

## School Turnaround in Philadelphia: Mastery Charter Schools

### OVERVIEW

Mastery Charter Schools is a charter management organization that operated seven schools serving 4,200 students in grades K through 12 in Philadelphia in the 2010-2011 school year. Six of these schools—three elementary and three middle/high—are turnaround schools that Mastery has taken over as part of the School District of Philadelphia’s Renaissance Schools Initiative. All schools were reopened by the management organization as charter schools, enrolling the same students (as well as enrolling incoming grades from existing feeder schools) but with different leadership and staff.

Mastery’s operating philosophy reflects the organizations’ belief that private-sector management practices can be effectively translated to school systems. Chief Executive Officer and Founder Scott Gordon explained his organization’s rationale for approach in testimony to Congress in 2009: “In education, we have the notion that schools operate differently than the rest of the economy—schools are not like traditional businesses because ‘kids are not widgets.’ They are not. But adults are still adults—and the common-sense management practices that drive successful organizations—be they hospitals, software companies, or schools—are the same. High-performing organizations set clear goals. They hold management and employees accountable for results. They measure progress continually and adjust to meet changing conditions. They hire the highest-quality talent and promote the best. They supervise staff, monitoring and supporting their performance. They promote the high-performers and exit non-performers—basic functions of management.”<sup>1</sup>

Given this, Mastery has identified six core management systems:

- 1) **Values-based organizational culture** – Mastery articulates nine core values and uses these values to drive decision-making. They include: student achievement above all; service to students and families; The High Road (doing the right thing); joy and humor; straight talk; open doors and transparency; and initiative and continuous improvement.
- 2) **Intensive coaching and support** – Investment in and support to teachers is the highest priority. Mastery provides this through common instructional models, ongoing and frequent coaching and professional development, and individual and collaborative planning time.
- 3) **Performance-based pay** – Mastery ties all pay and promotion systems to teacher execution and growth against instructional strategies, exhibition of core values, and student achievement.

### QUICK FACTS

- **SCHOOL TYPE:** Charter school management organization
- **NUMBER OF SCHOOLS:** 7 SCHOOLS IN 2010-2011; 3 additional schools will open
- **GRADES:** K-8
- **SIZE:** ~500 students per school at scale
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** 87% of students are low income; 96% of students are minority
- **LOCATION:** Philadelphia, PA and Camden, NJ
- **GENERAL ED FUNDING LEVEL:** \$8,662 per pupil
- **STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO:** ~15:1
- **STUDENT TO STAFF RATIO:** ~11:1
- **SCHOOL DAY/YEAR:** 9AM - 4PM
- **AVERAGE CORE CLASS SIZE:** 22 TO 23

<sup>1</sup> Testimony to House Committee on Education & Labor by Scott Gordon, CEO Mastery Charter Schools, Philadelphia PA. May 12, 2009. Retrieved online: <http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/documents/111/pdf/testimony/20090512ScottGordonTestimony.pdf>

- 4) **Aligned curricula, assessments, and data-driven instruction** – In order for all students to go to college, Mastery clearly defines pathways to college. Student progress is assessed in every subject daily, and those data are used to determine actions and next steps.
- 5) **Effective school leadership** – School leaders must have capacity to focus on instruction, so all schools have expanded leadership teams. Principals are also given clear management protocols and effective regional supervision from the central office.
- 6) **Outcomes-based management** – Mastery sets tough goals and measures progress against them, including teacher value-added, every six weeks.

By applying these management strategies in its schools, Gordon says Mastery is developing a “way to change the way schools work and to really raise the bar for every student.”<sup>2</sup> Having opened the organization’s first school, a start-up charter high school, in 2001, the organization expanded to open its second school in 2005. Mastery opened three more schools in fall of the 2011-2012 school year, including a turnaround elementary school and turnaround comprehensive high school. (The third school is a new charter school in Camden, NJ.)

