

School Turnaround: A Brief Overview of the Landscape and Key Issues

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This brief was developed as pre-read material for participants at the *Driving Dramatic School Improvement* event, held in January 2010. It contains an overview of the actors and issues in the turnaround space and questions to be discussed at the event.

A full, revised report, incorporating feedback and discussions from the January event and additional research, will be released to the field in February 2010.

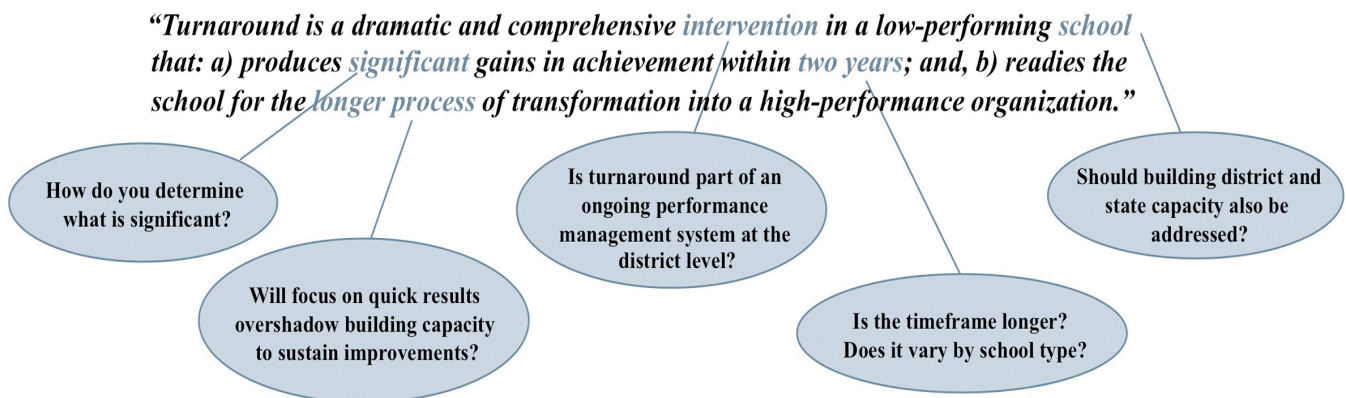
A. Introduction

In early 2009, the Obama Administration announced its intention to use five billion dollars to turn around five thousand of the nation's poorest performing schools over the next five years. This is a bold challenge to an education sector that has succeeded at turning around individual schools, but has never delivered dramatic change at a national scale. To foster urgency and fuel innovation, the federal government has created large pools of funding and is providing strong policy direction for school turnaround. In response, education leaders are developing and implementing new approaches to improving schools. However, turnaround work is in early stages and the field is highly fragmented.

If we are to systemically fix our nation's underperforming schools, we must work in concert to identify and spread effective practices, create the policies and conditions for success, and build capacity to tackle turnaround on a national scale. This brief summarizes key issues shaping the school turnaround field and raises questions we hope to collectively discuss at the Driving Dramatic School Improvement Conference on January 11, 2010.

B. What is Turnaround?

Defining Turnaround. The word turnaround is used broadly and means different things to different individuals. To ensure we are collectively working to solve the same problem, we proposed and tested the following definition of Turnaround put forward by the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute. While this definition received broad agreement when we tested it with over 50 interviewees including state and district representatives and other practitioners, we also heard continued debate on particular components:



Critical Need for Success. Clearly, the single most important reason to turn around schools is to improve student outcomes. These 5 questions represent areas for debate which we will discuss at the conference. Given the high level of resources and attention focused on turnaround, education leaders feel enormous pressure to show results. Set against this backdrop, we heard strong consensus for the need to develop measures to track progress and success at both the school and system level in order to make course corrections and identify and spread best practices. Without proof of progress, stakeholders fear that public support for turnaround will erode and gains will not be sustained.

Defining Success for Schools. While many states and districts have established criteria to identify schools in need of turnaround, there is less clarity on knowing when a school has *been* turned around. Without expectations for success, resources may be withdrawn before gains are made or solidified. Stakeholders also strongly emphasize that a turnaround is only successful if it achieves gains with *the same* student population. In our interviews, three themes emerged around measuring school-level success.

- **Determining what to measure.** Schools should track interim progress and ultimate outcomes related to school environment and student performance. In the former, interviewees cite metrics such as lower rates of violence or suspension, increased student and faculty attendance, lower drop out rates, and higher staff retention. For the latter, interviewees identify increases in formative student evaluations, improved standardized test results, and higher graduation rates. Interviewees also emphasize that results should be evaluated in absolute terms and benchmarked against past performance and expected performance using value-added measures.
- **Setting the bar.** For some, making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a good starting point for considering a school to have been turned around. However, many actors spoke more ambitiously about dramatic initial gains followed by an ability to sustain and build upon those gains over time. Lastly, many expressed the view that a school was not turned around until it had closed the achievement gap and had reached a high bar of student success. For example, Mastery Charter Schools aims for 100% college attendance. Other goals for dramatic improvement we observed include 50% improvement in graduation rates and double digit gains on state performance tests.
- **Timeline to success.** In general, interviewees believe schools can be turned around in 2-4 years, with improvement in the school environment and culture occurring within 1-2 years and improvements in student performance occurring in the second or third year. However, this timeline varies based on local conditions and is likely longer in high schools. Also, stakeholders urge patience in the first year or two of turnaround as some student performance indicators may actually decline as attendance increases and as new staff come on board and a new school culture is developed.

