School Turnaround in Cincinnati Public Schools

DISTRICT BACKGROUND 2010-11:	
Enrollment	34,000 students
$/Pupil	$10,900
% Free & Reduced-price lunch	73%
% Special Education	21%
% English Language Learners	4%
Year Turnaround Program Initiated	2008
# of Turnaround Schools	16 Elementary

OVERVIEW

Cincinnati Public Schools' (CPS) turnaround effort, the Elementary Initiative, was launched in the fall of 2008. Superintendent Mary Ronan, a veteran CPS administrator and teacher, assumed interim office in August of that year and as part of her incoming work conducted a district-wide analysis of school performance and practices across the city's 57 schools.

CPS enrolls nearly 34,000 students in preschool to 12th grade. These students are predominantly African American (69 percent) and white (24 percent), and 73 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.[1] CPS had been making steady gains at the high school level over the past ten years (graduation rates rose 30 percentage points[2]), but elementary results have been uneven. Ronan's team discovered that elementary schools were highly decentralized, without common curriculum or standards for practice. The experience of students varied widely, with many falling behind state standards.

Given these findings, Ronan's team decided to focus their work at the K–8 level, providing comprehensive assistance across all elementary schools, along with intensive support for the 16 lowest-performing schools. Thirteen of these schools were in "academic emergency," the state's lowest performance category. Announcing the effort, Ronan declared, "These children will no longer languish in a system where they can go from kindergarten to eighth grade in a school that has never met federal guidelines for what makes a good school."[3]

Once the 16 turnaround schools were identified, Ronan appointed Deputy Superintendent Laura Mitchell to oversee and "shepherd" the initiative. Together, Ronan and Mitchell moved quickly to conduct in-depth reviews of staff capacity, school culture, and academic practices. Based upon the results of this review, four schools were selected for total redesign, and the principal and all existing teaching staff were replaced. The remaining 12 schools have undergone turnaround with the same staff and leadership in place.

The Elementary Initiative has provided extensive leadership training and support to the 16 elementary turnaround schools over the last three school years. It has resulted in dramatic changes in practice, with measurable gains at three-quarters of the targeted buildings within two years of implementation.

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[1] Cincinnati Public Schools website, *Basic Facts*, http://www.cps-k12.org/home/FactsAtGlance.pdf

[2] A. Cruver and M. Kane, *Growth and Justice*, "Cincinnati school district raises high school graduation rates for all," http://www.growthandjustice.org/sites/2d9abd3a-10a9-47bf-ba1a-fe315d55be04/uploads/Cincinnati_Case_Study_01-31-2011.pdf (2011).

[3] Cincinnati Public Schools website, *Elementary Initiative*, http://www.cps-k12.org/academics/acadinitiatives/eleminitiative/eleminitiative.htm.

TURNAROUND PROGRAM RESULTS TO DATE

Within two years of turnaround, over 75 percent (13 out of 16) of the turnaround schools improved on the state performance index, and overall gains in reading and math across turnaround schools exceeded state averages at every grade level. Improvements at these schools also boosted the district's performance; having been in "continuous improvement" status since the launch of Ohio's accountability rankings, the district achieved a rating of "effective" for the first time in 2010.[4]

SCHOOL	OHIO PERFORMANCE INDEX[5]		
	Pre-turnaround: '07-08	Post: '09-10	Change
Carson School	69	72	+2.9
Chase School	63	68	+5
Frederick Douglass	65	69	+3.6
Hays-Porter School	58	61	+3.3
Oyler School	71	77	+6.6
John P. Parker School	71	71	-.1
Pleasant Hills Academy	70	71	+.9
Pleasant Ridge Montessori	71	65	-6.1
Quebec Heights Elementary	75	62	-12.5
Rockdale Academy	60	73	+13.3
Roll Hill School	66	72	+6.7
Ethel M. Taylor Academy	61	70	+8.6
Redesign Schools			
Mt. Airy School	68	64	-4
Rothenberg Preparatory Academy	59	67	+8.3
South Avondale Elementary	60	62	+2.4
William Howard Taft School	57	63	+6.1

DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY ON SCHOOL TURNAROUND

CPS's turnaround program is founded on the belief that school improvement requires strong leaders who deeply understand turnaround strategies from the business sector and who can "empower and inspire their teachers."[6] By rigorously training these leaders, supporting them directly with additional resources and time, encouraging collaboration and the sharing of best practices, and rigorously using data to plan and track progress, CPS believes that schools will be able to dramatically improve results and culture and sustain improvements over time.