Mastery’s vision is to run and operate a system of schools that close the achievement gap, ultimately serving as a proof point for larger-scale reform. To do this, according to Gordon, Mastery will need “to get large enough to make a difference in an entire region and connect with other quality providers both to learn and to share.”<sup>3</sup> The organization sees school turnaround as both an opportunity to serve more students more quickly than it could by opening new charter schools, as well as to prove that creating and sustaining high-achieving schools that serve any student is possible. “If one school can do it, if four schools can do it, if seven schools can do it,” Gordon said, “it can be done.”<sup>4</sup>

## TURNAROUND PROGRAM RESULTS TO DATE

Students who enroll at Mastery schools are representative of those enrolled in traditional district schools within Philadelphia. Approximately 75 to 80 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches, and 17 to 23 percent receive special education. Incoming students to Mastery campuses are typically in need of intensive support, scoring at the bottom 20th to 35th national percentile on standardized tests, and more than two grade levels behind in reading and math.

Despite the low skill level of entering students, Mastery sets high bars for school performance. The organization seeks to close the gap between performance in its turnaround schools and the state within four years of school takeover. Outcomes have been impressive: While all of Mastery’s turnaround schools severely lagged the district at time of takeover, all schools now outperform district averages, and several have nearly closed the gap with the state. Cultural indicators have also improved dramatically, with the Mastery campuses reporting far fewer disciplinary and behavioral incidents (decreases of roughly 80 percent from pre-turnaround) and a decrease in student turnover of 50 percent. College-going rates have also increased; for

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<sup>2</sup> Martha Woodall, “Mastery charter schools aim to transform education,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 1, 2009 (<http://www.allbusiness.com/education-training/education-systems-institutions-primary/13090576-1.html#ixzz1VDZ2Xqj0>).

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Herold, *Mastery Charter 'Restarts' Philadelphia's Struggling Smedley Public School*, Politics Daily, <http://www.politicsdaily.com/2011/02/22/mastery-charter-restarts-philadelphias-struggling-smedley-pub> (February 22, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Zach Subar, “Can-do attitude for charter school leader,” <http://roxborough.patch.com/articles/can-do-attitude-for-charter-school-leader> (October 2010).

example, in a neighborhood where district high schools send approximately 20 percent of their graduates to college, 93 percent of Thomas' seniors will attend. (Two-thirds of these students will go to four-year schools.)<sup>5</sup>

Most of Mastery's turnaround schools have also drawn more students than their pre-turnaround predecessors. At Harrity Elementary School, which reopened under Mastery management in the fall of 2010, neighborhood enrollment grew from 620 students to 835, with an additional 60 students on the wait list.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to raising student achievement, Mastery has also recently set goals to improve teacher quality and retention. Mastery schools seek to raise teacher quality by 10 percent each year—as measured by the organization's internal teacher evaluation system—and retain at least 83 percent of all teachers over a three-year period. Mastery is early in measuring these targets, but is making good progress. Schools have a three-year retention rate of 76 percent, but 93 percent for Advanced and Master-Level teachers. Further, Mastery schools' administrative retention rate is 85 percent over three years.<sup>7</sup>

Mastery's turnaround successes have led to national attention. President Barack Obama highlighted the organization's results in a 2010 speech to the National Urban League, saying, “In just two years, three of the schools that Mastery has taken over have seen reading and math levels nearly double—in some cases, triple... One school called Pickett went from just 14 percent of students being proficient in math to almost 70 percent... [and]... violence dropped by 80 percent ... And that's no coincidence. Now, if a school like Mastery can do it, if Pickett can do it, every troubled school can do it.”<sup>8</sup>

## SCHOOL TURNAROUND ELEMENTS

### Resetting schools by instituting a defined school culture of high expectations

Mastery (whose motto is “Excellence. No Excuses.”) employs a “sweat-the-small-stuff” culture across all schools, holding all adults and students to high behavioral expectations. Gordon notes, “We created a very intentional college-focused culture. We created a set of behavioral expectations and were relentless in enforcing them. We created a positive culture system (trips, etc.) and introduced a restorative justice model. Most importantly, we hired and trained staff that were to be on one page regarding school culture, student support, and discipline.”<sup>9</sup>

