher evaluation, distribution of teachers, work rules, and charter policies.

- State education departments can promote conversations between districts and unions, as in Massachusetts, where the state education department has taken on an active role in convening unions and districts and facilitating the negotiation process. In Rhode Island, the state education department has taken a different approach, working with the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers to develop a joint-venture model for site-based management, where labor gets a "seat at the table" in return for giving up the existing contract and negotiating a school-specific contract.

  The Rhode Island education department, too, has exercised significant authority under state law over such labor issues as seniority and assignment. "When we've reached what feels like an impasse with improvement and we think human capital is the issue, we haven't hesitated to order districts to make that change," says David Abbott, deputy commissioner at the Rhode Island Department of Education.

- Other districts have proactively negotiated with local labor, as in New Haven, Connecticut, where teachers ratified a new contract aimed at the district's lowest-performing schools, as described above.

- In many cases, however, changes to state laws and regulations have been needed to allow districts and unions to draft new policies around labor. For example, Superintendent Pastorek says Hurricane Katrina allowed for a new model and approach to labor issues in New Orleans with the creation of the Recovery School District.

*Develop turnaround-specific capabilities and capacity.*

- A number of states and districts have begun to dedicate resources and create specific units to oversee turnaround work. This practice was raised as a key success factor by states, districts, and turnaround operators and providers alike. Interviewees also cited the importance of states and districts taking advantage of current funding around school turnaround to put long-term systems and capabilities in place that sustain their initial turnaround efforts.

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[55] Childress, Stacey, "Moving Beyond the Conventional Wisdom of Whole-District Reform," *EdWeek*, September 14, 2009.
[56] Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, "The Turnaround Challenge," 2007.

- Interviewees also wanted to see states and districts develop robust human capital pipelines to support turnaround efforts. In particular, they wanted to see aligned programs that are specifically designed to recruit, train, certify, and support teachers and principals for turnaround schools. This is particularly relevant for building system capacity to employ the turnaround model or in rural schools that may have difficulty attracting turnaround-ready educators. States and districts themselves expressed the need to build their own human capital capacity — bringing in new staff with relevant turnaround expertise and enhancing the turnaround knowledge of their current staff.

- In order to effectively support school leaders and operators, stakeholders believed central offices need to increase the operational supports they provide to turnaround schools. Chris Coxon, chief program officer of initiatives at the Texas High School Project, says that "a critical factor for turnaround situations is the ability of districts and states to 'clear the deck' for school leaders." Anything that takes principals away from their focus of teaching, learning, and community engagement — meetings at the state level, dealing with facilities issues like a broken window, problems with food services — should be handled speedily by district or state central-office staff. For example, work is under way in Washington, D.C., to build the district's capacity to take on noninstructional issues quickly and efficiently, while in Virginia, the state turnaround office responds to all principal outreach within 24 hours.

- Given the increasing number of new organizations entering the school turnaround field, principals and school operators we interviewed frequently expressed their desire for districts and states to vet the quality of turnaround providers.

- Districts or school operators should commit to strategically reallocate resources and empower school leaders. In New York City, for example, when resource-mapping exercises revealed that only half of the budget was being spent in the schools, a decision was made to decentralize funding and devolve as much decision making as possible to schools. "Aligning resources to key infrastructure and decision points along the way is necessary," says Sajan George, managing director at Alvarez and Marsal. "Rather than overlaying a new turnaround initiative on top of what exists, you need to fundamentally change how you do business as a district."

*Build accountability and data systems to track progress and inform decisions.*

- Interviewees believed that districts, states, and school operators should invest in data systems that provide longitudinal as well as formative real-time data linking student performance with targeted turnaround interventions. According to the Data Quality Campaign, 44 states now collect data that can identify the schools producing the strongest academic growth for students, up from 21 states in 2005.[57] For example, Chicago has made a major investment in an online school- and student-level data system that allows for more frequent assessments and rapid turnaround of results to inform decision making. "You need to have systems built to be able to know what's happening, or else how can you effect change?" asks Alan Anderson, acting deputy CEO for human capital at Chicago Public Schools.

- Data systems should also be used to track school performance across the district, assessing where progress is being made in turnaround schools, guiding earlier intervention in other schools so that they do not need turnaround, and ensuring that interventions in turnaround schools are not having adverse impacts on other district schools. Providing central-office staff with real-time, formative data on school and teacher performance allows for greater accountability, as well as enables more effective decision making around issues like resource allocation and human capital management.

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[57] Data Quality Campaign Web site.

- Interviewees stressed that accountability systems need to be structured between states and districts, between districts and school operators, between districts/school operators and schools, and between all of the above and local communities. The systems should ensure that clear performance and reporting goals are set and communicated so that accurate and timely progress and outcome data can be shared, learned from, and acted upon. Within good systems, accountability enables autonomy, and relationships are based on mutual goals and support instead of on compliance and consequences.

*Build systems and structures that allow for sharing lessons across schools.*

- According to Mass Insight Education, a benefit of its cluster-based approach is to facilitate knowledge and resource sharing. The development of clusters, organized around identified needs (such as school type, student characteristics, feeder patterns, or regions), also has the potential to provide specialized supports, deliver common services, develop stronger purchasing power among schools, and create opportunities for shared learning and support across schools.

  Clustered networks have been introduced in a number of urban school districts, including Miami-Dade's Improvement Zone and Chicago's Renaissance 2010 schools. Clusters are also being formed at the state level, where Mass Insight Education's Partnership Zone Initiative is working with six partner states to ensure they receive advice and support from national education organizations in human capital, policy, and nonacademic supports.