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[4] Cincinnati Public Schools, *Facts and Stats,* http://www.cps-k12.org/academics/AcadInitiatives/ElemInitiative/EIFactsStats.pdf (2010).

[5] Cincinnati Public Schools, *Elementary Initiatives: Performance Index Over Time*, http://www.cps-k12.org/academics/AcadInitiatives/ElemInitiative/EIPerfTime.pdf (2010). The Ohio Performance Index is a weighted average of all tested grades and subjects, with more weight given to higher performance levels; comparing the performance-index scores over time shows trends in school achievement.

[6] Cincinnati Public Schools website, *Frequent Asked Questions*, http://www.cps-k12.org/academics/AcadInitiatives/ElemInitiative/EIFAQs.pdf

While CPS places a heavy emphasis on leadership, the district strategy is one of holistic reform. The Elementary Initiative consists of 14 different elements of intervention[7] and schools are expected to implement a common school design using these elements. (For a complete list of the initiative elements, see the Appendix.)

Five of these elements have been implemented across all elementary schools in the district, not just turnaround schools. These universal components include:

- **Use of data and analysis** to guide evidence-based decisions, through the expanded use of assessments, operational data, and student and school data dashboards;

- **Expanded school-site "learning teams"** consisting of vertical and content-teaching teams that work together to develop individual strategies for each student;

- **Teacher-led professional development** in schools through a partnership with the Mayerson Academy for Human Resource Development;

- **Primary and intermediate content specialists** through identifying teacher-leaders to serve as content specialists to teacher teams; and,

- **Implementation of a new principal evaluation system**, including a student-score-based component.

The remaining nine elements are implemented in turnaround schools only. These elements fall into broad categories, including:

- **Intensive leader training** and support through a partnership with the University of Virginia (UVA) Turnaround Specialist Program and principal networking;

- **Use of data to target interventions and monitor progress** through deep school audits, data dashboards, progress monitoring, and individual student success plans;

- **Extending learning time** by adding four additional weeks of school that focus on core academics and enrichment activities;

- **Improved reading instruction** in grades K-8 with model lessons and curricula;

- **Universal pre-kindergarten** aligned with K-8 curriculum and systems; and

- **Improved support** from the district (allocation of turnaround teams and streamlining of services) and aligned partners (who provide funding and supplementary services to students).

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[7] Cincinnati Public Schools website, *Summary of Elementary Initiative*, http://www.cps-k12.org/academics/AcadInitiatives/ElemInitiative/ElemInitiativeSmry.pdf

CPS's turnaround strategy is highly prescriptive. Schools are expected to implement all elements of strategy and share common academic and operational processes. Because of this, school-level turnaround strategy focuses primarily on implementing the district "non-negotiables" and on problem-solving to maximize the effectiveness of implemented elements.

DISTRICT TURNAROUND APPROACH

In her role as head of the Elementary Initiative, Deputy Superintendent Laura Mitchell serves as the point-person for work in all 16 schools, and all principals and curricular leaders report directly to her. She is described as the "driving force behind day-to-day implementation of the turnaround initiative."[8]

When the district announced the Elementary Initiative, CPS leadership decided to reallocate 80 percent of the district-level instructional support personnel to the turnaround schools in the form of turnaround teams comprised of a principal coach, lead teachers (who are selected from top-performing classrooms), and teacher coaches. These teams, overseen by Mitchell, visit schools weekly and are held accountable for school progress. They make specific recommendations to schools, connected to timelines, and follow up with principals. The district also developed a number of tools to help support accountability and monitoring, including district, school, and student-level dashboards tied to specific turnaround indicators, short-cycle assessments, benchmark assessments, rubrics for weekly school visits, coach logs, and student-data folders.

Turnaround teams convene on Fridays to discuss observations and school challenges. Mitchell uses these meeting to prioritize school supports, as well as to identify areas for strategy change. Mitchell visits schools monthly to meet one-on-one with principals. During this one-hour meeting, they review data and conduct walkthroughs to monitor implementation of turnaround strategy and identify areas for improvement or additional supports. Principals also meet together as a network with Mitchell on a weekly basis to check in and problem-solve.