While all staff members are expected to uphold cultural practices and systems, the work is overseen by an assistant principal of school culture, who is supported by a team of deans and social workers (typically one for every 200 students, or roughly six personnel). Culture is clearly communicated through core values and code

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<sup>5</sup> Martha Woodall, “Turnaround charter getting high marks for college prep,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 1, 2009 (<http://www.philly.com/philly/education/94677939.html>).

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Herold, *Open for business, looking to expand*, The Notebook, <http://www.thenotebook.org/october-2010/102901/open-business-looking-expand> (October, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Center for Education Compensation Reform, *Overview of Mastery Charter Schools TIF Grant*, [http://cecr.ed.gov/profiles/pdfs/cohort3/CECR\\_GP\\_MasteryCharter.pdf](http://cecr.ed.gov/profiles/pdfs/cohort3/CECR_GP_MasteryCharter.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Remarks by President Obama on education reform at the National Urban League Centennial Conference, July 29, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-education-reform-national-urban-league-centennial-conference>

<sup>9</sup> *Education Week Live Chat: Using Stimulus Aid to Turn Around Low-Achieving Schools*, 12/10/2009. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/events/chats/2009/12/10/index.html>

of conduct, and is reinforced through rituals and programs such as weekly restorative practice community meetings, classroom circles, and a strictly enforced merit/demerit system.

Gordon notes that the success of the Mastery turnaround process is due not to the explicit pieces of school culture the organization emphasizes, but in large part to the coherence with which they execute against cultural vision: “I don’t know that our culture is better than anyone else’s culture, but I do know that schools that have one culture, [where] all the adults are operating from [the same] playbook, clearly are more successful than [schools where] all the adults aren’t on the same page.”<sup>10</sup>

Given this belief that execution matters as much as the culture being put into place, Mastery has a very explicit “cultural reset” approach to opening its turnaround schools. In addition to holding community meetings prior to the beginning of the year, staff members stand outside of the school building on the first day of school to personally welcome all students to the building. Leaders and teachers emphasize the fact that this is a fresh start, with new opportunities and expectations. For example, a Philadelphia reporter described the first day of school at Smedley Elementary, a campus Mastery took over in the fall of 2010: “Principal Brian McLaughlin assembled students in the sweltering cafeteria and pointed to a picture of a giant eraser projected onto a screen. ‘I want you to think of all the things from last year that you may not have liked,’ McLaughlin said. ‘We’re going to erase those right now.’”<sup>11</sup>

Cultural reset is furthered by upgrades to the physical facility. Gordon sees this as essential to communicating investment in the community and increasing expectations for the work inside. Schools share common physical design features that seek to replicate professional working environments, with bright colors and glass classrooms.

This makeover of the school building is a non-negotiable for Gordon’s team. While longer-term renovations may take time, Mastery believes schools must appear physically different on the first day of school. This can pose logistical challenges. For example, Mastery was given control of three elementary schools in the early summer of 2010 and had raised \$1 million per school to upgrade the sites. However, the team discovered in June that the district had planned to run summer school prior to the takeover, leaving just three weeks for Mastery to do any renovations. Rather than postpone building improvements, Mastery’s team organized crews to work “around the clock” to complete upgrades prior to opening.<sup>12</sup>

The intense focus on culture that Gordon describes is core to the ongoing management of the schools; systems and high expectations put in place are expected to remain even after initial stages of turnaround. However, as the school moves from stabilization to capacity-building, the emphasis naturally moves away from discipline and basic order to enrichment. New students participate in a one-week-long cultural induction program before the start of the school year in order to assure that all students clearly understand and can adapt to the “no excuses” environment.

