The Turnaround Challenge

Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools

New Research, Recommendations, and a Partnership Framework for States and School Districts

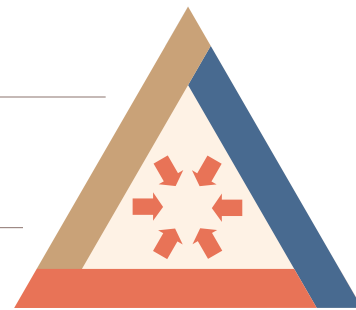**Mass Insight**
Education & Research Institute

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Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools

By Andrew Calkins, William Guenther, Grace Belfiore, and Dave Lash

New Research, Recommendations, and a Partnership Framework for States and School Districts

Mass Insight
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The Turnaround Challenge and its Supplemental Report can be downloaded from the web at www.massinsight.org.

Foreword

In *Time* magazine's recent analysis of the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (June 4, 2007), the effort was given an overall grade of C, with some aspects of the law and its implementation rating an A or a B. What brought the overall judgment down was the F, by far the lowest grade, given to the category *Helping Schools Improve*. "Even the Department of Education," *Time* wrote, "concedes that its remedies for chronic school failure are not working." ABC-News was little more encouraging in its appraisal, giving "rescue plans for failing schools" a D.

These highly critical reports arrive alongside of others lauding individual school success stories. In fact, higher standards and testing have helped to demonstrate, more clearly than ever before, that schools serving highly challenged, high-poverty student enrollments – the kind of schools most likely to be deemed "chronic failures" – *can succeed.* But we have clearly not developed ways to extend that success, or to apply successful schools' strategies to help struggling schools improve.

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, it does. By the end of the decade, at current rates, about five percent of all U.S. public schools will be identified as chronic failures in need of what NCLB calls "restructuring." (See chart, displayed with more detail on page 16.) The vast majority of students at these schools "graduate" to the next level with a skills and knowledge deficit that all but cripples their chances at future success.

Turning Around the Bottom Five Percent: 5,000 Schools in Restructuring by 2010

Year	Schools
2005-2006	600
2006-2007	1,100
2007-2008	1,900
2008-2009	3,300
2009-2010	4,900

School Turnaround: **a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that produces significant gains in student achievement within two academic years.**

How can we interrupt this cycle?

That was the charge given to us by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in September, 2005: examine the landscape of current effort to turn around the nation's most chronically under-performing schools and develop a new framework for states, working in partnership with communities and districts, to apply to school turnaround. The Mass Insight Education & Research Institute represented a compelling choice for the foundation to conduct this work: a non-profit organization that has been deeply involved in policy facilitation, education reform advocacy, effective-practice research, and intensive school-improvement services simultaneously at the state level for ten years. All of these capacities informed this report, as did the fact that our home and our work over that decade has been in Massachusetts – a national model, in many ways, for effective standards-based reform.

But on the issue of school turnaround there is much to be done, here in the Commonwealth 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 returns a definitive "No." The analysis, conclusions, and framework presented in *The Turnaround Challenge*, we hope, will help educators, school reformers, and policy leaders across the country develop a new generation of turnaround strategies that carry, at the very least, the possibility of success.

William Guenther and Andrew Calkins
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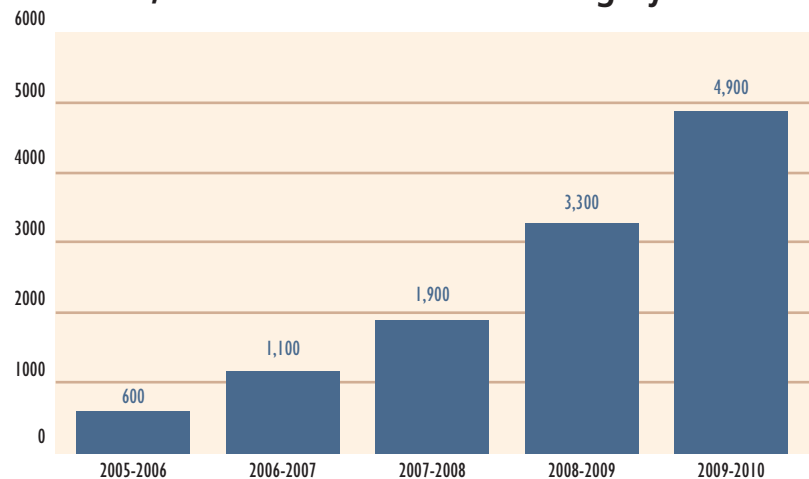
12 Tough Questions

A Self-Audit for States Engaged in School Turnaround

Use this self-audit to measure the probable impact of your state's approach to school turnaround. A corollary tool for school principals charged with turnaround can be found on page 88, following this report's recommended policy framework.

Evaluating Your State's Commitment

1. Has your state visibly focused on its lowest-performing five percent of schools and set *specific, two-year turnaround goals,* such as bringing achievement at least to the current high-poverty school averages in the state?

2. Does your state have a plan in place that gives you confidence that it can deliver on these goals?

3. If not: Is there any evidence that the state is taking steps to accept its responsibility to ensure that students in the lowest-performing schools have access to the same quality of education found in high-performing, high-poverty schools?

Evaluating Your State's Strategy

4. Does your state recognize that a turnaround strategy for failing schools requires fundamental changes that are different from an incremental improvement strategy?

5. Has your state presented districts and schools with:

    • a sufficiently attractive set of turnaround services and policies, collected within a protected turnaround "zone," so that schools actively *want* to gain access to required new operating conditions, streamlined regulations, and resources; and

    • alternative consequences (such as chronically under-performing status and a change in school governance) that encourage schools and districts to volunteer?

6. Does your state provide the student information and data analysis systems schools need to assess learning and individualize teaching?

7. *Changing Conditions:* Does your state's turnaround strategy provide school-level leaders with sufficient streamlined authority over staff, schedule, budget and program to implement the turnaround plan? Does it provide for sufficient incentives in pay and working conditions to attract the best possible staff and encourage them to do their best work?

8. *Building Capacity – Internal:* Does your state recognize that turnaround success depends primarily on an effective "people strategy" that recruits, develops, and retains strong leadership teams and teachers?

9. *Building Capacity – External:* Does your state have a strategy to develop lead partner organizations with specific expertise needed to provide intensive school turnaround support?

10. *Clustering for Support:* Within the protected turnaround zones, does your state collaborate with districts to organize turnaround work into school clusters (by need, school type, region, or feeder pattern) that have a lead partner providing effective network support?

State Leadership and Funding

11. Is there a distinct and visible state entity that, like the schools in the turn-around zone, has the necessary flexibility to act, as well as the required authority, resources, and accountability to lead the turnaround effort?

12. To the extent that your state is funding the turnaround strategy, is that commitment a) adequate and b) at the school level, contingent on fulfilling requirements for participation in the turnaround zone?

The Main Ideas in *The Turnaround Challenge*

Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools

Despite steadily increasing urgency about the nation's lowest-performing schools – those in the bottom five percent – efforts to turn these schools around have largely failed. Marginal change has led to marginal (or no) improvement. These schools, the systems supporting them, and our management of the change process require fundamental rethinking, not more tinkering. We will not make the difference we need to make if we continue with current strategies. That much is clear.

What does successful school turnaround entail? To begin with: a "protected space" where schools are given the flexibility, resources, and support that teachers and administrators are calling for – and that true cultural and system change requires.

A Specialized Discipline

Turnaround requires dramatic changes that produce significant achievement gains in a short period (within two years), followed by a longer period of sustained improvement. Turning around chronically under-performing schools is a different and far more difficult undertaking than school improvement. It should be recognized within education – as it is in other sectors – as a distinct professional discipline that requires specialized experience, training, and support.

There is little track record of turnaround success at scale. A few large urban districts such as Chicago, Miami-Dade, and New York City have undertaken promising turnaround strategies, but most are in their early stages and developing the capacity to fully implement them continues to be a challenge.

Broader implementation of the lessons learned from these turnaround pioneers will require state action on a number of fronts:

- Require failing schools and their districts to either pursue more proactive turnaround strategies or lose control over the school.

- Make fundamental changes in the conditions under which those schools operate.

- Develop a local marketplace of partner/providers skilled in this discipline.

- Appropriate the $250,000-$1,000,000 per year required to turn around a failing school.

A Special Zone for School Turnaround

Comprehensive turnaround will be most effective *when it is actively initiated by districts and schools in response to state requirements and with state support*. States must work to create an appealing "space" or zone for failing schools that provides high-impact reforms such as control over hiring/placement, scheduling, and budgeting, and incentive pay to draw experienced teachers. States must also create distinctly *un*appealing alternatives that include consequences like school closure or state-directed restructuring.

Within the Zone: The Three 'C' Strategies, Supporting a Strong Focus on People

Turnaround is essentially a people-focused enterprise. States, districts, schools, and outside partners must organize themselves to attract, develop, and apply people with skills to match the needs of struggling schools and students.

Three basic elements, this report proposes, are required to make that strategy succeed:

1. **Change** *conditions*. Create a protected space free of bureaucratic restrictions and overly stringent collective bargaining agreements. Provide incentives to challenge and motivate people to do their best work.

2. **Increase** *capacity* internally on school staffs, especially among school leaders, and externally through a strong marketplace of local providers with the experience and ability to serve as lead turnaround partners (see below).

3. **Organize** *clusters* **of schools** – either within a district or across districts – with their own lead turnaround partner providing comprehensive services focused on turnaround. These clusters can be grouped by need, school type, region, or other characteristics.

New State Agency and Commitment

To facilitate the three 'C's, states must create a visible, effective agency that – like turnaround schools themselves – is free from normal bureaucratic constraints and has a flexible set of operating rules that allow it to carry out its mission.

