



ORGANIZING THE CENTRAL OFFICE TO SUPPORT SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Moderator: *Karen Baroody – Managing Director, Education Resource Strategies*

Panelists:

- *Laura Mitchell – Deputy Superintendent, Cincinnati Public Schools*
- *Don Fraynd – Chief School Improvement Officer, Chicago Public Schools*
- *Tanya Carter – Deputy Executive Director, Denver Public Schools*
- *Frank Barnes – Chief Accountability Officer, Boston Public Schools*

A Variety of Turnaround Approaches

There are a variety of approaches to turnaround and varying levels of central office support to schools around key frameworks and tenets. What these turnaround efforts share are:

- Strong leaders
- Effective teaching teachers
- Individual attention and time for accelerated learning
- Productive school culture
- Health, social and emotional support

For the Central Office, turnaround means:

- Defining the **model** and interventions
- Providing **support** through coaching, training, and partners
- Creating **accountability** and **monitoring** of progress
- Integrating with **district-wide strategy** for improvement

Common Themes of District Turnaround:

1. The varying need for autonomy and relief from district rules and bureaucracy
2. Reliance on data to set goals and help schools get better
3. Use of partners
4. The sharing of best practices and challenges among districts

A Comprehensive, Standardized Model

Cincinnati’s turnaround includes intensive training and support to 16 low-performing schools, identified in their Elementary Initiative. Thirteen of the 16 schools have significantly raised their performance index, outpacing test score gains, and five of six SIG schools made AYP. However, Mitchell admitted, “We don’t feel like we’ve arrived. We’re on the journey...Auditors have said we have great ideas, cutting edge, but we fall apart on implementation, communication and holding people accountable for results.”

Specific Initiatives

In addition to looking at research and audits to identify “gaps between good schools and ours,” Cincinnati has provided intensive training and support to schools, including:

- Aligned content with standards, focusing on math and ELA.
- Personalized learning with “Student Success Plans” and data conversations for every child and small group instruction
- Ascend Performance Institute – a program to develop top principals and teacher leaders
- Principal coaches to support, monitor, and hold people accountable

- Curriculum Managers in 60-80% of the schools to improve instruction and complement the coaches.
- Extended learning time with 4 additional weeks on June
- The development of a monitoring tool
- Extensive communications to the community

- Weekly risk-management meetings with screen shares of progress measures
- Weekly detailed stop light plans with clear coding of who's in red, yellow, green
- Comparison of project status to related student information and outcomes
- Development of fully integrated packages for schools.

Comprehensive, Standardized Support Efforts through Office for School Improvement

Chicago's "turnaround work should change the district forever." Building the Chicago turnaround model for high schools has involved comprehensive, standardized efforts, close results-based collaboration, and strong support and oversight of school management, operations and performance. The Office of School Improvement (OSI) manages one third of the turnaround schools and outsources the rest to AUSL. OSI has required several key concessions from the Central Office: Political backing of turnaround efforts to fire staff, long-term funding, and total control and autonomy by turnaround staff.

"We know someone at Central Office has our back – 'I'm on my way. Just relax.' We really need support. We have to feel connected. When I feel valued for my work, it makes me want to work harder." (Principal, Turnaround School)

Chicago context: "We need to recreate the school community for the 21,000 students in horrible high school conditions and the 60,000 students in horrible elementary conditions. We grabbed the bottom schools (serving approximately 17,000 students) and put them into turnaround and restart."

Role of Office of School Improvement. The office takes responsibility for project management and accountability through:

They monitor grades and attendance first. "There's no room for debating the merits of standardized tests when you're at 2% proficiency... We look at qualitative measures available to paint a picture of a school. We also look at severe misconduct, and measure the impact of tier 2 social/emotional supports such as trauma recovery and anger management groups – measures of kids healing."

Building Strong School Leadership Means Filling the Bench

"Skilled principals with track records have options. We've got to make sure the bench is full. AP becomes Principal. We've been using this model all along. The turnaround model can't be based on the principal so when they move on, the place doesn't fall apart."

"The principal gets a stipend to coach, but they do it for recognition as leader among peers, they really enjoy it. They have to be picked based on track record. The incentive if you move to low-performing or re-design school is working with a high performing team."

Two Autonomous Networks w/ Support from Blueprint and District

Denver offers "great district support and expertise," while turnaround for 20 schools is organized into two networks. The networks have the flexibility and autonomy to function as mini-school districts that can address the needs of their

individual schools around the five tenets of school success.

DPS's 5 Tenets: 1. Excellent in leadership and instruction; 2. Increasing instructional time; 3. Fostering no-excuse culture of high expectations; 4. Frequent assessment to improve instruction; 5. Daily tutoring in critical growth years

Blueprint is an organization that offers hands-on help to schools with “a sense of immediacy of not waiting too long to make changes.” They execute:

- Monthly walk-throughs based on specific criteria
- Meetings with teachers and student focus groups
- Month to month action plans
- Monitoring instruction on a weekly basis to continually revise the action plan.
- Monitoring building indicators of high expectations (including data walls, visible goals, safety, culture, and adult interventions)
- Guided conversations with principals and teachers in the buildings

Changing Working Conditions

To turnaround proficiency levels from 90% failing to 80% passing, increase college readiness and graduation rates, and reduce the achievement gap, BPS is smoothing the way for change through negotiations around working conditions for 1. Greater hiring/dismissal flexibility, 2. Differentiated roles and pay, and 3. Additional time.

“We’ve added 90 hours of instructional time and 100 hours of professional development and planning time. Our strategy is to start with 11 schools. Now we’re negotiating and laying the foundation for all 125 schools. This work requires a team of people.”

Playing the role of facilitator, not just the leader is key to turnaround. “We need to remove barriers created by the central office. The district is bureaucracy – it can no longer be ‘other.’”

Seven Transformational Levers:

Looking at demographics, empirical research, best practices, and working with ERS, BPS is focusing on 7 key areas:

1. Transformational leaders who bring vision, attract resources and bring coherence to resources when they come
2. Effective teachers
3. High expectations/Ownership for results
4. A focus on instructional rigor/engaging, progress monitoring
5. Effective use of time
6. Focus on social/ emotional supports/Engage families
7. Accountability – targets and consequences.

To build leadership, Boston uses “PLPs and data leaders that share practices and what’s working for them. We convene principals... People do a lot of great things and need to be able to learn from the network.”

Community Partners and Service Providers

These districts are coordinating services and providers to improve the services that students receive and better meet the missions of their schools.

Cincinnati uses “an organizational chart for every school with 4 goals – academic, community, parent, wellness. If the service organization can’t align then they get out.”

In Chicago, “We use RFPs. Any agency we work with has to have a proven track record in raising attendance, behavior and grades.”

Boston is building local educational support through a network of community organizations, “including CitiYear, Citizen Schools, Boston Plan for Excellence, Mass2020, Teach Plus and others.” Boston also uses home visits, working with the housing authority to improve chronic attendance problems.