### **Fostering teacher effectiveness**

Mastery invests heavily in centralized instructional and teaching standards, trains teachers on these systems, and tightly monitors implementation. Each school employs an AP of Instruction and an instructional coach

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Herold, *Not a minute to waste’—even in first grade*, The Notebook, <http://www.thenotebook.org/blog/103016/not-minute-waste-even-first-grade> (October 2, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Herold, *Mastery Charter ‘Restarts’ Philadelphia’s Struggling Smedley Public School*, *Politics Daily*, <http://www.politi>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

who work with master teachers to conduct formal and informal observations and coach individual teachers on an ongoing basis. New teachers receive three weeks of cultural and academic induction training in the summer, and all staff (including new teachers) participate in two full weeks of collaborative instructional training and planning before the beginning of the school year. In addition to individual planning periods, teachers plan collaboratively (by grade at the elementary level and by subject at middle and high) for two hours during early-release time on Wednesdays, as well as during school-wide data days every six weeks, when they work in teams to analyze formative assessment data and create instructional and intervention action plans.

Teachers, particularly novice ones, report that the consistent systems used in Mastery schools are helpful to managing classroom behavior so that they can focus on lesson effectiveness. Kallie Turner, a second year teacher at Mastery's Smedley Elementary, noted "Last year, I taught in a public school in Louisville... I felt that I wasn't getting the help I needed to make my classroom successful. This year, there is a more universal strategy that is being used, so students know exactly how their behavior should be throughout the day. We only have a certain amount of time to learn as much as we can, so we have to stay super-focused."<sup>13</sup>

Mastery has developed an internal teacher-residency program to build a pipeline of teachers. This program consists of four phases: a five-day Pre-Service Professional Development, where residents are introduced to the Mastery Instructional Model; a three-day Pre-Service Preparation and Planning Period, where residents work to create a 20-day unit plan; a 20-day Summer Practicum, where residents teach four hours daily of summer school and receive regular video-taping and coaching; and a full-year Residency, where they serve as intern teachers, meeting three times a week with central office staff for coaching. During the first three phases of this program, residents receive \$2,500. Upon successful completion, residents are offered intern positions and are paid a starting salary, and are eligible for annual bonuses for each of the two years following their start dates.

### **Redesigning teacher incentives and career pathways**

Gordon states: "I can't think of anything more important to school success than developing a comprehensive teacher talent development system—clarity as to what good instruction is, clarity as to how instruction is evaluated, linking professional development and coaching to the instructional standards that are evaluated, linking student results to teacher advancement, and linking pay and promotion to instructional quality."<sup>14</sup> Given this, Mastery has worked to develop a clearly articulated teacher-development system that is linked to compensation and promotion.

Mastery has created a four-tier teacher advancement system with four teacher categories: Associate, Senior Associate, Advanced, and Master. Each of these categories is independent of seniority and degrees and links to specific advancement criteria and salary. The salary range for these positions is shown below:

#### **Mastery Salary Ranges 2010-11<sup>15</sup>**

Associate Start:	44,750
Associate Top:	52,250
Senior Associate Start:	52,500
Senior Associate Top:	60,500
Advanced Start:	60,750

<sup>13</sup> Herold, *'Not a minute to waste' - even in first grade.*

<sup>14</sup> *Education Week* Live Chat: *Using Stimulus Aid to Turn Around Low-Achieving Schools.*

<sup>15</sup> Mastery website, [http://www.masterycharter.org/files/MCS\\_FactSheet\\_GratzClymer\\_022311.pdf](http://www.masterycharter.org/files/MCS_FactSheet_GratzClymer_022311.pdf)

Advanced Top:	67,000
Master Start:	67,250
Master Top:	74,500

All of this is linked to a performance-based compensation system (PBCS), which Gordon believes "supports a culture that we're all here to get better—the teacher and the kids."<sup>16</sup> PBCS for teachers is based on their student achievement results (45 percent, for overall student and school achievement of learning standards as well as individual value-add); exhibition of Mastery values, leadership contributions, and responsibilities (15 percent); and skill demonstrated in classroom observations (40 percent). Depending on the result of the performance assessment, teachers may be promoted to the next teacher category with an increase in pay (bonus and cost-of-living (COLA)), stay in their existing teacher category and receive an increase in pay, receive only a COLA adjustment and be put on remediation, or not receive a contract renewal.