School leaders report feeling a higher level of support from the district, both in terms of program and resources, than they did prior to becoming turnaround schools. Principal Alesia Smith noted, "If I call with a request for something that is about raising student achievement or supporting my staff, Laura [Mitchell] will look for the resources to make it happen."

SCHOOL TURNAROUND ELEMENTS

Turnaround schools are all required to implement a universal strategy and school design, and are provided intensive central support from the Elementary Initiative Office.

Key Components of the Elementary Initiative

Strong Leaders. At the outset of the initiative, CPS launched a new principal-evaluation system across all elementary schools. This policy linked ratings of principal effectiveness to student achievement and accomplishment of school improvement goals; turnaround principals are offered performance bonuses for meeting goals.

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[8] Public Impact case.

However, CPS quickly recognized that supporting its turnaround leaders would require more than just the provision of new systems and academic strategies; principals needed to be trained in creating and managing cultural change as well.[9] In the spring of 2009, and with support from the GE Foundation, CPS partnered with the UVA School Turnaround Principal Specialist Program to provide its turnaround principals with intense training on change management and leadership.

UVA's program provides guidance to districts in selecting leaders with potential for turnaround effectiveness, builds the capacity of those leaders by training them in the fundamentals of successful turnaround and introducing them to model systems and processes from business and education. It also provides ongoing support to those principals during the school year and helps districts create a supportive environment for these leaders (for example, by requiring the appointment of a district shepherd who goes through trainings together with the principals and holds primary decision-making authority for school support throughout the program).

Core to the program's philosophy is that UVA doesn't prescribe a school-improvement design; rather, UVA staff train district shepherds and principals to think differently and provides management tools. CPS leaders adopted a number of tools, including 90-day planning, celebrating quick wins, and "rapid resets" to test new strategies and change course if data indicate they aren't working. Turnaround Coach Shauna Murphy said, "We were taught to think and problem-solve, on our own, based on each school's unique needs and characteristics. The 'quick-wins' element helps keep the momentum going."[10] The district turnaround teams also awarded "turnaround Grammys" to schools in areas like "Best Use of Resources," "Most Creative," and "Best 90-Day Plan Implementation," which schools displayed prominently in their buildings.

These tools and the overall training mindset gave principals a new way to approach their work: Quebec Heights Principal Ted Jebens noted, "It's almost like running a marathon… You don't look at the end result 20-some miles away. You just look at it one step at a time."[11] UVA also emphasizes the importance of building a leader cohort, so turnaround principals meet together weekly to problem-solve and share ideas. Mitchell also worked with the Cincinnati business community to identify leaders from the private sector to mentor principals.

An additional benefit of the UVA program is the prestige associated with it. Melody Dacey of the Mayerson Academy, a professional development partner to the schools, described this benefit, saying, "I see this cohort of principals has been lifted up. Suddenly the mission is possible. They are proud of being Elementary Initiative schools. There is no stigma attached anymore."[12]

Effective teaching. Schools employ a "learning teams" approach, organizing teachers into grade- and subject-level teams that work collaboratively weekly for 50 to 60 minutes to analyze data and plan (alternating weeks between teams). In addition to this collaborative time, teachers plan individually for about 200 minutes each week.

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[9] Cincinnati Public Schools website, *Elementary Initiative.*
[10] Cincinnati Public Schools website, *Quick Wins*, http://www.cps-k12.org/academics/AcadInitiatives/QuickWins/QuickWins.htm
[11] Rachel Abbey, Catalyst Ohio, "Cincinnati turnaround schools seeing gains on district tests," http://www.catalyst-ohio.org/news/index.php?item=825&cat=28
[12] Public Impact case. (2011)

CPS contracts with a local professional development provider called the Mayerson Academy to provide schools with professional development services rather than running an internal professional development department. As part of the Elementary Initiative, CPS decided to place a district-wide emphasis on teacher/expert-led professional development at the school level. Principals identify teacher-leaders to serve as the primary- and intermediate-level content specialists in each subject (math, science, and literacy at primary levels and math, science, literacy, and social studies at the intermediate levels) for the school site, and these leaders are trained as coaches. The district uses a "train-the-trainer" model by having two of these content specialists participate in district-wide training (the content of which is determined by Mitchell's team) and then return to their schools to train and coach others four times during the school year. These content experts are also present for teaching team and data meetings.