Defining Success for School Systems. We heard broad agreement on the importance of tracking success at the system level, but few states and districts have established specific goals. Emerging themes include:

- **Turnaround specific goals for students and for schools.** At the student level, districts should have clear expectations for student gains in turnaround schools. At the system level, districts and states need to set improvement goals along with corresponding milestones and timelines across their portfolio of schools.
- **Tracking performance of all schools, not just turnaround schools.** Districts need to ensure that while some schools are being turned around, others do not fall into the need to be turned around. Additionally, districts need to be careful that the interventions at turnaround schools (e.g., school closure, teacher replacement) do not adversely impact other schools in the system.
- **Finding best practices.** Districts and states are looking to measure progress and compare results of different turnaround interventions to identify what is working and why. This best practice identification and sharing should happen both within systems and across systems.
- **Developing infrastructure and capacity.** Districts and states need to evaluate themselves on their ability to undergird turnaround success. As Justin Cohen from Mass Insight states, *“Fixing individual schools is not going to fix the issue. We need to measure system performance and conditions.”*

C. Federal Funding and the Four Turnaround Models

Federal Funding. Funding that impacts school turnaround efforts includes:

- ***Race to the Top Fund (RTTT)***: \$4.35 billion in competitive grants to states with turnaround being one of the key focus areas. Guidelines for the turnaround section specify that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must implement at least one of the four turnaround models outlined below. LEAs with nine or more turnaround schools must employ multiple models.
- ***School Improvement Grants (SIG)***: \$3.546 billion allocated to states by Title I formula to be granted out competitively to districts within each state. The guidelines align with RTTT guidelines, including the necessity of using the four turnaround models.
- ***Investing in Innovation Fund (i3)***: \$650 million in competitive grants to nonprofits partnering with LEAs to expand innovative and evidence-based approaches that significantly improve achievement, close achievement gaps, and improve teacher/principal effectiveness – all areas related to turnaround.

The size of these funds coupled with the urgent financial needs of states and districts has put the federal government in a strong position to influence policy change and LEAs' turnaround strategies. Already, many states have passed laws to be eligible for RTTT funding and developed turnaround strategies to increase the competitiveness of their application as turnaround accounts for 10% of the RTTT rubric.

Turnaround Models Proposed in RTTT Guidelines. Four turnaround approaches are outlined:

- ***Turnaround Model*** – Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of the school's staff, adopt a new governance structure, and implement a research-based vertically aligned instructional program.
- ***Restart Model*** – Transfer control of or close and reopen a school under a School Management Organization (SMO) or school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- ***School Closure*** – Close the school and enroll students in other, higher-achieving schools.
- ***Transformation Model*** – Develop teacher/principal effectiveness (including replacing the principal), implement comprehensive instructional reform, extend learning and teacher planning time, create a community-orientation, and provide operating flexibility and sustained support.

The approaches differ in implementation needs for new principals and teachers, for outside providers and school operators, for financial support, and for socio-political will to overcome interest group resistance. Additionally, the approaches may also vary in how they impact school culture and student improvement. The chart below summarizes how the models may compare on these dimensions. It is meant to stimulate debate given that the models have not yet been deeply studied and that their implementation is highly sensitive to contextual factors such as policies, faithfulness of implementation, or quality of providers.

Turnaround Models: Continuum of Requirements and Impact				
Requirements				
Human Capital	Closure & Transformation		Turnaround	Restart
Provider Capacity	Closure	Transformation	Turnaround	Restart
Financial Cost (To the District)	Closure	Transformation	Restart	Turnaround
Socio-political will	Transformation	Turnaround	Restart	Closure
Impact				
Ease of Implementing New Culture		Transformation	Turnaround	Restart
Speed of Academic Improvement		Transformation	Turnaround	Restart

Choosing Among the Models. As states and districts plan turnaround initiatives they face a looming question: “How should I choose between the four turnaround approaches?” To date, most states and districts are choosing based on resource requirements, such as the availability of new principals or quality school operators, and not based on matching the needs of schools to the strengths and potential for impact of each model. Given that there is still so little research that links school needs to models and to results, many states and districts plan on building a stronger base of evidence for the efficacy of each model relative to school and community needs.

D. The Turnaround Sector and Actors

The Demand. As part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools must demonstrate AYP in improving their performance or enter a process of corrective action, which ultimately might lead to replacing the school’s leadership or restructuring the school itself. With 5,017 schools in the restructuring stage in 2010, Mass Insight recently estimated that over 2.5M students are at risk of or are already receiving a woefully inadequate education. Out of over 100,000 schools nationwide, this bottom 5% have persistently failed to make AYP for four or more years and are often characterized by high staff turnover, high rates of violence, and low rates of graduation. Unfortunately, this is a growing market. In 2010 the number of schools in restructuring increased by 28% from 2009, and an alarming 118% from 2008. Looking towards the coming school year, an additional 1,899 schools currently subject to “corrective action” are at risk of falling into restructuring. Out of this potential market, FSG estimates that 35% of schools in need of turnaround are being selected by states and districts for turnaround interventions. States and districts are targeting a narrower subset of schools given their limited capacity and the scarcity of operators and turnaround technical services providers.