PCBS at Mastery is still a work in progress, as Gordon notes that the task of connecting pay to teacher contribution and skill was not easy. "Linking pay to performance is very difficult—it requires that the school actually know and define what good instruction is, have the means to evaluate it, the ability to support/coach teachers to attain it, and the ability to connect student data to instruction quality. It took us six years to do so—and that was in a charter environment where we could each year fix what we screwed up the previous year."<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, as he notes, Gordon believes that this system will be effective in attracting the kinds of professionals that Mastery wants in its schools. For example, "a teacher with outstanding performance can earn up to four times the salary of colleagues with mediocre results, or up to 14 percent more than teachers within the same status level, easily out-earning colleagues in surrounding districts that use seniority/step-pay systems."<sup>18</sup> Great teachers (at least by Mastery standards) will be rewarded and stay within the system, growing into leadership roles in schools.

The human capital system that Mastery has created is effective for retaining high-performing teachers (as discussed, retention rates for Master and Advanced teachers is 93 percent) as well as for exiting underperforming ones. According to the Center for Education Compensation Reform, "teachers who underperform are exited through non-renewal (4 percent in 2009-2010) or often choose to leave when they do not receive performance pay (30 percent of teachers who received only a COLA increase in 2009-2010 decided not to remain at Mastery)."<sup>19</sup>

### **Focus on data and outcomes to drive all decision-making**

Mastery's data use is fanatical. Gordon says, "We use data in almost every aspect of the school's operation. We have end-of-the-year goals for students and use interim assessments every six weeks to know if students are progressing towards those goals. We collect and analyze data on attendance, discipline, number of courses failed, etc. throughout the year so that we can intervene appropriately."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dale Mezzacappa, *Mastery chief speaks about Oprah*, The Notebook, <http://www.thenotebook.org/blog/102865/mastery-chief-speaks-about-oprah> (September 21, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> *Education Week* Live Chat: *Using Stimulus Aid to Turn Around Low-Achieving Schools*.

<sup>18</sup> Center for Education Compensation Reform, *Overview of Mastery Charter Schools TIF Grant*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Education Week* Live Chat: *Using Stimulus Aid to Turn Around Low-Achieving Schools*.

Mastery has developed an internal dashboard system that integrates student achievement data, teacher performance, and school-culture metrics to allow principals and leadership teams to monitor progress against goals. Additionally, the organization has invested in the Mastery Value-Added System (MVAS), which is used to determine student growth not just year to year, but between benchmark assessments. This allows the organization to target intervention as well as have many value-added measurements for a given teacher over multiple points of the year.

### **Social, emotional, and health supports for students**

Given the intensity of the academic environment at Mastery schools, Mastery places explicit emphasis on the non-academic development of its students as well. Gordon notes that in many Mastery schools "kids get more art and music and physical education than they did before turnaround. And we are one of the only schools in the U.S. in which all students take a class in social and emotional learning."<sup>21</sup>

Mastery believes that effective student academic and non-academic support comes first through the fostering of relationships between students and adults, and students report that they agree. A Mastery senior, Keenan Burton-Sessons, who was a student at Mastery's first turnaround school, the Thomas campus, recalled: "The same students who you saw in Thomas fighting every day—here, you don't see them fight at all... I think what changed and made the students change is they got respect from teachers... They thought their teachers cared."<sup>22</sup>

Students participate in daily 22-minute advisories and are encouraged to actively seek support from faculty members and deans. To support students' growth as community members over time, the school provides students with significant instruction on Mastery's own social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. Ninth graders participate in a full period of SEL-programming daily, and all other grades have two periods per week focusing on self-awareness and management, social awareness and relationship-building, and critical thinking and decision-making. The school employs two full-time SEL teachers to do this work.

