

School Turnaround in Boston Public Schools

OVERVIEW

In fall 2009, the leadership of Boston Public Schools (BPS) was working to identify its lowest-performing schools as part of the creation of the district's five-year strategic plan. During the same timeframe, related developments were unfolding at the state level. First, a significant piece of education reform legislation was signed into law in January 2010 by Governor Deval Patrick.

This legislation, called “An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap,” gives school districts authority to put reforms in place for schools that are identified as “Level 4,” or chronically underperforming. For example, the act allows districts to negotiate changes in collective bargaining agreements through a resolution process, and requires school staff members to reapply for their positions.¹

Also, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) was compiling a list of the Level 4 schools across the state: those most in need of turnaround. BPS and DESE collaborated on the final list of Level 4 schools—based on MCAS performance, student growth, percent of students in warning, and high school graduation rates—and in March 2010, 12 BPS schools were designated Level 4 (see inset at right). The Level 4 schools make up less than 10 percent of the total 135 schools in the district, and educate just over 6,000 students, or about 10 percent of students in the district.² High-level demographic data for the students at these schools are as follows:

- 92 percent Black or Hispanic
- 86 percent eligible for free/reduced-price meals
- 40 percent limited English proficient
- 22 percent Special Needs
- Nearly two-thirds live in Circle of Promise (a five-square-mile area that encompasses some of Boston's highest-need neighborhoods in Roxbury and Dorchester)

While the district was honing its turnaround strategy for the Level 4 schools, the federal government released funding for low-performing schools that stipulated the implementation of one of four “federal intervention models.” Therefore, BPS leaders based redesign plans on these federal models to some extent.³ In May 2010, BPS finalized its five-year strategic plan, which included a focus on the Level 4 schools, and shared it with the public.

DISTRICT BACKGROUND 2010-11:

Enrollment.....	57,050 students
\$/Pupil (09-10).....	\$11,525 for Regular Ed \$14,524 overall
% Free & Reduced Lunch.....	74%
% Special Education.....	19%
% LEP or ELL	30%
Year Turnaround Program Initiated.....	2010
# of Turnaround Schools	7 elementary 3 middle school 2 high school

BPS Level 4 schools

Elementary:

Louis Agassiz
(closed summer 2011)

William A. Blackstone
Paul A. Dever
E. Greenwood
John P. Holland
John F. Kennedy
William Monroe Trotter

Middle:

Orchard Gardens (K-8)
Henry Dearborn
Harbor

High:

Jeremiah Burke
The English High School

¹ <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/1-27-10%20Acceleration%20Agenda%20and%20Turnaround%20Update-1.pdf>

² District data are as of February 2010, as stated in the Acceleration Agenda (the five-year strategic plan), (<http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/AccelerationAgenda.pdf>)

³ The two federal intervention models used by BPS are the *turnaround* and *transformation* models.

In fall 2010, the district launched full implementation of its turnaround strategy at the 12 schools. Implementation varies somewhat across schools, and included the closing of one school, but certain elements are consistent: increased instruction time, additional time for professional development and teacher planning, new relationships with community partners to provide social and emotional supports, and measureable annual goals. School leaders were replaced at five of the schools; the other seven had had new school leaders within the previous two years. At seven schools, teaching staff were asked to reapply for their jobs and more than 50 percent were replaced. Federal funding, distributed at the state level, was granted to the turnaround schools as part of a competitive application process, covering turnaround costs, particularly the extended day.

TURNAROUND PROGRAM RESULTS TO DATE

The district’s goal for Level 4 schools is that, by the end of the three-year period, they will be removed from Level 4 status. However, BPS also wants the perception of these schools to fundamentally change. As Chief Accountability Officer Frank Barnes explains, “We want families and the community to view these schools as schools of choice and want to send their kids there. We don’t just want to get off a list, but we want to improve the quality of schooling in the city.”

Barnes feels optimistic about the changing perceptions: “We’re a school-choice district so parents vote with their feet and more people are wanting to go to these schools. They’re seeing changes and hearing via word-of-mouth that people are happy there.” The district shared some early indicators of progress with the Boston School Committee in June 2011. In regards to student achievement, early indicators were:

- According to the Diebels (K-2), every elementary and K-8 school showed growth in the percentage of students reaching benchmark from the Beginning-of-Year (BOY) to the Middle-of-Year (MOY)
- According to Learnia (3-8), A-Net (3-8), and ATI (9-12), there are early indicators of success in every school and each school has at least one area in which growth has outpaced the district.

Preliminary data was also shared in June 2011 regarding student rates, as shown below.