Turnaround work is expensive. In addition to creating a management agency with the necessary authority and flexibility, the work requires adequate resources with corresponding accountability measures in place. Since failing schools customarily lack a vocal constituency to champion their cause, the state commitment must realistically include vigorous advocacy by the governor, state board of education, state superintendent, and leaders from the legislature, business, the nonprofit/foundation community, and the media.

New Model of Turnaround Partners

Failing schools need skilled outside assistance to mount a comprehensive, sustained turnaround initiative. That will require a far stronger resource base of partners than the patchwork of individual consultants (mostly retired educators) now assisting with intervention in most states. It also will require development of a special category of lead turnaround partners – providers that act as integrators of multiple services. The absence of such integrating partners leaves teachers, schools, and districts enmeshed within a confusing array of disconnected outside providers.

Lead turnaround partners would integrate multiple services either as a contractor for school management or on a consulting basis, in conjunction with the district. Lead partners would provide a comprehensive set of integrated academic (and perhaps some back-office) services.

The Benchmark: High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

A small number of schools throughout the country successfully serve high-poverty populations similar to those that typically attend our lowest performing schools. HPHP schools exhibit three overarching characteristics. Together, they make up what the report calls the Readiness model – a set of strategies that turnaround efforts should emulate. The Readiness dimensions include:

Readiness to Learn

- Schools directly address poverty-related student deficits with such strategies as:
  – Extended school day and longer year
  – Action against poverty-related adversity
  – Discipline and engagement
  – Close student-adult relationships

Readiness to Teach

- Shared staff responsibility for student achievement
- Personalized instruction based on diagnostic assessment and flexible time on task
- Teaching culture that stresses collaboration and continuous improvement

Readiness to Act

- Ability to make mission-driven decisions about people, time, money, and program
- Leaders adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships
- Creative responses to constant unrest

With more than 5,000 schools heading towards the most extreme category of underperformance ("Restructuring") under No Child Left Behind by 2009-10, states have little time to waste before mounting retooled initiatives with the comprehensiveness and imagination necessary to successfully turn around those failing schools.

The Turnaround Challenge is being released nationally, with the assistance of a number of education organizations. The Mass Insight Education & Research Institute plans to follow up on this report with a national research-and-development initiative to produce step-by-step blueprints, tools, and sample policy language for states and districts committed to pursuing more proactive forms of turnaround. The initiative also will examine ways that states and the federal government can spur the development of a much stronger resource base of highly skilled turnaround partners. All of this work will be undertaken in conjunction with a number of collaborating organizations and public agencies.

More information on school turnaround can be found at our web site at www.massinsight.org.

"While 39 states have the authority to take strong actions, and while these same 39 states contain dozens of failing schools that have not appreciably improved for years, we still find strong interventions extremely rare."
— Researcher Ronald Brady, 2003

Call to Action

The Protracted Tale of Massachusetts' First Chronically Under-Performing School

*Seven years of
"light touch" school improvement strategies:
No real impact*

Fall 2005:
State intervention
*begins 7 years
after case opens*

4% Proficient

8% Proficient

1998   1999   2000   2001   2002   2003   2004   2005

**1998 and 1999:
Critically low MCAS scores**

January 2001: State fact-finding review
July: BOE approves improvement plan

October 2004: School declared
Chronically Under-Performing

Spring 2000: Referred for State panel review
May: Review decision deferred; $25K for planning
October: School declared Under-Performing

May 2003: Two-year follow-up review:
decision on status deferred

February 2005: Assessment of district or school
capacity to implement improvement plan

Fall 2005: America's Choice begins working in
Kuss Middle School and 3 feeder elementary
schools

THE GRAPH: 8th grade math scores on Massachusetts MCAS exam for Kuss Middle School, Fall River, MA.
Students in the Proficient and Advanced categories were 4% in 1998 and failed to rise above 8% by 2005.

Marginal change = marginal results for under-performing schools

Massachusetts, Mass Insight's home state, is widely (and deservedly) cited as a leader in achievement
and effective school reform. But the story of the Commonwealth's poorest-performing schools nonetheless reflects
a national social policy crisis: America's collective inability to help high-challenge, high-poverty, low-achieving schools succeed.

And: our willingness to let these schools (like the one described in the graph above)
struggle while generations of students pass through, emerging without the skills they need.

Massachusetts has moved, since 2005, toward stronger forms of intervention and support in its failing schools.
So have some other states and large school districts. A few high-performing, high-poverty schools are showing the way.

But without sustained commitment and dramatically different strategies, the future will look like the past.
In the spirit of igniting that commitment and galvanizing bold new responses to the turnaround challenge, we offer this report.

1. The Problem – and the Vision

THE PROBLEM

Five percent or 5,000 of America's one hundred thousand public schools, representing more than 2,500,000 students, are on track to fall into the most extreme federal designation for failure by 2009-10.

Many more schools will be placed in less extreme categories; in some states, the percentage will significantly exceed 50%. But a good portion of these schools will be so designated because of lagging gains in one or more student subgroups, under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. These schools face challenges that may be solved by fairly modest forms of assistance.

But the 1,100 schools already in Restructuring – the most extreme designation – as well as those likely soon to reach it represent a level of persistent failure that commands swift, dramatic intervention.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Turning around the "bottom five" percent of schools is the crucible of education reform. They represent our greatest, clearest need – and therefore a great opportunity to bring about fundamental change.

Why Schools Fail

These schools fail because the challenges they face are substantial; because they themselves are dysfunctional; and because the system of which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of the high-poverty student populations they tend to serve.

The school model our society provides to urban, high-poverty, highly diverse student populations facing 21st-century skill expectations is largely the same as that used throughout American public education, a model unchanged from its origins in the early 20th century. This highly challenged student demographic requires something significantly different – particularly at the high school level.

Turnaround: A New Response

Standards, testing, and accountability enable us, for the first time, to identify with conviction our most chronically under-performing schools. *Turnaround* is the emerging response to an entirely new dynamic in public education: the threat of closure for underperformance.

Dramatic change requires urgency and an atmosphere of crisis. The indefensibly poor performance records at these schools – compared to achievement outcomes at model schools serving serving similar student populations (see The Benchmark, next page) – should ignite exactly the public, policymaker, and professional outrage needed to justify dramatic action. If status-quo thinking continues to shield the dysfunctions that afflict *these* schools, there can be little hope for truly substantial reform throughout the system. Turnaround schools, in other words, represent both our greatest challenge – and an opportunity for significant, enduring change that we cannot afford to pass up.

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

1 Safety, Discipline & Engagement
Students feel secure and inspired to learn

2 Action against Adversity
Schools directly address their students' poverty-driven deficits

3 Close Student-Adult Relationships
Students have positive and enduring mentor/teacher relationships

readiness to **LEARN**

readiness to **TEACH**

4 Shared Responsibility for Achievement
Staff feel deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement

5 Personalization of Instruction
Individualized teaching based on diagnostic assessment and adjustable time on task

6 Professional Teaching Culture
Continuous improvement through collaboration and job-embedded learning

readiness to **ACT**

7 Resource Authority
School leaders can make mission-driven decisions regarding people, time, money & program

8 Resource Ingenuity
Leaders are adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships

9 Agility in the Face of Turbulence
Leaders, teachers, and systems are flexible and inventive in responding to constant unrest

The Benchmark

A small but growing number of high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools are demonstrating that different approaches can bring highly challenged student populations to high achievement.

How do they do it? Extensive analysis of HPHP school practice and effective schools research revealed nine strategies that turn the daily turbulence and challenges of high-poverty settings into design factors that increase the effectiveness with which these schools promote learning and achievement. These strategies enable the schools to acknowledge and foster students' *Readiness to Learn*, enhance and focus staff's *Readiness to Teach*, and expand teachers' and administrators' *Readiness to Act* in dramatically different ways than more traditional schools. This dynamic "HPHP Readiness Model" is represented in the graphic above.

A "New-World" Approach

As understanding of these Readiness elements grows, it becomes clear that HPHP schools are not making the traditional model of education work better; they are reinventing what schools do. We call this "New-World" schooling, in contrast to the "Old-World" model – a linear, curriculum-driven "conveyor belt" that students and schools try (with little success in high-poverty settings) to keep up with.

The New-World model evokes instead the sense of a medical team rallying to each student, backed by a whole system of skilled professionals, processes, and technologies organized and ready to analyze, diagnose, and serve the goal of learning. The converging arrows symbolizing this "New-World" model of education lie at the center of the Readiness Triangle. What happens in classrooms between teacher and student is the most critical moment in the delivery of the education service. But the quality of that moment depends entirely on the readiness of the system and the people who are part of it to teach, learn, and act effectively and in accordance with the mission.

For more information on the magnitude and nature of the turnaround challenge, see Part 1 of this report. For more on the strategies and lessons offered by high-performing, high-poverty schools, see Part 2 and the Supplemental Report.

2. The Challenge of Change

WHAT'S BEEN TRIED

The research on turnaround of failing schools reveals some scattered, individual successes, but very little enduring progress at scale.

Most schools in Restructuring (the federal designation for chronic under-performance) are like organisms that have built immunities, over years of attempted intervention, to the "medicine" of incremental reform. Low-expectation culture, reform-fatigued faculty, high-percentage staff turnover, inadequate leadership, and insufficient authority for fundamental change all contribute to a general lack of success, nationally, in turning failing schools around and the near-total lack of success in conducting successful turnaround at scale.

Turnaround vs. "School Improvement"

Most of what's applied to under-performing schools today represents an incremental-change effort or an incomplete attempt at wholesale change.

"Light-touch" efforts that redirect curriculum or provide leadership coaching may help some average-performing schools improve, but they are clearly not sufficient to produce successful turnaround of chronically poor-performing schools. This is not surprising, given that high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools have evolved such fundamentally different strategies to achieve success, and that turnaround initiatives need additionally to break through existing inertia.

Turnaround, as we are defining it here, is different from *school improvement* because it focuses on the most consistently under-performing schools and involves dramatic, transformative change. Change that, in fact, is propelled by imperative: the school must improve or it will be redefined or closed.