Further support is provided to teachers by differentiated instruction experts who are placed at each school to coach teachers on methods for assessing and grouping students based on data, as well as for addressing individual needs. Principals can also send teachers out on a one-off basis to receive individualized professional development from the Mayerson Academy as needed during the school year.

In addition to using common curricula, all schools use a common lesson design for core subjects. (This design was initially piloted in literacy only, but was found to be so effective that it was adopted in math, science, and social studies as well.) Teachers use whole-group instruction to introduce new content, and then move to small-group centers, which allow for independent practice and small groups, as well as one-on-one work. This structure allows teachers to integrate intervention and enrichment into the class block.

Individualizing instruction and adding time in core subjects. Schools administer benchmark assessments that are created and scored by the central office three times per year, along with short-cycle assessments (which are brief and have three to four questions) every two to three weeks in core subjects. The results of these assessments are used in data conversations with students, as well as to determine placement in small groups and one-on-one tutoring during the 90-minute math and literacy blocks during the school day.

CPS creates student success plans (SSPs) for every student. These online plans are developed by teachers with support from instructional support teams and are the primary means through which student intervention plans are created. They are reviewed with students and their families quarterly. Further, every school utilizes a "data war room" where teams meet to discuss and display individual student data every two weeks following each assessment. Teachers also keep data folders for each class, in addition to using the district-created SSPs and dashboard.

CPS has also extended learning time across all turnaround schools by running a non-mandatory program called "Fifth Quarter." At the end of the traditional school year, schools offer a four-week, full-day extension of school, focusing on core subjects in the morning and enrichment activities through community partners in the afternoon. CPS engages a variety of community partners at no cost, and teachers are paid through a grant. Students spend academic time with their regular teachers, allowing for a seamless transition between the traditional year and extended time.

While CPS's primary strategy for extending school time is Fifth Quarter, schools may apply for additional grants to extend the school day or pay for additional tutors as needed. Schools that have received federal

School Improvement Grants use part of the funding to provide an additional 45 to 90 minutes of tutoring after the end of the school day.

Supports for students. Recognizing that many students were arriving to kindergarten already behind, CPS moved to expand early childhood programming by offering full-day preschool at all turnaround schools. The preschool program is fully aligned with state indicators and the K-8 curriculum. CPS also developed a preschool data dashboard to identify at-risk four-year olds, and partnered with "Success by Six," a local United Way program, to support these children and families through information provision and home visits.

CPS has also created full-service schools by investing in Community Learning Centers (CLC), which it intends to expand district-wide and act as hubs for community services, providing access for students and families to health, safety, and social services. In many turnaround schools, mental health agencies coordinated by local partner MindPeace have co-located to provide counseling supports to students for free. CPS also works with a number of community partners to provide supports to homeless children (Project Connect) and college-readiness programming (GEAR UP and Project GRAD).

Additional support and monitoring. CPS has invested in significant resources to assist with monitoring and supporting its turnaround schools. The district team performs comprehensive "audits" of school leadership, teacher capacity and qualifications, culture, reading and math practices, and community engagement at the beginning of the school year to guide co-development of technical assistance plans. These plans are readdressed at mid-year course-correction meetings and are complemented by use of district-created dashboards that aggregate data at the student, teacher, school, and district level on an ongoing basis (at least every eight weeks).

CPS also reorganized existing internal resources to better support schools, most notably by appointing Laura Mitchell as the primary point of contact with all schools. Central office support teams collaborate with Mitchell's office to provide necessary operational and academic services, allowing principals to focus on the management of their own schools rather than on managing "up" to multiple district offices. In addition, CPS strategically moved resources from other areas to provide greater support to turnaround schools. Eighty percent of district instructional supports are targeted to Elementary Initiative schools, and high-school coaches were redirected to provide services teachers in grades seven and eight to help increase levels of high school readiness.

Standardization vs. Customization

As previously stated, most elements of the CPS's turnaround strategy are non-negotiable. The approach is highly standardized, with schools receiving the same general resources and sharing similar curricula, day-to-day routines, schedules, and structures. Principals note that this makes sense, not only because the district has tightly linked its strategies to a strong research base, but also because of the high mobility of students. Turnaround Principal Graves-Hill noted, "Our district is transient. We don't want kids to have to do things completely differently if they're just transferring schools. The same is true with our teachers, who also move."

