"Turnaround Case Studies" was originally written in 2011 to show how different school systems turn around their lowest performing schools. We have shared these case studies with many audiences since they were originally authored and we have found that the key messages continue to ring true. Although some time has passed, it is still the case that while districts employ various strategies, they all recognize turnaround is not something schools can do on their own – it requires supports and interventions at the district level. Further, investing to turn around the lowest performing schools is an opportunity to implement systematic changes that impact all schools. We hope you find "Turnaround Case Studies" useful in considering turnaround strategies in your district.

Turnaround Case Studies: Elevating Turnaround to a Systemic Level

Introduction

Since 2009, the federal government committed $3.5 billion to turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools. The magnitude of this investment was an opportunity not only to improve specific schools, but to implement systemic changes that benefited all schools in a given district, and all students. Districts faced and continue to face two critical questions: How can school systems build turnaround efforts at scale to achieve dramatic improvement that is sustainable over time? And how can districts leverage short-term funding and increased urgency about turnaround to do this? In this document, Education Resource Strategies (ERS) presents 10 case studies that explore the early efforts of districts in using these resources towards the goals of sustainability and scale.

Two years into the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, we looked at the significant differences in turnaround approaches, engagement of partners, and spending strategies. From the districts we examined, we have identified five essential steps to turnaround at scale, which each district undertook to varying extents.

The steps:

1) **Assess** – measure district-wide school performance, need, and viability;
2) **Target** – differentiate among schools for appropriate action;
3) **Define** – indentify and provide key components of turnaround intervention;
4) **Reorganize resources** – reallocate money and staff to support the turnaround strategy, including aligning funding, accountability and support, and removing barriers; and
5) **Integrate and align** – incorporate turnaround into the district-wide strategy for sustained improvement by
   (a) aligning turnaround with the spectrum of accountability, autonomy, and support;
   (b) ensuring adequate resources for all students; and
   (c) elevating lessons learned in turnaround to the district level

Our investigation of these early, mixed efforts indicates no one right approach to turnaround. Rather, strategies must be consistent with accurate information on existing system capacities. The districts we profile looked very different to begin with in terms of size, student demographics, funding levels, political environment, existing systems, and so on—and each district's unique context affected implementation of turnaround initiatives.

Turnaround Case Studies illustrates early turnaround in six school districts and four education management organizations, and includes portraits of successful turnaround schools within each district or effort, as well as system-wide summaries. We present these with the intention that other districts can learn from them and introduce their own district-specific strategies for serving underperforming schools.

Given that a high percent of the targeted "turnaround" schools exist within urban school districts— where many high-needs students do not attend the few schools receiving SIG funding—it's especially important to consider system-wide strategies for helping all schools to improve. Students who have been left out of the formal turnaround process can still benefit from district lessons on improving the academic performance of a high-needs population. Yet we find that many districts are not bringing lessons from turnaround to scale. If systems don't better support all low-performing schools, schools bordering on turnaround status may decline into turnaround even as turnaround schools improve, and schools exiting turnaround may quickly backslide if the broader system doesn't support strategies that drove improvement during turnaround.

District Case Studies

Boston – Turnaround Schools – 11 Schools (originally 12; one closed). Employed school closures, mergers, expansions, pilots, and charters as turnaround strategies.

- *The Challenges*: balancing district requirements with school autonomy; finding highly qualified teachers without draining other schools; sustaining improvement after extra funding runs out
- *Common District Investments*: replaced leadership where required; offered additional incentives/compensation for leaders; replaced teachers where necessary; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; provided teacher professional development; instituted teacher-leaders and/or coaches; gave support to teachers for analyzing student data; extended instructional time; introduced parent/community liaisons; supplied professional staff and worked with outside partners for student health, social, and emotional support; fostered community engagement; created smaller supervisory zones; gathered data and installed data-support staff at the system level
- *Funding*: state SIG allocation and federal ARRA funds on top of per-pupil funding
- *Results:* after one year, every school showed modest growth in students hitting benchmarks from beginning to end of year, and each school had at least one area in which growth outpaced the district

Charlotte-Mecklenburg – Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) – began with seven schools, expanded to 24 schools at time of case study. Invested in strong school leaders who assembled core teams for their schools.

- *The Challenge:* sustaining attention to needy schools as the initiative has expanded; moving excellent principals from one school to another
- *Common District Investments:* replaced leadership where required; offered additional incentives/compensation for leaders; added leadership staff such as APs or school business

managers; replaced teachers where necessary; offered incentives/compensation for teachers; instituted teacher-leaders and/or coaches

- *Funding:* incentive compensation for the SSI team, training support; no other extra resources
- *Results:* SSI schools generally showed an increase in percentage of students attaining proficiency; principals with more directive leadership styles had larger gains. Schools where new SSI teachers represented a smaller percentage of total staff had smaller gains. Across time, SSI students were able to close the mathematics gap, but had not yet closed the reading gap

Chicago – <u>Office of School Improvement (OSI)</u> – three high schools.[1] Provided standardized model for schools it managed internally, outsourced "restarts" to AUSL.

