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## School Turnaround at the System Level

### *Aspen Institute, Education Resource Strategies Spotlight Turnaround Strategy in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*

WASHINGTON, DC (April 20, 2010) – The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) experience in school turnaround was the subject of a Capitol Hill briefing hosted today by the Aspen Institute and its Education and Society Program. As the federal Race to the Top initiative and current Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization discussions focus on the importance of turning around low-performing schools, CMS provides an instructive example for how effective turnaround can be accomplished on the district level.

CMS is combining the use of effectiveness data and strategic staffing to create a coherent, systemic approach to school turnarounds – and getting gains in student achievement as a result. The event today featured CMS Superintendent Pete Gorman and the release of [\*Strategic Staffing for Successful Schools: Breaking the Cycle of Failure in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools\*](#), a study released today by the Aspen Institute and Education Resource Strategies, Inc. (ERS). The study focuses on how CMS uses principal and teacher effectiveness data in its school turnaround efforts.

“At Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we are committed to turning around our low-performing schools. Our Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) is central to that turnaround effort,” Gorman said. “By recruiting top talent, both teacher and principal, to our most troubled schools, we are able to tackle our toughest challenges. Strategic Staffing has been integral to improving student achievement and in generating support for reform from educators and from the community.”

Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which was recently nominated for the prestigious Broad Prize, uses principal and teacher effectiveness data to identify the district’s top talent and recruit them to turnaround failing schools with financial and other professional incentives. SSI was also a focus of yesterday’s U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee hearing, hosted in Charlotte, on innovation in education.

“The knowledge that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has gained in its development of turnaround strategies, particularly the Strategic Staffing Initiative, can be beneficial for other districts struggling with the challenge of persistently low-performing schools,” the report states. “While there are certainly particular factors in CMS that support success of Strategic Staffing, there are many variations of this strategy—with the critical components being a proven school leader and a core collaborative team—that could be tailored to other schools and districts.”

Such critical components to a successful district wide turnaround strategy include:

- **A transformational leader** who can build a culture of high expectations and ownership of student outcomes;

- **High-capacity teams of teachers** with know-how and expert support to collaborate to adjust instruction using assessment data on student progress;
- School designs that **prioritize core academics and provide time and individualized interventions** for students to catch up; and
- **Resources and central support** to implement their turnaround vision.

“Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is charting a new course on turnarounds,” said Ross Wiener, Executive Director of the Aspen Program on Education and Society. “The Strategic Staffing Initiative demonstrates the value of a team approach to turning around schools. It’s a smart policy because effective teachers have consistently said that money alone isn’t enough to bring them to struggling schools -- districts need to focus on leadership and working conditions, too -- and the Strategic Staffing Initiative does that.”

“Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Strategic Staffing Initiative demonstrates how turnaround efforts can be executed simultaneously across a school district,” ERS Director Jonathan Travers said. “By focusing on a systemic approach to turnaround, CMS’ investment in selected schools is made in the context of a broader district improvement strategy.”

The full research study can be found at:

[http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/breaking\\_the\\_cycle\\_of\\_failure\\_in\\_charlotte\\_schools/](http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/breaking_the_cycle_of_failure_in_charlotte_schools/)

### **About Education Research Strategies (ERS)**

**ERS** ([www.erstrategies.org](http://www.erstrategies.org)) serves as a partner with the CMS on its turnaround efforts. It is a non-profit organization that works extensively with large urban public school systems to rethink the use of district and school level resources and build strategies for improved instruction and performance.

### **About Aspen Institute**

**The Aspen Institute** seeks to promote nonpartisan inquiry and an appreciation for timeless values through its seminars, policy programs, conferences and leadership development initiatives. **The Aspen Education and Society Program** helps local, state and national education leaders share knowledge about how school systems can improve the education and life chances of low-income students and students of color and works to create programs and policies to accomplish these goals. [www.aspeninstitute.org/education](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/education).

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