- Cohort-based knowledge sharing can also happen through district or state efforts to create communities of practice or working groups of principals.[58]

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[58] Maxwell, Leslie A., "Six States Sign on to School Turnaround Project," *EdWeek*, February 2, 2010.

# Key Gaps

Given the early stages of turnaround work, it is not surprising that our research and interviews unearthed significant gaps that must be filled to ensure that school turnarounds can succeed at scale (see Exhibit 17).

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**Exhibit 17:** Key Gaps

**Capacity:** There are not enough proven turnaround experts or organizations, and existing organizations are still building capacity and infrastructure. Additionally, there is little capacity to assess the quality of the large number of new entrants to the school turnaround field.

**Funding:** There may be a lack of ongoing operational funding to sustain efforts. Additionally, the requirements for the distribution of federal funds are putting pressure on states and school districts to act without adequate planning time.

**Public and Political Will:** Key actors find it challenging to make the difficult decisions required for dramatic school turnaround.

**Conditions:** Policies and conditions in districts and states are frequently at odds with what is necessary for success in turnaround.

**Research and Knowledge Sharing:** There is not enough research or evidence to identify, share, and scale effective turnaround interventions.

**High Schools and Rural Schools:** While improving the performance of any school is difficult, it is particularly challenging to implement and succeed in school turnaround at high schools and at schools in rural areas.

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## GAPS IN CAPACITY

There are not enough high-quality experts or organizations engaging in school turnaround work to reach the necessary scale. Existing organizations are still building their own capacity and expertise, and district and state offices lack the people, tools, and infrastructure to assess providers and support turnaround work. The gaps in capacity break down into four categories:

- **Human Capital Capacity.** Education leaders point to human capital at the school and system levels as a significant concern. At the school level, there is an insufficient supply of high-quality teachers and leaders who are prepared to take on the uniquely challenging environments of turnaround situations. This problem is particularly acute given that several of the turnaround models require new leaders and teachers. Many of the organizations who recruit, train, and support new principals and teachers are not focused on school turnaround or are still building their own capacity to identify and prepare turnaround-ready educators. Although institutes of higher education have the potential to provide greater scale in preparing enough teachers and leaders to go into targeted schools, significant concerns exist about whether their current programs can prepare turnaround leaders and

teachers. School operators, districts, states, and other turnaround providers are also struggling with finding and training the right people to lead and staff their own turnaround initiatives and offices.

- **District and State Capacity.** Many states and districts still have no specific department or staff focused on school turnarounds. Additionally, they lack turnaround-specific funding streams; structures like data and accountability systems or rubrics to vet partners; knowledge of best practices; and capabilities like engaging unions, partnering with business and philanthropy, or analyzing real-time data. Finally, states and districts have often fallen into relationships based on compliance, and they now need to build their capacity to work more effectively as turnaround collaborators. "We at the state departments of education need to build our capacity," says John King at the New York State Department of Education. "Federal policy is now asking states to go from a compliance focus to a support focus, which is a big transformation in and of itself."

- **Operator Capacity.** Few turnaround-focused operators exist to serve the market, and most of those that do are still too early in their work to have proven results. "I'm not sure we have the experienced, proven vendors that could do this job in a sufficiently critical mass to cover the whole United States with lead partners," says Smith at the Virginia Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education has urged CMOs to take on turnarounds, but for the most part, charter management organizations and charter operators have not taken up the challenge en masse. This may be due to the fact that many charter organizations are still struggling to reach scale and quality within their existing models or that their models differ in important ways from those needed to succeed in turnarounds.

  **Provider Capacity.** As with operators, there are not enough proven turnaround-focused providers to serve the number of schools and districts in need of turnaround. It may also be a challenge to convince high-quality human capital and other service providers to enter this space, because the work is difficult and because turnaround schools represent only a small sliver of the market that these organizations can attempt to serve. "The turnaround market may not be big enough right now to be worth spending time on it," says Larry Berger of Wireless Generation. "Why wouldn't I rather sell to Buffalo, New York, than to all the turnaround schools? They can guarantee demand in a way that the turnaround space can't." This challenge is particularly acute in rural areas, where providers or operators are unlikely to be motivated by the possibility of reaching scale. However, in some areas, the lure of federal funding is leading to a large number of new entrants into the school turnaround space. In the long term, this will be good for the field's capacity; but, in the short term, many of these organizations have little direct turnaround experience and need to build their own expertise and capacity.

## GAPS IN FUNDING

State and district leaders expressed concerns that RTTT and other federal funding is short term and will not be available to sustain the work unless turnaround is more formally built into the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. On the positive side, there is the potential for additional funding in the near future. In January 2010, President Obama requested an additional $1.35 billion from Congress to serve as a Round III of Race to the Top, with pools of money potentially to be made available to districts as well as states. The proposal for 2011 funding also specifically calls for $900 million in a reauthorized School Turnaround Grants program.

There is also great potential for existing federal revenue streams, such as Title I, Title II, and IDEA, to be used to greater effectiveness in the lowest-performing schools. Beyond the federal level though, states are facing increasingly stretched budgets, and most states have no specific operational funding streams allocated to support school turnaround. While many states, districts, operators, service providers, and researchers are looking to philanthropic sources to fill in gaps, significant concerns remain about the ability to create or access sustainable long-term operational funding.[59]

## GAPS IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL WILL

State and district departments of education, as well as school boards, mayors, and other governing bodies, must be willing to make the difficult decisions required for school turnaround, such as closing failing schools and negotiating with teachers' unions to gain more flexibility over teacher contracts. "We need to use every ounce of our energy and every bit of political capital to [make turnaround happen]," says Andres Alonso, CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools. "It's about building the political urgency and the sense that whoever gets in the way is working against kids."[60]

There is also a need for greater community engagement, particularly from parents and community-based organizations, to ensure a continuous demand for and commitment to dramatic school improvement. A few districts and states are beginning to take on some of this community engagement and empowerment work. The Baltimore City Public Schools system has taken an active role in engaging community organizers and assigning them to schools in an effort to partner grassroots organizations with the school system. In San Jose, California, the community launched San Jose 2020, an effort to bring together the county office of education, the city of San Jose, educators, business leaders, and community organizers, with the goal of eliminating the achievement gap in San Jose by the year 2020.