- *The Challenge:* since all of Chicago's high schools are in the bottom 5 percent of high schools in Illinois, actions undertaken for the three turnarounds had to be replicable and scalable
- *Common District Investments:* replaced leadership where required; offered additional incentives/compensation for leaders; added leadership staff such as APs or school business managers; replaced teachers where necessary; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; implemented new instructional systems; instituted teacher leaders and/or coaches; gave support to teachers for analyzing student data; implemented early intervention with tutoring or small-group instruction; restructured student schedules; extended instructional time; physically renovated; renewed discipline and installed security staff; introduced parent/community liaisons; supplied professional staff and worked with outside partners for student health, social, and emotional support; fostered community engagement; created smaller supervisory zones; gathered data and installed data-support staff at the system level
- *Funding:* efforts in the first three years have been funded through grants and district funding; additional funding will be 10 percent, maintained indefinitely
- *Results:* preliminary results for two of the turnaround high schools show significant gains on early indicators like attendance, number of freshman on-track, and one-year drop-out rate

Cincinnati –<u>The Elementary Initiative</u> – 16 schools, four totally redesigned. Extensive leadership training: centralized design, weekly school visits, and frequent school performance reviews.

- *The Challenge*: incorporating schools' lessons into the centralized approach versus customization
- *Common District Investments*: replaced leadership where required; provided training and ongoing coaching for leaders; replaced teachers where necessary; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; implemented new instructional systems; instituted teacher leaders and/or coaches; restructured student schedules; extended instructional time; worked with outside partners for student health, social, and emotional support; fostered community

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[1] Chicago contracted with the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) for two high schools and 10 elementary schools for turnaround. That work is discussed in a separate case study below.

engagement; created smaller supervisory zones; gathered data and installed data-support staff at the system level

- *Funding:* a combination of per-pupil, ESEA, ARRA, and SIG dollars, as well as philanthropic investment by entities like the GE Foundation
- *Results:* within two years, over 75 percent (13 out of 16) improved on the state performance index, and overall gains in reading and math across schools exceeded state averages at every grade level. Improvements at these schools boosted the district's performance to a rating of "effective" for the first time in 2010

Denver – Portfolio Strategy/ School Performance Framework – 14 Schools. Data-driven, portfolio approach with strong community input.

- *The Challenge:* engaging the community in determining the right research-based approach, interventions, and instructional model for each school
- *Common District Investments:* replaced leadership where required; offered additional incentives/compensation for leaders; provided training and ongoing coaching for leaders; replaced teachers where necessary; offered incentives/compensation for teachers; implemented new instructional systems; provides teacher professional development; instituted teacher leaders and/or coaches; implemented early intervention with tutoring or small group instruction; extended instructional time; introduced parent/community liaisons; works with outside partners for student health, social, and emotional support; fostered community engagement; created smaller supervisory zones; gathered data and installed data-support staff at the system level
- *Funding:* SIG with additional money through DPS' general fund and philanthropy
- *Results:* seven of eight schools met or exceeded expectations; one remained in "red" category at time of writing. In addition, three of the four schools in DPS' initial turnaround cohort showed improvement in the median growth percentile improvement in reading, writing, and math

Miami – Education Transformation Office (ETO) – 19 schools in 2010, 26 schools in 2011. An autonomous turnaround region that standardizes school design and provides intense support.

- *The Challenge:* re-energizing a "separate school governance" strategy after an expensive and only modestly successful earlier attempt; managing pressure under Florida's differentiated accountability model

- *Common District Investments:* replaced leadership where required; offered additional incentives/compensation for leaders; added leadership staff such as APs or school business managers; provided training and ongoing coaching for leaders; replaced teachers where necessary; offered incentives/compensation for teachers; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; instituted teacher leaders and/or coaches; implemented early intervention with tutoring or small group instruction; extended instructional time; introduced parent/community liaisons; worked with outside partners for student health, social, and emotional support; fostered community engagement; created smaller supervisory zones

- *Funding:* primarily SIG, as well as Title I and II federal ESEA dollars
- *Results:* in the first formal year, all designated "intervention" schools exited the state's lowest-performing category, and official state school grades improved substantially for all but four schools. Overall reading proficiency increased by a percentage point, mathematics by five, and science by seven

Case Studies of Other Education Management Organizations

Like districts engaged in turnaround, these organizations—which also received SIG funding—focused on creating or revamping schools to eliminate achievement gaps. Three are charter management organizations and one is a turnaround and teacher-preparation organization.

AUSL (The Academy for Urban School Leadership) – under contract with Chicago Public Schools managed 12 previously low-performing schools at time of case study. AUSL is both an educational management organization focused on turnaround schools and a teacher-training organization. CPS gives AUSL complete autonomy to manage schools, but holds it accountable for results. Additionally, AUSL runs the Chicago Teacher Residency (CTR) program, through which it recruits, selects, and trains teacher residents, ensuring a pipeline of effective teachers for AUSL schools.