The Market. While some organizations have been providing school turnaround services or are now emerging with programs and services directed towards turnaround, the number and capacity of operators and providers serving the turnaround sector is still inadequate to meet the aggregate demand. At the same time, states and districts are also just beginning to develop the infrastructure, accountability systems, and partnerships to develop and launch turnaround strategies. These nascent efforts have tended to cluster in select geographies in which there is a large number of chronically failing schools and strong state / district support for turnaround. Beyond the federal government, key players shaping the turnaround sector include states and districts, school management organizations, supporting partners, research and field-building organizations, and philanthropic funders. The sections below provide a high-level summary of activities underway within these categories, with the recognition that the field is rapidly evolving and the effectiveness of highlighted efforts will need to be assessed over time.

States and Districts

States and districts are playing a range of roles in turnaround, including:

- **Creating accountability structures.** The Massachusetts DOE recently created a new accountability framework that assesses school effectiveness and reviews district performance. The Long Beach Unified School District's Office of Research, Planning, and Evaluation is an in-house research department that partners with all district schools to collect formative assessments and end-of-course exam data that provide immediate results prior to receiving state exam results.
- **Driving high-quality human capital solutions.** In 2009, the Missouri DOE partnered with the University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program to train principals in each of the state's 29 schools selected for turnaround. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the Strategic Staffing Initiative provides a mix of financial and hiring incentives for principals and their staff to build highly effective school leadership teams in the district's most under-performing schools.
- **Leading collective bargaining efforts.** In October 2009, teachers in New Haven, Connecticut ratified a new contract aimed at the district's lowest performing schools. According to the agreement, *"schools deemed 'turnarounds' would be reconstituted with new leadership and staff. Teachers would have to reapply, and principals would select those to be hired. These schools would also be freed up from most contract provisions and could be operated by third-party management organizations, including charter school operators."*¹ The contract provisions have been criticized for not tackling tenure and pay for performance issues, but many believe that it is a breakthrough in the dialogue between management and unions. *"This is an incredibly progressive contract,"* says Joan Devlin, Senior Associate Director for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). *"It addresses teacher voice, and it gives the district the flexibility it needs to make [these reforms] work."*² Unions are also beginning to examine other issues critical to high-needs schools like teacher evaluation. The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and New York State United Teachers have been awarded an AFT grant to establish a multi-district approach to more rigorous teacher evaluation in partnership with state education leaders and local unions.
- **Working directly with schools.** The South Carolina DOE is implementing a comprehensive turnaround approach developed by the state directly with several rural schools. The Cincinnati Public School District is piloting a redesign program in three of the district's lowest performing elementary schools. Through this program, the district selects a new principal who is trained through the UVA School Turnaround Specialist Program, hires new lead teachers, develops professional development plans, and enhances school technology. In addition, the district has an external "turnaround team" that measures school performance and coaches schools for three years on leadership, data analysis, management issues, and instructional practices.

¹ & ² <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/21/09union.h29.html?r=829946276>

In addition to these efforts, states have begun to set policies and pass legislation to help facilitate turnaround and build new partnerships with districts to standardize instructional and evaluation practices:

- **Creating policy conditions for turnaround success.** In Colorado, the “Innovation Schools Act of 2008” strengthens school-based decision-making by allowing for more autonomy from district and state education regulations. The Act allows schools to make their own decisions on spending, the length of the school day and year, course content, hiring, and teacher compensation. Said then-President of the Colorado State Senate, Peter Groff: “*We have the potential to improve student achievement by offering flexibility in the way education is administered.*”³
- **Developing partnerships with local education agencies.** The state DOE of Virginia requires its districts to develop a plan for how to support their lowest performing schools, and partners with each district to monitor implementation of the plan. To do so, the state has brought in administrative coaches to work with each district, and built a learning community for turnaround principals to discuss issues and best practices across the districts. In Georgia, the state DOE closely collaborated with Atlanta Public Schools to revamp state standards, moving from content-based standards to a more rigorous set of performance-based standards.

School Management Organizations and School Operators

Outside of the traditional district-managed public schools, turnaround schools can be run by charter school operators and managed by for profit or nonprofit Education Management Organizations (EMOs) or nonprofit Charter Management Organizations (CMOs). Organizations that manage public schools – both charter and non-charter schools – take on many or, in some cases, all of the functions traditionally fulfilled by the district, including human resources and program design. Charter Management Organizations like Green Dot Public Schools, Mastery Charter Schools, Education for Change and Friendship Public Charter Schools have already entered the turnaround space.