[59] U.S. Department of Education.
[60] "Driving Dramatic School Improvement" conference.

In order to effectively mobilize communities to demand high-quality education for their children, "We must develop the information to show that there's a crisis," says Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Quality Education. "This information is how we can assist policymakers and school leaders in generating the necessary public and political will to drive change." New York City has introduced an easy-to-understand school-level grading system that gives schools annual ratings of A through F and that is communicated to parents. Gary Huggins of the Aspen Institute's No Child Left Behind Commission echoes the urgent need for community engagement. "NCLB created this data-rich environment but parents don't know the information," says Huggins. "We have to get a lot better about making that have meaning to parents."

## GAPS IN CONDITIONS

Policies and conditions in districts and states across the country are frequently described, at best, as unsupportive, and at worst, as roadblocks to turnaround success. The gaps in conditions break down into five categories:

- **Collective-Bargaining Agreements.** Interviewees point to provisions in agreements that may hinder turnaround, including hiring, firing, and tenure rules; working hours; teacher distribution; and restrictions around performance management and teacher observation and evaluation. These provisions and policies limit the ability of school leaders, operators, districts, and states to make decisions in the best interests of children.

- **Data and Accountability Systems.** Districts and states lack effective, timely data systems to link student performance over time with specific turnaround interventions.

- **Operating Flexibility for Management Organizations.** State and district policies, regulations, and laws frequently do not support the level of autonomy that schools and operators need over key dimensions necessary for change — staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.

- **Limitations on Charter Involvement.** Many states still have charter caps, limiting their ability to employ the restart model. Funding levels and facilities restrictions can also deter charter operators from being willing to take over schools in the restart model.

- **Governance and Leadership.** In order for turnaround efforts to be sustained, superintendents and school boards must align their efforts and be willing to take on dramatic change. "When the superintendent and board can build an effective partnership, the likelihood of changes being sustained increases," says Joe Villani, deputy executive director of the National School Board Association. However, the average superintendent stays on the job for less than 3.5 years, and the vagaries of election cycles can undermine school board members' commitment.[61] The challenge, then, is how to sustain turnaround efforts over a longer time frame. In some cities, mayoral control has paved the way for turnaround efforts, laying the groundwork for bold interventions around teacher evaluations and dismissals, charter schools, and contracting with external providers.

## GAPS IN RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

There is not yet enough evidence to identify the most effective interventions for turnaround. Unfortunately, state policies or a lack of student- and teacher-linked data systems often obstruct the ability to track the effectiveness of various interventions at the student level. Given that many states and districts are employing multiple models for turnaround, it will be important to develop a clear research agenda that will allow the field to determine whether or not certain models outperform others in particular contexts.

"I am worried that we are not going to learn as much as we could about what works in schools," says Bryan Hassel of Public Impact. "Under NCLB, there was no information gathered on what was tried and what worked or didn't work. As we continue with this work, gathering key data would be really useful."

Interviewees also voiced the need for further research into the relative effectiveness of turnaround approaches for particular student subgroups. "We need to learn more about the extra focus needed for high-need populations in these turnaround situations — English Language Learners students, disabled students, homeless or underhoused students, and so on," says John King of the New York Department of Education. "What are the best practices regarding each of these student subpopulations?"

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[61] Council of the Great City Schools, "Urban Indicator: Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salary Sixth Survey and Report," Winter 2008/2009, http://www.cgcs.org/research/research_pub.aspx.

At the school level, examples exist of schools that have been successfully turned around, but stakeholders across the field point to a greater need for proof points and evidence to show how to implement at scale what has worked in the past. As one interviewee noted, "No model yet exists that is both scalable and replicable." At the system level, too, there is a need to examine and document systems that have been successfully turned around, and to pinpoint factors that contributed to turnaround success.

In addition, few mechanisms exist for knowledge sharing in the field to identify the most effective practices and tools and bring them to scale. "Who is going to track who does what with the school improvement dollars?" asks Laura Weeldreyer, deputy superintendent of Baltimore City Public

Schools. "Was one of the models more successful than the others? What processes did districts use to choose interventions, and did schools have a say? There are no processes in place to learn what others are doing."

Fortunately, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences announced in fall 2009 a commitment to evaluate what states are doing with their stimulus education dollars, whether common strategies have emerged, and whether the efforts funded improved schooling. "I certainly don't want to be here in three years and have somebody say, 'What did we get for that $10 billion?'" says John Easton, director of IES. "We've got to be learning from this."

Exhibit 18 identifies the three most commonly cited questions for a "learning agenda" of the turnaround field.

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**Exhibit 18:** A Learning Agenda for the Turnaround Field

- What does progress and success look like in turning around an individual school and a system of schools?

- Which models of school turnaround are most effective and efficient given the particular circumstances, student demographics, geographies, and levels of the school and the district? Why are they effective?

- Which changes at the local, state, and national levels support success in turning around significant numbers of schools? How do entities at these different levels work together to create systems, build capacity, and ensure sustainability?

# GAPS IN HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS

As we identified gaps, interviewees consistently cited high schools and rural schools as the two settings where the gaps identified above were most severe and particularly difficult to address. Because of that, we have included Exhibits 19 and 20, which speak to high school and rural school turnarounds, respectively.

