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CONFERENCE PAPERS

“Turning Around the Nation’s Worst Schools”
American Enterprise Institute
March 11, 2008



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March 11, 2008

For at least four decades, we have wrestled with the challenge of “turning around” the nation’s most troubled schools. From new curricula and school designs devised in the 1960s, to the “effective schools” efforts of the 1970s and 1980s, to the “best practices” mantra currently in fashion, we have sought the formula that might work. An array of turnaround specialists and programs, including University of Virginia’s Darden/Curry School Turnaround Specialist Program, Louisiana’s School Turnaround Specialist Program, Chicago International Charter School’s ChicagoRise, and the Rensselaerville Institute’s School Turnaround Program, is today focused on this work. But the scale is small compared to the scope of the challenge, pegged by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) through its “adequate yearly progress” measuring stick at nearly 10,000 schools *in need of improvement* and 2,000 schools in the ultimate *restructuring* category of under-performance. These numbers will continue to rise as the 2014 deadline for 100 percent proficiency approaches.

Early turnaround efforts have for the most part resulted in only marginal improvements, raising more questions than answers. Promising practices have failed to work at scale when imported to troubled schools. Systemic solutions, from site-based management to high-stakes accountability, have thus far not led to the hoped-for transformation of the lowest-performing schools. The implementation of the NCLB remedies, especially the *restructuring* provision, has also been less than transformative.

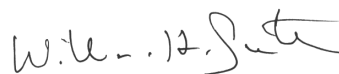
Meanwhile, education is not the only sector in which we have had enormous difficulty turning around troubled organizations. The private sector, too, struggles with turnaround efforts, with research suggesting that even the most intensive turnaround interventions are successful no more than thirty-five or forty percent of the time. In truth, the turnaround challenge facing educators, policymakers and reformers today is really a series of challenges that begins with the very definition of the word. *What does a successful turnaround look like? What will successful turnarounds, implemented at scale, require in terms of funding, increased capacity throughout the system, and changes in the incentive structures that shape how people work and learn? What obstacles will turnaround initiatives encounter, and how can those obstacles best be addressed? What roles should individual schools, school provider organizations, unions, districts, the state, and the federal government play? What changes should be made to NCLB to better serve these chronically under-performing schools?*

To address these issues, we are pleased to share these thoughtful analyses, penned by thinkers who have wrestled deeply with these critical questions. For more information, readers are invited to visit the AEI (www.aei.org/event1646) and Mass Insight (www.massinsight.org) websites.

Sincerely,



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PANEL I

School Turnaround: What It Is and Why We Need It

Andrew Calkins

Mass Insight Education & Research Institute

Despite years of reform and steadily increasing urgency about the nation's lowest-performing schools, efforts to turn chronically failing schools around have largely failed. While aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and its implementation are judged favorably by some constituencies and harshly by others, there is broad consensus that NCLB's rescue plans for failing schools have not proved very effective.

These highly critical reviews arrive alongside other reports spotlighting impressive individual school success stories. In fact, whatever its other impacts, the nation's standards and testing movement has at least helped to demonstrate that schools serving highly challenged, high-poverty student enrollments – the kind of schools most likely to be experiencing chronic failure – *can* in some cases succeed. But we have not yet developed an adequate understanding of what these schools are doing differently, or how to extend their success to the broader context of urban schooling.

It is a poignant and troubling irony. Just as we discover that demographics need not determine destiny, the nation's new school-quality measurement tools reveal that for students attending our worst-performing schools...in fact, they generally do. Extensive efforts to improve these low-performing schools have produced little success. Analysis of these reforms shows that our collective theory of change has been fairly timid, compared to the nature and magnitude of the need. All of this presents educators and policymakers with a question that Paul Tough, writing for *The New York Times* in late 2006, presented in sharp relief:

“The evidence is becoming difficult to ignore: When educators do succeed at educating poor minority students up to national standards of proficiency, they invariably use methods that are radically different and more intensive than those employed in most American public schools. So as the No Child Left Behind law comes up for reauthorization, Americans are facing an increasingly stark choice: is the nation really committed to guaranteeing that all of the country's students will succeed to the same high level? And if so, how hard are we willing to work, and what resources are we willing to commit, to achieve that goal?”¹

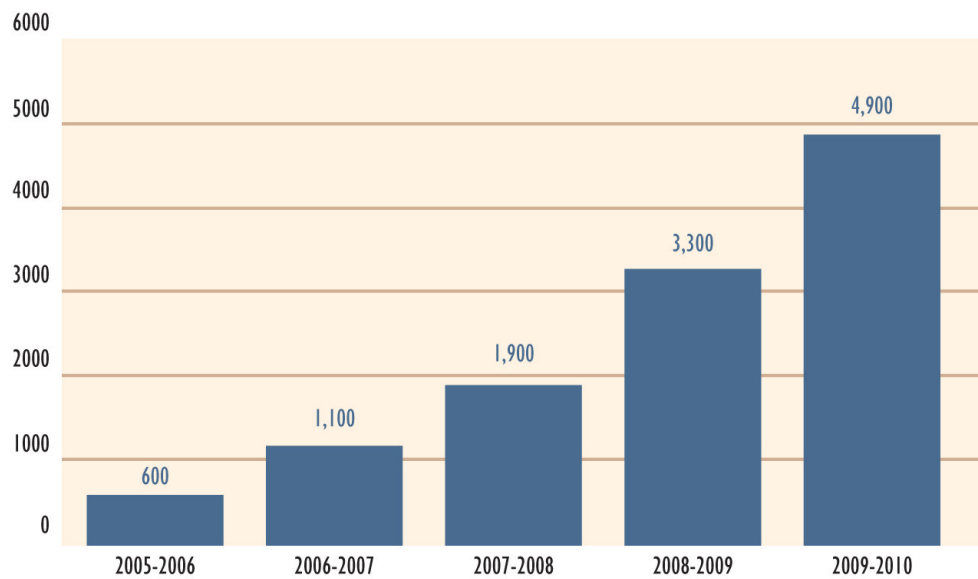
¹ Tough, Paul, “What It Takes to Make a Student.” *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, November 26, 2006.

THE GROWING SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

The numbers are arresting. Under NCLB, schools that do not meet annual achievement goals (“Adequate Yearly Progress” or AYP, in the parlance of the law) enter into a series of categories of under-performance, triggering correspondingly more intensive forms of intervention. Schools that fail to meet their goals for five consecutive years are placed in NCLB’s most extreme designation: *Restructuring*. That timeline, and various delays in states’ implementation of the law, is why it has taken awhile since the NCLB’s passage in 2001 for schools to move in any great numbers into that ultimate category.

But ready or not, here they come. Within two years, at current rates, five percent, or 5,000, of America’s one hundred thousand public schools—representing more than 2,500,000 students—will be identified as chronic failures in need of restructuring. (See figure below.)

5,000 Schools in Restructuring by 2010



Projections are based on Center for Education Policy 2005-06 data for schools in Restructuring Status under NCLB with the assumption that the rate of schools leaving that status will remain constant over the next four years.

Many more schools – in some urban districts the number will approach 100% -- will be placed in less extreme categories. Some of these schools' challenges might be solved through fairly modest forms of assistance and investment. Many of the schools finding their way into NCLB's early-stage accountability categories, in fact, are fairly high-achieving schools that have stumbled, so far, in bringing one or more student sub-groups (i.e., special education students or an ethnic minority) to achievement goals. But the nearly 2,000 schools already in Restructuring today – as well as those likely to soon reach it – are schools in which performance has been so pervasive and so low for so many years that they would fall within practically any definition of chronic failure a state could devise. The NCLB-driven visibility of the failing grades assigned to these schools, and their growing number, has put the challenge of turning them around near the top of the educational policy agenda in most states.

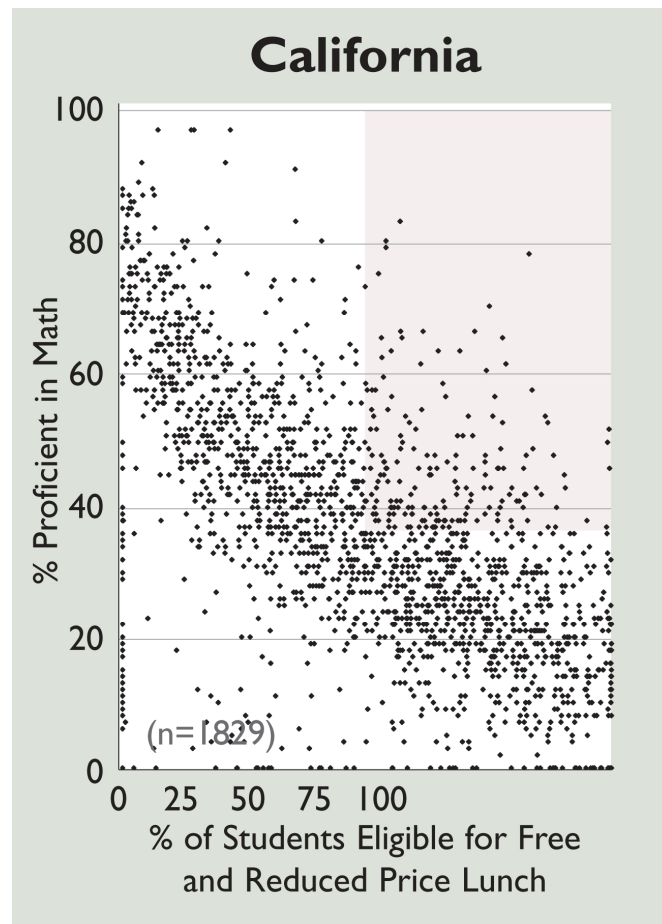
POVERTY'S IMPACT

That challenge, however, is more complicated than simply “fixing” a crop of broken schools. Schools entering Restructuring fail for any number of reasons, but they tend to fall into three broad categories. They fail because:

- First, the challenges they tend to face are substantial: high-poverty students who arrive with enormous skill deficits and disengaged parents; multiple languages and cultures; relatively higher percentages of special education students; constant upheaval from persistent student mobility. In other words: even if we knew how to do it well, the task facing educators in high-poverty schools would be a terrifically daunting one.
- Second, these schools tend to be dysfunctional, under-resourced organizations, staffed by disproportionately inexperienced teachers, led by over-extended principals, and weighed down by a self-fulfilling culture of low expectations. In other words: yes, in this sense, schools reaching NCLB's Restructuring category almost certainly *do* need “fixing,” organizationally.
- Third and perhaps most problematical, the system of which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of the high-poverty student population they tend to serve. In other words: we have yet to figure out, broadly speaking, how to break the link between poverty and low achievement.

For Mass Insight's 2007 report, *The Turnaround Challenge*, we correlated 4th and 8th grade reading and math scores against school poverty in the 40 states for which data were available. All of the charts look essentially like the California 8th grade math chart presented below: the higher the poverty level of student enrollment, the lower the achievement outcome. (We use California as the example here because the state's sample size is so large.)²

As School Poverty Increases, Student Achievement Declines



Eighth grade math scores, by school, 2006. National Longitudinal School-level State Assessment Score Database.

The poverty achievement gap begins early and accelerates as children grow older. By age 3, children born in poverty have acquired, on average, only half the vocabulary of their higher-income counterparts. Far from mitigating the achievement gap, the experience of most children

² Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., and Lash, D., *The Turnaround Challenge*. Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007.

in public schools appears to exacerbate it. A vast body of research shows that the gap increases as they progress through school.³ Being poor far outweighs race/ethnicity, family structure, and other factors as causes of cognitive disadvantage.

This is not news. But understanding poverty’s role in learning and the reasons why schools fail can establish a set of design conditions from which solutions can be forged – and a lens to hold up to the exemplars, the emerging cohort of “beat the odds” schools that are demonstrating that success is not only possible, but, as veteran education reporter Karin Chenoweth titled her recent book on the subject, “It’s Being Done” (Harvard University Press, 2007).

THE PROOF POINT: HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS

For *The Turnaround Challenge*, we looked at nearly 300 research reports, policy studies, news articles, and other resources, including all of the analyses of high-performing, high-poverty (HHP) schools we could find. We were looking for proof points – evidence that public schools could bring highly challenged, high-poverty students to achievement levels matching those of their high-performing suburban counterparts. Are they out there? This research returned a very qualified “yes.” A number of these high-performing, high-poverty (HHP) schools exist, but exceptionally few at the high school level, and many carry asterisks because they serve student enrollments who have opted in, meaning they are not entirely representative of urban student populations.

As we combed the research, including Mass Insight’s own six-year inquiry into 50 Massachusetts “Vanguard” schools and districts through our Building Blocks Initiative for Standards-Based Reform,⁴ two important themes emerged.

- First: the HHP schools seemed to be exceptionally focused on what we began to call students’ *readiness to learn* – meeting head-on the impacts that poverty, disruption, and low expectations have had on their students’ readiness to take responsibility for learning.

³ See, among others: Borman, G.D. & Rachuba, L.T., *Academic Success among Poor and Minority Students: An Analysis of Competing Models of School Effects*. Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, February 2001.

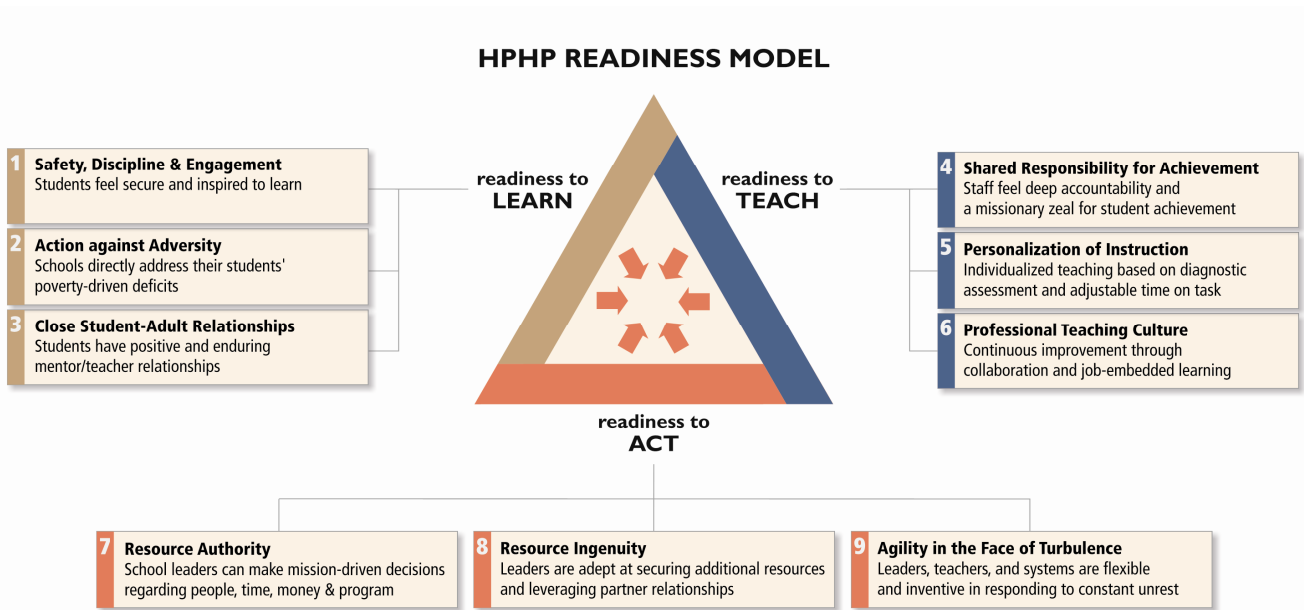
⁴ Available at www.massinsight.org.