Hybrid models are also emerging. Some organizations work with district schools, as in the case of a nonprofit organization like Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), which provides teachers trained for urban schools and contracts with the district to run turnaround schools. Others, like New Visions for Public Schools, create new schools and work as a support organization for networks of district schools. When working with turnaround schools, SMOs and operators are typically granted autonomy, assume full responsibility for students’ results, and are held accountable through the provisions of a contract or charter signed with the district or state agency.

Supporting Partners

A variety of partner organizations help to support school reform efforts in general and are evolving to support school turnaround specifically at the school, district, and state level. The chart below illustrates the many types of supporting partners currently working in both school reform and turnaround.

³ <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/GovRitter/GOVR/1211966060528>

Partners Supporting School Turnaround

Type of Partner	Example Organizations
<p>Comprehensive School Redesign</p> <p>Organizations that help schools implement robust turnaround strategies including diagnosing issues, building teacher/principal capacity, and designing instructional approaches</p>	<p><i>The Institute for Cambridge Education, Partners in School Innovation, Student Achievement</i></p>
<p>Human Capital and Professional Development</p> <p>Organizations and programs working to increase the supply of quality educators in turnaround schools through recruiting, training, and supporting turnaround principals and teachers</p>	<p><i>Louisiana School Turnaround Specialist Program, New Leaders for New Schools, The New Teacher Project, New York City Leadership Academy, UVA School Turnaround Specialist Program</i></p>
<p>District and School Resource Management</p> <p>Organizations that help districts and schools institute financial and operational policies and practices to support turnaround</p>	<p><i>Alvarez and Marsal, Education Resource Strategies</i></p>
<p>Integrated Services</p> <p>Organizations that work with school staff to integrate social and behavioral support directly into the learning environment</p>	<p><i>Turnaround USA, Turnaround for Children</i></p>
<p>Parent and Community Organizing and Engagement</p> <p>Coalitions aimed at mobilizing parents and the community to urge districts and states to create needed conditions</p>	<p><i>America’s Promise, Parent Revolution</i></p>

Research and Field-Building Organizations

Research and field-building organizations provide a range of data analysis, practices and tools on turnaround, and also to help foster partnerships and incite dialogue amongst education decision-makers on how to be most effective and to create scale. Examples include the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, Public Impact, and the Center on Education Policy.



Philanthropic Funders

Private, corporate, and community foundations have recently become involved in supporting the turnaround sector nationally and locally. For example, the Carnegie Corporation of New York is funding research at a national level and turnaround work in multiple geographies at the state level, while funders like Boeing and the Communities Foundation of Texas are supporting turnaround work at the state, district, and operator level. However, these efforts are relatively new and few funders are focusing on turnaround specific issues.

E. Lessons Learned from Early Efforts

Although most school turnaround efforts are at an early stage, we looked across practitioner efforts – at the school and systems level – to identify conditions that drive effective turnarounds and some common “lessons learned”.

Summary of Conditions to Drive Effective Turnarounds

	 School-Level Turnaround Conditions	 System-Level Turnaround Conditions
Vision	A coherent vision for school culture and instruction exists in support of all children learning at a high level	A coherent vision for school support exists to ensure all schools succeed and all children learn at a high level
Planning	School leadership has a full “planning year” before the school turns over	Systems exist for early identification of schools that may need turnaround
Autonomy	School leader has some degree of autonomy over human capital, schedule, budget, and program*	Districts and labor align on key autonomy issues
		Resources are re-allocated to allow for more decision making to happen at the site level
Leadership and staff	Effective leader and leadership team is in place and willing to make difficult decisions (e.g., to turnover staff)	Leadership (including school boards) is aligned behind turnaround efforts and is willing to make or support difficult decisions (e.g., to replace principals or close schools)
	Teaching staff is hired and supported to meet the demands of a turnaround	
	Additional staff (e.g., security guards, guidance counselors, mental health providers) is hired to meet high levels of student need	Robust pipeline exists for teachers, principals, and additional staff with expertise in school turnaround and school turnaround-related issues
Execution	All adults consistently and rigorously maintain a culture of high expectations and deliver strong instruction and programs	Schools are supported by aligned systems (e.g., data, human capital, accountability) and central offices manage non-instructional issues
	Effective external providers are brought in as appropriate	Mechanisms exist to identify and vet effectiveness of external providers
Data and Performance Management	There is a strong focus on using data and performance management to improve the quality of teaching and learning	Data systems and support are in place to deliver timely, formative, and summative information based on rigorous state standards
Accountability	Students, parents, teachers, leaders, and external providers are held accountable for school improvement*	Students, parents, teachers, leaders, external providers, and central office are held accountable for school improvement

*Note: In some cases, the SMO holds these autonomies and responsibilities.

School-Level Lessons Learned

Lessons learned include:

Build-in planning time for community engagement and creating a new school culture.

- Most stakeholders agree that a full “planning year” in advance of a school’s re-opening is ideal, particularly when changing a large percentage of staff as in Turnaround and Restart models. Successful turnaround principals spend this time building community support, hiring staff, creating a vision for change, and aligning the staff and leadership team behind that vision.
- In particular, transforming a school’s culture requires strong alignment between all adults in the school to design an inspirational culture and then consistently execute day in and day out on the concrete actions needed to instill that culture – actions that include modeling behavior, setting high expectations, and enforcing discipline codes effectively and positively.