The Inadequate Response to Date

Our collective theory of change has been timid, compared to the nature and magnitude of the need. Most reform efforts focus on *program change* and limit themselves to *providing help*. Some also allow for *changing people*. A very few also focus on *changing conditions and incentives*, especially the degree of leadership authority over staff, time, and money.

Analysis of school intervention efforts to date confirms that they are generally marked by:

- **Inadequate design**: lack of ambition, comprehensiveness, integration, and networking support

- **Inadequate capacity**: fragmented training initiatives, instead of an all-encompassing people strategy and strong, integrated partnerships that support the mission

- **Inadequate incentive change**: driven more by compliance than buy-in

- **Inadequate political will**: episodic and sometimes confusing policy design; under-funding; and inconsistent political support

Focusing on program reform is safe. It produces little of the controversy that the more systemic reforms (human resource management, governance, budget control) can spark. NCLB, despite its intended objectives, has effectively endorsed and supported risk-averse turnaround strategies through its open-ended fifth option for schools entering Restructuring. The net result: little track record nationally – and that mostly at the district level, not the state – in comprehensive, system-focused, condition-changing turnaround.

For more on responses to date, see Part 3, Appendix A, and the Supplemental Report.

What Success Requires: A "Zone" for Effective Turnaround

States and districts can engineer more effective turn-around at scale by creating space that supports *outside-the-system* approaches, focused *inside* the system.

The high-performing, high-poverty schools we studied tend to reflect characteristics of highly entrepreneurial organizations. That makes sense. These schools are succeeding either by working outside of traditional public education structures (charters); or by working around those structures, internally (in-district charter-likes); or by operating exceptionally well against the system – with emphasis on *exceptionally*. Lessons from these schools indicate a need for the following elements in any school turnaround effort – all of which reflect characteristics that are not norms, broadly speaking, of traditional inside-the-system public schooling:

▶ **Clearly defined authority to act** based on what's best for children and learning – i.e., flexibility and control over staffing, scheduling, budget, and curriculum

▶ **Relentless focus on hiring and staff 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

▶ **Additional time** in the school day and across the school year

▶ **Performance-based behavioral expectations** for all stakeholders including teachers, students, and (often) parents

▶ **Integrated, research-based programs and related social services** that are specifically designed, personalized, and adjusted to address students' academic and related psycho-social needs

A handful of major school districts – Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York City, Philadelphia – are experimenting with *turnaround zones* in an effort to establish protected space for these kinds of approaches. (See graphic at right.) The opportunity for states is to create this kind of protected space for turnarounds on behalf of all school districts.

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

FIGURE B
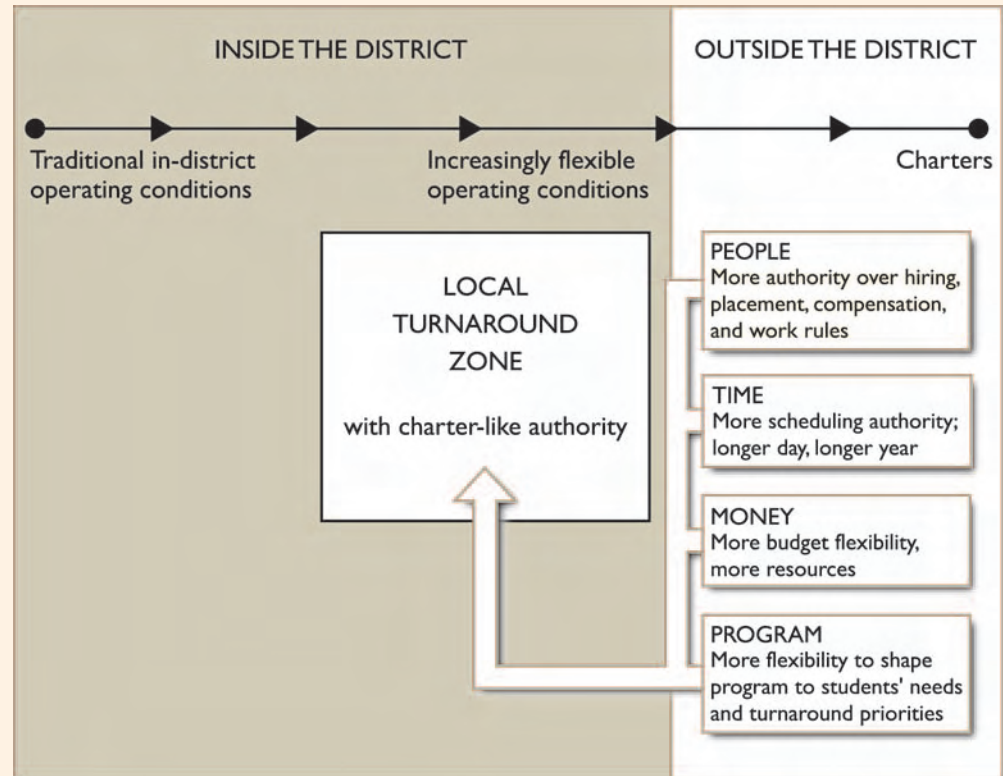
Building the Turnaround Model:

In order to enable school-level reform that incorporates the three "readiness" dimensions of high-performing, high-poverty schools (see page 9), turnaround zones must be created – either within or across school district lines – that change traditional operating conditions that inhibit reform. The zones establish outside-the-system authorities inside the system, within a framework of strong support and guidance from the district and a lead turnaround partner.

3. The Way Forward

A CALL TO ACTION FOR STATES

Effective turnaround at scale calls for bold, comprehensive action from the state, working together with districts and outside partners.

State governments must take strong action – even in strong local-control states. They must act in concert with districts and outside providers. With rare exceptions, schools and districts – essentially risk-averse, conservative cultures – will not undertake the dramatic changes required for successful turnaround on their own. But while states may have the responsibility to ensure equitable intervention across district lines, they clearly do not have the capacity to implement turnaround on the ground at the scale of the need. Their role is to require fundamental, not incremental change; establish operating conditions that support, rather than undermine, the desired changes; add new capacity in high-leverage school and district roles and establish turnaround partners; and galvanize local capacity where it is currently trapped in dysfunctional settings.

The Three 'C's of Turnaround at Scale

Our research suggests that a coherent, comprehensive state turnaround initiative would incorporate three key elements: Changing Conditions, Building Capacity, and Clustering for Support.

Changing Conditions
Turnaround requires protected space that dismantles common barriers to reform. 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 or "carve-outs" for their neediest schools. But others (Philadelphia, Oakland) have needed intervention from the state to mount similar initiatives.

States should pass regulations (as Massachusetts has) or legislation (as Maryland has) that produce sufficient leverage for all district leaders to create the protected space they need for turnaround to be effective. The best regulations *change the incentives* for local stakeholders, motivating the development of turnaround zones in order to gain their advantages – while avoiding "final option" alternatives that would diminish district and union control.

The condition changes needed for turnaround zones can be controversial. But turnaround leaders clearly must have the authority to *act*. That means a collaborative revision of many contractual requirements in districts with unions. Districts, working with turnaround partners and the state, must be able to install new principals if needed; principals must in turn have control over who is working in their buildings, along with the allocation of money, time, and programming (including curriculum and partnerships with social services). Schools must be freed to take on professional norms, including differentiated roles for teachers and differentiated compensation. Decision-making must be freed so that it revolves around the needs of children, not adults. At the same time, each turnaround school cannot be expected to design and manage its own change process; its latitude for decision-making lies within a framework of strong network support and turnaround design parameters established by the state, and carried out by districts and/or turnaround partners.

Building Capacity
Organizational turnaround in non-education-related fields requires special expertise; school turnaround is no different. It is a two-stage process that calls for fundamental transformation at the start, managed by educators with the necessary training and disposition, with steady, capacity-building improvement to follow. Neither schools and districts, nor states, nor third-party providers have sufficient capacity at present to undertake successful turnaround at scale. Building that capacity for effective turnaround – both inside of schools and among outside partners –

FIGURE C

must be the state's responsibility, as school districts lack the means and expertise to do so on their own. Moreover: turnaround represents an opportunity to redesign the ways schools work with outside partners. The fragmentation that characterizes current school/provider relationships needs to be replaced by an integrated approach that aligns outside support around the turnaround plan, organized by a single "systems integrator" partner.

Clustering for Support
Turnaround has meaningful impact at the level of the school building, but 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 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.

The Political Realities: Enabling the State Role
Turnaround of failing local schools has no natural constituency. Coalitions of support must instead be built at two levels – statewide and community-wide. To ensure sustained and sufficient statewide commitment to turnaround reforms and investments, *someone* (governor, commissioner, business/community leader) or some agency must create an advocacy coalition of political, education, corporate, foundation, university, and non-profit leaders. To ensure broad commitment to turnaround at the community level, states can blend the leverage of accountability-based sanctions (you risk losing authority over this school if you fail to act) with the "carrot" of resources and condition-change. Finally: to design and implement turnaround effectively, states must create an appropriate coordinating body or mechanism to lead the work, ideally as a public/private agency linked to the state department of education.

For more on the three 'C's and the state role, see Parts 3 and 4 of this report, along with the proposed Framework in Part 5.

From Fragmented Improvement Projects to Integrated Turnaround Strategies

"Old World" Intervention Capacity & Roles

State Consultants — District Mandates — One School — Many Providers & Partners

"New World" Comprehensive Turnaround Framework

STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

State — District

State Turnaround Agency — LOCAL TURNAROUND ZONE — District Support Office

CHANGE **CONDITIONS**
BUILD **CAPACITY**
CLUSTER FOR SUPPORT

Cluster of Turnaround Schools

Lead Turnaround Partner

Supporting Providers

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

1.1 The Challenge of School Turnaround
How this report works, and what you can get out of it

The goal of this study was to produce recommendations for states and school districts seeking a flexible, systematic approach to swift and significant transformation in schools (particularly high schools) deemed chronically under-performing under No Child Left Behind or state accountability systems. Our research leads us to believe that turnaround of this kind is achievable, and furthermore, has the potential to open the door to more widespread dramatic education reform.