- Second: the schools were able to organize and tailor their overall approach to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and staff development around this assessment of their students needs – their readiness to learn. In most cases, this resulted in school models that look substantially different from traditional public schools: longer days, longer years, and different kinds of schedules, teaching approaches, and human resource practices.

The schools may in fact be delivering something very “traditional” to their students: good teaching in a supportive environment that permits sufficient attention to meet their individual needs. It’s what good teachers have always done. But the HPHP schools have to go to extraordinary lengths to make this happen because of the skill-level and behavioral deficits their students bring to school (again, *readiness to learn*), and because of the systemic challenges that high-poverty schools face in building the deep teaching capacity they need to be effective (in other words, their own *readiness to teach*).

The HPHP schools succeed, we suggest, because they either enjoy or they have established on their own a third “readiness”: *readiness to act*, meaning the authority, proactivity, and entrepreneurialism required to make mission-driven decisions focused entirely on the needs of children. Sometimes this third readiness is written into the school’s founding documents as a means of providing it with operating flexibility; this is true in the case of charter schools or charter-like district schools such as Boston’s Pilot Schools or Worcester, MA’s University Park Campus School. Sometimes it is more informally adopted and practiced by a school leadership team that simply refuses to let contractual restrictions, school district dysfunction, or state-driven compliance burdens get in its way. This three-Readiness triangle is represented in the graphic below.

How High-Performing High-Poverty Schools Do It: The HPHP Readiness Triangle



The graphic shown here was developed to convey what we found so striking in high-performing, high-poverty schools. But it also provides a kind of map for school reform over the past 15 years, and thereby, a way to understand why our collective efforts to turn around failing schools have generated so little success.

- Most school reform has focused intensively on just one leg of this triangle: ***Readiness to teach***. This leg encompasses the establishment of standards; curriculum alignment; professional development; instructional approaches; use of assessment data – essentially, the whole nine yards of what we all tend to think of as standards-based reform. There has been very good work done here. *Readiness to teach* strategies can have important positive impacts in mid-performing schools and are a critical element in any turnaround strategy. But applied without attention to the other two legs of the triangle, they have been shown to be insufficient to turn around the most poorly-performing schools. (See “Why So Little Impact?” below.)
- ***Readiness to act***, along the bottom of the triangle, represents strategies that reflect impatience with the constraints that public education places on educators trying to do what’s best for children. Among other things, it refers to the authority to make mission-

driven decisions about staffing, scheduling, budgeting, and programming, instead of having to operate within a narrow band of compliance shaped by bureaucratic regulation or contractual requirement. Charter schools are one response to this impatience. So are other schools that by collaborative agreement (e.g., New York City’s empowerment schools, Chicago’s Ren-10 schools, or Boston’s Pilot schools) or state direction (e.g., Massachusetts’ “Co-Pilot” turnaround schools) have been granted at least some measure of this additional authority. These strategies have gained some momentum, but have generally not been applied at broad scale – hence the intense interest in Edmonton’s reform strategies and in New York City’s *Children First* initiative, which is currently attempting to do just that.

- **Readiness to learn**, in some ways, is where some of the most interesting new work is being done right now. The KIPP academies’ relentless focus on school culture and behavioral expectations falls into this category. The emerging interest in grade 6-12 and 7-12 academies, spurred by the success of such schools as Worcester’s University Park, is part of it, too. Educators there and at similar schools may use different words, but their model reflects a judgment that at-risk students must preserve and enhance their *readiness to learn* during their middle school years in order to find continuing success in high school – and in order to help the educators build a successful high school culture of learning. Strategies along this leg of the triangle run counter to the prevailing theory that good curriculum and good teaching will, almost automatically, produce good students. Their presence in the triangle does *not* constitute an excuse for poor achievement in high-poverty schools. Rather, they reflect a commitment to proactively address the impacts of poverty on students’ readiness to learn, and use them as important parameters for school design.

“SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT” TO DATE: WHY SO LITTLE IMPACT?

Our survey of the literature and high-profile intervention strategies in under-performing schools for *The Turnaround Challenge* revealed that almost none of the reforms being applied to under-performing schools embrace all three legs of the Readiness triangle. The reforms tend to represent either incremental change strategies (a new curriculum, some staff training) or

incomplete attempts at wholesale change (reconstitution of staff but without any changes in the operating context for new staff coming in).

In fact, current intervention strategies appeared to us to suffer from a number of inadequacies, which can be grouped into four categories:

- Inadequate design: lack of ambition, comprehensiveness, integration, and support from a high-capacity network.
- Inadequate capacity: fragmented training initiatives, instead of an all-encompassing, people-focused strategy capable of building sufficiently strong leadership and staff and equally strong external partnerships that support the mission.
- Inadequate incentive change: driven more by compliance than buy-in.
- Inadequate political will: episodic and sometimes confusing political mandates and requirements; underfunding and lack of flexibility in budgeting; and inconsistent political support.

The results, given these inadequacies, are predictable. Probably the largest and most scientific study of school intervention to date, conducted by American Institutes for Research in 1999, concluded that 21 of 24 fairly extensively funded Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) programs failed to improve achievement.⁵ Similarly dim conclusions were reached by RAND researchers reviewing New American Schools (NAS) models in 2002.⁶ Some other intervention efforts have taken a different tack, focusing on replacing people instead of changing programs. But these “reconstitution” efforts, such as initiatives undertaken in Washington D.C. and San Francisco, frequently have ended up hiring back majorities of the people who had been let go, because of weakness in the recruiting pool. Neither of these two types of intervention – what we call *program change* and *people change* – has produced the desired outcomes because they fail to address the systems and conditions in which people work. The same is true for today’s prevalent state-driven intervention strategy of assigning consulting educators – usually retired principals or superintendents – to provide once- or twice-per-week management help to principals leading struggling schools. Schools that have clearly and undeniably failed their

⁵ American Institutes for Research, 1999.

⁶ Berends, M., Bodilly, S., & Kirby, S.N., *Facing the Challenges of Whole-School Reform: New American Schools After a Decade*. RAND, 2002.

students for five or more years in a row need much more significant help – help that addresses not just people and programs, but the operating context and incentives that so largely determine their impact.

CREATING OPERATING CONDITIONS CONDUCTIVE TO SUCCESS

What, broadly speaking, would more fundamental forms of turnaround strategies for chronically under-performing schools look like? To search for answers, we examined the characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools and backwards-mapped from there. The research on HPHP schools we studied for *The Turnaround Challenge* showed them to reflect characteristics of highly entrepreneurial organizations. In order to successfully address the needs of their high-poverty student enrollments, these schools tend either to be working outside of traditional public education structures (charters); or are working around those structures, internally (in-district charter-likes); or are operating exceptionally well within the system. By whatever process, as we noted above, they have been able to enhance their administrators' and staff's *readiness to act*, more so than is the case in traditional public schools. This flexibility shows up in the ways that these schools manage their essential resources and investments: people, time, money, and program.

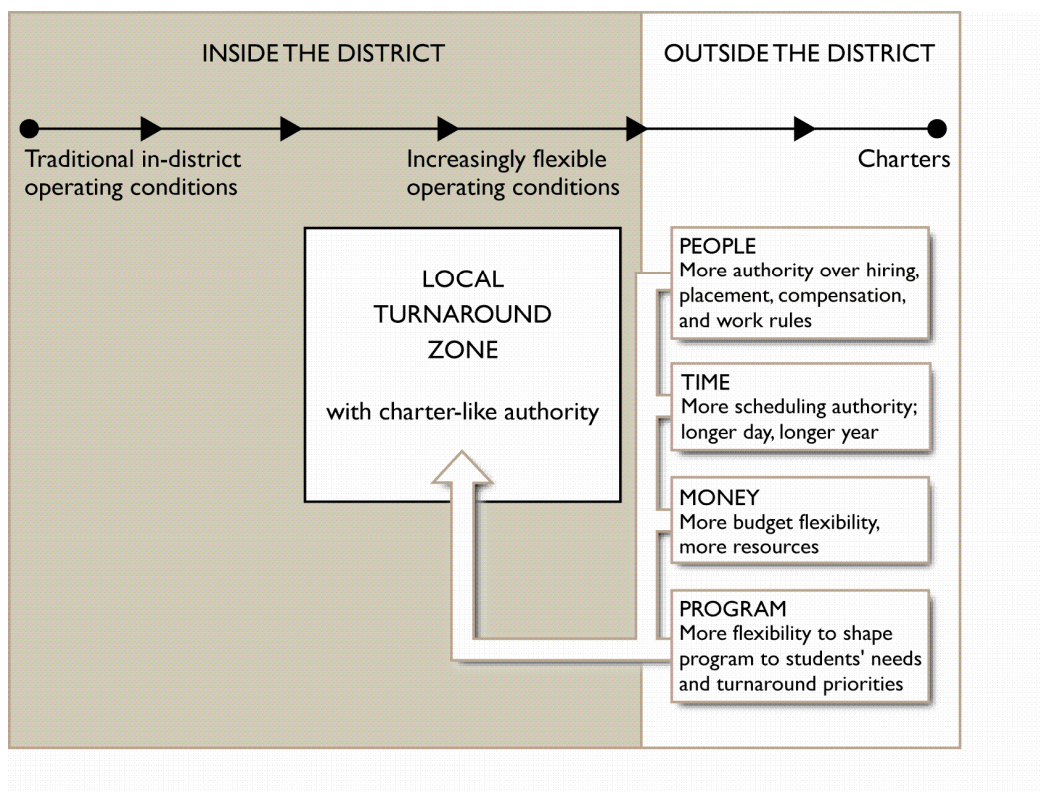
We propose, in *The Turnaround Challenge*, that the strategies that tend to emerge from these high-performance, high-poverty schools' use of their increased operating flexibility should be regarded as key elements in any comprehensive effort to turn around a failing school. Strategies such as:

- A clear focus on staff evaluation, hiring, and in-school development as part of an overall “people strategy” to ensure the best possible teaching force.
- Highly capable, distributed school leadership – i.e., not simply the principal, but an effective leadership team that includes teachers with augmented school roles, working to build a cohesive, professional teaching culture.
- Additional time in the school day and across the school year.

- Integrated, research-based programs and related social services that are specifically designed, personalized, and adjusted to address students’ academic and related psycho-social needs.
- Absolute clarity on performance goals and on interim assessments of progress.
- Clear, performance-based behavioral expectations for all stakeholders including teachers, students, and (often) parents.

How can this be accomplished at scale? A handful of major school districts – Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York City, and Philadelphia, among others – have experimented with turnaround “zones” in an effort to establish protected space for these outside-the-system approaches *inside* of the system. (See figure below.) For the most part, this work is in its early stages and developing the capacity to fully implement them continues to be a challenge. The opportunity for states, of course, is to enable the creation of this kind of protected space for turnarounds across all school districts, not just the pioneers.

Applying Outside-the-System Approaches, Focused Inside the System



It's a classic public policy dilemma. How can policymakers change the incentives so that, rather than choosing the *least* intensive, comprehensive, and in the end, intrusive forms of Restructuring strategy (as various studies show is dramatically the case), educators at all levels opt for more deeply transformational strategies? That is the focus of a different paper, save for one closing comment here: that, in fact, we may already be part of the way there.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT TODAY: INCREASING INCENTIVE TO UNDERTAKE MAJOR CHANGE

Public schools have never faced the threat of closure (or some form of dramatic restructuring) for academic under-performance. The resulting complacency about graduating severely under-skilled students by the thousands was, in large part, the bull's-eye on the target for the nation's higher standards movement. But now we find ourselves, in 2008, with growing dissatisfaction over the performance of American schools, relative to counterparts in other countries, as a matter of national interest; the multi-year data necessary to identify with conviction the schools that are not measuring up; and a cohort of 2,000 schools (and growing) that has moved all the way to the ultimate-consequence categories for under-performance set by federal law.

The opportunity may be here for genuine consensus on the need for true reform. And here is the reason: for the first time, the incentives for change in education are beginning to resemble those that exist in other sectors.

In the business and non-profit worlds, turnaround happens because a company or organization is threatened with the loss of its very existence, and its response matches the seriousness of that threat. According to the cross-sector literature, successful initiatives to turn around failing organizations have common elements that differ significantly from "continuous improvement" efforts. Elements associated with turnaround include replacement of top management with leaders with specific capabilities suited to engineer what some studies call "second-order," more fundamental changes; a fast cycle of change-inducing actions focused on problem-solving, measuring, and driving results; early wins that can replace a culture of failure with a culture of success; and changes in multiple environmental factors essential to enable turnaround.⁷ A

⁷Center on Innovation and Improvement/Public Impact, *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement*. Public Impact, 2007.

strong research base supports the importance of control over hiring, firing, and working conditions for successful turnaround within other sectors; other studies demonstrate the importance of driving for results – “implementing strategies even when they deviate from established organizational practices.”⁸ Still others point to authority over budget: “funneling more time and money into successful tactics while halting unsuccessful tactics.”⁹ And other research emphasizes the importance of acting “in relentless pursuit of goals, rather than touting progress as ultimate success.”¹⁰

If all of this sounds somewhat familiar, it’s because these cross-sector turnaround strategies look very much like the organizational strategies practiced by HPHP schools. They are focused and driven on outcomes, but flexible and agile on implementation. They place a high value on leadership and staff, on mission-driven triage where necessary, and on the needs of their clients.

The other sectors do have something that the schools world lacks: a healthy marketplace of turnaround management organizations, which can provide the necessary and timely expertise to assess, plan, and carry out a turnaround plan. (*The Turnaround Challenge* framework suggests a solution to this capacity gap in the development of a new breed of Lead Turnaround Partners, to be addressed in papers submitted for Panel II, *Effective Turnaround at Scale: A Framework and Turnaround Attempts and Strategies So Far.*)

For all of that research on effective practices in cross-sector turnaround, and for all of that turnaround management organizational capacity, the record for successful corporate and non-profit turnarounds is not great. Estimates vary, but it appears clear that the majority of turnaround efforts fail. When they do, companies close their doors, their employees (presumably) find other jobs, and their clients start buying from other providers. The schools world is different in this respect. The students still need to be served.

That requirement, to date, has trumped the need for major change, at least in chronically under-performing schools. Will the altered landscape brought about in part by NCLB galvanize

⁸ Ibid., page 18.

⁹ Ibid., page 19.

¹⁰ Ibid., page 19.

fundamental reform in these schools? The answer depends on our collective ability to ask the logical follow-up questions clearly – and respond to them honestly. Will our current set of intervention strategies succeed? No. Do we have the capacity in the schools, among policymakers, and among partners right now to succeed in turnaround? No. Are there some “proof-point” schools that are serving high-poverty, high-challenge student populations effectively? Yes – a few. Do we have the political and public will to engage deeply in substantially different reform approaches in order to replace failing schools with high-performing ones?