### **Additional time and individual attention in core academic subjects for students who have fallen behind**

Mastery's model is based on the idea that while students may enter school at differing levels of preparedness, all students will leave with the skills to succeed in college. Therefore, the entire academic program is back-mapped to deliver the academic and personal competencies required by colleges and the modern workplace. This way, while students may enter at many skill levels, Mastery students are all expected to leave school ready for higher education.

To meet students at their incoming skill levels, middle and high schools offer multiple course options at entry grades and have a proficiency-based grading system. Students may be at different levels across many subjects (for example, in a tenth grade honors social studies class, but a ninth grade pre-algebra course.) Through remedial coursework at lower grades and intense interventions, all students participate in pre-college coursework by 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Mastery has also implemented a competency-based grading system to maintain high academic expectations and performance. Students with grades below 76 percent receive an "Incomplete" and must repeat the course; students who prove both content and skill "mastery" progress to the next level. In addition to

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<sup>21</sup> Mezzacappa, *Mastery chief speaks about Oprah*.

<sup>22</sup> Woodall, "Turnaround charter getting high marks for college prep."

offering summer school to help students complete credits, Mastery offers a longer school day for all students (at least 7.5 hours), a longer year (by seven days), Saturday school, and homework hours.

Mastery has created a Student Assistance Program at the school level, overseen by an Assistant Principal of Instruction and deans, to identify internal supports for students who are not on track (as measured by benchmark assessments or class grades) or are referred for support by a teacher. Students entering school below proficiency are enrolled in year-long, 50-minute “ramp-up” literacy or math periods in addition to their core classes. These intervention classes are limited to 20 students (general core classes average 25, upper level courses average 29) and are focused on rapidly increasing skills so that these students can be engaged in college-preparatory coursework by their third year. In addition to working an eight-hour day, all teachers, core and non-core, are contracted for 200 minutes per week of additional work time so as to offer their students office hours, homework club, and Saturday school.

Students like Shoemaker Campus student Shannon Moulton report that this higher level of support makes a big difference. “Back in seventh grade [before turnaround by Mastery], they didn’t teach us a lot... But since we have a lot of help and Saturday school and our teachers are better, we get to be more comfortable in how we’re learning.”<sup>23</sup>

Finally, in addition to providing intense remediation and focusing on interventions that move students up to grade level quickly, Mastery places a premium on time usage during the school day. “We really can’t be wasteful of our students’ time,” says Smedley Principal Brian McLaughlin. “We have students who enter school *incredibly* behind.”<sup>24</sup> Teachers use stop watches as a means to motivate students to perform non-academic tasks (such as transitions or paper passing) more quickly.

However, the intensity of the academic environment can mean that there is less time for fun, particularly at the elementary level where students and parents are used to having more time to play. In reporting on the turnaround of Mastery’s Smedley campus, reporter Benjamin Herold writes, “there is very little wasted time—and there is also very little laughter and play. Turner [a Mastery teacher] and her students are almost always ‘on-task’—and as a result, their individual personalities peek out only occasionally.”<sup>25</sup>

Mastery seeks to balance this by integrating rituals and fun into the school day through award programs or by teaching through raps and chants, as well as through enrichment activities before and after school.

### **Family and community engagement**

Prior to takeover, Mastery invests heavily in engaging and understanding communities. Mastery provides information sessions and events for prospective parents and engages deeply with potential partners to develop plans. Mastery consultant Erin Trent described the work, saying, “Really, it was a lot of listening.” She and other team members answered questions from hundreds of parents, met with legislative leaders, visited community organizations to learn about the programs they offer, and spent countless hours on the phone encouraging people to attend tours of existing Mastery schools.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Martha Woodall, “A lesson learned: W. Philadelphia charter making the score,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 19, 2007 (<http://www.masterycharter.org/files/ABetterFitAtShoemaker.pdf>).