At the same time, schools note that the district is open to learning and changing strategy as needed, and has developed a practice of principal networking and best-practice sharing in order to identify problem areas and share best practices. For example, one of the key elements of the turnaround strategy is that schools are required to communicate on an ongoing basis about progress against standards. Teachers reported that the

tool developed for doing this at the district level was not effective for students in younger grades. A teacher at Roll Hill Elementary developed a graphic organizer for use with these students, which was adopted across the network of schools.

While outcomes and priority elements are clearly defined, principals have authority and are considered managers at the school level. As Principal Smith notes, "As long as you are rigorous and getting [to your goals], no one cares how you get there." School leaders control all hiring and firing decisions, are the primary communicators of strategy internally for staff and externally with parents and community members, and have responsibility for cultivating relationships with the community to identify enrichment and other supplemental resources (such as donations to support incentive programs). District support is provided through monthly hour-long site meetings with Mitchell to review indicator data from the school dashboards and complete a walk-through with principals to make sure schools are running smoothly and key elements are in place.

FUNDING

CPS has had a student-based budgeting system since 2000, providing additional resources for students with special needs as well as at key grade levels (first, second, and the transition to high school). CPS's turnaround initiative is funded by a combination of per-pupil, ESEA, ARRA, and School Improvement Grant dollars, and philanthropic investment by entities like the GE Foundation.

The district has also drawn in significant resources from external partners, including philanthropies and nonprofits. The local GE Foundation has provided over $25.3 million in support over an eight-year period to improve instruction.[13] Other strategic partnerships have included the piloting of the Teacher Advancement Program and a partnership with The New Teacher Project to redesign teacher evaluation, effectiveness definitions, and pay.

In addition to bringing in additional funds, the district has done significant work to reallocate existing resources and identify areas where inefficient use existed. As noted, centralized instructional support teams were reassigned to focus on elementary initiative priorities. Mitchell also conducted an analysis of the district's $3.7 million allocation to supplemental education spending, and tied new contracts to student performance gains. In addition, she and Ronan closely scrutinized the district's existing collective-bargaining agreement and identified areas where more value could be found. For example, Ronan reinterpreted an existing clause in the contract to move master teachers from their existing schools into positions at turnaround schools.[14]

In order to help principals manage their resources effectively, each school hires a site-level "Resource Coordinator" who works with the principal using a district-created resource-allocation worksheet to examine how effectively people, time, and money are used at the site. This coordinator also helps manage partnerships with external service providers. This allows principals to better focus on instructional priorities while also making sure that enrichment offered by partners matches strategy.[15]

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[13] Cincinnati Public Schools news release August 4, 2011, http://www.cps-k12.org/media/releases/Aug11GEGrant.pdf
[14] Public Impact (2011).
[15] Public Impact (2011).

Profile: Roll Hill Elementary

OVERVIEW

Vickie Graves-Hill had been principal of Roll Hill Academy for two years when she received word from the district that her school would be targeted for intensive support under CPS's new Elementary Initiative. Founded in 2005 as the merger of two under-enrolled elementary campuses that had been in "academic emergency," Ohio's lowest performance ranking, Roll Hill inherited a legacy of academic underperformance and failed improvement initiatives.

Despite best efforts, Roll Hill's performance fell below expectations, and the district's decision to make Roll Hill one of its turnaround schools was welcome news. "We had things in place, but they just weren't working," said Graves-Hill. The school had opened as a Community Learning Center, forged a close partnership with the local affordable housing community (which roughly 50 percent of enrolled students called home), and had put a number of other basic supports into place to meet student needs. "Teachers were here until 9 o'clock at night… and each year we had small gains."[16]

Changes in the first school year of the turnaround (2008-2009) focused primarily on the implementation of new structures and tools such as reading programs, student success plans, and an extended school year ("Fifth Quarter"). However, Graves-Hill noted that the real turnaround effort began following her summer training with the UVA Turnaround Specialist Program in 2009. The UVA program, which was funded by a grant from the General Electric Foundation, helped her "make the connection between what the business world does and what schools need to do," and even though her school wasn't a revenue-generating organization, "our data is the same as a business person's money." CPS's Deputy Superintendent met with the principals following the lectures to help them integrate their learnings into their plans for the upcoming school year.