**Exhibit 19:** A Spotlight on High School Turnarounds

While interviewees acknowledge the difficulty in turning around any school, high schools were singled out as being particularly challenging. Academic remediation is more difficult, because students have accumulated knowledge and skills gaps over many years and have only a few remaining years to address them. The high school curriculum and schedule are also more complex. Changing school culture is more difficult, because the students in the building are nearly adults themselves and may resist the changes.

High schools also tend to have larger numbers of students and lack the resources to intervene proactively with students on an individual level. In addition to these challenges, which are relevant to all of the turnaround models, fewer high school operators exist to support the restart model, and closure is more difficult because there are typically few if any additional high-quality high schools in close proximity.

Recognizing the special needs of high schools, a few states, districts, and operators are trying to develop solutions. One approach is to dramatically redesign high schools — beginning with breaking them up. For example, New York City has replaced 20 underperforming public high schools with 200 small schools of choice that offer a more personalized learning environment, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, support to meet instructional and developmental goals, and a focus on connections to college. A recent MDRC evaluation has shown that these schools are achieving higher graduation rates than comparison schools (a difference of 10 percentage points) and have closed one-third of the gap in the graduation rate between white students and students of color.

Green Dot has taken a similar approach at the school level, taking over Locke High School in Los Angeles and reopening it as eight (and now nine) small college-prep academies. A year after the takeover, Green Dot has seen modest improvements in test scores, but dramatic indicators of a change in culture, including a more than 58 percent improvement in retention, almost 38 percent more students taking tests, and a 25 percent increase in the graduation rate.

Another approach is to build specialized capability in the district to support high school turnaround. "As a district, we're going to focus on high school turnaround, since there are many more external turnaround operators out there that can work on elementary and middle schools," says Don Fraynd of the Chicago Public Schools Office of School Turnaround. Chicago Public Schools has had success in its turnaround of Harper High School by putting in place a capable team of turnaround leaders; allocating sufficient time for planning; and ensuring access to the right resources for hiring, professional development, curriculum development, community engagement, and school operations.

The field has an urgent need for a greater focus on turnaround solutions at the high school level. Almost 2,000 of the nation's high schools have been described as "dropout factories," because they graduate fewer than 50 percent of their students. A welcome sign is that many states, districts, and operators are embarking on new approaches to turn around these schools.

## Exhibit 20: A Spotlight on Rural Turnarounds

Rural areas face unique challenges in executing turnaround strategies. Given their widely dispersed geographies, it can be difficult to attract new principals and teachers, school operators, or other turnaround partners. This makes it hard to employ the turnaround or restart models.

Additionally, in rural districts, "Closure is not an option, because there is not an alternative for the students," says Amanda Burnette, director of turnaround schools at the South Carolina Department of Education. "For many of our rural districts, we also can't even consider the turnaround option, because we don't have the teachers to fill vacancies." Furthermore, for small rural districts, building capacity to support turnaround can be cost-prohibitive, given the small number of schools.

To address these challenges, some rural areas or smaller states see the need to aggregate or "pool" demand to create incentives for providers. Some states have determined that turnarounds will only succeed in rural areas if the state itself implements and supports them directly. For example, the South Carolina Department of Education has assumed responsibility for turning around certain rural schools. "Many, many small districts, both rural and exurban, are not going to be able to make the kind of investment in technology and accountability that's needed," says Sajan George of Alvarez and Marsal. "The state needs to develop an assessment and accountability system that smaller districts can draw on."

The U.S. Department of Education, in its late-2009 release of final SIG regulations, acknowledged the concerns of rural superintendents, but also stressed the newly available resources: "We understand that some rural areas may face unique challenges in turning around low-achieving schools, but note that the significant amount of funding available to implement the four models will help to overcome the many resource limitations that previously have hindered successful rural-school reform in many areas." Despite these resources, interviewees consistently expressed concern for how turnaround would be implemented in rural areas.

# Critical Actions

Multiple actors across the education sector must commit to a concerted, collaborative effort for turnarounds to succeed at scale. They must work together to scale nascent efforts, build capacity, and address gaps. Based on more than 150 individual actions collected at the "Action Planning" session at the "Driving Dramatic School Improvement" conference, as well as on FSG's interviews and research, we have identified the highest-priority steps that need to be taken collectively and by each type of actor. A table aligning these actions by actor with a summary of the gaps is included in an appendix. Turnaround actors collectively must develop common metrics for success, understand and learn from what is and is not working, build capacity and expertise, create conditions for success, and maintain urgency around turnaround efforts to sustain political will. Exhibit 21 summarizes specific actions that need to be taken collectively to address the gaps and is followed by recommendations for individual organizations.

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Education Department already plays a key policy-setting and funding role, but can also support research, rigorous evaluation, and knowledge sharing to benefit the turnaround field. Specific actions include:

- Ensure adequate funding for states and districts to build the infrastructure that sustains turnaround work once federal funds have been expended.

- Ensure that the timeline for distribution of federal funds allows for states, districts, and schools to have adequate planning time to develop and employ successful turnaround interventions.

- Build early learnings from turnaround efforts into ESEA reauthorization and future funding, potentially to include:

  o Community buy-in, coinvestment, and parental engagement,

  o Turnaround grants made directly to districts,

  o Consideration of and provisions to accommodate the challenges of rural states,

  o Additional competitive grant processes, and

  o Rewards and incentives for schools, districts, and states that succeed in turnaround.