Prepare to meet student needs that are severe and pervasive.

- While turnaround schools may appear demographically similar to other proximate schools, years of chronic failure results in a higher level of student need. Operators who have taken on turnarounds were surprised by the extent of special education needs, the level of violence, the depth of academic remediation required (particularly at the high school level), and the prevalence of mental health issues.
- Charter operators note that the work is substantially different and more difficult than starting a new school due to the need to provide additional wraparound services and resources, including guidance counselors, extensive case management, mental health services, social/emotional programming, academic remediation, and increased security.

Principals and leadership teams need the will and skill to drive change in demanding environments.

- Many of the characteristics and behaviors of leaders, in turnaround schools are not highly different from those of leaders in other schools. Critical skills include stakeholder management and relationship-building, communication, professional development, and instructional leadership. What separates turnaround leaders is the will and discipline they have to implement these behaviors within a much more challenging environment.
- Other characteristics *are* particular to turnaround leaders who must be relentlessly consistent, be willing to make difficult decisions, maintain urgency, resolve crises, and hire/manage a new staff.
- Successful turnaround leaders are not “lone rangers” – they develop and rely on leadership teams, distribute responsibility among staff, and partner with the district and the community.
- There is debate around the degree of experience required for turnaround principals to be effective. Some believe deep prior experience as a principal is critical while others like AUSL believe that a strong training process can overcome a lack of previous experience. Additionally, there is debate about whether turnaround principals can or should lead the school once it is turned around.

Turnaround teachers need strong classroom and teamwork skills as well as additional support.

- In the classroom, teachers in turnaround schools must be prepared to meet the acute behavioral and academic needs of their students through effective classroom discipline and management and through remediation approaches targeted at students who are multiple grade levels behind. Given the diverse needs of their students, teachers must be particularly willing to use real time data and feedback to adjust their approaches in response to specific student needs.
- In the school, teachers play a role in creating a new school culture in concert with the principal. Teachers need to “*come to the table with ideas and suggestions about how to move the school forward,*” according to Kenyatta Stansberry-Butler, Principal at Harper High School. Turnaround teachers often work longer hours, take on additional responsibilities as part of leadership teams and work closely in teams to case manage the highest need students.
- The demands of the turnaround environment place a special emphasis on professional development tailored to the teacher’s level of experience.

Signal change early, communicating “quick wins” to students, staff, parents, and the community.

- The Department of Education’s Institute of Education Science (IES)’s 2008 practice guide on turning around chronically low-performing schools highlights the need to “*provide visible improvements early in the turnaround process*” to “*rally staff around the effort and overcome resistance and inertia.*” Quick wins in non-academic areas serve to signal to students and the community that a dramatic change is underway.
- Quick wins might include improving the physical condition of the building, improving student behavior, improving attendance, and establishing team planning processes among teachers.

Take advantage of the urgency of turnaround to build capacity for long-term sustainable results.

- The culture, assessments, instructional approaches, and programs that allow schools to dramatically improve student performance should be systematized and built upon to ensure that schools do not relapse into failure and continue to improve.

System-Level Lessons Learned

Successful school-level turnaround efforts must be sustained and supported by corresponding changes at the system-level. According to Bob Hughes, President at New Visions, “*Turnaround efforts won’t succeed if they are only school focused and are not complemented by systems change. No bad school is an island; it exists in a system.*” Lessons that apply to districts, states, and SMOs include:

Articulate a powerful vision for turnaround and be willing to make difficult decisions.

- School turnaround depends on commitment to a powerful vision of student and school success.
- There must be a willingness to make politically difficult decisions, such as closing failing schools, replacing principals, or negotiating with teachers’ unions for needed autonomies.

View turnaround as a portfolio of approaches, with school closure as a viable option.

- In the short-term, districts and states likely need to continue to choose turnaround models based on resource constraints (i.e. the availability of human capital and viable operators). However, forward-thinking districts are planning on tracking performance and building capacity to employ models in the long-term based on the needs of schools, the efficacy of the models, and the ability to have impact for students.
- Districts and states should view school closure as an option to improve student outcomes at the system-level, particularly when districts invest in creating new, high performing schools. In large urban districts where there are issues of underutilization, closing schools and reassigning students can effectively allow districts to reallocate per-pupil dollars, offering the opportunity to “right size” the system. However, school closure is counterproductive if there are no other proximate high quality options. Because school closures can be highly political and controversial, state DOEs can support districts by “providing political cover.”

Work collaboratively with labor unions to create needed conditions.

- A critical challenge for turnaround is getting districts and states to better partner with labor unions to eliminate the barriers to success. Potential areas of contention include staff hiring and turnover, performance pay, teacher evaluation, distribution of teachers based on seniority, work rules, and charter policies. In many cases, changes to state laws and regulations are needed to allow districts and unions to draft new policies.
- State DOEs may also be able to promote conversations between districts and unions, as in Rhode Island and New York.

Build capabilities to effectively support and manage turnaround efforts.