We’ll see.

PANEL II A

Effective Turnaround at Scale: A Framework

William Guenther

Mass Insight Education & Research Institute

The challenge of turning around chronically under-performing schools is a daunting one for several reasons, but chief among them is that the task clearly calls for a comprehensiveness and integration-of-parts that are not hallmarks, frequently, of public policymaking. Public education, in particular, may be prone to what former Boston superintendent Tom Payzant calls “projectitis” – pursuing goals by project, rather than by coherent strategy. Failing schools require comprehensive solutions because their various challenges and dysfunctions are so thoroughly embedded. As was documented in the paper written for Panel I, *School Turnaround: What It Is and Why We Need it*, however, interventions aimed at turning around the most chronically under-performing schools – those that are clearly and consistently failing to serve their students adequately by anyone’s definition – have generally fallen into the piecemeal-reform-effort trap, despite aspirations and program titles (i.e., “Comprehensive School Reform”) that attempt to avoid it.

The problem is that most school intervention strategies are a bit like drug-driven weight reduction programs: injecting medicine without addressing the context, systems, and processes (i.e., diet, lifestyle, body type) that combined to produce the issue to begin with. They tend to treat symptoms instead of getting at root causes.

The challenge is complicated, in this case, because we have not yet shown that we *can* address the root causes – the impacts of poverty, low expectations, chronic disruption from student migration, demonstrably lower teacher capacity relative to schools serving more affluent student populations – truly successfully at any kind of scale. (Just look at the achievement results of the most celebrated urban districts, such as Boston and New York City, and compare them to statewide averages for non-poverty schools.) Turning around failing schools serving high-poverty student enrollments requires not just repair work but a re-engineering of the school model and the systems that support it. That re-engineering requires not just the application of some reform “medicine,” but a re-thinking of the structures, authorities, capacities, incentives, and resources that define the context, the operating conditions in which these schools do their work. That’s not to say that all of society’s ills need to be solved before high-poverty schools can succeed; it *is* to say that turnaround design for truly failing schools – the vast majority of

which serve high-poverty enrollments – must take the nature of the challenge these schools face squarely into account.

To move even single schools from chronic under-performance to a satisfactory standard (which really should be average performance by non-poverty schools in the state) is rare indeed¹¹; to scale this up will require a coordinated, comprehensive approach that involves policymakers, practitioners, and partners at a number of levels. In this paper, we introduce a framework that has been developed with exactly this challenge in mind.

The proposed framework represents a distillation of the findings and recommendations from the 2007 report developed by the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, *The Turnaround Challenge: Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools*.¹² The report is the result of the charge given to Mass Insight by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in September 2005: Examine the landscape of current efforts to turn around the nation's most chronically under-performing schools and develop a new framework that states, working in partnership with communities and districts, can apply to school turnaround. The report draws on two years of research and analysis with on-going vetting by educators, policymakers, and reform experts nationwide. The framework's guiding assumptions also rest on Mass Insight's own experience in implementing school and district intervention strategies (including federally funded Comprehensive School Reform work) over the past ten years in Massachusetts, and our six-year-long "Building Blocks" research initiative to identify effective education practice, particularly in schools serving high-challenge, high-poverty student enrollments. Mass Insight represented a compelling choice for the Gates Foundation to conduct this work: a non-profit organization that has been deeply involved in

¹¹ Public Impact's *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff* (2005), the Rennie Center's *Scaling Up: Reform Lessons for Urban Comprehensive High schools* (2005), and Karin Chenoweth's *It's Being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools* (2007) confirm our own research finding that schools that are truly successful in serving high-poverty populations are rare, and that they are virtually always new starts rather than schools that were previously under-performing. Even these schools do not tend to match the achievement outcomes of the best suburban counterparts, though some come fairly close.

¹² Available online at http://www.massinsight.org/resourcefiles/TheTurnaroundChallenge_2007.pdf

policy facilitation, education reform advocacy, effective-practice research, and intensive school-improvement services simultaneously at the state level for ten years.¹³

All of these capacities informed this report, as did the fact that our home – and the focus of our initial work over that decade – has been in Massachusetts, the nation’s poster-child in many respects for effective standards-based reform. But on the issue of school turnaround there is much to be done, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and in every state, bar none. There are no easy answers – except one. To the question, *will current intervention strategies produce the results we want?*, the research signals a definitive “No.”

INTRODUCING THE FRAMEWORK

Indeed no single state has assembled, funded, and begun to implement a turnaround strategy incorporating all of the elements of the framework we propose here. We identified some promising strategies from several state intervention efforts – chiefly Massachusetts, but also from Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Arizona, and several other states¹⁴ – and from districts with pioneering intervention programs underway, including Chicago, New York, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia. It is clear that the political landscape, social/economic circumstances, and education reform experience and structures of every state will make development of this kind of initiative uniquely challenging.

The proposed framework is an ambitious one. But we believe that commitment, organization, and inventiveness on this scale is what the research clearly suggests is required for any state that is serious about turning around its most underperforming schools. The framework is intended –

¹³ Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, founded in 1997, is an independent non-profit that organizes public schools, higher education, business, and state government to significantly improve student achievement, with a focus on closing achievement gaps. Mass Insight’s education reform strategies are defined by two convictions: that change at scale depends on the practical integration of research, policy, and practice; and that only dramatic and comprehensive change in high-poverty schools will produce significant achievement gains. The strategies that Boston-based Mass Insight implemented to help make Massachusetts a reform model now inform the organization’s national work on two high-impact goals: using Advanced Placement® as a lever to attain excellence in math and science achievement and to transform school culture, and the successful turnaround of consistently underperforming public schools.

¹⁴ Arizona is also moving towards conditions change, while Virginia’s investment in turnaround leadership indicates a commitment to developing a statewide capacity in that area. Other states we researched for *The Turnaround Challenge*, that provided primarily “light touch” technical assistance, were: Alabama, California, Hawaii, Michigan, and Ohio.

like our larger report – to jumpstart informed discussion and action around the vital importance of school turnaround, the opportunity it represents to bring about fundamental change, and the need to pursue it with a fully integrated, comprehensive, well-supported strategy. The ultimate goal is to help states change the paradigm of their approach to school intervention, moving beyond accountability-and-compliance (which, from the field’s point of view, looks like a lot of labeling and very little support), towards a more comprehensive model that incorporates a balance of sticks and carrots.

The box on the next page summarizes the proposed framework. The initial section on system re-design (framework elements 1 and 2) provides background on the definition of school turnaround, which has already been addressed in the paper written for Panel I. This paper will focus on the framework elements that describe critical state responsibilities in catalyzing effective turnaround at scale, which we categorize using three ‘C’ strategies: *Changing Conditions*, *Building Capacity*, and *Clustering for Support*.

The Turnaround Challenge Framework for State Initiatives

Defining the Approach: What does effective, comprehensive turnaround involve?

SYSTEM REDESIGN: Changing the Whole School

1. Turnaround is a dramatic, multi-dimensional change process at a chronically under-performing school.
2. Successful school turnaround produces significant gains in student achievement within two years, as the first of a two-phase restructuring process aimed at meeting state averages for non-poverty schools within five years.

The Three ‘C’ Strategies: How can the state catalyze effective turnaround at scale?

CHANGING CONDITIONS: The Authority to Act

3. Effective turnaround relies on widely-recognized program reform elements, but it depends equally on the conditions into which those reform elements are applied.

BUILDING CAPACITY: People Before Programs

4. Maximizing leadership and staff capacity is the most important element in turnaround success and the state’s most important role.
5. Fragmented, episodic assistance from outside partners must be replaced by a new model of aligned and integrated support, organized by deeply embedded lead turnaround partners.

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT: Organizing the Change

6. Effective turnaround solutions focus on producing change at the school and classroom level, organized in clusters of schools by need, design, or region.
7. Effective turnaround at scale requires a transparent, deliberate blending of “loose” and “tight” in implementation and design.
8. For scale, efficiency, capacity-building, and effectiveness, states should differentiate their involvement in turnaround by the degree of local district capacity.

Organizing the State Role: What is required to enable an effective, state-led turnaround initiative?

EFFECTIVE STATEWIDE COORDINATION: A Different Kind of Agency to Address a Different Kind of Challenge

9. The state must free itself to be able to undertake this work.

STATEWIDE & COMMUNITY COALITIONS: The Necessary Leadership Consensus

10. Because under-performing schools have no natural constituency, advocates for turnaround must proactively build leadership support at the state and community levels.

THE THREE ‘C’ STRATEGIES: HOW CAN THE STATE CATALYZE EFFECTIVE TURNAROUND AT SCALE?

We believe that the research shows that effective turnaround at scale calls for something much more than incremental strategies aimed at individual schools. It requires bold, comprehensive action from the state, working together with districts and outside partners. This is true even in states with long traditions of strong local control.¹⁵ With rare exceptions, schools and districts – essentially risk-averse, conservative cultures when it comes to fundamental change – will not undertake the dramatic, transformative changes required to engineer successful turnaround on their own. The state’s role is to require fundamental, not incremental change, and to establish protected zones that incorporate the three ‘C’ strategies as described below.

Changing Conditions: The Authority to Act

Effective turnaround relies on vital school-level reform elements, but it depends equally on the conditions into which those reform elements are applied. For turnaround to be effective, leaders must gain authority over critical resources and levers for improved achievement – the elements that define the operating context in which the reforms are taking place. The state can play a crucial role in enabling these conditions for turnaround schools by creating a statewide turnaround space that clears aside common bureaucratic, contractual, and other roadblocks to reform and produces an intervention zone that educators actively want to *join*, instead of avoid. These enabling conditions include:

- **People:** *Flexibility to put people with the right skills in the best position to do their most effective work – to make personnel decisions based on the needs of the school, its students, and its performance goals, and not on the needs of adults.* This flexibility includes control over recruiting, hiring, placement, development, responsibilities, supervision, evaluation, and removal. It means that principals and turnaround leadership teams can assemble and assign their school’s faculty on the basis of fit, capacity, and merit, instead of being constrained by overly restrictive collective bargaining provisions and seniority rules (as required in Massachusetts’ turnaround policy, passed in October

¹⁵ See, for example, Hassel, B. & T. Ziebarth (2005). *School Restructuring via the No Child Left Behind Act: Potential State Roles*. Education Commission of the States.

2006, though never fully funded or implemented). It means that a school might choose to ensure (as Lowell Middlesex Charter School in Lowell, MA does to address the needs of its particularly at-risk population of high-school dropouts) that all faculty have social services training or experience. District leaders, union leaders, and policymakers tend to give slim odds to the prospect of achieving this kind of flexibility, but the fact is that it is being done, through collaborative agreements worked out between unions and management in New York City, Chicago, and Boston (for its Pilot schools), among other models.

- **Time:** *The authority and money required to expand time on learning for students and planning time for teachers – in conjunction with other reforms.* More time, by itself, is not a silver bullet, but it appears to be a critically important supporting element in schools that successfully serve disadvantaged students.¹⁶ This expansion includes an extended school day and an extended school year. Additional time is similarly required for staff – for adequate professional development and for common planning. The importance of time is not being lost on school reformers these days; many charter models (such as KIPP) and turnaround designs emerging from some of the major district initiatives (such as Miami-Dade’ Improvement Zone) emphasize additional time, and where they do not, practitioners are adding it anyway. (Following its initial turnaround in Chicago without extra time, the Academy for Urban School Leadership decided to reallocate funds to ensure additional time in all subsequent turnaround efforts.) Control over the scheduling of time (double-block periods, special enrichment/remediation periods, or more far-reaching options) is critical as well. The value of extra time is not measured in an extra dose of whatever instructional methods weren’t doing the job before; it lies in enabling the successful adoption of fundamentally different school strategies.
- **Money:** *Authority to analyze current resources and allocate them to budget lines that directly support the turnaround plan.* Turnaround design must include a willingness to make difficult choices between competing priorities. There must be recognition, in addition, that comprehensive turnaround is expensive. In particular, additional time and additional (often higher-capacity) staff cost money. Experience to date with initiatives

¹⁶ See, for example, Education Trust (2005). *Gaining Traction: How Some High Schools Accelerate Learning for Struggling Students.*

similar to turnaround suggests costs in the range of \$250,000 to \$1 million annually for three years to implement a turnaround effort incorporating the strategies shown to work in high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools, with additional, though declining, investments necessary in the years following. The cost of school turnaround will vary by school, based on size and its own particular needs. An illustrative example is provided in the box at the end of the “Conditions” section of this paper.

- **Program:** *Authority to implement and adapt research-based strategies shown to be effective with the high-poverty, high challenge students who attend most chronically under-performing schools.* Programs that set HPHP schools apart from their less successful counterparts include approaches and structures that vary greatly but at their core enable teachers and administrators to work together as professionals to: analyze and respond to continuous change; to deliver personalized and engaging instruction; and to mitigate the impact of poverty on their students’ readiness to learn. The MATCH School in Boston, for instance, sets five brief assessments every Friday on material taught that week. By the end of a schoolwide assembly, teachers are able to provide immediate individualized intervention on topics identified for remediation for each student. The school then assigns its cadre of graduate-student interns (who all live on the top floor of the MATCH building) to help provide that intervention on an individualized basis. Program flexibility must exist within a larger framework of district-wide consistency (due to student migration between schools), structure (certain required, research-based elements of turnaround design) and support (because some program elements – for example, formative assessments – are more efficiently developed across a network of schools).

Sample Turnaround Costs: \$50 Million for 50 Schools in Turnaround Zones

An effective state initiative serving 50 persistently under-performing schools in turnaround “zones” is likely to include costs such as these:

Estimated Annual Costs of Turnaround

	Estimated Average Cost per School	Estimated Annual Cost for 50-school Turnaround Initiative
3.0 FTEs of support personnel (up to five or more specialists)	\$270,000	\$13,500,000
Incentive and responsibility-based compensation	120,000 average for E/M/H	6,000,000
Lead turnaround partner assistance; staff & leadership development; curriculum materials and related	200,000	10,000,000
Funding for extended time (one hour/day)	288,000 average for E/M/H	14,400,000
Average school total	878,000	43,900,000
Coordinating turnaround agency staff, research/design, operations, partner support, program evaluation		5,000,000
Total annual costs for 50 schools		\$48,900,000

These costs reflect the following assumptions and factors:

Support Personnel

Support personnel configuration would vary by school size and need, and include full- or part-time people with skills central to the turnaround mission, such as a turnaround leader, math coach, data analyst, or social-service program leader. (The table is based on a school with 500 students.) Some specialists may be employed by the district, but some would be on-the-ground practitioners from the lead turnaround partner. Note: the totals here reflect estimates for the costs of turnaround, without specifying the state and district (or private) share of those costs. States should assume average district per-pupil spending in these schools at a minimum, and might well require districts to provide an annually rising share of the additional costs.

Incentive and Responsibility-Based Compensation

Turnaround schools will need to pay for the turnaround expertise of their principals and leadership team, as well as to attract high quality teaching and support staff; compensate for extra responsibilities; and change incentive structures at the school. We have assumed extra compensation at an average of \$3,000 per faculty member (including the principal), but not necessarily that it is distributed evenly.