Turnaround School	Attendance	Chronically Absent	School Choice	# of Students Suspended
Aggregate of all	↑	↓	↑	↓
Blackstone ES	↑	↓	↑	↑
Dever ES	↓	↑	↑	↓
E. Greenwood ES	↑	↓	↑	↓
Holland ES	↑	↓	↑	↑
JF Kennedy ES	↑	↑	↑	↓
Trotter ES	↓	↑	↑	↑
Orchard Gardens K-8	↓	↓	↑	↓
Dearborn MS	↑	↓	↓	↑
Harbor MS	↓	↑	↓	↓
Burke HS	↑	↓	↑	↓
English HS	↓	↓	↑	↑

A comparison of MCAS results between 2010 and 2011 shows steady improvement in the eight of the eleven turnaround schools with an average increase of 4.5 in the percentage of students reaching Proficient or above in English language arts and 6.8 in Math. While one elementary school saw a 6 point drop in ELA proficiency, others posted gains of as much as 10 and 12 points. Improvement in Math proficiency was more significant with 16 and 18 percentage point increases for students at two of the elementary schools.

Comparison of MCAS Results (2010 -2011)

Turnaround School	Change in ELA Proficient/Advanced	Change in Math Proficient/Advanced
Aggregate of all	4.5%	6.8%
Blackstone ES	1%	NA
Dever ES	-6%	11%
E. Greenwood ES	12%	8%
Holland ES	-2%	1%
JF Kennedy ES	9%	18%
Trotter ES	-3%	2%
Orchard Gardens K-8	10%	16%
Dearborn MS	6%	5%
Harbor MS	6%	-1%
Burke HS	12%	5%
English HS	4%	3%

DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY AND SCHOOL TURNAROUND APPROACH⁴

The district believes that seven core elements are needed for turning around low-performing schools (see inset below) and the strategies implemented thus far reflect these core elements.⁵ These core elements also align with the two federal intervention models being used by BPS.⁶

The seven core elements of turnaround provide the basis for the district’s specific turnaround strategies, which are consistent across Level 4 schools. However, given limited resources, the district realized that it could not implement all strategies with the same level of intensity at each school—particularly in the first year. Instead, BPS defined four levels of intensity that linked to the degree of change expected during year one. As Barnes explains, “At each Level 4 school, we implemented one of the two federal models with different levels of intensity. These levels meant four different levels of expectations. We want all schools to arrive at the same place after three years—emerging from Level 4 status, but we expected to see a bigger pop

Core Elements for Turnaround

- 1) Transformational school leaders
- 2) Effective classroom teachers
- 3) Culture of teamwork, high expectations, and ownership for results
- 4) Focus on instruction
- 5) Social and emotional supports
- 6) Family and community engagement
- 7) Accountability

⁴ Further details on district turnaround approach can be found in the BPS District Turnaround Plan, dated June 29, 2010 (http://www.btu.org/sites/default/files/bps_district_turnaround_plan_6-29-10%20_0.pdf)

⁵ These core elements were developed with the support of Education Resource Strategies (ERS).

⁶ BPS is using two federal intervention models: turnaround (at five schools) and transformation (at seven schools). Turnaround model schools: Blackstone ES, Dever ES, Trotter ES, Orchard Gardens K-8, Harbor MS. Transformation model schools: Agassiz ES (closed in summer 2011), Greenwood ES, Holland ES, Kennedy ES, Dearborn MS, Burke HS, English HS.

in some schools after year one.” The most intense implementation occurred at two schools—Blackstone and Orchard Gardens—which had the highest need, according to metrics used. The district’s strategies are detailed below.

Replace school leaders. As explained earlier, BPS appointed new school leaders at five of the schools (including the two where efforts were most intense), and the other seven schools already had excellent leaders in place that had been appointed within two years prior. The district had clear criteria for selecting these leaders: They needed to demonstrate certain attributes including a focus on results, use of data to monitor progress, ability to establish a cohesive school culture, and experience with reorganizing resources to attain achievement targets. The district created a candidate pool composed of both internal and external candidates and then developed a profile of specific leadership needs for each Level 4 school. Those profiles were used to screen candidates for specific school positions and candidates underwent a rigorous interview process. Principals receive bonuses if student achievement improves according to certain targets, and there are consequences if principals are not effective. In fact, the district has already had to replace two principals since Fall 2010.