## Exhibit 21: Collective Actions to Fill Gaps

| Gaps | Collective Actions |
|---|---|
| **Capacity** | • Promote the entry of new quality providers and scale proven operators.<br>• Create training and recruitment approaches to attract and develop turnaround talent.<br>• Create and staff distinct turnaround offices or divisions. |
| **Funding** | • As possible, repurpose current ongoing funding sources to address turnaround needs.<br>• Ensure that specific turnaround funding streams are included in ESEA reauthorization.<br>• Promote the use of one-time funding to build long-term capacity and infrastructure. |
| **Public and Political Will** | • Build awareness of the need for change among students, parents, educators, policy makers, and communities.<br>• Engage and mobilize stakeholders, and build public demand to advocate for needed changes.<br>• Establish laws and policies that support those making difficult decisions. |
| **Conditions** | • Change the culture of engagement between schools, districts, and states from compliance to cooperation.<br>• Establish laws and policies that ensure needed school and district autonomies and capacity.<br>• Develop and implement shared accountability systems at the system and school levels. |
| **Research and Knowledge Sharing** | • Ensure funding and attention are directed to rigorously studying and comparing the efficacy of turnaround interventions.<br>• Document and share turnaround successes and challenges to improve implementation.<br>• Create opportunities and infrastructure to collect, organize, and share research and best practices. |

- Develop clear standards for student achievement and turnaround success at the school and system levels.

- Implement a national evaluation, knowledge-building, and dissemination initiative that tracks and reports on the turnaround efforts of states and districts.

- Support and sustain the development and implementation of robust state longitudinal data systems.

- Serve as a voice for urgency around turnaround efforts, supporting states' ability to make difficult decisions.

## STATES AND STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

States can focus on developing scalable solutions to human capital and operator capacity issues, creating conditions for success through policy change, assessing the quality of turnaround providers and operators, and investing in the IT and accountability infrastructure that supports turnaround success. Specific actions include:

- Collaborate with districts to identify where capacity should be built to effectively execute on turnaround strategies, and designate a specific office and staff to lead turnaround efforts.

- Use a range of strategies to develop, attract, and retain principal and teacher talent at the lowest-performing schools, including:

  o Providing professional-development opportunities,

  o Instituting financial incentives or pay for performance,

  o Ensuring equitable teacher distribution,

  o Strengthening university and alternate-certification paths,

  o Generating and supporting dialogue with labor and helping bring districts and labor "to the table" for negotiations, and

  o Providing political cover for districts, where necessary.

- Create policies that provide districts, turnaround operators, and turnaround school staff with the autonomy over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data that they need to succeed.

- Develop processes for vetting external turnaround providers.

- Support the sharing of best practices within and among districts and schools through clusters, turnaround zones, or other structures.

- Make investments in technology (performance management and accountability systems), allowing assessment data to be available and accessible to districts, schools, and local communities.

- Provide opportunities for rural districts to partner with one another to reach greater scale, or work directly to implement turnaround strategies in rural areas.

## DISTRICTS

Districts can create strong talent pipelines, build their accountability and school support capacity, and ensure the availability of critical, high-quality partners, particularly to fill human capital needs and operate schools. Specific actions include:

- Hold leaders of schools and school operators accountable for turnaround success, while providing them with the autonomy they need to succeed.

- Ensure a pipeline of highly effective teachers and principals who can succeed in turnaround schools, and then provide them with the professional development to enable their success.

- Provide or identify high-quality partners to offer efficient and aligned noninstructional supports to allow turnaround leaders and school operators to focus on culture change, instruction, and community support building.

- Use turnaround as an opportunity to partner with unions, as relevant, to create the needed conditions for turnaround success, such as autonomy over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.

- Engage communities, particularly parents and community-based organizations, to generate demand for change among stakeholders.

- Collaborate with the state to identify where capacity should be built to effectively execute on turnaround strategies, and designate a specific office and staff to lead turnaround efforts.

- Support the sharing of best practices among schools through clusters, turnaround zones, or other structures.

## UNIONS

Unions can consider turnaround schools as a "laboratory" in which they are more willing to experiment with new types of contracts, new ways of collaboratively partnering with districts, new work rules, and new teacher-evaluation and pay-for-performance approaches. Specific actions include:

- Engage proactively with states and districts to develop, attract, and retain principal and teacher talent to the lowest-performing schools, and create conditions supporting their success, including:

  o Creating flexibilities within current contracts around instructional time and other work rules, and

  o Developing new and more flexible contracts specifically focused on turnaround schools, with provisions for such elements as data-driven evaluation, hiring and tenure policies, and performance pay.

- Serve as an advocate for turnaround teachers to ensure they receive adequate pay, support, and professional development, given the demanding environments in which they are working.

## SCHOOL OPERATORS

School operators can scale existing successful models, identify and train turnaround professionals, and build organizational capacity to run turnaround schools. Specific actions include:

- Consider entering the turnaround space and customizing school models — particularly in areas such as human capital development, curriculum and instruction, parent outreach, and community engagement — to succeed in turnaround situations.

- Negotiate the autonomy and authority needed to succeed, including autonomies over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.

- Develop human capital pipelines and on-the-ground professional development opportunities for turnaround teachers and leaders.

- Develop consistent and rigorous approaches to align all school personnel behind a powerful vision for success and to create positive cultures of high expectations for students.

- Partner with existing organizations and entities, such as turnaround supporting partners, institutes of higher education, districts, and states.

- Share successes and challenges of turnaround efforts to increase the field's knowledge base.

## SUPPORTING PARTNERS

School-support partners of all types can build turnaround-specific capacity, services, and expertise. In particular, the most pressing need is for action from human capital providers to develop turnaround-specific training, recruitment, and support approaches for teachers and school leaders that can drive success in turnaround situations, as well as to partner with districts on creating robust human capital management systems. Specific actions include:

- Develop turnaround-specific training modules to prepare teachers and leaders for turnaround schools.