Lead Turnaround Partner, Professional Development, and Curriculum

Additional support for the work of the lead turnaround partner, professional development (school-based and across districts to build turnaround management capacity), diagnostic assessment and data analysis expertise, teaching and social service skills, as well as related curriculum and program costs, would be provided on a percentage basis staked to student enrollment. For the purposes of this example, an average of \$200,000 per school has been allotted.

Funding for Extended Time

In addition, schools would receive funding separately to pay for extended time, one of the cornerstones of HPHP performance. Assuming 30 elementary, 15 middle, and 5 high schools in the mix of 50 schools in this imagined state example, the addition of one hour per day, and 37 operating weeks per year to the school calendar, the cost of this extra time would total \$14.4 million (\$5.4/elementaries, \$5.4/middle schools, \$3.6/high schools).

Turnaround Agency Operations

The cost of the state's turnaround coordinating agency includes all costs of the administering of the work, including staff and operating costs, administering state policy, creating the turnaround models, supporting the turnaround partners, shaping the development of turnaround leadership, and providing for program evaluation.

Sources of Revenue for Turnaround

Many states, compelled by NCLB, are directing some funds to school intervention initiatives. Our researchers universally heard complaints that funding for the work was insufficient. The costs outlined here, multiplied across the many dozens and in some cases, hundreds of schools entering Restructuring, add up to a sizable annual investment. States can look to foundation help for innovation and pilot model-building, but the scale-up can only happen through sustained commitment of public dollars. Federal reauthorization of NCLB may produce a substantial portion of the required investment. States will need to justify the remainder on the grounds that money invested here will be matched (as research has shown) many times over by savings in social service costs down the road; the need to build a high-skill workforce to remain nationally and globally competitive; and as a civil rights obligation to provide an adequate education to all children, regardless of income or race.

From Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., and Lash, D., The Turnaround Challenge. Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007.

BUILDING CAPACITY: PEOPLE BEFORE PROGRAMS

Maximizing leadership and staff capacity is the most important element in turnaround success and the state's most important role. Besides creating conditions that enable people to do their best work, states need to ensure that recruiting, preparation, and licensure processes produce a high quality pipeline of educators at all levels, and they need to invest in continuous skill-building. The emerging research on high-performing high-poverty (HPHP) and promising turnaround schools confirms the central importance of strong leadership in their relative success.¹⁷ Leading the process of turnaround clearly requires a special skill set in education (as it does in other fields). Most school districts do not have the resources themselves to develop high capacity school leadership – much less a specialized subset of principals with expertise in turnaround – so it must be a responsibility of the state.

Equally as important: the state must address the need for capacity development among other high-impact positions in schools (e.g., coaches, lead teachers, and performance assessment specialists), and among outside providers of turnaround and related services. All of this turnaround work needs to convey a sense of innovation and provide compelling career options

¹⁷ See, e.g. Futernick, K, (2007). *Excellence Loves Company: A Tipping Point Turnaround strategy for California's Low-Performing Schools*; Public Impact's report for the Center on Innovation and Improvement (2007). *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement*.

for more entrepreneurially-minded educators, which means that incentive structures that govern behavior must also be transformed.

Fragmented, episodic assistance from outside partners must be replaced by a new model of aligned and integrated support, organized by deeply embedded lead turnaround partners.

Turnaround represents an opportunity to redesign the ways schools work with outside partners. By the time a school reaches NCLB's restructuring stage, school leaders tell us it has hosted literally dozens of separate reform programs and partners, with little or no integration happening to form a coherent whole. The state must not only support the capacity of outside providers to assist with turnaround (or lead the process); it must create the structures and policies necessary to ensure that single providers act as systems integrators – coordinating the roles and contributions of other collaborating partners. These Lead Turnaround Partners must also establish strong connections with the social service agencies that help provide important counterweights to the effects of poverty on families and children through home visiting, early education, homelessness prevention strategies, and other services that enable high-poverty students to be ready to learn.

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT: ORGANIZING THE CHANGE

Effective turnaround solutions focus on producing change at the school and classroom level, but organized (for scale, impact, and efficiency) in clusters of schools by need, design, or region. Change at the school level, and through it to the level of classroom instruction, is where reform is shown to be meaningful and productive – or not. But turnaround at scale cannot be accomplished in ones and twos. Several factors – the number of schools requiring assistance; resource-efficiency; replication of successful models; and establishment of effective K-12 pathways through school-level feeder patterns – indicate the value and importance of designing and implementing turnaround work in clusters of schools.¹⁸ Clustered turnaround work can be approached vertically (focusing on successful transitions for students from their elementary through their high school years), or horizontally (by type – for example, urban middle schools or alternative high schools for at-risk students and dropouts). Organization of the work could take several forms:

¹⁸ The most notable district turnaround efforts (Miami-Dade, Chicago, and Philadelphia) as well as New York City's districtwide *Children First* initiative all use some type of clustering strategy.

- Within single districts conducting turnaround on behalf of a cohort of under-performing schools (or multiple cohorts, in districts pursuing a portfolio of different approaches with different governance and/or management structures).
- Across two to four districts, organized and supported by the state, where combined turnaround work makes sense because of geographic proximity or shared school attributes.
- Across a larger number of districts, each of which has just one or two chronically under-performing schools, or where the state wants to encourage implementation of particular school.

Cluster size is a critical consideration, and while the research is unclear on what would be most effective and efficient in a perfect world, in this imperfect world of very limited capacity (both among districts and potential lead turnaround partners), it seems advisable to keep clusters relatively small – five to ten schools at the maximum.

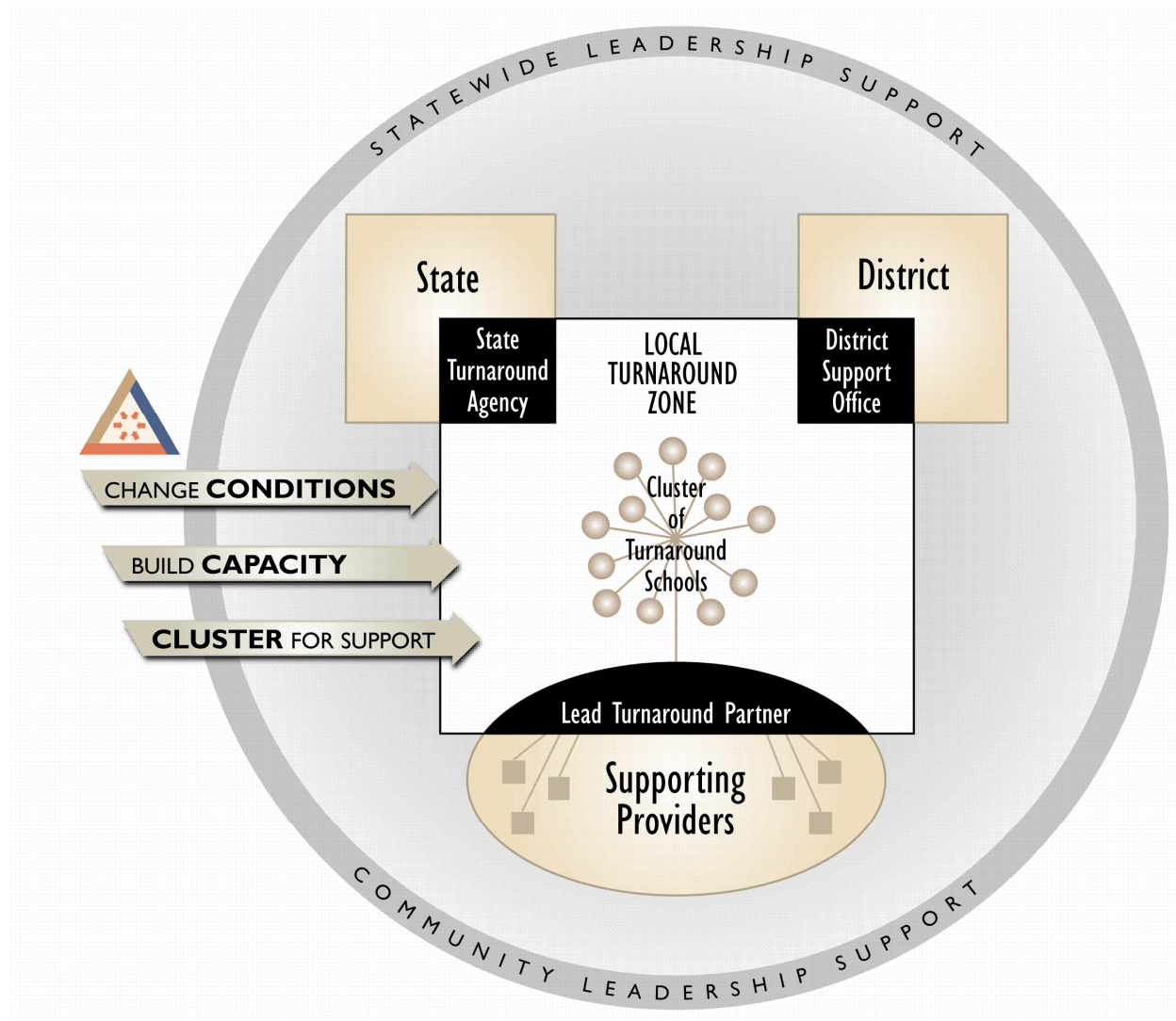
Effective turnaround at scale requires a transparent, deliberate blending of “loose” and “tight” in implementation and design. The changes in operating conditions outlined above are necessary to allow the people closest to the work to have a strong say in how it is done. The HPHP schools and turnaround exemplars vividly demonstrate the importance of school-based decision-making authority and school-wide commitment to reform. But leaving all decision-making authority up to the schools – as in the charter model – makes little sense in a turnaround context. In constructing a turnaround zone, states have the opportunity to blend “loose” design and implementation authority (i.e., providing latitude) and “tight” (controlling more systematically within the cluster, often through the application of leverage)¹⁹ in, for example, the following ways:

¹⁹ The loose-tight dynamic has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. See especially New Schools Venture Fund/Bridgespan (2007, funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), *Expanding the Supply of High Quality Schools*.

- “Loose” in allowing school/district leaders to develop their own turnaround plans; “tight” in insisting on certain essential elements and, in some cases, on requiring the assistance of an outside partner to produce the plan;
- “Loose” in extending to districts an opportunity to use altered conditions and additional resources to intervene successfully in their struggling schools; “tight” in holding them accountable for performance improvements within two years and reserving the ultimate authority to install alternate governance in the school on evidence of continued lack of improvement.

The same careful blending of loose and tight is relevant at the implementation level of turnaround, too; some functions (such as curriculum choices or HR recruiting and support) may be more effectively and efficiently managed at the network/cluster level, while others (such as teaching approaches or actual staff selection) are better left up to leaders at the school sites. For scale, efficiency, capacity-building, and effectiveness, states should differentiate their involvement in turnaround by the degree of local capacity. Some districts and schools are better equipped to undertake comprehensive turnaround – along the lines required by the state’s turnaround plan criteria – than others. Partly for reasons of scale and limited resources, partly to raise capacity for turnaround statewide, and partly on the principle of “loose” where authority has been earned and “tight” where it has not, states should match the degree of their involvement in the design and implementation of turnaround in inverse proportion to the degree of local capacity to undertake the work. Moreover, states can accomplish several aims by also opening up the turnaround zone to volunteer schools and districts ready to undertake “pre-emptive turnaround.” The volunteer schools represent an important way for states to scale up the impact of their turnaround zone. The whole point is to motivate districts and schools to undertake comprehensive turnaround themselves. The keys are the positive incentives in joining the turnaround zone – and the matching incentive to avoid the more unappealing alternative of deeper state management authority.

The Proposed Turnaround Framework: New Structures for States, Districts, and Providers



States, districts, and the outside provider community all need new organizational structures in order for turnaround work to succeed at scale. A turnaround “zone,” characterized by the three ‘C’ strategies, can provide the opportunity to develop those structures on behalf of a targeted group of schools where there is strong consensus for change. At the state and district level, turnaround management must have more operating flexibility than current structures tend to allow. Among providers, lead turnaround partners should work with districts and schools to integrate the too-often confusing array of projects, consultants, and related support from the state and community into a coherent, achievable turnaround strategy.

ORGANIZING THE STATE ROLE: WHAT IS REQUIRED TO ENABLE AN EFFECTIVE, STATE-LED TURNAROUND INITIATIVE?

An effective state-led turnaround initiative will require of the creation of a different kind of state agency to lead it, one with the freedom and authority to ensure that turnaround succeeds at scale. A visible agency within the Department of Education with a high-profile leader, or perhaps better, a special public/private authority (modeled, for example, on state

agencies that manage infrastructure or complex public works initiatives, or on the charter authorizing bureaus some states have created) would be well-positioned to recruit high-quality managers and to implement more effectively the various roles the state would play in organizing turnaround:

- Creating the changes in rules and regulations governing the work within these schools (i.e. to bring about the appropriate, enabling condition-set), rather than leaving these often difficult changes to local decision-makers and/or risking the fracturing of local stakeholder relationships over their implementation.
- Distributing targeted resources as appropriate and ensuring that local districts are investing at least their average per-pupil expenditure in these schools.
- Investing strategically in capacity development by supporting the development of:
 - School turnaround leadership as a discipline with a particular skill set.
 - A resource base of high-capacity providers to assist districts and schools.
- An improved pipeline of high-capacity, well-prepared educators over the long-term.
- Ensuring the quality of school turnaround plans and the capacity of the implementation team by providing models and monitoring the work.
- Building a framework and infrastructure to provide these supports that is unfettered by the regulatory and bureaucratic weights that sometimes handicap state government initiatives; that provides differentiated support based on the assessed needs of school districts with chronically under-performing schools and their capacity to undertake successful turnaround; and that can ensure that the work is scaled sufficiently to meet the statewide need.

Because under-performing schools have no natural constituency, advocates for turnaround must proactively build coalitions and leadership support at the state and community levels. Tough challenges require tough – and united – leadership. The state can and should play an active role in enabling scaled-up turnaround of chronically under-performing schools. The politics here are challenging, because under-performing schools have no natural constituency; parents and local leaders generally tend to shy away from the dramatic restructuring of traditional local schools. Turnaround advocates must therefore seek to create a statewide leadership coalition in their state

– one that conceivably includes the governor, legislative leaders, the chief state school officer, state board of education, urban superintendents, and leaders from the state’s foundation, nonprofit, higher-education, and business communities, as well as from the media. All of this is eminently plausible, because while there are plenty of devils in the details, the cause of school turnaround is propelled by three public policy “winners”:

- unquestionable social purpose: the mostly disadvantaged students in these schools deserve better.
- sound economic strategy: money invested in these schools, helping their students become contributing members of society, pays sizable dividends down the road.²⁰
- ironclad data: the incremental improvement strategies we’ve been trying have clearly not worked.

Now the question is: which states are ready to take a stand?

²⁰ See Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, *The Silent Epidemic* (2006), available at www.gatesfoundation.org, among other sources of data on this point.