Transformation of this kind is, however, untested and unfamiliar territory in school reform. **There is no real precedent** for the threat of closure due to under-performance – a new concept in public education. **There is no clear consensus** as to the distinctions between turnaround, takeover, restructuring, reconstitution, and redesign. Finally, **there is no blueprint**: despite the nation's longstanding struggle and angst over failing schools, there is simply no consistent, reliable, and enduring track record of turnaround success at the district or state level anywhere in the country.

Accordingly, the study was designed not only to learn as much as possible from past and current reform efforts, but to broaden the analysis by looking at specific root causes and at those rare schools that defy the odds in addressing them. This included:

- Researching the nature of under-performance in schools serving disadvantaged, high-poverty enrollments (which represent the bulk of failing schools);

- Examining the well-documented practices of individual high-performing schools serving these enrollments and distilling the strategies they use to achieve their results;

- Analyzing a wide spectrum of scaled-up school intervention, from those simply providing guidance and added capacity to more extensive initiatives involving staff or principal replacement, closure/reopening, and the establishment of special turnaround "zones" with altered operating conditions;

- Isolating the key elements, intensity, duration, resources, and funding required for turnaround of under-performing schools to take root; and

- Developing a framework for state policymakers and school district leaders to use in developing the systems, approaches, expanded capacity, and resource levels required to bring about dramatic transformation in struggling schools.

For more on our research methodology, see the facing page.

Tools for Practical Use
The project has produced several different tools for your use. They include:

- **Main report**: This summary of our major findings, conclusions, and recommendations, divided into five Parts and Appendices A and B.

- **Supplemental report**: Additional support for the most important points made in the main report, along with profiles of ten representative state intervention initiatives and four district efforts, with artifacts and resources from several of those initiatives. Available in print and at www.massinsight.org.

- **Downloadable presentations and resources**: Also available at www.massinsight.org are presentation decks you may download and customize to make the case for coherent, well-supported turnaround action in your state or district. In addition, our website offers a directory of available turnaround resources which we will be continually updating.

Map of *The Turnaround Challenge*

Research Methodology

This Project Map presents the research questions at the core of this project and the organization of our answers in this report. Research methods across a year's worth of information-gathering included the following:

- **Literature analysis**: More than 300 research reports, news articles, and other resources on school intervention, related federal and state policymaking, effective schools, poverty impacts, change management, and organizational turnaround

- **Individual and group interviews** with practitioners, researchers, leading policy-makers, and reform experts in more than a dozen states

- **Extensive interviews** with directors of school intervention in six major urban districts and with 50 school management and/or support organizations, through a related research project supported by the NewSchools Venture Fund

- **Review of the report's major findings and recommendations** by more than two dozen national reform leaders and project partners (see Acknowledgements in the Introductory Material section of the report)

Research Investigations

School Performance: Poor and Exemplary

Why do chronically under-performing schools fail?

Why do high-performing, high-poverty schools succeed?

School Intervention: Design and Results

What is the scale and nature of the nation's school intervention challenge?

What strategies have states and districts used to turn around failing schools, and with what impact?

What turnaround approaches would best address the reasons why some schools fail, and incorporate the hallmarks of schools that succeed?

Turnaround at Scale

How can states and districts accomplish effective turnaround at a scale that meets the need?

Report Elements

Part 1: The Challenge of School Turnaround
Understanding the nature and scale of the nation's turnaround challenge; the reasons for hope; and the present opportunity to make the practice of school turnaround a model for change in public education

Part 2: How High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Ignite Learning Under Adverse Conditions
Three dimensions – Readiness to Learn, Readiness to Teach, Readiness to Act – in which exemplary high-poverty schools excel, and what we should learn from them

Part 3: What Success Requires: Changing the Odds for Turnaround Schools (See also: Appendix A)
Key lessons from existing, inadequate restructuring efforts, resulting in a focus on three critical elements of turnaround design: conditions, capacity, and clustering.

Part 4: Organizing at the State Level for Turnaround of Under-Performing Schools
Why NCLB has failed to catalyze effective, high-impact intervention strategies; how state leaders can marshal the support required to implement comprehensive turnaround

Part 5: A Framework for Turnaround of Under-Performing Schools
The core elements of a suggested statewide framework for effective turnaround at scale

1.2 The Magnitude and Nature of the Turnaround Challenge
Many schools need assistance. The bottom five percent need much, much more.

The challenge for states and districts seeking to turn around chronically under-performing schools is one of scale and of strategy, having to do with the nature of these schools, their students, and the systems of which they are a part. The difficulty of the challenge is reflected in the inadequacy of existing reform efforts, proved by the lack of any sustained, demonstrated success.

Number of Failing Schools Rising Sharply

In 2005, the latest year for which complete data are available, more than 12,000 schools nationally (out of roughly 100,000) fell into NCLB's "In Need of Improvement" category. Some of these schools narrowly missed their targets for a single year;

to do so as NCLB's achievement targets rise towards the proficiency-for-all goal in 2014.

This flood of schools labeled under-performing has stirred concern across the landscape of American public education. Most relevant to our purposes here: the concern that the ever-increasing number and percentage of schools falling into the NCLB watch-lists are masking a deeper crisis in a smaller set of schools – those in which a large proportion of students have failed to meet state standards for multiple years in a row.

These are not schools that have been labeled "low performing" because of issues with a single student subgroup. These are schools that any reasonable observer would agree are

FIGURE 1B   **Nearly 5,000 Schools Are Projected to Be in Restructuring by 2010**
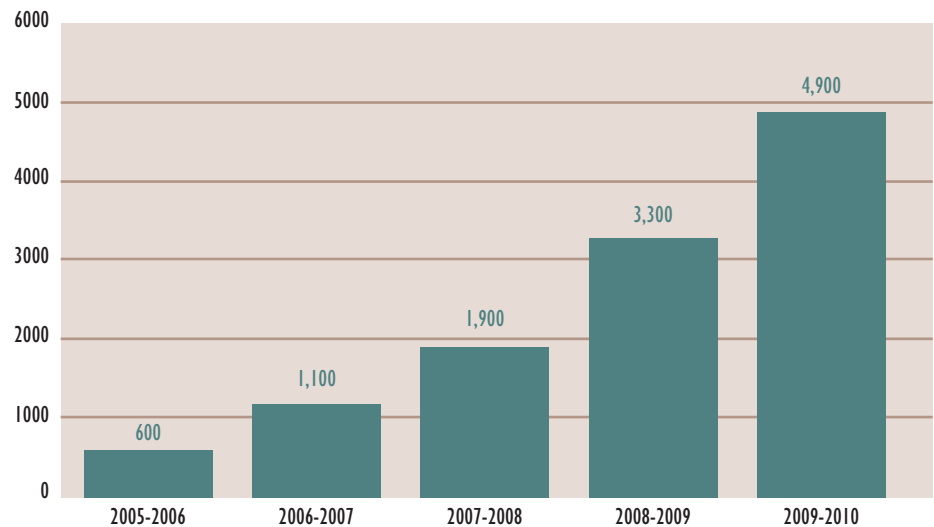
Projections are based on actual 2005-2006 data for schools in Restructuring Status under NCLB with the assumption that the rate of schools leaving that status will remain constant over the next four years. Source of 2005-06 data: Center on Education Policy (2006).

The schools in question are schools in which performance has been so low for so long that they would fall within practically any definition of chronic failure a state could devise.

others missed the mark within just one demographic subgroup (for example, Latino students or pupils in Special Education). Both the number and the percentage are rising annually, and in all likelihood will continue

chronically failing to provide their students with an adequate education. While states can establish different definitions of "chronic failure," such as 50% of students failing for two or more years in a row, the schools in

question are schools in which performance has been so low for so long that they would fall within practically any definition of chronic failure a state could devise.

Although inexact, projections of schools identified for Restructuring, the ultimate NCLB school-performance category, provide some estimate of the number of these chronically under-performing schools. As Figure 1B shows, if current trends persist,

some 5,000 public schools – about five percent of all public schools nationally – will be in Restructuring by 2009-10 as a result of failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for multiple years.

The Roots of School Failure
These schools fail because the challenges they face are substantial; because they themselves are dysfunctional; and because the system of

which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of the high-poverty student populations they tend to serve.

This report will discuss all of these issues, but we begin with the first and the third. Failing schools serve mostly poor children. As charts from eight states on page 27 amply demonstrate, there is a strong correlation between the family income characteristics of schools and their achievement outcomes. That's not news. What's noteworthy about those charts is the message they send about the power of some high-poverty schools to make big differences in student achievement – and the joint failure of public education and public policy to adopt and extend what's working in those schools.

These schools fail because the challenges they face are substantial; because they themselves are dysfunctional; and because the system of which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of the high-poverty student populations they tend to serve.

