



FEDERAL PERSPECTIVE ON TURNAROUND

Speaker: *Jason Snyder – Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, US Department of Education*

School Turnaround – Our Most Challenging and Important Work

There is unprecedented attention and funding being focused on turnaround -- at the school, district, and state level -- according to Jason Snyder of the US Department of Education's Office of School Turnaround. "This is our most challenging, controversial and important work."

According to a recently released OECD report, says Snyder, "The US has slipped from 9th to 16th in college attainment... An estimated 60% of jobs will require more than a high school diploma, yet only 41% of 25 to 34 year olds in the US have completed an Associate's Degree or higher. If we don't turn around our lowest-performing schools, we'll have no way of getting to the 60%."

With fewer than 15% of high schools producing over half of the nation's 1.2 million drop-outs, the Education Department has been focusing the majority of attention and resources on turning around the nation's lowest-performing schools through four efforts: Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants (SIG), Alignment of Existing Federal Resources, and ESEA Flexibility.

School Improvement Grants (SIG)

With over \$4.5B committed to SIG, "We're not just providing money, but requiring four models and for states to compete out their grants," said Snyder. Although a lot of people focus on charters and the 50% staff replacement components of two of the SIG models, "ED's turnaround effort is in fact focused on building

the individual and collective capacity at the school level," emphasized Snyder.

Early Successes and Challenges

Snyder highlighted successes and challenges to date:

- Although SIG successfully targeted the highest need students and schools (Of 826 SIG schools, 45% are high schools, 77% of the students are FRL eligible, and 78% of the students are African American and Latino.) 74% of the first cohort is implementing a transformation model with few turnarounds, restarts, or closures.
- Turnaround funding has "made space for strong leaders," however, other principals, superintendents, and states are "going through the motions" and conducting business as usual.
- RTTT and SIG are changing the relationships between SEAs and LEAs in positive ways, yet many questions still remain as to the role of the state.
- SIG has incited tough discussions and a focus on improving instruction, yet some LEAs are struggling with the required elements and ways to implement turnaround models well.
- Some LEAs lack sufficient capacity and planning time, but others have implemented effective district-wide reforms to support the lowest-performing schools.
- Although the data is incomplete, there is evidence of early gains in achievement. Snyder admitted, "We're still trying to determine what's working."

Moving Forward

The Education Department is addressing the challenges through monitoring, policy guidance, and technical assistance, such as collecting and disseminating practices and enabling peer-to-peer learning among states. “We’re trying to collect and disseminate practices. The more you can share the better,” summarized Snyder.

ESEA Flexibility

“We’re offering flexibility in exchange for some reforms at the state level. One of the goals is to effect dramatic, systemic change in the lowest-performing schools,” by requiring plans for strong leadership, effective teaching, redesigned schedules and use of time that will promote the goals of:

- College and career ready expectations
- State-developed differentiated recognition, accountability, and support
- Supporting effective instruction and leadership
- Reducing duplication and unnecessary burden

Future Vision of Success

“Success is not just increasing student achievement and graduation rates. True success is proving what’s possible, creating the models, creating the examples that you can show to others and to the naysayers who claim these schools can’t succeed, then effectively disseminating and inspiring others to do the same. Then districts are going to want to raise their hands and do that too. It’s early. We’re working to create that evidence.”

As members of the Education Department visit districts and schools across the country, they recognize the hard work of turnarounds, as they try to listen on the ground to how they can be most helpful. Snyder encouraged schools, districts, and states to share strategies and models

as ED looks for strong examples of what’s working.