<sup>24</sup> Herold, *Mastery Charter 'Restarts' Philadelphia's Struggling Smedley Public School*.

<sup>25</sup> Herold, “*Not a minute to waste—even in first grade*.”

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Herold, *Mastery’s big gamble set to pay off*, The Notebook, <http://www.thenotebook.org/blog/113444/masterys-big-gamble-pays> (March 14, 2011).

After a school opens, Mastery continues to engage with parents through other means. “Parents in the schools we turned around were previously not very engaged. The first step in engaging them was to change the culture of a building—from dangerous and chaotic to safe and welcoming. From there, we focused on means of getting parents involved in academics and homework—and then PTA-like involvement,” says Gordon.<sup>27</sup> Teachers are expected to log at least eight phone calls per week to homes, and two parents sit on the board of every school.

### **Centralized monitoring and support mechanisms**

Mastery has developed a strong Network Support Team at its home office that centrally manages and supports schools. This team is comprised of four areas, each of which is overseen by a chief officer who reports directly to Gordon: Program, Operations, Finance, and Innovation. Program staff, who oversee all academic services and human capital initiatives, meet weekly with principals to conduct school walkthroughs, talk about student data, and problem-solve.

## **FUNDING**

As charter schools, Mastery schools receive roughly 20 percent fewer per-pupil dollars than district schools. In order to make sure investments maximize teaching and learning, Mastery schools do not employ teaching aides, security guards, or full-time janitorial staff.

Given the investments that the organization makes in the first year of turnaround (mainly capital investments), schools typically require a small amount of philanthropic funding in their first year. Schools are fully sustained on public revenues in years following. Like most schools that are part of a centralized management network, schools pay roughly eight percent of per-pupil dollars in fees to the Mastery central office to cover home office services and costs.

Mastery raises private funds and invests about \$1 million to \$1.5 million in each of its new schools—for facilities improvements, books, computers, and other amenities. As discussed earlier in this case, Gordon views this investment as essential: “It allows us to start in a building that looks and feels fresh and bright. It creates a different environment when kids walk in the door.”<sup>28</sup> To offset the cost of this investment, Mastery has been able to negotiate long-term, low-cost leases with the district as part of their turnaround agreements.

While Mastery seeks to fund all of its operating costs on ongoing public revenues, the organization raises additional philanthropic dollars to cover growth and central office capacity-building, funding new schools and projects like the development of new technologies, teacher residency programs, and leader development programs. The organization has recently won a \$5.1 million federal grant<sup>29</sup> that will help it open another 12 campuses in Philadelphia and Camden. Further, Oprah Winfrey’s Angel Network in September wrote it a \$1 million check as well.

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<sup>27</sup> *Education Week* Live Chat: *Using Stimulus Aid to Turn Around Low-Achieving Schools*.

<sup>28</sup> Mezzacappa, Mastery chief speaks about Oprah.

<sup>29</sup> ED press release, *Education Secretary Arne Duncan Announces Twelve Grants for \$50 Million to Charter School Management Organizations*, September 29, 2010 (<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/education-secretary-arne-duncan-announces-twelve-grants-50-million-charter-school>).

## SOURCES

In addition to footnoted sources, this case study draws upon the author's work with the school system over the course of August 2006 to August 2010, as well as sources on the Mastery Charter Schools website—[masterycharterschools.org](http://www.masterycharter.org) (Mastery Charter Schools' Organization Overview.

[http://www.masterycharter.org/files/MCS\\_Overview\\_Feb\\_2011.pdf](http://www.masterycharter.org/files/MCS_Overview_Feb_2011.pdf); Mastery Charter Teacher Residency Program. *www.masterycharter.org/files/MTRPTrainingOverview042409.pdf*).