PANEL II B

Turnaround Strategies and Attempts So Far

Seth Reynolds

The Parthenon Group

INTRODUCTION

With 5,000 schools likely to be in the final stage of NCLB accountability by 2010, the need to turnaround underperforming schools has never been more acute. While addressing these schools will be extremely difficult, there are examples of successful turnarounds of individual schools across the country. The challenge is now to bring those isolated successes to scale. While there are not yet any definitive solutions to scaling turnaround success, existing efforts have begun to illuminate some critical drivers of success.

In *The Turnaround Challenge*, Mass Insight Education proposes a set of frameworks and approaches to take turnaround work to scale. This paper examines how these approaches have played out in practice in the districts and states that have engaged in turnaround to date. By applying the Mass Insight framework to the actual experiences of these leading districts and their partners, education leaders can draw lessons to inform their approaches to the impending turnaround challenge, from defining their own strategy, to setting timeframes and expectations for success, and to making the necessary trade-offs and compromises that will inevitably be required.

First, a brief explanation of our methodology can frame what follows. In our research, we adopted Mass Insight's definition of "turnaround" as any strategy intended to significantly improve academic outcomes for substantially the same group of students within 2 years. That definition enables us to consider multiple turnaround approaches. These include: traditional "carve-out" districts or zones, close-and-replace approaches using internal district staff, close-and-replace approaches using external partners, and even expanded charter-like solutions.

Despite this relatively broad definition, and because turnaround at scale is still in its infancy, there remain limited examples of sustained strategies to study. To date, this type of work is limited primarily to major districts' attempts at turning around clusters of persistently failing schools. Fortunately, these examples can be instructive to future efforts both within and outside of the district context and therefore serve as case studies for how *The Turnaround Challenge* frameworks can play out in practice for both district-led and partner-led efforts. We reviewed the

following turnaround efforts, using detailed interviews with district leaders and analysis of district documentation to understand their approaches:

- Boston Superintendent’s Schools
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s Achievement Zone
- Chicago Renaissance2010
- Miami-Dade School Improvement Zone
- New York City – Chancellor’s District (1996-2002)
- New York City (2002-Present)

In each of these cases, the districts identified schools that were persistently underperforming and therefore were in need of turnaround. In other words, typical “improvement” efforts had failed to make a significant change in the underperformance of a group of schools, and the districts attempted to fundamentally change the approaches they took with them. While most of these efforts are too recent to have significant data on effectiveness, important observations and key implications emerge. In attempting fundamental change, each district employed elements of the frameworks in *The Turnaround Challenge*. Our objectives in this paper are to provide education leaders and policymakers with the market reality-based lessons around how to best implement the frameworks outlined in *The Turnaround Challenge*.

Two of these frameworks are particularly useful to consider. First, the High Performing High Poverty (HHP) Schools Readiness model highlights the elements required to ensure that HHP schools have the Readiness to Learn, to Teach, and to Act.²¹ As *The Turnaround Challenge* documented, the power of combining these HHP factors with strong school leadership to ensure coherence and effectiveness has been documented in many studies of effective-practice research.²² The critical question then becomes: how can leaders at all levels create situations that

²¹ Common elements found in HHP schools fall into three broad categories: Readiness to Learn (Safety, Discipline, & Engagement, Action Against Adversity, Close Student-Adult Relationships), Readiness to Teach (Shared Responsibility for Achievement, Personalization of Instruction, Professional Teaching Culture), and Readiness to Act (Resource Authority, Resource Ingenuity, Agility in the Face of Turbulence).

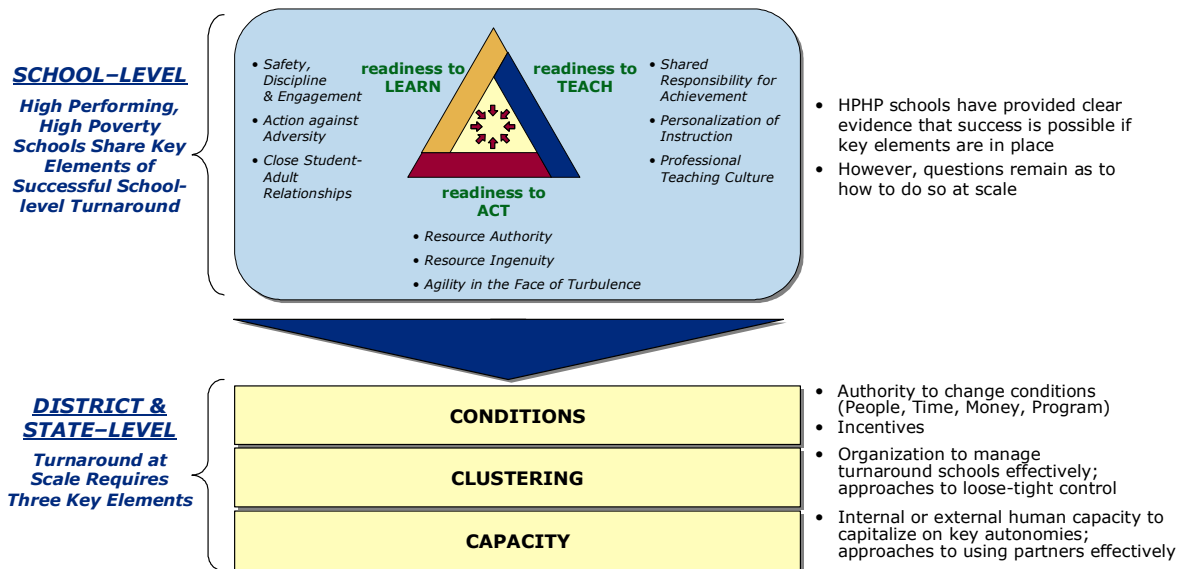
²² Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., and Lash, D., *The Turnaround Challenge*. Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007, p.39.

allow and encourage the transformation into and creation of more HPHP schools to meet the enormous challenge of turnarounds?

The second key framework in *The Turnaround Challenge* highlights three C’s – Conditions, Clustering, and Capacity – which provide a road-map to create environments to bring HPHP schools to scale. Specifically, leaders and policymakers must create the following:

- Authority to change **Conditions** such that strong school-level and network/district-level leaders can shape the underperforming school to meet the significant needs of its students.
- Effective **Clusters** to manage turnaround schools effectively, blending loose and tight control according to the specific context and leveraging scale to grow HPHP schools beyond one and two isolated success stories.
- Approaches to improve **Capacity** by bringing more and higher levels of talent to the schools and network / district.

Turnaround at Scale—Key Frameworks



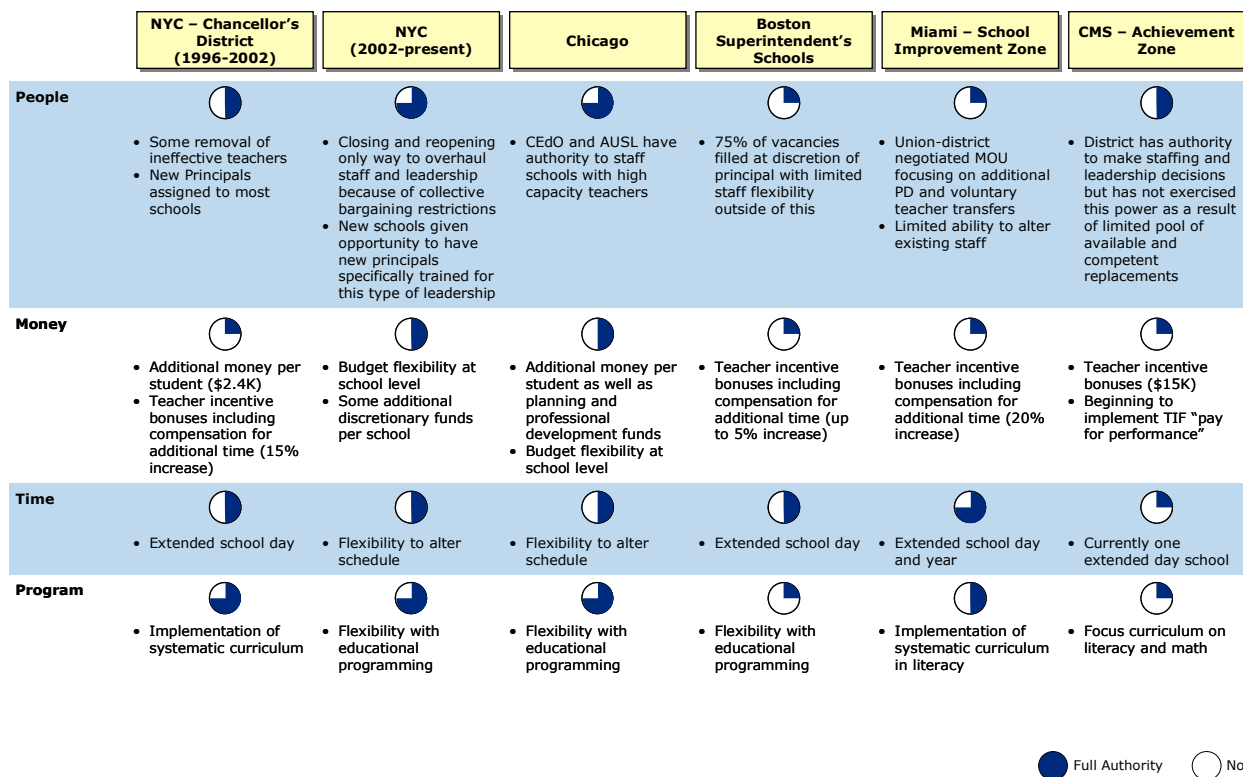
Achieving these school-level elements of successful schools requires a concerted effort on the part of the district or state in creating the conditions necessary for success, organizing and

managing the cluster or clusters of under-performing schools, and in building the capacity to handle the increased demands such an endeavor creates. We will go through each of these requirements in turn, using case studies of several leading school districts to exemplify the necessary steps and common pitfalls in the path of school districts attempting to confront the necessity of school turnaround.

CONDITIONS

The critical conditions that turnaround leaders must have authority on which to act fall into four key categories: People, Time, Money, and Program. In *The Turnaround Challenge*, Mass Insight expands on the importance of these conditions. However, while true turnaround requires threshold levels of these conditions, examining how districts employed these strategies reveals the difficulty in fully achieving authority over conditions in practice. The chart below provides an overview of how specific districts have achieved elements of the critical conditions.

Conditions—Authority to Control Key Factors



In practice, while many of the example districts were able to achieve significant authority over *program* and some authority over *time*, most have been less successful in achieving control over *people* and *budget*. In particular, it is interesting to note that the districts that achieved the greatest control over people in terms of the ability to truly shape the personnel in turnaround schools are New York City today and Chicago, both of which have a mayoral control governance structure, and, in Chicago's case, reasonably positive relationships with the union. In both of these cases, the turnaround strategy did not require a separate "carve-out" district, but rather fit into a broader district-wide improvement strategy. Instead of creating a separate zone within which to achieve key authorities, New York City and Chicago chose to "close & replace" with new schools, essentially achieving the ability to re-staff the schools to change the culture.

In Boston, Miami-Dade, and New York City's earlier initiative, the Chancellor's District, turnaround leaders responded to more challenging union and political situations by "carving out" the lowest performing schools to create a separate entity in which they could get some level of authority over the conditions. Nevertheless, despite creating the carve-out districts in the political and union environments they inhabited, these districts were unable to achieve significant control over people. In Boston, for example, they were only able to achieve the ability to control 75% of the vacancies, which did not address the existing staff, where significant change would be necessary to enable the district to create a new culture.

Interestingly, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which does not have collective bargaining agreements with its union, has actually achieved significant authority over people within its carve-out Achievement Zone. While they have not employed this authority broadly to date, in the Achievement Zone they have changed out administrators, reconstituted two high schools, and have begun interviewing and re-hiring teachers in one middle school. Of course, all districts then face the same practical challenge in these cases in that the ability to exercise authority over the people in the schools requires that they have a capable pool of people from which to draw to fill newly freed up positions. In speaking with various districts, one of the constraints in exercising any authority over people is due to concerns over supply of talented new staff. In order to ensure that authority over people can be effectively employed, turnaround leaders will need to carefully consider the incentives and talent pipelines that they put in place. In addition,

where districts do have the ability to change people in turnaround schools, they face the challenge of finding schools to send underperforming union teachers. In larger districts, this is less of a problem, but in the smaller districts, which lack slack in the system to absorb exiting teachers, it poses a much greater challenge.

In summary, failing to achieve threshold levels of authority over all four key conditions limits the likelihood of success of turnaround. However, the inability to select the people in the school seems to be the most critical factor, as it is difficult to achieve anything more than incremental gains while working within the constraints and limitations of the current staff, and, importantly, the culture which they create. Clearly not all teachers whose schools reach turnaround status are part of the problem, but the ability to evaluate and assess whether teachers and administrators are up to the challenge of turnaround work and to remove those who are not is key. Most people we interviewed were clear that this did not mean that wholesale change in all schools is the norm; rather, it is the ability to remove the small number of “culture killing” staff that impede efforts to change the way the school operated that is critical. While some of these districts are able to change people by virtue of self-selection of staff out of the schools, the pace at which that happens is incompatible with the process of turnaround at scale.

CLUSTERING

Given a district has a successful approach to achieving the necessary conditions of turnaround, consideration must be given to the organization and management of the turnaround schools. In most cases, districts group these schools into one or more “clusters”. These clusters may include schools managed directly by district staff as well as those managed by outside partner organizations. These partner organizations come from both the nonprofit and for-profit worlds and have a range of experiences in supporting school improvement efforts. Districts must decide how tightly to manage all of the elements of control, from professional development to student support. This dynamic of “loose-tight” management is critical to the nature of a turnaround effort. In the districts we examined, a “loose” model was the exception rather than the rule, and generally occurred in situations where the district had strong control over the conditions for success we’ve outlined: The chart below outlines specific districts’ approaches to decision-making authority between the district, school and outside partners.

Clustering—Approach to Decision-Making

NYC – Chancellor’s District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightly managed by Chancellor’s District office • District retains control over all elements of instruction and school management as well as people, time, money, programs and accountability
NYC – Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loosely managed by district • In a reversal of the Chancellor’s District approach, schools are given significant autonomy to make their own decisions regarding most elements of school operation • District tightly manages the school accountability process • Office of New Schools manages new schools as a cluster overseeing cross-functional district actions and policy
CPS – Partnership Turnaround	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loosely managed by district • CPS gives external partners managing turnaround charter-like authority over school operation, allowing them to implement their own school improvement plans • As with NYC, school accountability tightly managed by the district
CPS – Internal Turnaround	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightly managed by district • District has complete authority over teacher and principal hiring, as well as control over budget, scheduling and programmatic decisions
BPS – Superintendent Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightly managed by district • Other decision-making powers remain with the district • Discretion at the school and district level was constrained by limited authority given union position
Miami – School Improvement Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightly managed by district to circumvent school-based management organizations that thwarted broad changes • District mandated standard literacy programs
CMS – Achievement Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tight oversight from Achievement Zone level • Allows for school decision-making with district approval

Elements that lead to authority over people such as mayoral control (NYC) and a strong working relationship with a progressive teachers union (CPS) contributed to a district’s ability to manage their turnaround cluster more loosely. Additionally, more aggressive tactics such as close-and-replace in New York City were critical in establishing the conditions that allow for loose management. Interestingly, while Chicago manages one outside partner organization, the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), running many of its turnaround schools loosely and giving it significant levels of autonomy and authority, the partner itself manages schools very tightly, keeping a close grasp on the necessary conditions. In both of these districts, the loose turnaround management was part of a more broadly-defined district-wide reform strategy, as we have previously discussed.