Poor children arrive at the school-house door with deep learning deficits. The neuroscience of disadvantage is clear: By age 3, children born in poverty have acquired, on average, only half the vocabulary of their higher-income counterparts. (Hart and Risley, 2003) By kindergarten, there is a significant deficit in reading. (NCES, 2005) Being poor far outweighs race/ethnicity, family structure, and other factors as causes of cognitive disadvantage. (Lee and Burkam, 2002)

Far from mitigating the achievement gap, the experience of most children in our public schools appears to exacerbate it. As indicated in Figure 1C, by grade 4 children eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch trail

Poverty Has an Early and Continuing Impact on Achievement

The typical gap between children in high-poverty schools (————) and children in low-poverty schools (————) begins at birth, not Kindergarten, and reaches 3 to 4 years by grade 12.
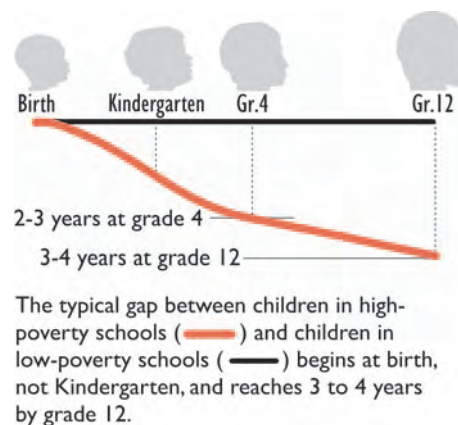
their counterparts by two to three grade levels in reading – the essential skill for future learning. (NCES, 2005) By the time they reach grade 12, if they do so at all, poor and minority students are about four years behind other students in reading. (Haycock et al, 2001)

As we will explore in Part 2, a child's economic circumstances are far from the only factors inhibiting achievement in high-poverty schools. The various risk factors have been well-

documented: higher absenteeism and behavioral challenges, lower parent involvement and different parenting style, higher student migration and

Being poor far outweighs race/ethnicity, family structure, and other factors as causes of cognitive disadvantage.

teacher turnover rates, school budget inequities, higher percentages of new and under-prepared teachers, and a prevailing culture of low expectations for achievement, among others.

Furthermore, our poor and minority students are highly concentrated in high-poverty schools, and our minority and immigrant child populations are soaring. (Fix and Passel, 2003) Our failure, as a society, to interrupt low achievement patterns in high-poverty schools has significant consequences not only for the children involved, but also for society in general (see box, page 19).

The Magnitude and Nature of the Turnaround Challenge
(continued)

The Inadequacy of Current Intervention

Given the nature and complexity of these root causes for under-performance, it should not be too surprising that existing, fairly marginal reform efforts have generally failed to turn the schools around. These are schools that continue to fail students at rates that

Wasn't standards-based reform supposed to change all of this?

The answer is yes – or rather, *yes-but*. The "but" in this context has to do with the nature of public policy, which tends to be long on the rhetoric of immediacy but short on actions that fundamentally alter the status

FIGURE 1D

A "Pacing Guide" to Standards-Based Reform: At the End of the Sequence Is Intervention in Failing Schools

1. GOALS	Establish clear standards for achievement
2. SUPPORT	Provide resources, training, tools, funding
3. ACCOUNTABILITY	At every level – districts, schools, students
4. ASSESSMENT	High quality, matched with standards, and ensuring fairness
5. INTERVENTION	First: support for struggling students **Second: turnaround for struggling schools**

Intervention into struggling schools and districts is the least-developed and least-understood dimension of the nation's standards-based reform movement.

are double their state averages, and quadruple (or more) the failure rates at the highest-performing schools serving similar student populations. For a variety of reasons, "first-generation" interventions – those prompted since the crystallization of the higher-standards movement in the early 1990s – have left these schools seemingly untouched. Their achievement rates are static. Their failure is compounded, with interest, when their graduates enter middle school or high school or the workplace with skill sets that are breathtakingly insufficient for the new challenges they face.

quo. And nowhere is that tendency stronger than in education-related public policy.

The standards movement, codified nationally in 2002 with the passage of No Child Left Behind, was and remains today an effort billed as a challenge to the status quo. NCLB and the many partially overlapping state accountability systems set in place over the past decade have brought the challenge of chronically under-performing schools squarely into the public limelight. Spurred in part by a kind of sports-pages fascination with rankings and lists, newspapers and other

media have enthusiastically embraced the school-performance ratings released by state education agencies, splashing them with gusto across their front pages. Lawmakers and policymakers across the country have initiated waves of regulation in response to the (often) bad news in the rankings. The new regulations have advanced a number of different dimensions of standards-based reform, including the determination of the performance standards themselves, performance measurement in the form of testing, and accountability systems designed to

categorize struggling schools. (See Figure 1D, A "Pacing Guide" to Standards-Based Reform.)

At the end of that line of standards-based public policy initiatives comes "intervention." And there, public policy both nationally and in state capitals across the country has mostly blinked. Compared to the scale and immediacy of the need, failing-school intervention policy and the actions it has precipitated over the past decade can be characterized this way: *Ready... aim... aim... aim... ... aim some more....*

Compared to the scale and immediacy of the need, failing-school intervention policy and the actions it has precipitated over the past decade can be characterized this way: Ready... aim... aim... aim... ... aim some more....

The seven-year timeline, presented in the Call to Action on page 7 of this report, for Massachusetts' response to the first school to nudge its way into the state's Chronically Under-Performing category is, unfortunately, and lack the comprehensive "people" strategies needed to accompany dramatic change. School intervention has been consistently under-funded and provided with inconsistent political support. While most involve only

Ironically, in making visible the indefensibility of the status quo, failing schools' well-documented and chronic under-perform-ance may turn out to be a critical lever for effective reform.

far too typical. *Intervention* into struggling schools and districts is the least-developed and least-understood dimension of the nation's standards-based reform movement.

Indeed our analysis of state and district intervention efforts (presented in Part 3 and in detail in Appendix A and the Supplemental Report) confirmed that the vast majority of these efforts suffer from inadequate design, stop well short of the comprehensive-ness of change required, fail to provide the support that schools require,

changes in programs, some also include changes in people; only a handful address changes in conditions that would allow the kind of approaches used by high-performing, high-poverty schools.

Nonetheless: it appears to us that the time for more dramatic intervention has come. Ironically, in making visible the indefensibility of the status quo, failing schools' well-documented and chronic under-performance may turn out to be the critical trigger for effective reform.

Why It Matters
When Public Schools Consistently Fail the Children They Serve

It is difficult to overstate the importance of solving the challenge of chronically under-performing schools. Within two years, schools in NCLB's Restructuring cat-egory will represent more than one million students nationally. Many of these students will move to the next level without developing foundational skills that are essential for success, particularly considering the higher-level capabilities increasingly demanded by the knowledge economy. Many are destined to join the ranks of high school dropouts, documented most recently in *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (Bridgeland et al, 2006), never obtaining the high school diploma that is a critical, though increasingly insuffi-cient, key to economic success. In six of the nine largest school districts in the U.S., graduation rates are below 50%, and none of the nine has a rate higher than 55%. (Swanson, 2004)

The statistics are even more dire for students from low-income families and stu-dents of color, whose rates of achievement, graduation, and post-secondary com-pletion are far lower than those of their peers. (Perie et al, 2005; Swanson, 2004; Carey, 2005; and Part 2 of this report)

Economists and educational researchers have argued persuasively that a decent middle class wage requires at a minimum a high school education that equips people to pursue post-secondary education successfully. (Murnane & Levy, 1996) The consequences of poor education ripple through society in the form of higher crime rates, higher costs of public assistance, and lower tax revenues. No com-munity can thrive when many of its public schools consistently and thoroughly fail the children they serve, and our democracy suffers when so many of our citi-zens are not equipped to participate meaningfully in civic life.

High school dropouts:
- Earn $9,200 less per year, on average, than high school graduates.
- Are three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates.
- Are twice as likely as high school graduates to enter poverty from one year to the next.
- Are eight times as likely to be in prison as high school graduates.
- Collectively represent a loss of about 1.6 percent of the gross domestic product each year.

Sources: Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, The Silent Epidemic (2006); Rouse, Social Costs of Inadequate Education Symposium, Columbia Teachers College (2005)

1.3 A Turning Point for Turnaround – and an Entry Point for Real Reform?
Failing schools offer a chance to do things differently. Will we take it?

On a cloudy, atypically chilly day last November in Washington, DC, more than a hundred education reform leaders from across the country crowded into a conference convened by the American Enterprise Institute and the Fordham Foundation. One after another, panels of experts – educators, researchers, public officials,

A small number of high-performing, high-poverty schools are demonstrating that different approaches can bring highly challenged student populations to high achievement.

foundation leaders – took center-stage and decried the lack of progress being made under President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act in turning around achievement in the nation's poorest-performing schools.

"This was a roomful of the country's biggest champions of standards-based reform," said one participant after the conference concluded, "reflecting on NCLB's impact on our neediest schools, five years after its enactment. And I can tell you it was a relentlessly discouraging day."

It's easy to be dismayed by the results of the nation's most vigorous effort ever to significantly raise achievement among all public school students. Reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have nudged upwards, but not so much as to inspire optimism that NCLB's goal of

proficiency for all by 2014 is even remotely within reach. (See Figure 1E.) For the 2005-6 school year, more than one-quarter of the nation's schools failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress; a total of 29 states saw an increase that year in the number of schools not making AYP. And the results to date of state and district efforts to turn around chronically under-performing schools, spurred by NCLB's accountability requirements and "toolbox" of restructuring options, is inconclusive at best and substantially disappointing at worst.

And yet.

And yet our research over the past eighteen months has convinced us that a confluence of factors has created a window of opportunity for much more dramatic approaches to school reform, focused (at least at first) on the bottom five percent of schools. These factors include:

- The promise of high-performing, high-poverty school success

- A new generation of comprehensive intervention strategies by a few major urban districts on behalf of their struggling schools

- The growing sense of urgency and acceptance that in these schools, the status quo is indefensible and everything has to be on the table.

The Promise of High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools
It's a primary benefit of standards-based reform: our ability to identify with confidence schools that demonstrably outperform their peers. It's what gives ballast to two truisms of modern-day school reform: *no excuses* and *all kids can learn*. We all know the pattern: virtually all of the worst-performing

schools serve high-poverty enrollments. Yet in every state, some high-poverty schools perform significantly better than others, and a few perform nearly as well as schools serving much more affluent student populations.

Can good schools, by themselves, break the cycle of diminished expectations and quality of life that rules in impoverished neighborhoods – or do poverty and its related issues need to be addressed first? The answer, we will argue over the course of this report, is that the two are inextricably linked, and that success lies in creating good schools that are also well-tuned to the nature and needs of high-poverty student enrollments. Some inner-city schools are already demonstrating this, creating new models designed specifically to meet the needs of this student population.