- A number of states and districts have begun to dedicate resources and create specific units to oversee turnaround work. This practice was raised as a critical success factor by states, districts, and turnaround operators and providers alike.
- In order to effectively support autonomies granted to school leaders and operators, central offices must increase the operational supports they provide to turnaround schools so that school-based leaders and staff can focus exclusively on teaching and learning. Chris Coxon, Chief Program Officer of Initiatives at the Texas High School Project, states that “*a critical factor for turnaround situations is the ability of districts and states to clear the deck for school leaders.*”
- Stakeholders agree that the district should serve as “ground zero” for school turnaround interventions, but increasingly states are also taking on active roles. Such roles include developing statewide human capital pipelines, partnering with districts on school assessment and accountability approaches, compelling district action by designating schools for turnaround, and particularly in more rural areas, directly intervening to turn around schools.
- Close partnerships and alignment need to be developed between districts and states. Traditional compliance-based relationships need to be transformed into partnerships based on mutual goals and shared accountability.
- Also critical to turnaround success is a district or SMO level commitment to strategically reallocate resources to empower school leaders. In New York City, for example, when resource mapping exercises revealed that only half of the budget was being spent in the schools, a decision was made to decentralize funding and devolve as much decision making as possible to schools.

Ensure school leaders have site-based autonomy over budget, staffing, schedule, program, and data.

- According to a recent study by William Ouchi at the UCLA Anderson School of Management, the performance of schools improves measurably when principals have more autonomy. According to Ouchi, “*school organization reform alone produces a more potent improvement in student performance than any other single factor.*”
- Critical autonomies include: budget, where Ouchi found a direct correlation between the degree of the principal’s control over budget and the degree to which student performance rises; human resources, where stakeholders cite the ability to hire and fire staff, evaluate and observe teachers, and select leadership team members; schedule, to increase learning and planning time; curriculum and instructional programming, to meet academic, social, and emotional needs; and data, where schools need the ability to collect, analyze, and act on real-time student performance data.

Establish accountability and data systems to track progress and inform decision making.

- Districts, states, and SMOs should invest in data systems that provide formative, longitudinal, real-time data linking student performance to targeted turnaround interventions. For example, Chicago has made a major investment in an online school and student-level data system that allows for more frequent assessments and rapid turnaround of results to inform decision-making. Chicago is also pairing the technology with rigorous data analysis, training, and support.
- Data systems should also be used to track school performance across the district, assessing where progress is being made in turnaround schools and guiding earlier intervention in other schools so that they do not fall into the need for turnaround.
- Accountability systems need to be structured between states and districts, between districts and SMOs, and between districts/SMOs and schools. The systems should ensure that clear performance and reporting expectations are set and communicated so that accurate and timely progress and outcome data can be shared, learned from, and acted upon. Within good systems, accountability enables autonomy and relationships are based on mutual goals and support instead of on compliance and consequences.

F. Key Issues and Gaps

Given the early stages of turnaround work, it is not surprising that our research unearthed significant roadblocks that must be overcome and gaps that must be filled to ensure that school turnarounds can succeed at scale.

Rural Turnarounds. While much attention has focused on dense urban areas with large numbers of schools in need of turnaround, rural areas face particular turnaround challenges. Given their geographic dispersion, it can be difficult or even impossible for rural districts and schools to attract new principals and teachers, SMOs, or other turnaround partners. This makes it extremely hard for rural areas to employ the Turnaround or Restart Models. Additionally, school closure is usually not an option as there are no other high quality schools nearby. In many cases, this results in states and districts not choosing rural schools for turnaround or states attempting to turn these schools around themselves. Furthermore, for small rural districts, building capacity to support turnaround can be cost-prohibitive. In rural areas or smaller states, some stakeholders see the need to aggregate or “pool” demand to incentivize providers to engage.

High School Turnarounds. While interviewees acknowledge the difficulty in turning around any school, high schools were singled out as being particularly challenging. Because students are older and closer to graduation, turnaround requires a much greater level of effort to change culture and to remediate academic performance. The result is our nation’s infamously cited 2,000 “dropout factories.” Districts and states will not achieve graduation targets without intentional turnaround strategies, which could include developing specialized district capabilities, as in Chicago, or the creation of multiple pathways to graduation including alternative small high schools, as in New York.

Gaps in Capacity: There are not enough people or organizations engaging in school turnaround work.

- **Human Capital Capacity.** Overwhelmingly, education leaders point to human capital at the school and system levels as a critical concern. At the school level, there is an insufficient supply of high-quality teachers and leaders who are prepared to take on the uniquely challenging environments of turnaround situations. This problem is particularly acute given that several of the turnaround models require new leaders and teachers. Additionally, many of the organizations who recruit, train, and support new principals and teachers are not focused on school turnaround or are still building their own capacity to identify and prepare turnaround-ready educators. School management organizations, districts, states, and other turnaround providers are also struggling with finding and training the right people to lead their own turnaround initiatives.
- **District and State Capacity.** Many states and districts currently have no specific department or staff focused on school turnaround. Additionally, they lack turnaround-specific funding streams, structures (e.g., data and accountability systems, rubrics to vet partners), knowledge of best practices, and capabilities (e.g., engaging unions, partnering with business and philanthropy, analyzing real-time data). Finally, states and districts have traditionally operated in a compliance model and many need to build their capacity to work more effectively as turnaround partners.
- **Operator and Provider Capacity.** Few turnaround-focused organizations exist to serve the market, and most of those that do are still too early in their work to have proven results. In particular, the US Department of Education (DOE) has urged CMOs to take on turnarounds. For the most part, however, charter management organizations and operators have not taken up the challenge en masse. This may be due to the fact that many charter organizations are still struggling to reach scale and quality within their existing models or that those models differ in important ways from the conditions laid out for turnarounds. As National Alliance for Public Charter Schools President and CEO Nelson Smith explains, *“Most of those who are successful in charters open new schools with clear autonomy provided by state charter laws. They’re not turnaround artists, and they have little experience in taking over turnaround schools.”*