- Identify characteristics of teachers and leaders who are effective in turnaround situations, and then adjust recruiting approaches to find and enroll those individuals.

- Study and evaluate the successes and challenges of strategies to prepare turnaround teachers and leaders, based on school and student outcomes.

- Work with states, districts, and operators to build aligned, cohesive human capital systems and pipelines.

- Use evidence-based outcomes (school- and student-level results) to support districts and states in the creation of conditions that most enable turnaround principals and teachers to succeed.

## COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Community-based organizations can mobilize community support for difficult decisions and partner with turnaround schools to help with academic remediation during out-of-school time. Specific actions include:

- Mobilize community support for turnarounds, working with parents, local businesses, local leaders, and other community organizations to:

  - Demand an excellent public education for all children, including advocating for schools to be shut down and teachers and leaders to be replaced when needed.

  - Engage and mobilize stakeholders across the community as advocates for education.

  - Hold district, state, and labor leadership accountable for a high-quality public education.

- Provide productive out-of-school-time academic and personal support programs to help students engage in school and catch up academically.

## RESEARCH AND FIELD-BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

Research and field-building organizations help move the field forward, studying and evaluating existing efforts, identifying tools and effective practices, filling knowledge gaps, and disseminating findings so that the turnaround field can learn and grow. Specific actions include:

- Analyze themes from successful and unsuccessful Round I and II Race to the Top applications.

- Document school- and system-level turnaround successes and failures, and analyze best practices of turnaround efforts within and across districts and states.

- Help devise rigorous evaluation approaches to ensure that the field learns from and spreads what works, and that resources are not invested in interventions that don't work.

- Pool resources and develop channels to share information, tools, and best practices broadly and effectively.

## PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS

Foundations can seed innovative models in leadership, teaching, curriculum, support services, community engagement, and other areas vital to turnaround work, as well as invest in partnerships with states and districts in applying these practices at scale. Specific actions include:

- Consider turnaround-specific initiatives, programs, and investments.

- Support the planning and implementation of state and district turnaround strategies directly and with matching funds for certain federal and state investments.

- Help effective turnaround operators scale and start up new turnaround school operators.

- Support research and field-building efforts to drive the effectiveness of the sector as a whole, including funding evaluation and research.

# Conclusion

Despite the tremendous level of activity currently happening in the school-turnaround field, the work is still in its early stages. The field is growing quickly, but remains highly fragmented. Interventions are being piloted, but practitioners lack knowledge of what is working and how to scale what works. It has many more questions than it has answers.

We hope that this report increases education reformers' awareness of the issues, prompts members of the field to think about how to most effectively get involved in or execute on turnaround work, and encourages practitioners to work more closely in concert with others in the field. After all, if the field is to systemically improve thousands of the nation's underperforming schools, everyone must work together to identify and spread effective practices, create the policies and conditions for success, build capacity, and ensure the sustainability of the work at scale.

# Suggested Resources

**For more information about federal guidelines, definitions, and funding for turnaround efforts:**

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- Center on Education Policy, "A Brief History of the Federal Role in Education: Why It Began and Why It's Still Needed," 1999.

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- U.S. Department of Education, "Letter to Chief State School Officers from Thelma Melendez."

- U.S. Department of Education, "Race to the Top Application."

**To read Race to the Top applications that states submitted:**

http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/index.html.

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**For more information about choosing among turnaround models:**

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- Connell, James P., "What Makes for Sound Investments in Educational Innovation?" Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2009.

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## For more information about states' roles in turnaround:

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## For more information about community engagement in turnaround efforts:

- Visit http://transform-myschool.org for examples of materials that three schools used in the process of converting from schools in Y4 program improvement to charter schools that increase student achievement, including parent petitions, a multimedia public-information campaign, timelines, parents' frequently asked questions, and parent fliers.

## For more information about human capital for school turnaround:

- Augustine, Catherine H., Gabriella Gonzalez, Gina Schuyler Ikemoto, Jennifer Russell, Gail L. Zellman, Louay Constant, Jane Armstrong, and Jacob W. Dembosky, "Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems," RAND Education, Commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, 2009.

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## For more information about school-level turnaround lessons learned:

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# Interviewees

| Name | Affiliation |
|------|-------------|
| Jay Altman | FirstLine Schools |
| Jacqueline Ancess | National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, Teachers College |
| Alan Anderson | Office of Human Capital, Chicago Public Schools |
| Kathy Augustine | Atlanta Public Schools |
| Ben Austin | Parent Revolution |
| Karla Brooks Baehr | Massachusetts Department of Education |
| Robert Balfanz | Everyone Graduates Center, The Johns Hopkins University |
| Elisa Beard | Teach for America |
| Larry Berger | Wireless Generation |
| Sue Bodilly | RAND |
| Harold Brown | EdWorks |
| LeAnn Buntrock | University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program |
| Amanda Burnette | Turnaround Schools Initiative at South Carolina Department of Education |
| Andy Calkins | The Stupski Foundation |
| Matt Candler | Independent Consultant |
| Karl Cheng | Parthenon Group |
| Dale Chu | Indiana Department of Education |
| Justin Cohen | Mass Insight Education |
| James Connell | First Things First/IRRE |
| Michael Cordell | Friendship Public Charter Schools |
| Chris Coxon | Texas High School Project |
| Jennifer Davis | National Center on Time and Learning |
| Nina de las Alas | Council of Chief State School Officers |
| Joan Devlin | American Federation of Teachers |
| Christine Dominguez | Long Beach Unified School District |
| Ann Duffy | Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement |
| Josh Edelman | District of Columbia Public Schools |
| Kristin Engel Waters | Denver Public Schools |
| Mary-Beth Fafard | The Education Alliance, Brown University |
| Don Feinstein | Academy for Urban School Leadership |
| Ben Fenton | New Leaders for New Schools |
| Larry Flakne | Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| Don Fraynd | Office of School Turnaround, Chicago Public Schools |
| Sajan George | Alvarez and Marsal |
| Robert Glascock | Breakthrough Center, Maryland State Department of Education |
| Scott Gordon | Mastery Charter School |
| Peter Gorman | Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools |
| Greg Greicius | Turnaround |
| Leah Hamilton | Carnegie Corporation of New York |
| Bryan C. Hassel | Public Impact |
| Kati Haycock | Education Trust |
| Frederick M. Hess | American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research |
| Gerry House | Institute for Student Achievement |