While the senior leadership team didn't change, Roll Hill experienced high teacher turnover at the end of the 2008-2009 school year, which Graves-Hill notes was perfect timing: "Part of my 90-day plan was how I was going to get this new staff on board and teach them about what I learned at UVA." Getting teacher buy-in was important, and Graves-Hill needed to "sell" the Elementary Initiative and turnaround process to her staff and make sure strategic elements were being implemented. The school's first "big win" came in October, when benchmark scores showed improvement. This gave the leadership team the necessary momentum to keep pushing for change and implementation of Elementary Initiative elements.

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QUICK FACTS

- **SCHOOL TYPE:** Public elementary school
- **GRADES:** Preschool- 8
- **LOCATION:** Cincinnati, OH
- **SIZE (09-10):** 568
- **DEMOGRAPHICS (09-10):** 99% free and reduced-price lunch, 97% minority, 0% limited English proficient, 17% exceptional students
- **SCHOOL DAY:** 9 AM – 4 PM
- **AVERAGE CORE CLASS SIZE:** 20 (K-3), 25 (4-8)
- **STUDENT TO TEACHER RATIO:** 19:1
- **AYP STATUS:** Met AYP in reading & math

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[16] Cincinnati Public Schools, *Roll Hill Academy's Turnaround,* http://www.cps-k12.org/academics/AcadInitiatives/ElemInitiative/EIRollHill.pdf (2010).

These change efforts paid off. Within two years, the school jumped two performance rankings from "academic emergency" to "continuous improvement," gaining approximately 7 points on the state performance index. Attendance rates rose from 94 percent to 97 percent.[17]

IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTRICT STRATEGY

Given the standardized district approach, most aspects of Roll Hill's school design are prescribed by the Elementary Initiative and not discretionary. As principal of the school, Graves-Hill therefore focuses on leading the implementation of this initiative and on monitoring and problem-solving. "The district did the legwork to identify research-based strategies," she notes. "But if we have challenges, we talk about it and work together to find a solution to try out."

Key elements of the Roll Hill approach included:

Use of data for continuous improvement. Graves-Hill feels that data monitoring is essential to school improvement and spends all day on Tuesdays meeting with teaching teams to discuss student data and work, alternating weeks with each grade-level (or subject at the intermediate level) team. She notes that the data war room (a component of the UVA training program) was particularly powerful. Student assessment results are written on index cards and displayed in red, yellow, and green areas of the wall, depending on proficiency on the latest short-cycle assessment. While some teachers were quicker than others to get comfortable with this level of transparency, nearly all have gotten on board. Teachers have begun to see this as a tool, and ask questions of others about their data. As Graves-Hill notes, "You don't want to be the teacher with all of your cards in red."

Graves-Hill daily conducts at least four to five informal classroom walkthroughs using a district-developed protocol. She looks for posted indicators and standards, data folders, and lesson plans, and notes the teaching strategy. She also gauges student engagement: "I ask two random children 'what are you learning?' 'How do you know what you're learning?' 'What can you do to improve? And, 'how do you know your work is good?' If they can answer those questions, I know the lesson is effective." Once finished, Graves-Hill writes down her findings and hands them to the teacher.

Productive School Culture. While Graves-Hill did not have the opportunity to replace staff when Roll Hill was designated as a turnaround school, she cites strong professional norms amongst her teachers as critical to the school's success. Sometimes "schools like mine aren't a great fit for all teachers… people just know if they want to be here and work hard. If not, they leave."

Extended time on core subjects. Graves-Hill uses her supplementary education and Title I dollars to hire teachers on an hourly basis to work with students during the school day. Teachers flag students in need of support via the dashboard system. Additional tutors come from a partnership with students from the University of Cincinnati.

Roll Hill also offers an Extended Learning Program two afternoons per week until 7:30 p.m. in partnership with the local Boys and Girls Club. Some teachers are contracted to work afternoons and the program is

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[17] Ohio State Assessment Results, *School Year 2009-2010 School Rating Data*, http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/Downloads.asp

managed by a resource coordinator who sits in on leadership team meetings to assure alignment with school strategy.

Additional student supports: As a Community Learning Center, most non-academic student supports are provided on-site. Teacher referrals are reviewed every Tuesday morning by a team consisting of Graves-Hill, the school nurse, and three therapists who are provided through a partnership with a local mental health center.