Gaps in Funding: In recognition of the pressing need for resources to begin flowing quickly, in December 2009, the USDOE announced that states can have almost immediate access to a percentage of their total Title I School Improvement Grants, enabling states to begin building capacity and ramping up for school improvement and turnaround work. However, states and districts express concerns that this funding and RTTT funding will be time delimited and may not be available to sustain the work. Additionally, in light of stretched state budgets, most states have no specific operational funding streams allocated to support school turnaround. Many states and districts are looking to philanthropic sources to fill in gaps, but as of yet, only a handful of foundations have made significant investments in turnaround.

Gaps in Will: State and district DOEs, as well as school boards, mayors, and other governing bodies, must be willing to make the difficult decisions required for school turnaround, such as closing failing schools and negotiating with teachers' unions to gain more flexibility in teacher contracts. There is also a need for greater community engagement, particularly from parents, to ensure a continuous demand for and commitment to dramatic school improvement. Says Carmita Vaughan, Chief Strategy Officer of America's Promise: *"Engaging the parents and the community deeply is the way to make the turnaround effort sustainable. Millions of dollars will not be pumped into these schools forever, so we need to build the community support and imperative to make it sustainable in the long run."*

Gaps in Conditions: Policies and conditions in districts and states across the country are frequently at odds with what is necessary for success in turnaround.

- **Collective Bargaining Agreements.** Interviewees point to provisions in collective bargaining agreements that may hinder turnaround, including hiring, firing, and tenure rules; working hours; teacher distribution; and restrictions around performance management and teacher observation and evaluation.
- **Data and Accountability Systems.** Districts and states lack effective, timely data systems to link student performance over time with specific turnaround interventions.
- **Operating Flexibility for Management Organizations.** State and district policies, regulations, and laws frequently do not support the level of autonomy schools and operators need over key dimensions necessary for change—human capital, time / schedule, budget, and program.
- **Charter Laws.** Many states still have charter caps. Funding levels and facilities restrictions can also deter charter operators from being willing to take over schools in the Restart Model.
- **Governance and Leadership.** In order for turnaround efforts to be sustained, superintendents and school boards must align their efforts and be willing to take on dramatic change. However, the average superintendent stays on the job for less than 3.5 years and school board members' commitment can be undermined by the vagaries of election cycles. The challenge, then, is how to sustain turnaround efforts over a longer timeframe. In some locales, such as Washington, D.C., New York City, and Chicago, mayoral control has paved the way for turnaround efforts, laying the groundwork for bold interventions around teacher evaluations and dismissals, charter schools, and contracting with external providers.

Gaps in Research and Knowledge-Sharing: There is not yet enough evidence for identifying the most effective interventions for turnaround. As one interviewee noted, *"no model yet exists that is both scalable and replicable."* Unfortunately, the ability to track the effectiveness of various interventions to student-level data is often obstructed by state policies or by the lack of student-level data systems. There are also very few mechanisms for knowledge-sharing in the field to identify effective practices and tools. Says Laura Weeldreyer, Deputy Superintendent of Baltimore City Public Schools, *"Who is going to track who does what with the school improvement dollars? Was one of the models more successful than the others? What processes did districts use to choose interventions, and did schools have a say? There are no processes in place to learn what others are doing."*

G. Questions for Discussion

To turn around thousands of schools, nascent efforts must be scaled significantly and the gaps identified in this report need to be addressed. In preparation for the upcoming Driving Dramatic School Improvement conference on January 11, 2010, we ask you to consider the following questions:

Session	Discussion Questions
Keynote: Tackling the Turnaround Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key levers for turnaround at the state and district level? • To succeed at scale, what do districts and states need from each other?
Plenary: The School Turnaround Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key issues around human capital? State/district/operator capacity? Policy? Measurement and accountability? Knowledge gaps?
Breakout: A Highly Effective Leader in Every School: Finding, Developing and Supporting Turnaround Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you recruit, select, and develop high quality turnaround leaders? • What characteristics and behaviors mark a strong turnaround leader? • What conditions do leaders need to succeed?
Breakout: Four Paths Forward: Choosing Among the Turnaround Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do states and districts choose models at the school and system level? • What conditions support successful implementation for each model at scale?
Breakout: Turnaround Teachers: Human Capital Management for Turnaround Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are effective human capital management practices that attract turnaround ready teachers and drive teacher performance? • How do turnaround schools, school districts, and labor unions work constructively to create flexibility around work rules?
Breakout: What Is the End-game? Defining and Measuring Success in Turnaround	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the criteria that should be used to designate schools for turnaround? To measure success? • How and over what timeframe is progress measured? Does it differ based on school type or level? • What do states expect of districts in terms of success? What do districts expect of operators and of themselves?
Action Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the most important action you/your organization can take to advance the turnaround field? What critical actions would you hope others take? • What needs to be done collectively?