As Paul Tough (2006) wrote in a *New York Times* Sunday Magazine cover story that appeared the same week as the conference in Washington DC, "The divisions between black and white and rich and poor begin almost at birth, and they are reinforced every day of a child's life." But, he continued: "A loose coalition of schools, all

of them quite new… provide evidence that… the achievement gap can be overcome, in a convincing way, for large numbers of poor and minority students, not in generations but in years."

While effective school practice research stretches back 30 years, the high-poverty school (and especially, high-poverty high school) that has turned chronic under-performance into consistent high achievement is exceedingly rare. Still, there is strong evidence to conclude that a small number of high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools are bringing highly challenged student populations to high achievement. A number of these schools operate outside of traditional school district structures (as charters or as in-district charter-likes)

– and the others tend to be led by strong, entrepreneurial principals whose vision and effectiveness aren't constrained by public education's conventions and embedded organizational challenges. They produce student achievement outcomes that vastly exceed urban norms.

Educators and reformers have long used effective-practice research as a basis for school improvement programs. But in Part 2 of this report, we argue that most of this work has taken place within a fairly narrow band, focused on technical solutions involving curriculum, data analysis, and staff development. Important work – but insufficient by itself. HPHP schools are able to generate such high achievement because they confront, in specific, comprehensive, on-going

FIGURE 1E

What Marginal Change Has Wrought: Static Achievement Since 1992
Trend in 12th-grade average NAEP reading scores

Souce: U.S. Department of Education, 2007

- - - - - Accommodations not permitted
———— Accommodations permitted

"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."
– Paul Tough, The New York Times
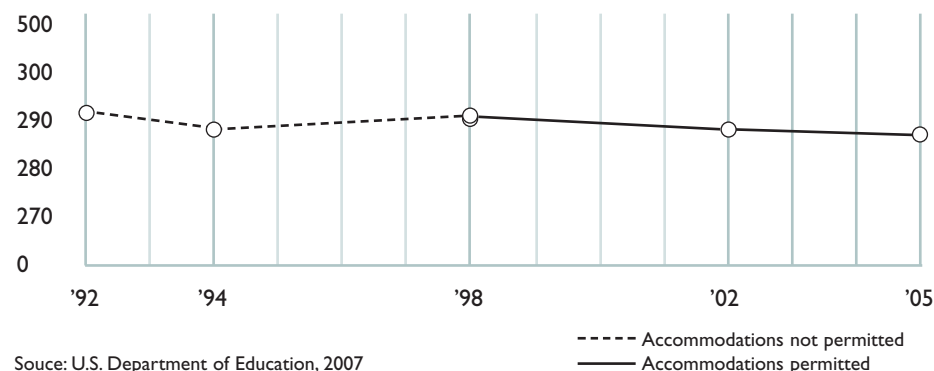
ways, the systemic effects of poverty on their students' learning. In Part 2 of this report we extract the essential methods and strategies they use to do this – a tailored set of effective practices we distill in the "HPHP Readiness Model," and which constitute a de facto set of design factors for school turnaround. Taken together, they illustrate, as Tough noted in his *New York Times* article, "the magnitude of the effort that will be required for that change to take place."

The Promise of District Experiments in Comprehensive Intervention
The HPHP Readiness model requires some fundamental changes in the

operating conditions of turnaround schools – how much authority, for example, principals and turnaround leaders have in shaping and working with their school's teaching staff. A handful of major districts – Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Miami-Dade – have begun to experiment over the past couple of years with more comprehensive forms of intervention that incorporate such thinking. These initiatives variously provide:

- **Authority to turnaround leaders to make choices** about allocating resources – people, time, money – in support of the plan

A Turning Point for Turnaround

(continued)

- **Waivers** of some collective bargaining requirements and work rules, collaboratively developed with teachers' unions

- **Resources to compensate staff** according to professional norms (i.e., for extra responsibility, duty in high-need areas, or for performance)

- **Resources for additional time** in the school day and/or school year

- **Extensive outside assistance from providers** and intermediary organizations, often supported by foundation grants.

It is too soon to tell whether these initiatives (detailed in Appendix A and the Supplemental Report) will produce exemplary results. But it's clear that they come far closer to providing an environment conducive to HPHP Readiness-style strategies than the more common, traditional forms of incremental intervention have done.

The Promise of Growing Urgency Regarding Failing Schools

The accountability timetable set in motion by No Child Left Behind has now delivered us to the doorstep of intervention. We are at the end of a line of public policy dominos set in motion by a commitment to higher academic standards – achievement goals, resource supports, accountability, and assessment. (See the standards-based reform "Pacing Guide" in Figure 1D on page 18.)

But NCLB and state accountability systems are only two of the factors fueling a growing sense of urgency to address the nation's chronically under-performing schools. Dim comparisons of American achievement to that of students in most other countries and fears connected to the outsourcing of American jobs, among other developments, have been wake-up calls for federal and state policymakers on the critical importance of educational attainment to society.

At the same time, awareness of the HPHP schools, variously called "Dispelling the Myth schools," "Vanguard" schools, "90-90-90" schools or any number of other monikers, is undercutting the long-held dogma of education-by-zip-code. "The evidence," as Tough (2006) concludes in his *New York Times* story, "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

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?"

Turnaround of America's poorest-performing schools represents an opportunity to take up Tough's challenge, to use these schools as a gateway towards the "radically different," "more intensive" methods so visible in high-performing, high-poverty schools. (See chart, facing page.)

In the challenge represented by America's most poorly performing schools lies an opportunity for dramatic, accessible, and achievable change.

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

The Turnaround Challenge offers analysis and a framework to guide that work. The first step in defining the turnaround solution is to extract the "DNA" from the HPHP schools that already bring under-performing students up to high standards. This is where we turn next.

Turnaround Offers an Entry Point to System-Changing Reforms

INCREMENTAL CHANGE **SYSTEM CHANGE**

School Improvement (Comprehensive School Reform: NCLB-driven interventions within Improvement & Corrective Action categories)	Replace State Management System *Tough Choices or Tough Times**	Reform District Management System NYC's Children First, Edmonton, Oakland	Create New-Design Schools Charters, in-district charter-likes
Theory: mid-performing and below-average schools can improve with coherent forms of program and capacity-building support	Theory: the entire system of public education is inadequate for 21st century needs and must be completely redesigned from the ground up	Theory: school districts must reinvent their own systems, structures, and processes to produce high performance in the schools	Theory: better results, faster, by opening new schools that are unfettered by reform challenges in the current system

Turnaround
Comprehensive system redesign

Theory: chronically under-performing schools need fundamental altering of structures, approaches, capacity, and (potentially) management and governance

Educators and reformers aiming for fundamental, not incremental, change in public schooling have essentially three avenues: replacing the entire public education system with a new one, reforming that system from within, or circumventing the system with work-around schools (otherwise known as charters). Chronically under-performing schools – and the comprehensive turnaround strategies presented in this report provide entry points, in different ways, to all three forms of fundamental change. (See chart above.)

Replace the State Management System: Redesign of the entire state-managed public education system in the United States was the recommendation of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce in its recently released report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. Radical changes of the nature recommended by the Commission – eliminating the school district as we know it now, making states the employers of teachers, creating K-10 "common schools" that send graduates to upper secondary or voc-tech academies – would require a vast rethinking of the current system and enormous rearrangement of resources, people, and organizational structures.

While acknowledging that these recommendations merit close consideration, *The Turnaround Challenge* suggests that the crisis in America's most poorly performing schools provides an even more urgent and a more accessible opportunity for dramatic and achievable change. *Urgent and accessible* because the standards movement has

provided incontrovertible evidence of these schools' failure; *dramatic* because that is clearly what's needed to turn these schools around; and *achievable* because other schools are proving that similar student populations can produce exemplary results. We propose in this report a call to arms that is located squarely in the here and now – but could lead to broader application of fundamental change.

Reform the District Management System: School districts, particularly large urban districts, have proved to be difficult organizations to reform. But virtually all urban districts are under intense pressure to intervene in growing numbers of under-performing schools. The "zone" strategies now being undertaken in some districts, and recommended in this report, provide the opportunity for a fresh-start proving ground, a chance for districts and external partners to essentially reinvent the district model from within.

Create New-Design Schools: "Charterizing" failing schools, meanwhile, is one of NCLB's options for schools entering its Restructuring category of under-performance – albeit not an option that has been selected very often. The charter-related entry point of more relevance here is the adoption of charter-like rules and authorities for schools within a district's turnaround zone. Such a zone thus could become the long-awaited vehicle for public schools to adapt what appears to work in high-performing charters.

* 2007 Report from the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce

2.1 How High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Ignite Learning Under Adverse Conditions
Understanding the DNA we must replicate at scale

As ecologists are quick to emphasize, organisms can be understood only in relation to their environments. So it is for high-performing, high-poverty schools: common "high-performance" mantras like *high expectations, all children can learn, no excuses*, or for that matter, *no child left behind* may signal important values but do little to illuminate the challenging circumstances of high-poverty school environments or the methods and strategies that HPHP schools employ in meeting them. (Haberman, 1999; Thomas & Bainbridge, 2001) Fortunately, as reform researcher Ronald Brady (2003) points out, HPHP schools "are a phenomenon of sufficient import to receive significant scholarly attention." (For our detailed analysis of this, see Part 2.4.)

In addition, emerging research from a variety of fields is rapidly reshaping our knowledge of high-poverty school ecology and *why* HPHP practices are successful:

- Researchers studying national databases of school achievement data, indexed with school poverty and minority attributes, are unlocking the black box of school performance and describing success patterns that are reshaping education reform as well as teaching. (The Education Trust, 2005a; Reeves, 2003; National Center for Educational Accountability/Just for the Kids, 2006)

- Child poverty researchers are pinpointing how a multitude of factors associated with socioeconomic status (SES) affect a child from birth to adulthood, concluding among many findings that even relatively minor mitigations can translate into meaningful improvement in student achievement. (Berliner, 2006; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997)

- Cognitive scientists report that "there is a gulf between low and middle SES children in their performance on just about every test of cognitive development" (Farah et al, 2006), with sweeping implications for early childhood and education policy, but also illuminating key causal mechanisms that might aid remediation.