| Name | Affiliation |
|---|---|
| Kevin Huffman | Teach for America |
| Gary Huggins | Commission on NCLB, Aspen Institute |
| Bob Hughes | New Visions for Public Schools |
| Rene Islas | B&D Consulting |
| Joanna Jacobson | Strategic Grant Partners |
| Jack Jennings | Center on Education Policy |
| Mike Johnston | New Leaders for New Schools |
| John Jordan | Mississippi Department of Education |
| John King | New York State Education Department |
| Barbara Knaggs | Texas Education Agency |
| Richard Laine | The Wallace Foundation |
| Lillian Lowery | Delaware Department of Education |
| Lisa Margosian | KIPP Foundation |
| Frances McLaughlin | Education Pioneers |
| Jordan Meranus | New Schools Venture Fund |
| Darlene Merry | New Leaders for New Schools |
| Laura Mitchell | Cincinnati Public Schools |
| Nora Moreno Cargie | The Boeing Company |
| Paul Pastorek | Louisiana State Department of Education |
| Marco Petruzzi | Green Dot Public Schools |
| Courtney Philips | The Broad Foundation |
| Eileen Reed | Texas Initiatives |
| Doug Reeves | The Leadership and Learning Center |
| Paul Reville | Massachusetts Department of Education |
| Jim Rex | South Carolina Department of Education |
| Bill Roberti | Alvarez and Marsal |
| Vincent Schoemehl | St. Louis Public Schools |
| Caitlin Scott | Center on Education Policy |
| Kelly Scott | The Aspen Institute |
| Joe Siedlecki | Michael and Susan Dell Foundation |
| Andy Smarick | Thomas B. Fordham Institute |
| Connie Smith | Tennessee Department of Education |
| Kathleen Smith | Virginia Department of Education |
| Nelson Smith | National Alliance for Public Charter Schools |
| Melissa Solomon | Atlanta Education Fund |
| Kenyatta Stansberry-Butler | Harper High School, Chicago |
| Tamar Tamler | Resources for Indispensable Schools and Educators (RISE) |
| Philip Uri Treisman | University of Texas at Austin |
| Victoria Van Cleef | The New Teacher Project |
| Carmita Vaughan | America's Promise Alliance |
| Joseph Villani | National School Boards Association |
| David Wakelyn | National Governors Association |
| Laura Weeldreyer | Baltimore City Public Schools |
| Courtney Welsh | New York City Leadership Academy |
| Ann Whalen | U.S. Department of Education |
| Bob Wise | Alliance for Excellent Education |
| Kevin Wooldridge | Education for Change |
| Trevor Yates | Cambridge Education |

# Organizations That Serve the Turnaround Sector

*Please note that this is not a comprehensive list*

## School Operators

- Academy for Urban School Leadership
- Education for Change
- Friendship Public Charter Schools
- Green Dot Public Schools
- Mastery Charter Schools

## Supporting Partners

- **Comprehensive School Redesign**
  - Cambridge Education
  - Edison Learning
  - Institute for Student Achievement
  - Partners in School Innovation
  - Strategic Learning Initiatives

- **Human Capital and Professional Development**
  - New Leaders for New Schools
  - The New Teacher Project
  - New York City Leadership Academy
  - Teach for America
  - University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialists Program

- **District and School Resource Management**
  - Alvarez and Marsal
  - Education Resource Strategies

- **Integrated Services**
  - Turnaround
  - Turnaround for Children

- **Parent and Community Organizing and Engagement**
  - America's Promise
  - Parent Revolution

## Research and Field-Building Organizations

- The Aspen Institute
- The Center on Education Policy
- Mass Insight Education
- NewSchools Venture Fund
- Public Impact

## Philanthropic Funders

- The Broad Foundation
- Carnegie Corporation of New York
- The Ford Foundation
- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- The Hewlett Foundation
- The Rainwater Charitable Trust
- The Wallace Foundation
- The Walton Family Foundation
- The Wasserman Foundation