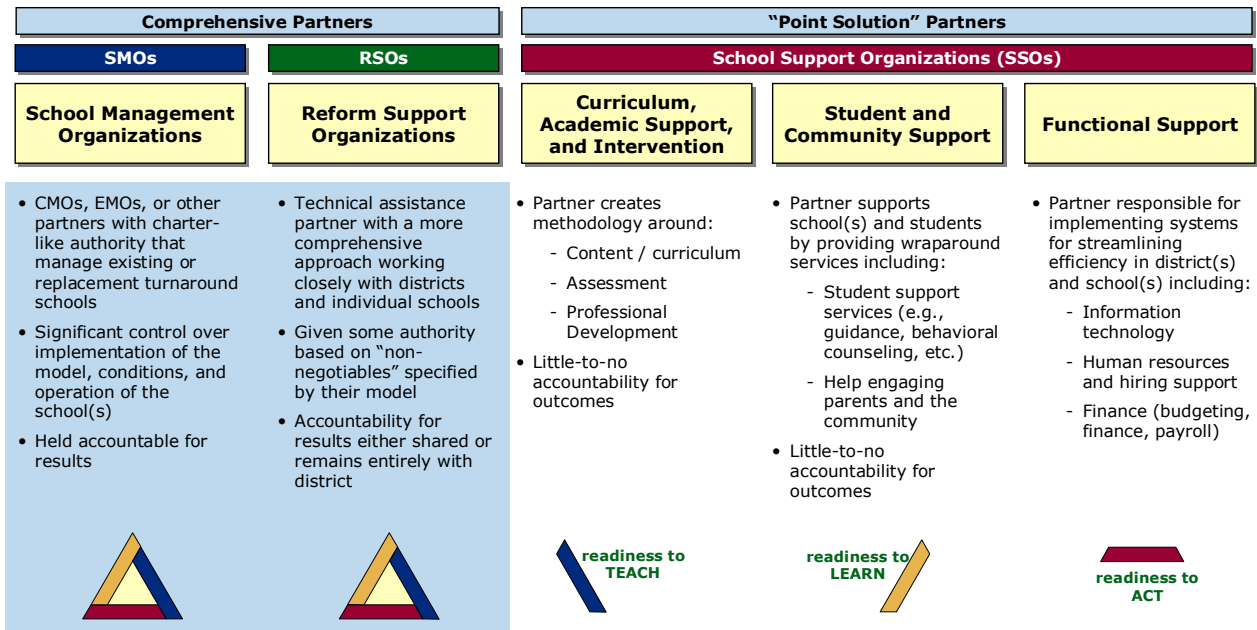
The other school districts tended to manage their turnaround clusters tightly: New York City (Chancellor's District – 1996-2002), Boston (Superintendent's Schools), and Miami-Dade (School Improvement Zone) all chose to be fairly tight in their management of the turnaround schools in their zones, particularly around programmatic approaches. In these situations, the districts appear to have been almost compelled to manage tightly, largely because of lack of control over the people in the schools.

Regardless of the loose or tight approach, most districts have created a distinct division reporting to the Superintendent or Chancellor to manage this work of transforming low performing schools. However, staffing decisions reflect very different mindsets. In the case of the carve-out zones, these offices tend to look similar to other existing local or area superintendents' offices. The positive aspect of this is that the offices report directly into the Superintendent or Chancellor, providing important authority to the office such that it can provide "air cover" for the turnaround schools. However, these offices tend to be staffed similarly to traditional area superintendent offices, which begs the question of how they will be able to drive results that are substantially different from "business-as-usual" in the district. In the case of Chicago, the Office of New Schools and the Chief Education Office (CEdO) have hired a mix of people with education, customer service, and project management experience that are not only strategic thinkers but are skilled at communication and data analysis. Chicago, along with New York City, is fairly unique in this approach to staffing, but other districts should consider adopting similar thinking in order to be effective turnaround leaders.

CAPACITY

As districts, states, and network leaders face the growing problem of chronically underperforming schools, they will need to look to external partners to bring in new talent and expertise to address the extreme challenges of limited resources and capacity. Too often, many districts do not have sufficient internal capacity to turnaround low performing schools at scale and outside partners offer expertise and the potential for this critical capacity. In fact, districts have heavily used partners or vendors for decades in a variety of supporting roles; the chart below examines the spectrum of partner involvement.

Partners—Wide Range of Potential Partners Exist



Typically, most partners/vendors provide services in just one area, as “point-solution” partners, with few providing comprehensive services that span content/curriculum, professional development and student support services. As a result, schools tend to have multiple partners providing services that are not coordinated or coherent. This type of situation is encapsulated in the example of an actual district, in which underperforming schools were served with seven new “improvement programs,” including four outside partners, each requiring the principal to use a different classroom observation rubric – the resulting confused and unfocused mess left that already challenged leader searching among the four different rubrics on her clipboard to do a simple classroom observation.

Rather than adding more and more of these “point-solution” improvement partners, districts would be well served to look towards more comprehensive, lead partners who will take on shared accountability and authority to drive turnaround in their lowest performing schools. While lead partners can take many different approaches to the work of turnaround, to be true lead partners they must take on some authority over the conditions at the school and some accountability for results – with specific, measurable targets and real consequences for meeting them or failing to do so. Chicago has been the boldest in using such partners, entrusting the

turnaround of multiple schools to outside partners such as AUSL through its Renaissance 2010 program. This approach requires a significantly different relationship between district, school, and partner, particularly around the level of authority afforded to the partner and the skill sets and management approaches of a district office that is now charged with procuring, managing, and coordinating outside resources as opposed to direct control of internal staff. It also requires a ready supply of potential lead partners, and to this point, there are significant gaps in terms of those partners capable *and* willing to take on the accountability for this work.

While there is a ready supply of what can be categorized as “point solutions”, there are very few true lead partners. School Management Organizations (SMOs) are the only true lead partners working today, and while they tend to be found more frequently in the charter space, there are increasing numbers of them willing to take on shared accountability and authority in turnaround situations as well, with the right agreements over conditions in place with the district. Nevertheless, there are still very few such organizations, and their bandwidth to take on sufficient schools to meet the impending challenge will continue to be limited. In addition, as more external organizations attempt to take on lead partner roles, this may in fact lead to greater levels of complexity associated with “sub-contractor” approaches, and models will need to be developed to manage inter-partner accountability to ensure that there is in place a functional dynamic that can produce results.

Reform Support Organizations (RSOs) are the most likely candidates to create additional capacity in the market by taking on lead partner authority/accountability given their fairly comprehensive focus on improving the whole school. Providers such as America’s Choice, Institute for Student Achievement and First Things First are currently partnering with districts to improve persistently underperforming schools. The relationships they have with districts and the schools they manage vary greatly, as does the level of control and accountability they hold. While their motivations likely also vary significantly, anecdotally they are signing on to work with turnaround schools because they present the greatest opportunity for significantly impacting student achievement. While they do incorporate some forms of mutual accountability into their agreements with districts, to date, they have stayed away from taking significant authority over the conditions within which their schools are operating. This is due to a firm belief among some

RSOs that building capacity with existing personnel is the only way they will create systemic change at scale – in other words, they need to improve the teachers that already work in these schools rather than replacing them in order to help the overall system improve. However, the lack of authority over key conditions, particularly around people, may undermine their ability to rapidly transform schools.

The fundamental challenge is finding middle ground for lead partners somewhere between SMOs that independently operate schools under charter-like conditions and RSOs that function more as lead consultants within existing structures. If we do not reach a point soon where charter-like conditions can be a reality for the majority of students in persistently underperforming schools, then finding this middle ground for RSOs willing to take on the authority and accountability for rapid, transformational results will be critical. The first step will be to persuade more districts that creating space for these kinds of partner relationships is not only acceptable but is imperative to success. The next step will require resisting the temptation to grow capacity too quickly, trying to address the needs of all schools by stretching existing internal and external partners too thin, potentially damaging the overall effort in the end.

CONCLUSION

Research on the current turnaround efforts at leading districts across the US illustrates a set of critical elements for success for turnaround at scale:

- Start with people. Changing the environment of an underperforming school through control over the people running that school is the most important component of successful turnaround.
- Additional authority over time, money and program continue to create a real environment for change and round out the necessary conditions for success.
- While there are different methods for creating and managing clusters of schools for turnaround, the critical components of this process lie in the clear delineation of authority and accountability up front, so that all parties are clear on their roles and responsibilities.
- Strong, capable outside partners with real experience managing and implementing turnaround (NOT incremental change) offer a clear path to sustained capability. True

lead turnaround partners will need to take on both accountability for student gains as well as the authority over the people and conditions in schools to achieve those gains.

- Turnaround efforts must be considered within the context of an ongoing, overall district reform strategy, and implemented as such.

PANEL III

Making Turnaround a Reality: Obstacles and Challenges

Douglas Sears

Boston University

The Boston University/Chelsea Public Schools Partnership was launched in a flood of publicity and controversy. Nearly twenty years later, I am occasionally asked, “So is BU still in Chelsea? That kind of...” And that’s when the question trails off with the implication that the Partnership didn’t work out. People are surprised to learn Boston University is still running the schools. The hardy souls who stuck around long after the glamour of publicity wore off tend to bristle, since they know what we found in Chelsea in 1989 and how much has been accomplished in a relatively short span of time. When people actually visit the schools today they are consistently amazed.

More than 5,500 students are enrolled in nine schools in the Chelsea Public Schools. Chelsea is a small, densely populated city just northeast of Boston. The most recent U.S. Census in 2000 indicated a total population of 35,080 but this figure likely omits significant numbers of unreported immigrants. In 1999 the median household income in Chelsea was \$30,161, with just over 20 percent of Chelsea families living below the poverty line. During the 2005-06 academic year, 78.7 percent of Chelsea’s school-aged children qualified for free or reduced-price lunches (compared to 27 percent of school-aged children statewide). Seventy-nine percent of children in the district come from homes where the primary language is not English.

Our contract with Chelsea stipulated that funding levels would remain at least level for the duration of the Partnership. Soon enough the City of Chelsea spiraled into total fiscal collapse. Boston University chose *not* to exercise our option to walk away. We stayed to implement massive changes in programs and personnel—and we reaped the negative political capital that attends such bloodletting exercises. It wasn’t until the City’s fiscal health returned and the state’s education funding formula changed—thanks to the Education Reform Act of 1993—that we were able to focus on what we wanted (and needed) to do in the first place. These goals included:

- rebuilding the physical plant from the ground up;
- creating a curriculum;
- institutionalizing sound daily operational practices;
- raising academic standards and improving student performance; and,

- bringing the district into compliance with innumerable state and federal regulations having to do with special education, fire and safety, bilingual education, and on and on.

The 1989 enabling legislation that authorized the Chelsea School Committee to delegate powers to Boston University identified 17 specific long-term goals for the Partnership, including:

- “Improve test scores for students in the school system;
- Increase the average daily student attendance rate; and,
- Decrease the dropout rate for students in the system.”

The goals were stipulated without accompanying benchmarks, in part because there were no effective record-keeping systems in place in Chelsea before the Partnership.

One of the ironies of our engagement is that the publicity surrounding Boston University’s “takeover”—and the fears it generated—led to refocused regulatory attention on the district. Through years of regulatory neglect, the district had been allowed to spiral into dysfunction. As a result, the early years of the Partnership saw a steady drumbeat of “gotcha” exercises by federal and state mid-level bureaucrats. These too, like the early budgetary challenges, had to be dealt with before we could focus on the work that really mattered.

What is it about Chelsea today that makes visitors so consistently amazed? We have an exemplary pre-K/kindergarten program that is so popular we have a steady policing challenge to keep non-residents from sneaking their children onto the wait lists and into the program. The buildings are beautiful. Materials are abundant. We’ve worked hard on security and staffing ratios are good. For those who believe that class size matters, classes range in size from the high teens to the mid-twenties.

What does all of this mean for children in the schools? It took us years to develop the necessary analytical and record-keeping capacity to do this, but we can now show that students who have a reasonably long run in the schools outperform students who come and go. I say students who

have a reasonably long run because our dominant demographic challenge has always been student mobility. Over the years the average mobility rate has been slightly under 33 percent—meaning that roughly a third of the students in the district leave in the course of an academic year, to be replaced by new or returning students.

We also know that in the various “value-added” studies that have been conducted—those which account for demographic and poverty phenomena—we have consistently been rated as strong. That is, we outperform most districts with similar challenges. But, because of the regulatory neglect of the district before the Partnership and the general disorder we inherited, we have the ironic problem that we don’t really know where we started. The state compelled Boston University to file an annual report on our work in Chelsea. It was my job to prepare these reports in the early days and I know now that the reports I put my name on were, at best, stabs in the dark. The pre-ed reform absence of state tests meant that there was no consistent measure of academic achievement. But we do know that from the mid-1990s—the approximate point at which we began to get a handle on data collection and management—we can document significant academic progress. SAT average scores have increased from an average of 727 in 1994–95 (after the re-centering) to 896 in 2006–07. From the first administration of the third grade Iowa literacy tests in 1997 we have seen significant gains—from 33 to 57 for this past year in reading comprehension, for example. We have made big inroads on the dropout rate, with the caveat that the annual dropout calculation that the Commonwealth requires doesn’t fully account for attrition over four years. It would take a full paper to explain the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the testing regime by which progress is made under the No Child Left Behind guidelines. For those who have followed this more closely, the gist of a review of MCAS performance is that the Chelsea district made its Annual Yearly Progress benchmarks overall with caveats for subgroups.

But, these tangible measures of progress notwithstanding, I would say that for those of us who have worked on this project for the better part of two decades, there is a poignant “What if?” or “What might have been...” undertone to our conversations and even our silent reflections. Far too many of the children in our care continue to fall into the various test categories that bespeak underperformance. Extraordinary amounts of time and money have gone into these schools and it

is frustrating and disheartening that we couldn't make a bigger dent than we did. Because these "What if's" provide interesting and relevant fodder for discussions about how to turn failing schools around, I've come up with a list of things that worked and things that didn't work—and things I would have liked to have had over the last twenty years in Chelsea.

PRACTICES AND POLICIES THAT WORKED

- 1) **Clearly Defined Roles and Responsibilities:** The partnership contract between Boston University and the Chelsea School Committee clearly defined and separated oversight and day-to-day management responsibilities. All management functions typically vested by state law and local law in a school committee or school board were granted to Boston University. The University, in turn, delegated personnel decisions to the superintendent and principals. The Management Team—which was created by the University to function as the equivalent of a school board—got out of and stayed out of the personnel business. The partnership contract provided the Chelsea School Committee a reserved power to override Boston University on “educational policy matters affecting the district as a whole”—a provision sufficiently general as to discourage frequent meddling. While none of the “founding” documents provided for accountability benchmarks, there were extensive reporting requirements at the both the state and local levels.