- Developmental psychologists have begun to focus "on the factors that enable at-risk students to 'beat the odds' against achieving academic success. Borrowing primarily from the field of developmental psychopathology, a growing body of educational research has identified individual attributes that promote academic resiliency." (Borman & Rachuba, 2001)

Also augmenting and informing HPHP research are studies of urban principals (Orr et al, 2005), the importance and dynamics of achieving teacher quality (Ingersoll, 2004; Policy Studies Associates, 2005), the linkage between student engagement and academic achievement (Finn & Owings, 2006), and the importance for poor students of close adult relationships and positive role models. (Shear et al, 2005; The Education Trust, 2005; Brooks-Gunn et al, 1993)

For this report, our research team surveyed the voluminous research literature, analyzed the most prominent studies, and drew deeply on Mass Insight's own Building Blocks effective-practice research (www.buildingblocks.org), which we have conducted since 2001. (For the full analysis, see the Supplemental Report.)

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It seems clear that what we are observing in the phenomenon of HPHP schools is the evolution of a new species.

We were persuaded by the research of three points:

1 The ecology of high-poverty schools is inherently *much* more unpredictable, variable, and irregular than that of low-poverty schools. This turbulence is foundational: lying below symptoms like poor teaching and student misbehavior, it reflects the vastly disparate backgrounds and preparedness of students; personal and family crises; the churn of students and staff entering and exiting individual schools; and the shortage of family and community supports. Students and staff in high-poverty schools face more curveballs in a week than their colleagues in low-poverty schools see in a year. Accounting for this turbulence in academic and organizational design, as well as in operations and training, is a prerequisite to successful schools.
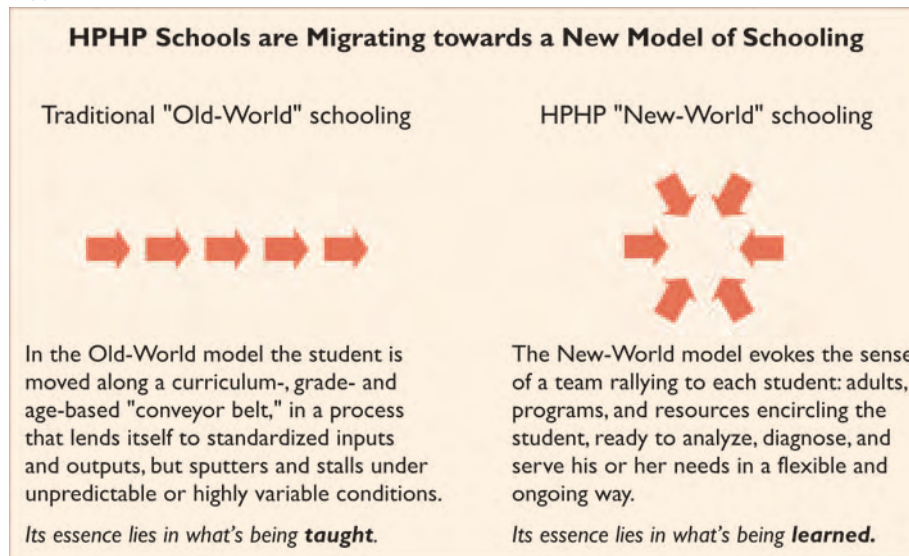
2 Our most common approaches do not help, and in fact sometimes do harm. Not only is our traditional model of public education largely unable to cope with unpredictability and turbulence that disrupts its reliance on grade-by-grade advancement, but in addition, common techniques of teaching, testing, and disciplining frequently "introduce

additional stressors and adversities that place [poor] students at even greater risk of academic failure." (Borman & Rachuba, 2001)

3 It seems clear that what we are observing in the phenomenon of HPHP schools is the evolution of a new species. Largely through on-the-scene improvisation and innovation, HPHP schools have morphed into highly adaptable organizations whose staff are expert at igniting learning for each child in spite of the surrounding turbulence. They mitigate the adverse conditions of poverty and overcome the unpredictable changes and crises that sink other high-poverty schools, not by making the traditional model of education work better; instead, they are, in essence, reinventing what schools do.

When students enroll in one of these schools, they are often several grade levels behind. As Paul Tough (2006) observed: "Usually they have missed out on many of the millions of everyday intellectual and emotional stimuli that their better-off peers have been exposed to since birth. They are, educationally speaking, in deep trouble. The schools reject the notion that all that these struggling students need are

HPHP Schools are Migrating towards a New Model of Schooling

Traditional "Old-World" schooling

In the Old-World model the student is moved along a curriculum-, grade- and age-based "conveyor belt," in a process that lends itself to standardized inputs and outputs, but sputters and stalls under unpredictable or highly variable conditions.

*Its essence lies in what's being **taught**.*

HPHP "New-World" schooling

The New-World model evokes the sense of a team rallying to each student: adults, programs, and resources encircling the student, ready to analyze, diagnose, and serve his or her needs in a flexible and ongoing way.

*Its essence lies in what's being **learned**.*

high expectations; they do need those, of course, but they also need specific types and amounts of instruction, both in academics and attitude, to compensate for everything they did not receive in their first decade of life."

To advance each student's learning, regardless of background and ability, HPHP schools have largely abandoned the Old-World model of education itself, supplanting the "one-conveyor-belt-for-all" thinking with a New-World model placing each student at the center of a set of coordinated services (Figure 2A) – a model very similar to the practices Michael Fullan and his co-authors describe in their provocative book, *Breakthrough* (2006).

HPHP schools are still a nascent and evolving species – almost always the product of local adaptation and innovation. Our national challenge (and

opportunity) is to apply their successful practices systematically to turnaround and intervention efforts in multiple schools, districts, and circumstances. Parts 3 and 4 discuss how that might be accomplished.

But first, Part 2 continues by examining the patterns of school proficiency and poverty, explaining why poverty is playing an increasingly significant role in American education, and summarizing a "perfect storm" of poverty-induced challenges that face our high-poverty schools – and very actively shape how high-performing, high-poverty schools have responded. In Part 2.4, we introduce the HPHP Readiness Model, which describes nine elements that comprise HPHP schooling. Finally in Part 2.5, we conclude with implications of HPHP schooling for effective school turnaround.

2.2 Patterns of Proficiency: Failing Schools Serve Mostly Poor Children
But: so do some successful schools, proving that school quality can *overcome zip code*

The most compelling case for a new model of high-poverty schooling lies in the achievement numbers. As a result of NCLB, it is now possible to track the achievement of students at every school in every state. The patterns are sobering – and illuminating.

The research team studied state by state scatterplots, like those on the facing page, showing school achievement vs. poverty at the eighth and fourth grade levels (high school data is not yet readily available). The patterns of the eight states displayed here are strongly representative of the patterns found in other states, and across other test subjects and grade levels. In addition to the overall patterns shown here, we reviewed similar data for high-minority versus low-minority schools.

Here's what the data show.

Proficiency drops steadily as school poverty rises: This pattern is by no means a surprise, but it remains disheartening to see just how strong the correlation is between poverty and chronic under-performance: The same pattern appears in state after state, implying deep, systemic deficiencies rather than occasional management breakdowns. Schools that fail, year after year, almost always reflect this proficiency-poverty linkage, which is why this report focuses on interventions

capable of breaking the cycle. Note that the poverty drag on proficiency begins right away: Schools comprised of just 10 or 20 percent poor students trail schools with negligible poverty, and that pattern continues along the x-axis as the percentage of school poverty mounts. The bottom line: Poverty erodes proficiency and poor students are underserved in virtually all schools, although our recognition of dysfunction and breakdown is generally reserved for our most urban and highest-poverty schools and districts.

School performance varies significantly at every income level, and extensively among high-poverty schools: In most states, the proficiency of schools becomes increasingly scattered as school poverty rises: the range of high performance and low performance among high-poverty schools tends to be significantly greater than among low-poverty schools. This variability exists among both high-minority and low-minority schools and among both urban and non-urban schools. Note the dramatic variability of performance among schools over 50 percent poverty: a large number with appalling performance and a handful of schools performing above the state median.

High-poverty schools that overcome poverty are scarce: No single, one-year snapshot can determine an HPHP school, but we can draw nevertheless two conclusions from these data: There are very few HPHP schools and they are likely to mitigate, but not erase, the effects of poverty. Look at the subset of schools that are likely to include HPHP

cannot be done with these data.) They are performing far above the high-poverty norm, and in some cases nearly as well as schools serving much more affluent student populations. Some schools beat the odds, proving it can be done and triggering the central HPHP question: How do they do it?

Interpreting the Scatterplots (Figure 2B)

Each dot represents one school. All public schools serving the eighth grade in each of eight sample states are shown.

It is important to note that each state establishes its own achievement standards and assessment system; therefore, the proficiency scores of one state cannot be directly compared to that of another state.

School poverty, on the other hand, is defined the same across all states as the percent of students eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch. Schools whose school poverty data were not reported or lost appear as "data noise" along the left axis.

The shaded boxes in the top right of each plot highlight the high poverty schools that were performing above their state's median on this math test. See further discussion of these schools in the paragraphs above.

schools: those schools in the lightly shaded box within each plot. These are schools with at least 50 percent poor students who exceeded their state's proficiency median for eighth grade math in 2005. (Each state has a different proficiency median, which is why the height of the box varies – and why state-to-state achievement comparisons

To completely unpack that question, we need to go a step further with our examination of poverty's impact on learning. In the next section, Part 2.3, we will examine the complexity of the challenge that all high-poverty schools face – and that only HPHP schools manage to mitigate.