FUNDING

The school's discretionary turnaround-related funding is provided through Title I grants, which are used to pay for tutoring and for purchasing materials for core math classes. Additional, non-discretionary turnaround investments—such as support from coaches, extended school year, principal training, and professional development—are provided through district funds.

Profile: Rothenberg Preparatory Academy

OVERVIEW

Rothenberg Elementary had languished in academic failure for ten years when it was identified for turnaround by district leadership in 2008.

Given the school's history of low performance and the results of a school audit that indicated low capacity for cultural change, Rothenberg was selected for redesign in the 2009-2010 school year. As a redesign school, Rothenberg's staff and leadership were reconstituted. Alesia Smith, who had previously led another high-performing school in the city, was hired to lead a comprehensive turnaround effort. She joined the rest of the turnaround specialist principal cohort for training with UVA, and then returned to take over as principal of the school. Smith rehired only four of the school's pre-turnaround staff. Remaining positions were filled by new staff as well as high-performers from her former school.

Smith and the staff met for two weeks prior to school opening to align around a mission and vision for the coming year, setting the goal of increasing student achievement by 10 percent. The school held an ice-cream social for students and families to communicate their commitment to change: "We wanted to show that we're here, we want to be here, and we chose to be here."

Much of the school's work in year one of turnaround involved instilling a new school culture by creating an environment conducive to learning and aligning expectations. Once that work was complete, Smith and her team were able to begin focusing on building teacher and student capacity for learning. "The first year was all about survival," Smith recalls. "We wanted to give [the students] as much academically as we could, but we were in survival mode for a lot of weeks. We had to really break some behaviors and expectations that had been in place for years. Last year, we really got into academics… Now the expectation is that we're not in survival mode. We have the culture down pat and we're coaching teachers… and bringing kids to the next performance level."

Results

Within two years of redesign, Rothenberg received a "continuous improvement" designation from the state, gaining roughly 8 points on the state performance index. Attendance rates rose from 94 percent to 97 percent.[1]

IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTRICT STRATEGY

Given the standardized district approach, most aspects of Rothenberg's school design are prescribed by the Elementary Initiative and not discretionary. As principal of the school, Smith therefore focuses on leading the implementation of initiative elements and on monitoring and problem-solving. Smith noted that district

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[1] Ohio State Assessment Results, *School Year 2009-2010 School Rating Data.*

requirements made good sense and that she had flexibility to adjust tactics if necessary to achieve goals. "It's all best practice, so there's no need to fight against it… Ms. Mitchell allowed us to do what was best for kids, we just needed to explain […] what we wanted to do and why." Smith feels that it is her job to constantly monitor and adjust approaches and school-level systems.

Key elements of the Rothenburg approach included:

Building teacher effectiveness. Given the school redesign, Smith was able to bring many teachers to the school, and has only had to replace three teachers. She hires and places teachers according to their strengths and,while she does have reading and math specialists on staff with whom she meets weekly as part of the Elementary Initiative, she is in classrooms daily. Teachers collaboratively plan weekly, alternating between grade and content teams, and Smith meets every other week with grade-level teams to review data.

Smith's strategy for providing support is to ask reflective questions: "If I see kids with their heads down, I leave a question: 'How do you know if all kids are actively engaged in the lesson?' Then the teachers usually want to come and engage with why I'm asking that question, and I can get into where I want to go with them." If teachers don't improve, she sends them to another teacher's classroom to observe before sending them out to the Mayerson Academy for supplementary training.

Making students part of the continuous improvement process. Smith routinely brings students into the data conversation: "I could talk their data to them, [saying], 'I saw you went up four points in this, what's happening here?'" By bringing students in to monitor and talk about their own progress, and by reviewing their SSPs on a quarterly, if not more frequent, basis, Rothenberg has been able to engage students in the turnaround process.

Productive school culture. Cultural turnaround was a major component of Smith's job as a redesign leader. "I came into a school where the school had been on the state list for ten years. You can imagine what it was like, what the expectations were." As a staff, Rothenberg's teachers and leadership team needed to get on the same page quickly. Smith felt that essential to all of this was consistency and diligence: "[we had to ask] what our positive school culture would look like, what we expect from the kids, what we expect in the hallway, can we agree on those things, and, if we agree on those then everyone has to make sure they're following through… We could not waver."