Replace over 50 percent of teachers at some schools. The Massachusetts education reform legislation “An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap” allows districts to require staff in Level 4 schools to reapply for their positions, and BPS exercised this authority in seven schools. This process encourages only teachers who are interested in being part of turnaround work to remain in the school. Any such teachers must submit a letter of interest that expresses their commitment and are subsequently invited to return to the school or not. (Teachers not retained may seek other positions in BPS.) BPS has leveraged several existing partnerships—such as with the Boston Teacher Residency program and Teach for America—to fill teacher vacancies. Like principals, teachers also receive bonuses tied to each metric; these are individual teacher awards based on aggregate student performance.⁷

Add instructional leaders and data managers. In the first year of turnaround, a few instructional strategies were specific to the highest-needs schools. For example, via a partnership with Teach Plus, BPS conducted a national search to recruit instructional leaders at three schools: Trotter, Blackstone, and Orchard Gardens. Also, Blackstone and Orchard Gardens, along with two other schools, have full-time data managers in-house.⁸

Extend the school day. In June 2010, a joint resolution committee⁹ issued a decision that allowed Superintendent Johnson to extend the school day in the 12 schools undergoing turnaround, with the provision of an extra stipend to teachers.¹⁰ Starting in the 2010-11 school year, the additional time—one hour per day—is divided between classroom instruction (approximately 30 minutes per day) and teacher development and planning. As Dr. Johnson explained, “This decision allows us to move swiftly to put the time, people and resources in place that will directly impact the students of Boston [...] We will, among other

⁷ Amount of bonuses is confidential.

⁸ In some cases, these data managers were supported by external partners; Achievement Network partnered with Orchard Gardens, and the Boston Plan for Excellence partnered with Blackstone.

⁹ The three-person committee included one person representing the Boston School Committee, one representing the Boston Teachers Union, and one from a list provided by the American Association of Arbitrators.

¹⁰ The extra stipend is \$4,100 for an additional 190 hours of service; this is a rate lower than the pro-rated teacher salary requested by the Boston Teachers Union.

things, be able to offer students in these underperforming schools more teaching and learning time with their dedicated teachers and school leaders.”¹¹

Provide social and emotional supports via partnerships. BPS relies heavily on partners to provide social and emotional supports at Level 4 schools: The City Connects program at Boston College works with the elementary and K-8 schools, while the BPS Office of the Department of Extended Learning Time, and After-school Services (DELTAS) work with the middle and high schools. These services are coordinated by counselors or social workers at the schools. Partnering with these organizations is mandatory for the Level 4 schools.

Foster family and community engagement. At the district level, the Office of Family and Student Engagement (OFSE) provides support for family engagement planning, and works with parent engagement positions at the schools to develop a communications plan, engage 10 percent of parents in Parent University, achieve a 60+ percent return rate among parents on the district climate survey and establish certain family engagement practices in the school (e.g., an active School Parent Council). The district ensured that all Level 4 schools had a Family Community Outreach Coordinator (FCOC) to foster engagement. OFSE also works with staff at schools and partners to identify additional community partners and coordinate among them.

Set measurable annual goals. The Massachusetts education reform legislation requires district monitoring of progress and performance at every Level 4 school. BPS monitors progress against measurable annual goals in three areas:

- Student rates (e.g., truancy rate, dropout rate), using 2009-10 as baseline year
- Student achievement (e.g., 4-year graduation rate, Composite Performance Index for ELA and Math), using 2008-9 as baseline year
- College readiness and school culture (e.g., percent of sophomores who participate in PSAT examinations, percent parents reporting meaningful opportunities to engage with and/or contribute to the school on BPS Climate Survey), using 2009-10 as baseline year

The Level 4 schools are all overseen by Chief Accountability Officer Frank Barnes, who is directly responsible for assessing the progress of the schools and determining which central supports are necessary.

SCHOOL TURNAROUND ELEMENTS

Due to the involvement of both the state of Massachusetts and the federal government (see “Funding” section below), each school had to write two different plans: a turnaround plan stipulated by state legislation, and a redesign plan stipulated by the federal government. A mandatory component of the process of creating turnaround plans included the use of local stakeholder groups—composed of various types of stakeholders—that made recommendations to the principal.

Many elements of the schools’ plans are mandated by the district, as explained above. However, each school created a school improvement plan that suited its unique challenges. The district allows flexibility in several components of school design. For example, schools can create their own master schedules as long as they incorporate district directives. Also, in the area of social and emotional supports, schools must meet district criteria, but may add additional activities as desired. Furthermore, there is some flexibility with curriculum in that schools can supplement but not supplant the common curriculum for ELA, math, and science.