- *The Challenge:* finding sufficient numbers of high-quality teachers; building an understanding in the community around authority granted by CPS to completely replace staff
- *Common District Investments:* replaced leadership where required; offered additional incentives/compensation for leaders; provided training and ongoing coaching for leaders; replaced teachers where necessary; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; provided teacher professional development; instituted teacher leaders and/or coaches; gave support to teachers for analyzing student data; implemented early intervention with tutoring or small group instruction; physically renovated; renewed discipline and installed security staff; supplied professional staff and worked with outside partners for student health, social, and emotional support; fostered community engagement; gathered data and installed data-support staff at the system level
- *Funding*: SIG; also supplements base CPS funding with additional funding from a combination of federal and state grants, foundations, and individual donors
- *Results:* all schools showed significant gains in attendance and achievement; schools managed the longest by AUSL showed greatest jumps

Mastery CMO started running schools in Philadelphia in 2001 and at the time of the case study operated seven charter schools, six of them turnarounds reopened as charters with the same students but different leadership and staff.

- *The Challenge*: incorporating private-sector management practices into school systems, especially performance-based pay; running schools with 20 percent fewer per-pupil dollars than district schools
- *Common District Investments*: replaced leadership where required; added leadership staff such as APs or school business managers; provided training and ongoing coaching for leaders;

replaced teachers where necessary; offered incentives/compensation for teachers; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; implemented new instructional systems; provided teacher professional development; instituted teacher leaders and/or coaches; gave support to teachers for analyzing student data; implemented early intervention with tutoring or small-group instruction; restructured student schedules; extended instructional time; physically renovated; renewed discipline; introduced parent/community liaisons; supplied professional staff for student health, social, and emotional support; fostered community engagement; gathered data and installed data support staff at the network level

- *Funding*: SIG and per-pupil funding from Philadelphia Public Schools; privately raised investments of about $1 million to $1.5 million in each new school for facilities improvements, books, computers, and other amenities
- *Results to date*: all schools now outperform district averages, and several have nearly closed the gap with the state; dramatically reduced disciplinary and behavioral incidents; 50 percent reduction in student turnover

ReNEW CMO New Orleans operates four charter schools with a model based on characteristics of high-performing "no excuses" schools and provides for a fee all "back-office" operations so schools can focus on instruction.

- *The Challenge:* running a sufficient number of schools that its overhead costs are funded
- *Common District Investments*: replaced leadership where required; added leadership staff such as APs or school business managers; replaced teachers where necessary; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; implemented new instructional systems; provided teacher professional development; gave support to teachers for analyzing student data; implemented early intervention with tutoring or small group instruction; restructured student schedules; extended instructional time; fostered community engagement; gathered data and installed data support staff at the network level
- *Funding:* general education funding per student, plus $1.3 million in federal aid per school
- *Results:* highest academic gains of all open-enrollment schools in the city, though not yet at goal of 75 percent proficiency at time of case study

Rocketship Education is a network of five charter schools in San Jose, California that are tightly managed and share a "hybrid" learning model. Students spend one-quarter of their school day working independently in learning labs or receiving tutoring.

- *The Challenge:* creating a pipeline of leaders who have mastered complexity of their model
- *Common District Investments:* added leadership staff such as APs or school business managers; provided training and ongoing coaching for leaders; offered incentives/compensation for teachers; provided extra time for teacher collaboration; implemented new instructional systems; provided teacher professional development; instituted teacher leaders and/or coaches; gave support to teachers for analyzing student data; implemented early intervention with tutoring or small group instruction; restructured student schedules; extended instructional

time; introduced parent/community liaisons; fostered community engagement; gathered data and installed data support staff at the network level

- *Funding:* regular public resources without the support of additional philanthropic dollars
- *Results:* Rocketship's first two schools ranked 5th and 15th in the state in 2010 among schools serving low-income populations; high levels of advanced students on state tests

Additional Resources

In addition to *Turnaround Case Studies*, other available turnaround resources from ERS include:

Series Overview: Sustaining Turnaround at Scale: Turnaround Summit Brief 1 summarizes the issues that districts face in building sustainable turnaround while leveraging short-term funding.

Investing for Sustainable Turnaround: Turnaround Summit Brief 2 highlights how long-term structures and lasting improvement can be created with short-term Federal and district funds.

Turnaround in Action: a video highlighting the roots of dramatic improvement in the Charlotte-Mecklenberg School District.

Turnaround Schools: District Strategies for Success and Sustainability: a step-by-step guide to turning around your lowest-performing schools.

Ferris, Kristen (2012). "Human Capital in Turnaround Schools." The School Administrator Magazine: an article by ERS manager of school turnaround and design.