Smith is also constantly searching for ways to pull the whole school into the turnaround process. In addition to developing school-wide rituals, such as school-wide "power words" and multiplication raps, Smith provides students with incentives for good work or for improvement on key indicators such as attendance. Resources for these incentives, such as food and field trips, are raised from the school community through her Resource Coordinator.

Additional time and support. As a school improvement grant school, Rothenberg offers a daily afterschool "power hour" for student tutoring and a homework club that serves roughly a third of all students daily. Smith meets with a coordinator to make sure that tutoring is aligned to student needs, and tutors have access to student dashboards.

Rothenberg also offers an Extended Learning Program two afternoons per week until 7:30 p.m. in partnership with the local Boys and Girls Club. Some teachers are contracted to work afternoons, and the program is managed by a resource coordinator who sits in on leadership team meetings to assure alignment with school strategy.

FUNDING

Rothenberg's turnaround has been supported primarily through a School Improvement Grant, which provides the school with approximately $1 million per year (the actual amount was $949,658 in 2010-2011). Funds support additional reading and math teachers to allow for a slightly lower class size (19 students, down from 20) as well as intervention time two to three times per week for struggling students, a community resource coordinator, and 35 additional school laptops. Additional discretionary turnaround-related funding is provided through Title I grants, which Smith used to purchase an additional reading teacher and a math tutor. Additional, non-discretionary turnaround investments—such as support from coaches, extended school year, principal training, and professional development—are provided through district funds.

Given that school improvement grant monies will expire, Smith is actively thinking about ways to sustain improvement with fewer funds. However, she notes that additional turnaround funds shouldn't be given into perpetuity. "We will only have SIG dollars for two more years, which will change everything… As of now, we're no longer on the state [turnaround] list because we've met targets two years in a row. You don't need all those extra resources, like tutors, once you've got the kids where they need to be. Once the kids get the gaps filled and you keep improving, then you can continue to fill the gaps with the people you have."

APPENDIX

Key Elements of the Elementary Initiative

Element	Description
Data and analysis to support evidenced-based decision-making	Expanded use of student and school data dashboards; Technical Assistance plans based upon audits of school capacity and results
Realignment of resources to support turnaround instructional support teams	Redeployment of 80% district-wide supports to turnaround schools through teams consisting of a turnaround principal coach, lead teachers, and content coaches; refocused high school coaches on grades 7 and 8 to support transition of students to high school
On-site core academic content specialists	Trained content specialists to act as coaches at each school site , who become primary professional development providers and are present for collaborative meetings
School-based learning teams	Created vertical and content collaborative teams who work with content specialists and receive team-specific professional development
Model reading structure in grades 4 through 8	Implemented universal reading-class structure consisting of whole-group direct instruction, small-group centers (two centers and one teaching station for small or individualized instruction), and whole-group closure
Essentials-focused and multisensory reading instruction	Training and implementation of LETRS (Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling) in grades 4 through 8, and multisensory intervention in grades K to 3
Differentiated instruction expert cadre	Introduced coaches and targeted professional development to assist teachers with assessing data, grouping, and regrouping to meet individual student needs
Principal training and development	Partnership with UVA Turnaround Specialist program to identify and train turnaround leaders on strategy and to provide ongoing networked support
Expanded learning time	Addition of a "Fifth Quarter" to all schools, month-long full-day programs focusing on core subjects in the morning and enrichment activities through community partners in the afternoon
Individual student success plans (SSPs)	Electronic SSPs developed by teachers with support from instructional support teams that are aligned to benchmarks and other class data that are reviewed with students and their families quarterly
Expanded early childhood programming	Full-day early childhood programs at all schools; alignment of preschool curriculum, standards, and assessments with state indicators and K-8 curriculum; development of preschool data dashboard to identify at-risk four year olds
Targeted and effective district support	Surveys of school needs; greater collaboration amongst central office teams to create fewer school touch-points; development of new evaluation system for principals and central administrators
Family and community engagement	Family reviews of SSPs; creation of school-based Community Learning Centers (CLCs), technology to engage parents; family-friendly school rating system
Targeted and effective external support and resources	Engagement of key philanthropic and service organization to provide additional aligned resources to schools, including the GE Foundation, existing CLCs, Strive Student Success Networks, University of Cincinnati STEM curriculum and Gear-Up for college