We look forward to your participation at the conference!

About FSG Social Impact Advisors

FSG Social Impact Advisors is an international nonprofit consulting and research firm dedicated to accelerating progress on social issues. FSG's Education and Youth Practice works with foundations, nonprofits, state agencies, corporations, and school districts individually and collectively to address education and youth-related issues. Founded in 1999, FSG achieves its mission in three ways:

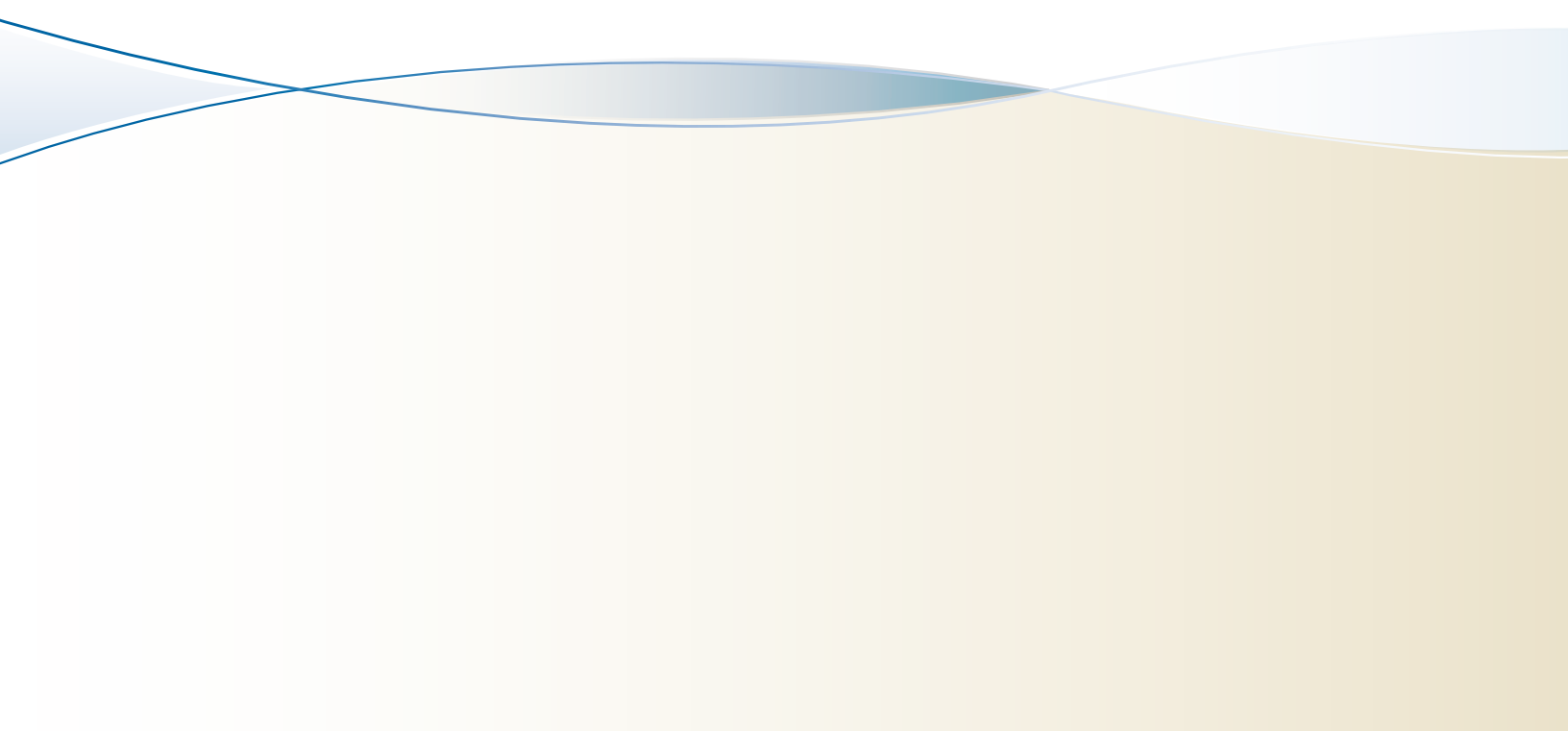
- **Advice** – Advising leading social sector actors on how to increase impact through strategy development and evaluation
- **Ideas** – Developing and sharing original research, tools and innovative approaches
- **Action** – Identifying long-term initiatives that address critical challenges and opportunities in the field

FSG's staff combines the highest standards of strategy consulting with a deep understanding of the social sector.

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About the Forthcoming Turnaround Landscape Report

For a deeper discussion of the issues covered in this brief as well as a turnaround sector map, look for a final report coming from FSG Social Impact Advisors in February 2010.





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