- 2) **Negotiated Contracts:** Boston University brought extensive labor and negotiating experience to the table. We assigned a lawyer to the partnership team who had worked for the Chancellor of the New York City schools and who was able to spend significant time on the Chelsea work. The primary labor negotiator was the University's personnel chief—who had previously headed personnel for the Boston Public Schools. The effect of this mobilization of experience has been twenty years of labor stability. More importantly, we were able to calmly and professionally negotiate for adjustments in working conditions that were directly tied to our educational priorities. And structural decisions about money that, if poorly understood and negotiated, can lead to budget deficits were avoided. (This financial provision is not trivial. Small school districts in Massachusetts can find themselves in deep trouble because honoring the legitimately negotiated provisions of a contract can lead to an unanticipated budget shortfall.

Carelessness about the components of a contract—seniority increases for teachers at grade and salary levels, for example—can have highly differentiated compounded effects over time, depending on how big they are and how and when they are implemented. Experienced labor negotiators who work closely with financial officers can avoid these pitfalls.)

- 3) **Sound Fiscal and Operating Practices:** The University assigned experienced fiscal and accounting personnel to the Chelsea Project from the outset in 1989. These individuals were instrumental in diagnosing the fiscal and operational woes of the school district—and the City of Chelsea—and in building a new business operation with sound, modern procedures and controls. We have had twenty years of budget stability—no deficits—through years of flush state budgets and through financial downturns. These days the University exercises only very light oversight over the district’s budget because the Chelsea business and finance operations are so sound. The University also operationalized the insight (or principle) that school committees should serve and approve an overall budget and set clearly defined educational priorities, rather than budget line by line. Avoiding debates about whether Principal X needed three or four cases of Number Two pencils produced both operational and political benefits.
- 4) **Private Development:** The University created a fundraising entity called A Different September Foundation (ADSF), which was based at BU but functionally separate, to augment the public budget with private donations. We raised more than \$11 million in private funds through this entity. As we prepare to move into the post-Partnership era, Chelsea is establishing its own development operation, building on the model of ADSF.
- 5) **Discretionary Accounts:** The University has consistently provided superintendents with discretionary accounts. This was a private sector reflex. The power of relatively modest but unrestricted budgets proved to be immense. The ability of a superintendent to fix an immediate problem with a prompt expenditure is politically and operationally critical. In Massachusetts, superintendents are frequently held hostage by school committees for tiny outlays that in the private sector would be seen as (a) small, (b) necessary, and (c) utterly

obvious and not worthy of more than ten minutes' discussion. I used discretionary funds to support intensive summer language training for a number of teachers who wanted to improve their command of Spanish, for example. Once, when I found myself caught in a politically inspired (and time-sapping) dispute about a fire door—and didn't have time for a drawn out argument about whether the code was being interpreted correctly—I simply bought a new door.

- 6) **Alternative Certification:** The Partnership made extensive use of the Massachusetts alternative certification rules (part of the Education Reform Act of 1993) to secure licensure for senior administrators and teachers. The alternative path is not a panacea but, at the simplest level, it expands the pool of interesting and capable candidates for key positions. Some of the nontraditional recruits do not always work out, but many others succeed in interesting and instructive ways.

PRACTICES AND POLICIES THAT DIDN'T WORK

- 1) **Letting a Hundred Flowers Bloom:** The University's involvement started in a rush of enthusiasm and excitement. Too many people with contradictory ideas and marching orders were allowed to have a presence in the schools. The fourth BU superintendent—in a rapid succession—had the unpleasant task of disciplining the University's over-engagement. The early exuberance led to contradictions between or among various educational or curricular philosophies, as well as an unmanageable amount of complexity. There were literally too many different programs and too many people running around. We sent conflicting messages to schools. For instance, the University's president explicitly stated that we were to teach phonics. Literacy professors insisted phonics were being taught "in context"—which turned out to be code for something closer to whole language. Teachers and principals in Chelsea were caught in the middle.
- 2) **Pay for Performance:** The public school labor model is a profound obstacle to change. We tried repeatedly to implement some form of merit pay and failed in the face of obdurate, entrenched resistance. (We do, in fact, have lead teacher positions that are a form of merit but, in my view, these do not really approximate the essential idea of

merit.) Rewarding performance is essential and the public school labor model does not provide sufficient flexibility to do this. A related flaw in the model is the blindness to supply and demand. We talk endlessly about shortages of qualified math and science teachers. An answer would be to let the market help recruit teachers. As Boston University first began its work in Chelsea, we accepted the immutability of the conventional public school labor model and we worked within it. We had no other option given the political landscape in 1989. But if I had to name one obstacle that proved huge and rarely surmountable, it would be the labor model.

- 3) **Bad Ideas:** In addition to the problem that arises from incoherence or contradiction in educational philosophy, it is important to point out that there are a lot of bad ideas in the realm of public education—many of them generated in institutions of higher education. These include constructivist math, critical thinking, collaborative learning, whole language, individualized instruction, multiple intelligence, balanced literacy, child-centered learning, scaffolding, self-esteem, small learning communities, invented spelling, authentic assessment, bilingual education, and the relentless disparagement of drill, practice, and memory. These ideas generally collapse sooner or later because of their own weight or vagueness, but they encumber the work of reform because the gravitational pull of the jargon is inexplicably strong. Our new high school was designed around an early variant of the small learning communities idea. We spotted the error and made mid-course corrections—but were stuck with a silly building design to which we have had to make after-the-fact modifications. I’m still embarrassed and annoyed with myself that I didn’t act earlier on my “Emperor’s New Clothes” reflex. We developed a new criterion for judging programs and initiatives: “If there’s no work in it, it won’t work”—meaning that anything that doesn’t require hard work probably isn’t sound. And we learned to ask what we would want for our own children. But the congeries of prejudices and practices that fall under the general heading of “Deweyan Progressivism” are a sea anchor impeding the advancement of children in our society.

I feel constrained to be emphatic on this point. None of these ideas has educational value. Behind each one is an ancient fallacy or a political agenda or the enduring hope

that it is possible to speak German by feeling it—with the book under the pillow. We can make all kinds of structural reforms, but if we continue to believe that education isn't about accumulating information or developing practiced powers of mind, we will fail. This is something I am learning about first hand in my work with the Boston schools. Pilot status confers some advantages but doesn't inoculate against bad ideas.

- 4) **Micro-regulation and Over-regulation:** Stipulating that the Tenth Amendment reserves authority in education to states, we found ourselves under constant, chronic, and contradictory scrutiny. The sheer labor time invested in managing the various regulatory visits was, ultimately, time stolen from improving instruction. Regulatory attention was too focused on means, and not focused enough on ends. And, the recommended or prescribed corrections were often counterproductive. (The antidote to fifty years of Deweyan progressivism isn't more of the same.)

We still talk about the time when two different state entities insisted on the superintendent's appearance at the same time on the same day. Even though the two organizations (the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and the Department of Education) did, in fact, talk to each other, we and they couldn't produce a resolution. Frequent and uncoordinated audits and reviewing visits to our district wasted countless hours, not least of all because the teams came with conflicting or ambiguous agendas. And, to be very candid, were composed of people who happened to be available for part-time work. And worse, who had in a couple of cases been relieved of employment in our district.

- 5) **Authentic Assessment:** We should have committed early on to a robust program of standardized testing that would have given us a better understanding of where we were as a district and where individual students were academically. When the state mandated the third grade Iowa reading test, we were stunned by our results. We wouldn't have been if we had heeded the advice of one of my predecessors, John Gawrys, who promoted standardized testing before it was required by the Commonwealth. I think that George Shultz's enduring arms control dictum—"Trust, but verify"—resonates in this context.

Any structural reforms that are not attached to mandated regimes of standardized testing—that is, testing which demands that students know things and be able to perform (ideally under time constraints)—will fail. The predisposition in the industry towards softer forms of assessment is strong but it should be resisted: absent an externally mandated regime, schools will drift toward the easier default.

IF WE WERE STARTING OVER, IT WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE:

- 1. Pilot Status for the District:** If we were inclined once again to subject Boston University to the exposure and risk associated with running a school district, I would adamantly advise our president to negotiate for some kind of zone or pilot status that would provide for management flexibility in personnel and budget matters. This would mean reasonable capacity to assign personnel where needed, clear authority in hiring and firing, and the possibility to use compensation to reward performance and attract teachers in areas where there are shortages by providing financial incentives. I would also advise negotiating for reasonable flexibility in management of time. Superintendents and principals need to be able to use the time in the school day to the best instructional advantage. It is important to elaborate (or reemphasize) that “pilot status” cannot mean the kind of status that Massachusetts law provides, by which, in essence, a school is turned over to a local committee and where the temptation is to do more of what hasn’t worked and there is a loss of management control.
- 2. State-Mandated Testing:** A high-stakes testing regime landed on us in the mid-nineties. It was painful, but it put an end to our own fruitless discussions about assessment and gave us increasingly clear and useful information. We could see where we stood in comparison to other districts. It took time, but the Massachusetts Board of Education improved the curriculum frameworks and aligned the state testing with the curriculum frameworks. We could have used this pressure and the accompanying assistance early on in the partnership.
- 3. No Child Left Behind:** Notwithstanding the constant cry that it constituted an unfunded mandate, NCLB steered serious money into literacy, accompanied by sound ideas about

how to use the money. Reid Lyon and Company helped us produce real gains in elementary literacy. The requirement that test data for subgroups be disaggregated and that there be accountability for performance, as awkward as it seemed at first, forced a concentration on where we might be failing children. And the demand for annual yearly progress forced an acceleration of effort and activity.

4. **Rational Regulation, Focused on Ends Not Means:** There is sufficient room for malfeasance and misfeasance in school districts that it is essential to have state oversight and regular audits of programs. But, as I said a moment ago, regulatory regimes that consume vast amounts of management time work *against* student achievement. The most important regulatory mechanisms are financial audits and mandated achievement testing.

5. **The support of the *Boston Globe* and the community of education reform activists.** The early days of the Partnership were characterized by active hostility from the community of education activists and advocates who colluded with the *Globe* and midlevel regulators to impede our progress. This sounds strong, but it is true. One of the most vivid examples was a civil rights complaint filed with the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education. Boston University was named in a discrimination complaint about a regional vocational school over which we had absolutely no control, jurisdiction, or authority, and the *Globe* was given advance knowledge that a complaint would be filed. We spent weeks defending ourselves against a completely fraudulent claim. This sort of thing was commonplace in the early years of our work. I am still amazed by the absurdity of the complaint that we can't vouch for the early data about Chelsea's performance. We offered, as a charitable act, to rescue a failed district. Among its failures was its record-keeping. We wouldn't have had to rebuild basic systems in Wellesley had we offered to run the Wellesley schools. But we're not sure what the point would have been in helping a suburban district.

CONCLUSION

Because we walked into a fiscal meltdown, Boston University was confronted not only with the immediate educational challenges that typify any urban district, but a budgetary train wreck. We had no choice but to perform triage. And we couldn't begin to make an educational difference until the funding picture brightened and we'd achieved some operational stability.

Superintendents and principals—not to mention classroom teachers—crave operational stability. Turnaround cannot be accomplished under a condition of chaos.

We struggled—and continue to struggle—with the prevailing labor model. Management flexibility in personnel matters is essential to any turnaround.

We struggled—and continue to struggle—with over- and micro-regulation. I came to know two commissioners of education quite well over the course of the Chelsea Partnership. Once they realized we were serious and conscientious in our work, they were admirably willing to run interference with overzealous and misdirected bureaucrats—and to endure sometimes intemperate phone calls and emails as a result. But far too much time went into coping.

Boston University brought extraordinary depth of experience to Chelsea in budgetary, personnel, and logistical matters. The scale of the University relative to the City meant that for key challenges we were able to provide targeted help relatively easily and without delay. There is a long list of useful, helpful things the University did in Chelsea that were well outside the scope of our agreement, but which contributed to the improvement of both the schools and the City. These included: snow plowing, restoring the Town Hall computers systems after a massive meltdown, volunteers to support the move from old to new buildings, loans of short-term use cell phones, and an improvised bus service for our early learning center when a vendor failed to provide service (this last feat was cobbled together by operations staff from our medical campus over a weekend). We developed the useful capacity to secure alternative licensure for capable individuals who served as teachers, administrators, and directors. Changing the political culture of the district required some tough fights—having an experienced lawyer helped immensely.

You would think that we would have brought extraordinary capacity in curriculum and instruction. We did, but we also brought some of the weaker ideas that have been developed in higher education. And we brought confusion. This was sorted out over time, but there's a cautionary tale to be read in our early experiences.

A partnership that began in 1989 and was intended to last ten years will conclude June 30, 2008. Those who stopped following the partnership in the news during the early years—when stories about our efforts all began with the “C” word: controversial—are surprised to learn that the community has twice asked the University to extend its agreement. Both extensions were affirmed by unanimous votes by the Chelsea School Committee. The current superintendent, a Boston University appointee, will continue to serve after June 30 at the behest of the Chelsea School Committee, as a Chelsea employee.

We will remain present and engaged in Chelsea, continuing some of the supports we have provided, including full tuition scholarships for Chelsea High graduates. One of our “good news, bad news” stories is that in recent years several graduates have turned down these scholarships, because they've been admitted to Ivy League schools. The University officials who were once caustically described as “suits” are still easy to spot on the streets of Chelsea, but they are known and liked.

Over time, our oversight has lightened steadily. Had we thought to do so, we might have measured phone traffic between the University and Chelsea over the past decade to show how the managerial center of gravity has shifted to where it must belong.

I don't know which analogy best applies—Dumbo learning to fly or training wheels coming off a bicycle. But the schools in Chelsea have been run from City Hall for much longer than any of us has realized. The transition has been gentle, seamless, and virtually unnoticed. And that may be the Partnerships' greatest accomplishment.

PANEL IV

NCLB's Impact on Turnarounds: A Policymaker's Perspective

Nancy Grasmick

Maryland State Superintendent of Schools

NCLB'S IMPACT ON SCHOOL TURNAROUND AT THE STATE AND DISTRICT LEVELS

Before the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed in 2002, had you asked any state or district leader about school-turnaround or school-improvement strategies, you would likely have received one of two responses: 1) a laundry list of initiatives and activities that may (or may not) be coordinated and that may (or may not) be linked to clear outcomes, or 2) an earnest statement resembling “*Everything* we do is focused on school improvement.”

Since NCLB, things have changed. While many states and districts were already implementing standards-based reform with an eye toward improvement, others were thereafter compelled to do so. NCLB created a greater sense of urgency about school improvement, about helping historically underserved students and their schools, and about closing achievement gaps. NCLB also created a broad framework with which to structure improvement efforts. The law provided states and districts a system for identifying which schools are most in need of improvement; clearer outcomes needing to be achieved; and a limited list of strategies to use as a starting point for improvement efforts.

NCLB has moved the dialogue about school improvement forward, but it's still up to states and districts to decide exactly *how* schools will be improved, and what systems, staff, and processes will guide the transformation. The biggest challenge is turning around chronically underperforming schools that have already advanced to NCLB's Restructuring stage. These schools have missed performance targets for at least five years and, frequently, for many different subgroups of students.