# Detailed Critical Actions Aligned to Turnaround Gaps

| Actor | Action | Gaps Addressed | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Capacity | Funding | Public and Political Will | Conditions | Research and Knowledge Sharing |
| **U.S. Department of Education** | **Build early learnings from turnaround efforts into ESEA reauthorization and future funding**, potentially to include:<br>• Community buy-in/coinvestment and parental engagement,<br>• Turnaround grants made directly to districts,<br>• Consideration of and provisions to accommodate the challenge of rural states, and<br>• Additional competitive grant processes. | | X | X | X | X |
| | Implement a **national knowledge-building and dissemination initiative** that tracks and reports on the turnaround efforts of states and districts, particularly the states that are implementing RTTT plans. | X | | | | X |
| | Develop **clear standards** for student achievement and turnaround success at the school and system levels. | | | | X | X |
| | Support and sustain the development and implementation of **robust state longitudinal-data systems**. | | X | | X | |
| | Serve as a **voice for urgency** around turnaround efforts, **supporting states' ability to make difficult decisions.** | | | X | | |
| **States** | Provide **opportunities for rural districts to partner with one another** to reach greater scale. | X | X | X | X | |
| | **Collaborate with districts** to identify where capacity should be built to effectively execute on turnaround strategies, and **designate a specific office and staff to lead turnaround efforts.** | X | | | X | |
| | Use a range of strategies to **develop, attract, and retain principals and teachers** at the lowest-performing schools, including:<br>• Professional-development opportunities,<br>• Financial incentives and/or pay for performance,<br>• More equitable teacher distribution,<br>• Alternate certification paths,<br>• Policy change,<br>• Partnerships with institutes of higher education,<br>• Generating dialogue with labor,<br>• Bringing districts and labor "to the table" for negotiations,<br>• Providing political cover for districts, where necessary,<br>• Retirement accumulation, and<br>• Differentiated pay systems. | X | | X | X | |
| | Develop **processes for vetting external providers.** | X | | | X | X |
| | Support the **sharing of best practices among districts and schools** through clusters, turnaround zones, or other structures. | | | | X | X |
| | Make **investments in technology** (performance management and accountability systems) and **make statewide assessment data available and accessible** to districts and local communities. | | | X | | X |
| **Districts** | **Engage communities** — particularly parents and community-based organizations — to generate demand and political will among stakeholders. | | | X | X | |

| Actor | Action | Gaps Addressed | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Capacity | Funding | Public and Political Will | Conditions | Research and Knowledge Sharing |
| **Districts** | **Hold leaders of schools and school operators accountable** for turnaround success, in exchange for **greater autonomy** around staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data. | X | | | X | |
| | **Collaborate with the state** to identify where capacity should be built to effectively execute on turnaround strategies, and designate a **specific office and staff to lead turnaround efforts.** | X | | | X | |
| | Provide **aligned noninstructional supports efficiently** to allow turnaround leaders and school operators to focus on instructional and community-building work. | | | | X | |
| | Support the **sharing of best practices among schools** through clusters, turnaround zones, or other structures. | | | | X | X |
| **Human Capital Providers** | **Build skills and capacity** to prepare teachers and leaders for turnaround situations. | X | | | | |
| | **Identify characteristics of quality teachers and leaders** who succeed in turnaround situations. | X | | | | X |
| | **Study and evaluate the successes and challenges** of strategies for turnaround teacher and leader preparation, based on school and student outcomes. | X | | | | X |
| | **Partner with existing organizations and entities** — such as school operators, districts, and states — to build the human capital pipeline. | X | | | | |
| | **Use evidence-based outcomes** — school- and student-level results — to encourage the creation of conditions that most enable principals and teachers to succeed. | | | | X | |
| **School Management Organizations, School Operators, and Support Providers** | **Share the successes and challenges** of turnaround efforts to increase the field's base of knowledge and to build credibility. | X | | | | X |
| | **Think creatively about solutions for reaching scale**, such as partnering with multiple rural school districts within a state. | X | | | X | |
| | **Partner with existing organizations and entities**, such as turnaround supporting partners, institutes of higher education, districts, and states. | X | | | X | |
| | Consider **entering the turnaround space.** | X | | | | |
| | Develop **human capital pipelines** and **on-the-ground professional development opportunities** for teachers and leaders. | X | | | | |
| **Philanthropic Funders** | **Provide seed funding** to providers and **help effective operators** reach scale. | X | X | | | |
| | Support **research and field-building efforts** to drive the effectiveness of the sector as a whole. | | X | | | X |
| | **Document and disseminate best practices** in turnaround philanthropy. | | X | X | | X |

| Actor | Action | Gaps Addressed | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Capacity | Funding | Public and Political Will | Conditions | Research and Knowledge Sharing |
| Unions | **Engage proactively with states and districts** to develop, attract, and retain principals and teachers at the lowest-performing schools, and create conditions that support their success, including:<br>• Working to identify flexibilities within current contracts, and<br>• Being willing to develop new and more flexible contracts specifically focused on turnaround schools. | X | | | X | |
| | **Serve as an advocate** for turnaround teachers to ensure they receive adequate support and professional development, given the demanding environments in which they work. | X | | | X | |
| Parents and Community-Based Organizations | **Demand an excellent public education** for children within local communities. | | | X | | |
| | **Engage and mobilize stakeholders** across the community as advocates for education. | | | X | | |
| | **Hold district and state leadership accountable** for transparency and high-quality public education. | | | X | X | |
| Research Organizations | **Document** school- and system-level turnaround **successes and failures.** | | | X | | X |
| | Develop channels to **share information and best practices** broadly and effectively. | | | X | | X |
| | **Conduct best-practices analyses** of community engagement in turnaround efforts within and across districts and states. | | | X | X | X |
| | **Analyze themes** from successful and unsuccessful Round I and II Race to the Top applications. | X | X | X | X | X |
| Collective Actions | **Collaborate across stakeholder groups** and encourage coordination and conversation among stakeholders. | X | X | X | X | X |
| | **Generate political will and momentum** for school turnaround. | | | X | X | |
| | Develop **metrics** for successful turnarounds, allowing states, schools, school operators, and LEAs to know how they will be measured. | | | X | X | X |
| | Document and share **best practices and challenges**. | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Serve as a **voice for urgency** around turnaround efforts. | | | X | | |

## Disclaimer

All statements and conclusions, unless specifically attributed to another source, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of any individual interviewee, the funders, or members of the advisory group.

SCHOOL TURNAROUND LANDSCAPE

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