¹¹ <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/news/rapid-reform-gets-approval-joint-resolution-committee>

FUNDING

In order to fund its turnaround strategies at Level 4 schools, BPS looked to newly available funding: a combination of the state’s federal School Turnaround Grant (STG) allocation and funds allocated through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Via a competitive process, ten of the schools¹² submitted redesign plans to the DESE for this funding.¹³ To qualify for the funding, each school’s redesign plan needed to include the implementation of one of the four federal intervention models.

In August 2010, the state granted school improvement funds to the ten schools that applied. The amounts varied by school according to several factors, including student enrollment and number of staff. (See table below for funding per school.)

School Improvement Funds received by BPS Turnaround Schools:¹⁴

Turnaround Schools	Funding received for 3-year period
Elementary schools:	
• Louis Agassiz	None
• William A. Blackstone	\$2.40M
• Paul A. Dever	\$2.32M
• E. Greenwood	\$1.38M
• John P. Holland	\$2.87M
• John F. Kennedy	\$1.24M
• William Monroe Trotter	\$1.56M
Middle schools:	
• Orchard Gardens (K-8)	\$3.73M
• Henry Dearborn	\$1.26M
• Harbor	\$1.24M
High schools:	
• Jeremiah Burke	\$1.69M
• The English High School	\$2.83M

The press release announcing the grants to BPS schools explains the funding in more detail:

Under the federal methodology, 100 schools [in the state of Massachusetts] were eligible, including 33 of the state's 35 Level 4 schools. [...] The federal School Redesign Implementation grant was developed to provide strategies for turning around underperforming schools and improving student achievement. [...] Districts were eligible to apply for between \$50,000 and \$2 million per year for each eligible school.¹⁵

The funds received by BPS schools span three years, starting with the 2010–2011 school year. Distribution of these funds across the three years varies according to school preference, as stated in their redesign plan; at most schools, it is divided equally across years, but some schools requested that it ramp up or taper off across years. Roughly half of these funds are being

used to extend the school day. Teachers receive an annual stipend of \$4,100 for their extra time. In addition to the funds received by schools listed above, BPS also applied for and received \$1.67 million for administration costs.

In addition to this primary funding source, the district has provided some additional funding to Level 4 schools. BPS pays for some transportation costs (due to extended day), funds Family Community Outreach Coordinators (FCOCs) and provides funding to support many of the partnerships at these schools.

¹² Redesign plans for the remaining two Turnaround Schools (Agassiz Elementary and Burke High) were submitted to MA DESE later in 2010.

¹³ A total of \$55.8M was available for expenditure in MA for a three-year period (FY11-FY13).

¹⁴ <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/news/ten-boston-schools-awarded-22-million-school-improvement-grants>

¹⁵ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=5667>

SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

Barnes acknowledges that the strategies implemented at Level 4 schools have affected other district schools, particularly in regards to having a sufficient high-quality teaching force. Many teachers recruited for Level 4 schools had been elsewhere in the district, and their relocation to higher-needs schools was a strain on other schools. This was exacerbated by the economic environment: The district had to reduce the number of teachers overall, including some who were excellent but did not yet have permanent status.

Because the majority of funding comes from School Improvement Grants, the financial sustainability of funding Level 4 schools at their current rate is low. When these grants run out after three years, BPS will need to determine how to continue key strategies and how to launch turnaround initiatives at other high-needs schools in the district.

BPS has been assessing the implementation of turnaround strategies to date and plans several adjustments going forward. Specifically, the district will focus on instruction, progress monitoring, and differentiated supports.

In terms of instruction, the district saw that the instructional leaders (at three schools) helped to make teacher teams more strategic in meeting student needs. Therefore, an instructional leader was added to Dearborn, because that school had large inconsistencies in teacher quality across classrooms.

The district took a fairly flexible approach to progress monitoring in the first year, but plans to formalize it going forward. BPS has recently convened several school leaders and partners¹⁶ and asked them to agree on common elements that should exist in usage of data. They then discussed how to make those elements operational. Next, the data people from Level 4 schools—whether full-time data managers or others who handle data for a particular school—joined the conversation to determine a common approach to using data to monitor student progress. As of 2011–2012, a total of nine schools have full-time data managers, up from four schools in the previous year. All schools are undergoing a quarterly review to analyze plan implementation and interim results so as to determine additional supports and necessary adjustments. In addition, partners are playing a larger role. For example, time audits by Massachusetts 2020 and the National Center on Time and Learning of the Level 4 schools have identified ways they can use their time better.

More effective use of time and the monitoring of student data will allow BPS to better differentiate support for individual student progress with more opportunity for targeted interventions and small-group instruction.