Of course, the problem of chronic school failure exists regardless of NCLB, but the law significantly affects how states and districts go about addressing the problem. Three aspects of the law have garnered a lot of attention and prompted conversations nationwide about goals and resources—and, perhaps most keenly, about leveraging the latter to achieve the former.

1) Identification of Schools

School improvement begins, of course, with identifying the schools that need it. NCLB clearly defines the identification criteria. But one must ask whether NCLB identifies the *right* schools

for intensive focus—whether the law differentiates sufficiently among struggling schools. Under the current system, a school that misses one performance target is treated exactly the same as one that misses ten. Clearly, the magnitude of the problem in one school is much larger than in the other. And it stands to reason that the reaction should be proportionate to the problem.

Accordingly, at least one draft version of NCLB's reauthorization includes a means for categorizing improvement-eligible schools based on the severity of their needs. For example, in the draft by Representative George Miller, schools would be labeled either "Priority" or "High Priority," depending upon the number of subgroups failing to meet Annual Measurable Objectives, and—based on the label—would have a different range of interventions prescribed.

Prioritizing schools identified for improvement is critically important because resources for assistance are limited. Resource scarcity causes another concern regarding school identification: NCLB's undifferentiated identification criteria could result in too many schools joining the improvement rolls, thus diluting the turnaround strategies' effectiveness. Under NCLB, Annual Measurable Objectives rise every year until 2014, when *all* students must be proficient in reading and math. Given the rising standards and ultimate 100 percent proficiency goal, it's virtually impossible to contend that the number of identified schools will do anything but climb—if not explode—over the next half-dozen years. Several states have more than 500 schools identified for improvement. In such cases, one must ask if services are being spread too thinly to be effective, especially when state budgets are rapidly shrinking. Can meaningful help be given to that many schools or, in smaller states, to 40 percent or 50 percent of schools? It seems unlikely.

Expanding the use of growth models in states may decrease the number of schools missing Adequate Yearly Progress, but growth models, in fact, pose their own problems. States would have to decide for themselves how much improvement is *enough* improvement and—without substantial changes to the law—they would *still* bump up against 2014's 100 percent proficiency goal.

Finally, one can reasonably ask whether the schedule that triggers different responses under NCLB is appropriate. For example, school choice and supplemental educational services may be insufficient to effect change in schools with significant need. Perhaps some schools in Corrective

Action would benefit from more sweeping changes (more quickly enacted) if it's likely they will end up in Restructuring a few years down the road.

While a more nuanced School Improvement system that differentiates schools according to real need rather than broadly drawn parameters could be difficult to construct, more students and more schools would be better served by it. There isn't a simple calculus by which to determine absolutely which schools need the most attention, but it is reasonable to assume that the scope and type of problems a school faces is *at least* as important as how long those problems have existed.

2) The Right Tools for the Job

Even with the “right” schools identified, states and districts are struggling with developing effective ways to turn these schools around—especially schools in Restructuring. NCLB requires that schools in Restructuring implement at least one of the following measures:

- Reopen the school as a public charter school;
- Replace all or most of the school staff;
- Contract with an outside entity to operate the school;
- Turn the operation of the school over to the state education agency; or,
- Implement any other major restructuring action that effects fundamental reform.

This list of options has significant limitations. For instance, in some states, charter-school laws are fairly restrictive; in others, state education agencies are prevented by state law from taking over schools. Perhaps to compensate for these obstacles, there's the “other major restructuring” option, which is vague enough to allow minor changes to satisfy the NCLB requirement. For example, districts commonly hire “turnaround specialists” to meet the restructuring requirement, but these specialists are not generally regulated, nor do they have a specific, demonstrable set of skills or qualifications that justifies their employment. In fact, given turnaround specialists' lack of demonstrated success, Maryland no longer allows failing schools to choose this option for their Restructuring plans.

The lack of knowledge about how to effectively turn a failing school around is not the fault of the federal government. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education developed and supports the What Works Clearinghouse, giving educators and policymakers a centralized source of ideas and programs that have met high standards of evidence of success. But in the end, very little research exists on how to bring about real sea change in schools.

Certainly, no one is suggesting that NCLB's twin goals of closing achievement gaps between students and supporting high performance among all students are the wrong ones or that the proposed strategies for meeting them are off course. In fact, it's likely that *some* of the strategies suggested under No Child Left Behind will be effective in *some* schools. For example, planning for Restructuring may provide schools and staff a sense of mission, streamline and intensify their focus, and give them an impetus to analyze strengths and weaknesses—all of which help schools that are basically sound succeed. Again, the issue is appropriate differentiation among schools: What are the right tools for *this* school, and will those strategies work in a reasonable time frame?

Given Maryland's 15-year history of school reform and accountability, the state has plenty of experience with comprehensive reform models. We know that comprehensive reform takes time to implement well—that is, in a way that permanently improves outcomes. Unfortunately, under NCLB, states don't *have* a lot of time, nor do the students attending the persistently failing schools that the law aims to help. Therefore, states need not only more and better research into what works, but also appropriate ways to gauge what's *not* working in a school—an assessment derived not just from students' test results but also from thorough analyses of school-level functions such as resource allocation, the quality of classroom instruction, and the capacity to use data to inform that instruction.

All these caveats and impediments to change notwithstanding, it's still incumbent upon states and districts to make sure that change *happens*. Clearly, there's no infallible strategy or even sequence of them. In fact, a study of Michigan schools conducted by the Center on Education Policy found that it wasn't any *one* strategy that made the difference in restructured schools but rather the *number* of strategies in which a school was engaged.

3) Reorganizing the Work of States and Districts

The No Child Left Behind Act asks that schools reorganize what they do around student achievement. States and districts must do the same. This requires examining exactly what's done out of habit—not for cause—and, in the process, asking some tough questions about roles and responsibilities, boundaries and collaboration.

- Can we get rid of the silos in which various services are organized, and work holistically and in a coordinated fashion to help schools?
- Can we agree on what districts do best and what states do best so that our roles are clear, so that there's less duplication of effort, and so that we make the most of our strengths?
- Can we better target our resources to the important leverage points?
- Can we get out of the way and not over-manage the process when our partners in the task are doing good work?

These were the questions that guided the early development of Maryland's Breakthrough Center, a reorganization of how the state supports schools and districts in need of improvement. The Breakthrough Center requires coordinating efforts across divisions within the state education agency; deploying resources consistent with need; employing strategies that have a direct impact on student and school performance; and holding schools and districts to established measures of effectiveness. The Breakthrough Center, still in development, is predicated on some essential—and, for us, novel—activities:

- Creating space and organizational structures at the state education agency so that we can coordinate and broker our services and external agencies' services to districts and schools in Improvement as well as those seeking continuous improvement.
- Capitalizing on existing and potential partnerships with local school systems, with government agencies, and with private industry to develop content, maximize technology, and access human capital that will improve outcomes for teachers and students.

- Providing incentives to districts for participation in or contributions to the Breakthrough Center (for example, *quid pro quo* arrangements for Center involvement, and revenue-generating opportunities for service or program contributions).
- Advising on the strategic placement of programs and people in districts to address identified challenges and replicate successful efforts.

LOOKING ACROSS STATES' SYSTEMS OF SCHOOL SUPPORT

Mass Insight's vantage point allows it to go beyond state-specific systems and examine several states' efforts to turn schools around. What the organization found is that state interventions for school turnaround appear to lack four fundamental features, which are outlined in *The Turnaround Challenge*. While I may not agree that each shortcoming identified by Mass Insight is, indeed, a pervasive one, the group's observations can initiate an important national dialogue about school turnaround, and they therefore deserve our attention.

- **Sufficient intensity, comprehensiveness, and sustainability.** States don't focus on operating conditions within schools. Staff development is limited rather than a thoughtful, comprehensive professional-development strategy. States don't take advantage of the commonalities among schools to develop strategies that could be used in many settings. Strategies for changes in schools are not mirrored in strategies focused on districts.
- **Incentives powerful enough to drive major change.** States don't go far enough in establishing their own aggressive outcomes for schools—outcomes that carry real consequences. When there *are* consequences, there isn't enough emphasis on positive incentives to encourage buy-in to reform efforts.
- **Strong public- and private-sector commitment to turnaround.** Unlike the collaborative climate that characterized the broader standards-based reform effort, businesses and community groups have not been engaged in the issue of school turnaround.
- **Willingness to think outside of the box regarding management of the initiative.** Generally, turnaround efforts are incorporated into existing educational structures

rather than independently established as a new structure whose sole function is school turnaround.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NCLB REAUTHORIZATION

I have raised several points of consideration as NCLB reauthorization approaches—based on my experiences as a state policymaker. Mass Insight, too, offers its take on turnaround principles, policy, and practice—based on a broader, cross-state view.

In a recent U.S. Senate HELP Committee policy briefing taken directly from earlier testimony, the group outlines five recommendations for improving school turnaround efforts. The recommendations are reprinted here directly from the testimony. While I don't necessarily agree that these principles are best addressed by federal changes—or even that each change is necessary—Mass Insight's suggestions do add to the conversation about next steps.

1) Recognizing the Nature of the Change Required

There is now a very substantial research base demonstrating that incremental school improvement strategies will not significantly increase achievement in high-poverty, high-challenge, chronically failing schools. The success models—high-performing, high-poverty schools—tend to operate quite differently from traditional public schools. *The goal of public policy on failing-school intervention must be to spur fundamental, dramatic change that addresses the dysfunctions of the status quo, produces significant improvement within two years, and readies the school to grow into a high-performance organization.*

2) Recognizing Turnaround as a Discipline

Turnaround should be viewed within education, as it is in other sectors, as a distinct professional discipline that requires specialized experience, training, resources, and support. The average school principal is not adequately trained to resolve such a multitude of dysfunction, from restructured budgets and service integration with social services to HR reengineering (not to mention instructional change) in the compressed time frame required for a turnaround. District administrators are generally not skilled in organizational strategy, change management, or in effective contracting and procurement. *Federal policy should support the development and*

application of specialized turnaround capacity within schools and districts and among external partner organizations.

3) Changing Operating Conditions

Turnaround requires protected space that offers leaders the authority to make mission-directed decisions regarding staff, schedule, budget, and program, and dismantles common barriers including inflexible contract and compliance requirements. Chronically under-performing schools offer a politically defensible opportunity to create such a space. A few entrepreneurial school districts (Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York) have created such condition-changing zones for their neediest schools. But most others need intervention from the state to mount similar initiatives. States should pass regulations that create sufficient leverage for all district leaders to develop the protected space they need for turnaround to be effective. The best regulations transform the incentives for local stakeholders, motivating the development of turnaround zones in order to gain their advantages—and avoid “final option” alternatives that greatly diminish district and union control. *Federal policy should provide incentives—both positive and sanction-oriented—that catalyze such state policy and that encourage union/district/state bargaining on behalf of these specialized zones.*

4) Building the Capacity of Lead Turnaround Partners

Schools don't turn themselves around, and neither states nor districts nor outside partners have adequate staff and funding to make turnaround successful. But turnaround demands skillful change management at the ground level. States, districts, and foundations must develop a new resource base of external, lead turnaround partners to integrate multiple services in support of clusters of turnaround schools. *Federal policy should provide incentives for states to develop this kind of approach.*

5) Clustering for Support

Turnaround at scale cannot be accomplished in ones and twos. States and districts should undertake turnaround in clusters organized around identified needs: by school type (e.g., middle schools or grade 6-12 academies), student characteristics (very high ELL percentages), feeder patterns (elementary to middle to high school) or by region. Clusters should be small enough to

operate effectively as networks, but large enough to be an enterprise—i.e., to provide valuable, efficient support from the network center. School turnaround is also expensive. Neither states nor the federal government have the resources to turn around 5,000 schools at once. *Federal policy should provide resources and set criteria for turnaround that prompts more proactive state (and therefore district) response, beginning with pilot programs funded on a competitive basis.*

This debate over school improvement and school turnaround—and dozens of similar ones now amplified in advance of NCLB’s reauthorization—will ultimately move us closer to the law’s bottom-line goals of improving achievement among all students and closing the gaps that separate them. As a nation, we have come tremendously far in the six years since the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law. Clearly, we still have far to go. But with more research into what works and what doesn’t with regard to school turnaround, with more states stringently exercising best practices, and with a rededication to profound organizational change in the pursuit of performance improvement, we will better serve the schools and students who need our help the most.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Andrew Calkins is the senior vice president of the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, an independent, Boston-based nonprofit focused on using higher standards reform to improve student achievement. Mr. Calkins coauthored *The Turnaround Challenge: Why America's Best Opportunity to Dramatically Improve Student Achievement Lies in Our Worst-Performing Schools* (Mass Insight, 2007), part of a larger initiative by Mass Insight to help states, districts, partner organizations, and foundations redesign school intervention strategies in chronically underperforming schools and use those strategies as models for broader urban school reform. Mr. Calkins served for six years as an elected member of the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee. In the past, he was editor of *Electronic Learning* magazine at Scholastic and executive director of the nonprofit group Recruiting New Teachers.

William Guenther is president and founder of the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, which currently focuses on two major programs: the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative (MMSI) and School Turnaround. MMSI improves college readiness across the commonwealth by increasing the quality of and access to advanced placement courses in math, science, and English. The school turnaround initiative works to transform chronically underperforming schools by creating a new framework to address the many needs in these schools while pushing public policy to embrace turnaround as an opportunity to improve the educational system. Mr. Guenther is also president of Mass Insight Corporation, a public policy research and business consulting firm he founded in 1989 to focus on Massachusetts economic competitiveness issues.

Nancy Grasmick, Maryland state superintendent of schools, is America's longest-serving appointed schools chief. Ms. Grasmick's career in education began in the Baltimore County Public Schools, where she worked as a teacher, principal, supervisor, assistant superintendent, and then associate superintendent. In 1989, the governor of Maryland appointed her special secretary for children, youth, and families, and, in 1991, the Maryland State Board of Education appointed her superintendent. She is on the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, the U.S. Army War College board of visitors, the Towson University board of visitors, the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, and the National Academies Committee. Ms. Grasmick has received numerous awards, including the Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Prize in Education, the President's Medal from Loyola College, the James Bryant Conant Award from the Education Commission of the States, the Johns Hopkins Woodrow Wilson Award for Government Service, and the Spirit of Children Award from the Ronald McDonald Foundation.

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Douglas Sears, an associate provost and assistant to the president for outreach and special initiatives at Boston University, oversees the coordination of the university's involvement in K-12 education, the Boston University/Chelsea School District Partnership. Previously, Mr. Sears served for five years as dean of the Boston University School of Education and spent five years as superintendent of the Chelsea (Massachusetts) Public Schools. During his tenure as superintendent, the Chelsea school district made substantial improvements in academic achievement and student attendance and reestablished art and music programs. Before coming to Boston University, Mr. Sears was a diplomat in the U.S. embassies in Switzerland and the Philippines, earning the Department of State's Meritorious Honor Award. He is a board member of the American-Swiss Foundation and the Hanson Initiative for Language and Literacy.