¹⁶ Including Achievement Network, Massachusetts 2020, City Year, the Boston Plan for Excellence

Profile: Orchard Gardens Elementary School

OVERVIEW

Orchard Gardens, a Boston Public Schools (BPS) Pilot School,¹⁷ is currently in its second year as a “Turnaround” school. Since the school first opened in 2003, Orchard Gardens has been one of the lowest-performing schools in BPS and Massachusetts. The overwhelming majority of students (90 percent) qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch, 25 percent are English language learners, and 25 percent have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The school also has a history of staff instability: five principals in seven years, more than 50 percent teacher turnover every year, and a teaching force consisting primarily of novice educators.¹⁸

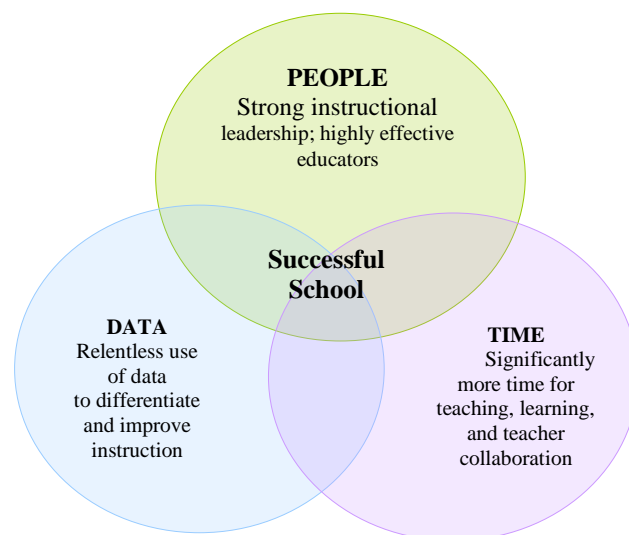
In 2010, Orchard Gardens began the turnaround process as part of the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program—a particular challenge given its history of persistent failure and students that were as much as five years behind grade level. Andrew Bott, a recruited Turnaround principal and current principal at Orchard Gardens, is tackling this challenge with a three-pronged theory of change: improved effectiveness of the school’s **people**, relentless use of **data** to differentiate and improve instruction, and significantly increased learning **time** (see figure at right).¹⁹ Together, these key elements ensure that each student receives the time and quality of instruction necessary to achieve proficiency. Orchard Gardens’ application and design of each of these core elements is explained below.

SCHOOL DESIGN ELEMENTS

Add leadership staff. Bott made the strategic decision to divide leadership responsibilities between himself and a Chief Operating Officer (COO). Having a COO in a public school is not a new idea, but it is fairly uncommon in a traditional public school. Bott’s inspiration came from some of the most effective charter schools in Massachusetts, many of which have COOs. The addition of this role allows Orchard Gardens’

Quick Facts 2010-2011

- **School type:** Pilot School
- **Grades:** K-8
- **Size:** Approximately 800 students
- **Demographics:** 33% African American, 63% Hispanic, 90% Free/Reduced Lunch, 25% ELLs, 25% IEPs
- **Location:** Boston, MA
- **General Ed Funding Level:** Not Available
- **School day/year:** Grades K-5 and Grade 8: 7:30a - 2:30p Monday - Friday; Grades 6 and 7: 7:30a - 5:30p Monday - Thursday, 7:30a - 2:30p Friday



¹⁷ BPS Pilot Schools are a network of public schools that have increased autonomy and flexibility to organize schools and staffing to best meet students’ needs while operating within the economy of scale of a large urban public school district: <http://www.ccebos.org/pilotschools/bostonpilotschools.html>

¹⁸ Orchard Gardens School-Level Redesign Plan:

http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/turnaround/FY11/511_FY11_Boston_Orchard_RedesignPlan.doc

¹⁹ Orchard Gardens School Website:

<http://orchardgardensk8.org/our-turnaround-journey/>

leadership to jointly tackle the challenges of running a complex school. Although initially the recruiting and hiring processes were Bott's responsibility, the COO has taken on a significant portion of these processes. The COO is also responsible for the operation of the school (e.g., transportation, building maintenance, food services, etc.) As principal, Bott still has some operational responsibilities—like the creation of the master schedule and budget—but his operational involvement is mostly at the level of vision and planning rather than daily execution. This allows Bott to focus on instruction, student performance, and working with families.

Add teacher-leaders. A strong team of teacher-leaders is a critical component of Orchard Gardens' turnaround strategy. Bott worked with the organization Teach Plus to recruit his teacher-leader team using the T3 Initiative (see inset at right). The team of 18 teacher leaders at Orchard Gardens takes on responsibilities in addition to teaching and is a critical part of the implementation of the turnaround plan. For example, teacher-leaders are responsible for the implementation of the positive behavior system and for developing and strengthening community partnerships. According to Bott, the team is able to provide leadership capacity beyond that of the principal and COO, which helps to create lasting change at the school. Teacher-leaders at Orchard Gardens are paid an additional \$6,000 for their leadership responsibilities. Bott believes that he would be able to build a core of quality teacher-leaders even without extra pay, but the extra compensation provides an incentive and a way of recognizing hard work.

Replace teachers. Prior to beginning turnaround in 2010, Orchard Gardens had a history of staff instability: Over 50 percent of staff had turned over every year since Orchard Gardens opened. Compliance with the federal "Turnaround" model required Bott to replace at least 50 percent of Orchard Gardens' faculty, and he chose to remove over 80 percent. While Bott realized that this massive turnover of staff could perpetuate a lack of connection and trust between students and staff, he considered this a short-term problem. By turning over a high percentage of staff, he was able to focus on finding, recruiting, and hiring the right people—the "rock stars" he felt were required to successfully and dramatically improve the school.

Bott began the initial recruiting and hiring process in April 2010 for the September 2010 school year, giving him a relatively short timeline to fill 60 teacher positions and 20 teacher aid positions. He was able to meet his recruiting challenge by using a combination of strategies. He explained that he thought "inside the box" by accessing the district's recruiting system and posting jobs online, and "outside the box" by tapping into other networks in New England and across the country. He recruited from the alumni network at Teach for America (TFA), specifically looking for individuals with a proven track record of success who had stayed beyond TFA's two-year commitment.

Although hiring 80 percent of a school's staff is no easy task, Bott felt there were several advantages to building a staff from scratch. For example, he did not have to consider how to assess existing staff's strengths and areas for growth to assign them as best as possible. Instead, he was able to specifically recruit individuals for open positions, which he believes led to more optimal assignments.

Retain staff. Bott knew that in order to retain his new staff, he needed to build a school culture that empowered them to be involved in and committed to the turnaround effort. He explained that new leaders disenfranchise staff members if they just "push" their own plans and do not seek buy-in. Rather, successful

Teach+ T3 Initiative

The T3 Initiative is an innovative program to recruit, develop, and support effective, experienced teachers to serve in the lowest performing schools.

The T3 Initiative:

- creates cohorts of highly effective and experienced teachers
- supports them in becoming turnaround specialists
- places them in teams in the schools in which they are most needed

administrators need to respect the professional skills of teachers and leverage that expertise to develop school plans that teachers will ultimately implement. Between year one of turnaround (2010–11) and year two (2011–12), Orchard Gardens retained nearly 95 percent of its staff, a dramatic improvement compared to past years. While the school’s first-year staff retention rate is high, Bott explains his worries about retaining staff after year three²⁰:

I have a lot of folks who have had a lot of time to refine their “turnaround” skills and leadership skills through informal and formal teacher-leader roles. And I know there are going to be people who are embarking on turnaround processes elsewhere who are going to come here looking to recruit my folks to take on those leadership positions.

With this potential future challenge in mind, Bott is already thinking about the school’s long-term recruitment plan. A successful human capital strategy must acknowledge that people are going to move on, and building a system to replace successful, effective individuals with an equally capable staff is a major challenge to sustained improvement.

Provide teacher development and extra time for collaboration. Recruiting and retaining individuals

Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)

The BELL after-school program provides students with intensive, individualized instruction in literacy and math and builds critical life and leadership skills.

The program meets for 2.5 hours per day, 3-5 days per week, for up to 30 weeks – a total of up to 375 hours of learning experiences.

committed to taking on a turnaround challenge is only part of building a strong school staff. Orchard Gardens is also committed to continued teacher effectiveness and growth. The school’s redesign plan outlines a structure for teacher collaboration and professional development, including ongoing leadership development, bi-weekly in-service professional development, weekly teacher team meetings, and monthly opportunities for teacher demonstrations and classroom observations. The school also uses a combination of formative and summative assessments to understand classroom instruction and progress. Bott and other administrators conduct classroom observations as an integral part of measuring teacher

performance and helping teachers to adjust their instruction methods.

Providing more instructional time for students is essential, and by federal regulations, a required component to a Turnaround strategy. However, Bott cautions that if the strategic plan only increases time for students without increasing quality time for teachers to work together, the school will struggle. People need the opportunity to work together to solve problems and create the strongest plans possible. Orchard Gardens’ teachers have embedded time during the day to meet regularly: a minimum of six planning periods per week (three open-planning periods and three team-meeting periods), as well as two hours every other week for professional development. Teacher leaders work together with administrators to co-plan the team meetings based on student needs.

Build community partnerships to share responsibility and extend learning time. As a principal, Bott believes that school leaders must have faith in their organization’s ability to plan and execute successfully to realize a

Citizens Schools ELT Program

More Time: Program runs for 3 hours, Monday-Thursday for the entire 6th grade as part of their regular school day. This is 400 extra hours per year for each student.

More Relevance: Math or literacy support based on state standards, and curricula designed to build students “skills, provide access to community resources, and instill belief in the connection between hard work and success.”

More Talent: 160 volunteer professionals and 16 Citizen Schools staff, led by an experienced instructional leader, work directly

²⁰ Excerpt from interview with Orchard Gardens Principal Andrew Bott.

school's strategic vision and meet its goals. He explains that a sure path to failure is to try to micromanage all the decisions that happen at the school. It is important that school leaders, especially turnaround leaders, have or develop a willingness to share that responsibility. A turnaround principal must be unwavering in his or her support of the school's vision, but the path to success is laid by trusting that the team will make those decisions that are in the best interest of the students.

Orchard Gardens teams up with a number of organizations that provide support in six areas: Student Support, Strategic Support, Health and Wellness, Teacher Support, Mentoring, and Family Engagement.²¹ The school's external partners have enabled Orchard Gardens to provide an extended school day. In 2010, the school's first year as a turnaround school, the sixth-grade students and some seventh-grade students enrolled in Citizen Schools' Expanded Learning Time (ELT) program (see inset). In 2011, Orchard Gardens partnered with Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL) to extend the school day for an additional 250 Orchard Gardens elementary school students in grades K–3 and Grade 5 (see inset).

Bott believes that an effective collaboration around ELT requires that the additional time is functionally and programmatically integrated into the regular school day. This ensures a seamless transition into the ELT programming for students and coordinated program delivery between the traditional school day and ELT programming. Simply having an external group take over the afternoon programming in a school is insufficient. Bott strives to integrate external partners into wider school operations as much as possible. For example, Citizen Schools collaborates with Orchard Gardens in areas such as scheduling and logistics, providing data access, and aligning policies and procedures. Citizen Schools also has access to and attends instructional and leadership meetings and joint professional developments.

Bott also points out the elements of effective contracts with external partners: specific goals and expectations for program delivery and quality and ultimately, student performance. For year one of the turnaround, Orchard Gardens had a standard Memorandum of Understanding with all of their external partner organizations. However, Bott adjusted these for year two, making the agreements between the school and its partners more specific, with target academic outcomes.

Another strategy that has helped strengthen the alignment of the extended day has been the coordination of specific messaging delivered to students both during the "regular" school day and ELT programming. The culture and expectations during the two portions of the school day are essentially the same. As Bott explained, one cannot set the expectation that students can behave one way between 7:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. and another way after that. Orchard Gardens spent a lot of time in its first year of turnaround building common cultural expectations. Bott believes that this hard work has paid off and the alignment between the school and its partners has continued to improve.

Restructure student schedules. The transition between the "traditional" school day and the "extended" portion begins with a joint homeroom period with an Orchard Gardens homeroom teacher and a Citizen Schools teacher. Students receive academic supports through homework time and Math League twice per week. Also, students participate in "apprenticeships" twice per week (see figure below). Apprenticeships match students with Citizen Teachers (adult volunteers from the community) to work on hands-on, project-based curricula in a range of subjects such as architecture, the arts, cooking, environment, finance, journalism, law, service, and science and technology. In their apprenticeships, students learn everything from how to program robots and how to write code for and design a computer game to how to make strategic financial

²¹ Orchard Gardens School Website:
<http://orchardgardensk8.org/our-turnaround-journey/>

decisions about an organization. The curricula may be either pre-developed or developed specifically for Orchard Gardens. Apprenticeships are designed to build skills in oral presentation, teamwork, leadership, data analysis, and advanced literacy technology, with the goal of explicitly linking academic skills to college and career success. Students also create and present a final product, called a “WOW!”, with families, teachers, and community members.

Citizen Schools Student Schedule

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:00am	ORCHARD GARDENS' TRADITIONAL SCHOOL DAY Citizen Schools full-time staff enter the building at 10am, and observe and support classroom teachers and prepare for the afternoon lessons they will lead.				
2:45	SNACK & TEAM HUDDLE	SNACK	SNACK	SNACK	ORCHARD GARDENS STAFF MEETING
	MATH LEAGUE	HOMEWORK SUPPORT	HOMEWORK SUPPORT	MATH LEAGUE	CITIZEN SCHOOLS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
6pm	COLLEGE TO CAREER CONNECTIONS	APPRENTICESHIPS	APPRENTICESHIPS	EXPLORATION	

Orchard Gardens’s master schedule was redesigned around the needs of students. For example, the schedule intentionally allows a student excelling at math to advance while simultaneously taking a remedial reading class. The schedule provides students with the flexibility to move between teachers and within grades to get the supports and interventions they need without getting “stuck” in an intervention for an entire year.

The schedule also helps the school meet the needs of its ELL population. At the elementary level, Orchard Gardens uses the English immersion state model. Students work in language-specific groups with teachers who are certified and licensed in second language acquisition. Students at the middle school level also take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes with qualified teachers. However, for other subjects like math and science, a student's schedule allows participation in more heterogeneous groupings not based solely on language level.

Use data to inform instruction. Data at Orchard Gardens is essential to determining baseline student achievement, defining success for each student, and plotting a course to achieve that success. In explaining the school’s data usage process, Bott used the example of assessing letter fluency in their kindergarteners. When a critical percentage of students failed to identify their letters on schedule, the Orchard Gardens team met to develop an intervention plan, which included both pedagogical interventions and a plan to reassess students to continually monitor progress.

Teachers also routinely use data to individualize instruction. Students who are struggling with particular standards or skills are identified through assessment data and are delivered instruction that meets their needs. Generating frequent, extensive data on learning is especially important at a school with a high number of struggling students. As Bott pointed out, looking at school-wide, summative data for Orchard Gardens, like the math MCAS scores, cannot provide the information needed to guide improvement when 90 percent of students are failing all learning strands. Instead, the school collects and analyzes more nuanced data to understand the specific needs of each student and to develop a plan.

Negotiate accountability and flexibility from the district. When asked what was the biggest support the district could provide to his Turnaround school, Bott said “accountability and flexibility.” That is, a turnaround school must be held accountable for its strategic plan while simultaneously having the autonomy to implement that plan. In his experience as a turnaround principal, Bott feels it is critical for a district not to micromanage a turnaround process, much like a successful principal must trust his teachers and staff to undertake a task. This is not to say that districts should not push turnaround schools to perform. He adds that districts should ensure that the improvement plans are rigorous and assess the progress a school is making towards its goals, whether by walkthroughs, observations, or data analysis. The district should then have a system to intervene if and only if a school fails to meet its goals. But to meet rigorous high standards, turnaround schools need the flexibility to take actions not always available to other schools. Bott uses the example of implementing a district curriculum at a turnaround school to illustrate the balance required between accountability and flexibility. A district math curriculum may not meet the needs of a school whose students are several years behind in math. If the district does not lift a mandate on using what has proven to be an ineffective curriculum at the turnaround school, the school is unlikely to succeed.

Use resources strategically for long-term sustainability. Orchard Gardens was awarded a total of \$3.7 million to undertake its three-year Turnaround. Bott’s advice for turnaround schools when making SIG allocation decisions is to think strategically for the long-term. Bott made the strategic decision to use the School Improvement Grant (SIG) to fund additional teacher pay and extend the school day beyond the traditional hours. Bott explains that while this decision may not have given the school “the biggest bang for the buck” in the short term, it would ultimately benefit the school in the long-term. With the additional resources allocated for “time,” Orchard Gardens will not lose teacher, staff or leadership positions at the end of the three-year turnaround period because of diminished funds. Bott added that while losing the SIG funding will be difficult, he and his team are “ahead of the curve” as they continue to think about and develop the school’s plan following the turnaround period.

SOURCES

This case study draws upon interviews completed with Principal Andrew Bott at Orchard Gardens (conducted November 18, 2011) and George Chu at Citizen Schools (conducted November 2, 2011) as well as a number of online sources and publications, including:

Boston Public Schools website: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/>

Building Educated Leaders for Life, after school programs information. Retrieved online:
<http://www.experiencebell.org/programs/after-school>

Citizen Schools “Orchard Gardens Case Study,” November 2011.

Teach Plus website, T3 Initiative Program: <http://www.teachplus.org/page/t3-8.html>

Orchard Gardens School-Level Redesign Plan:
http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/turnaround/FY11/511_FY11_Boston_Orchard_RedesignPlan.doc

Orchard Gardens School website: <http://orchardgardensk8.org/>