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School Quality *Can* Meet High-Poverty Challenges – and Does, Though Rarely

In Higher Poverty Schools: Lower Achievement, but Greater Variability, Suggesting Opportunity for Improvement
Each dot plots an individual school's percent proficiency (eighth grade math in 2005) against the percent of students with lunch eligibility.
The shaded box indicates the relatively small number of schools with lunch eligibility over 50% and math proficiency over the state median.

California
Florida
Illinois
Massachusetts

(n=1,829)
(n=785)
(n=1362)
(n=456)

Maryland
Michigan
Ohio
Washington

(n=277)
(n=910)
(n=930)
(n=495)

% Proficient in Math

% of Students Eligible for Free
and Reduced Price Lunch
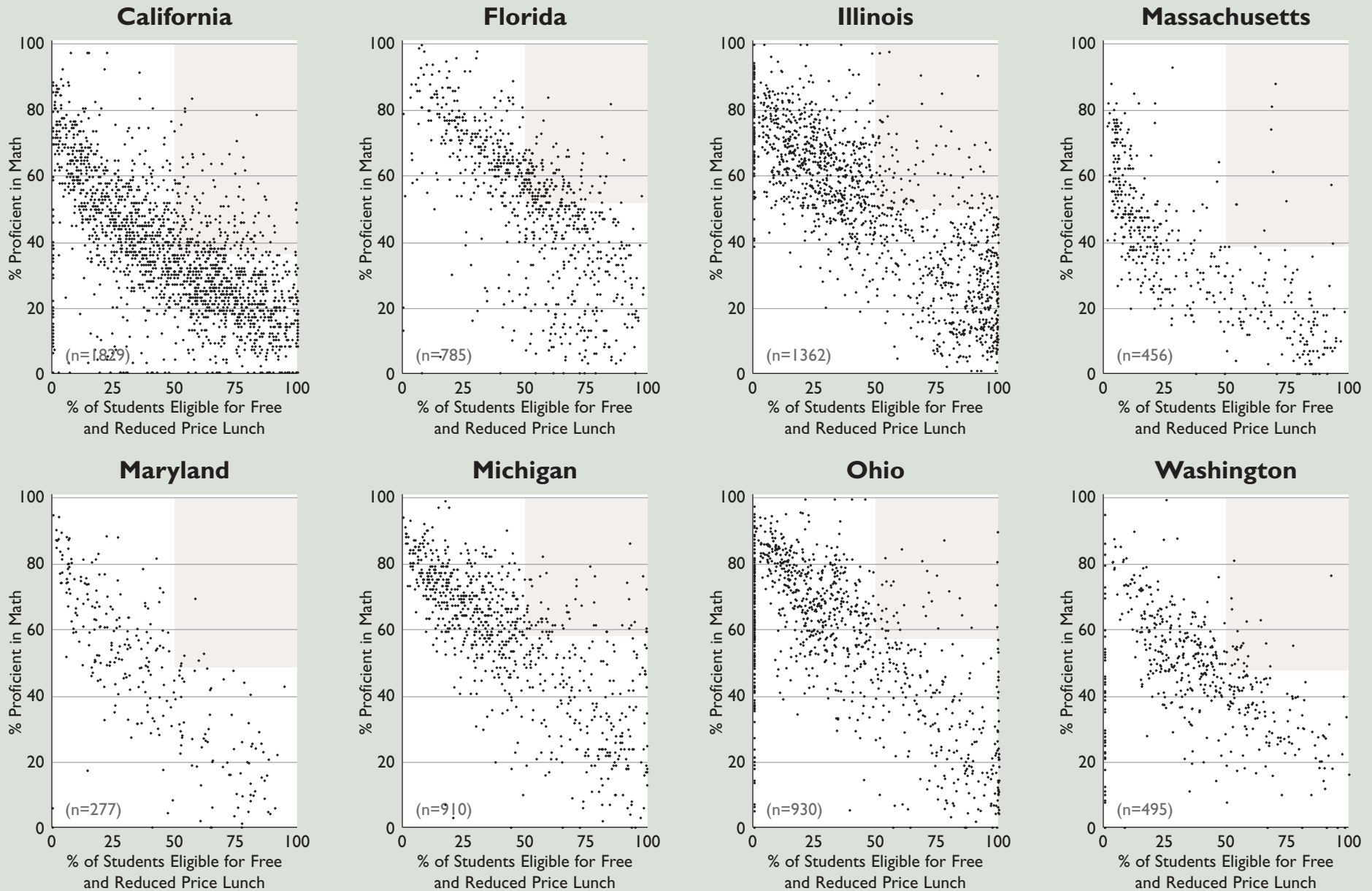
Data are from the National Longitudinal School-Level State Assessment Score Database (NLSLASD) 2006.

2.3 Poverty's "Perfect Storm" Impact on Learning
Understanding the deficits is a prerequisite to designing the solutions

Clearly the patterns of proficiency and poverty demand a new approach. If understanding the problem is half the solution, then dissecting poverty's role in *exactly why schools fail* establishes a checklist of design conditions from which solutions and innovations can be forged.

Anatomy of a storm: what poverty research tells us. The term "perfect storm" was coined in 1991 to describe the phenomenon of three major weather systems combining in the Atlantic to produce a storm of devastating proportion. Similarly, poverty's force comes in three mutually-reinforcing forms: individual and family risk factors, community and environment effects, and resource inequality. Each compounds the others, increasing the risks and obstacles for poor students in high-poverty schools in high-poverty neighborhoods. The poverty-related effects are substantial and measurable even before kindergarten, underscoring the importance of effective early intervention.

Drawing on an extensive review of the literature on poverty, we identified and analyzed the risk factors with the greatest implications for student learning within each of three poverty "arenas." Brief summaries are provided on the facing page and much more detail is available in the Supplemental Report.

Gathering force: child poverty on the rise. Poverty's perfect storm is building in strength and, as a society, we are in a high-stakes race to find solutions. Space does not allow us to include detailed statistics on poverty trends in America, but they are shocking. Already 35 percent of all students attend high-poverty schools, including over two-thirds of all minority students. (Orfield & Lee, 2005) The figures are on the rise across the board: Child poverty in the U.S., already higher than in any other developed country, increased by more than 11 percent between 2000 and 2005. (NCCP, 2006) The LEP (Limited English Proficiency) child population more than doubled from 1990 to 2000 from 5.1 to 10.6 million. (Fix and Passel, 2003) Within 25 years, the U.S. will have more minority students than non-minority (MBDA, 1999) with an equivalent sharp rise in student poverty.

The opportunity: turning risk factors into design elements. Understanding how poverty affects students and their learning helps to explain why existing mild interventions in chronically under-performing, high-poverty schools have not produced much improvement in student performance. "Schools do not achieve high performance by doing one or two things differently. They must do a number of things differently, and all at the same time, to begin to achieve the critical mass that will make a difference in student outcomes – in other words, high-poverty schools that achieve gains in student performance engage in systemic change." (CPE/Caliber Associates, 2005)

That change is rooted in a broad campaign to counter poverty-induced deficits. Figure 2C demonstrates the "field of play." The three forms of poverty effects we identified for this study are each shown with their respective impact on the set of key learning factors described by Walberg (1984).

In the next section, Part 2.4, we introduce our HPHP Readiness Model, which describes the nine elements we believe are most crucial to igniting learning under adverse conditions.

FIGURE 2C **Poverty Effects Have Moderate to Substantial Impact upon Key Learning Factors**

Key Learning Factors	Individual & family risk factors	Community & environment effects	Resource inequality
Student Aptitude			
Ability or prior achievement	Substantial	Moderate	Moderate
Development by age or maturation	Substantial	Moderate	Some
Motivation or self-concept	Substantial	Moderate	Moderate
Instruction			
The amount of time students are engaged	Moderate	Substantial	Substantial
The quality of instruction		Substantial	Substantial
Environment			
The home	Substantial		
The classroom social groups		Substantial	Some
Peer groups outside of school	Moderate	Substantial	
Use of out-of-school time	Substantial	Substantial	Some

Adapted from Walberg (1984) and other sources (see Supplemental Report)

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Poverty's Force Comes in Three Mutually-Reinforcing Forms

Individual and family risk factors

The factors in this arena, ranging from health and brain development and family economic hardship to parenting style and student motivation, are particularly interrelated. The children of poverty are not as prepared as the non-poor to enter the classroom, and before kindergarten, already test lower in cognitive skills. They come from families that face grave economic scenarios, and endure both physical and psychological disadvantages that limit their ability to thrive.

The need to focus on basic health and safety concerns can overshadow development of higher order thinking skills, and parent and familial modeling often fail to encourage children to focus on school. Students of poverty can be susceptible to poor self-image, or attempt to live up to stereotypic behaviors that thwart goal setting and the desire to succeed.

One factor compounds another and, as students who are not at risk continue to develop and progress on a higher trajectory, students of poverty fall even further behind.

The effect of community and environment

Compositional effects, such as community and school context, also have a significant impact on a child's experience of education, and his or her performance in the classroom. Living in poor neighborhoods increases the odds of student involvement in gangs, of children developing behavioral problems, dropping out of school, committing a crime, and becoming pregnant as a teenager. Even the most conscientious parents can lose their kids to the street. (Berliner, 2006)

Non-poor students attending high-poverty schools fall behind more frequently than poor students attending low-poverty schools. (Kennedy et al, cited in Lippman et al, 1996, p35) Conversely, research shows that children who grow up in poverty (and thus carry the same cognitive lags and ingrained effects of disadvantage) but transfer to middle-class suburbs and schools show rapid gains in behavioral measures and academic achievement. (Anyon, 2005a)

Resource inequity

The distribution of resources between poor and non-poor schools, and between urban, suburban, and rural schools, has been a source of controversy at both the local and national level for years. Research confirms that poor, urban students bear the brunt of inadequate financial resources.

The inequality in teaching resources is particularly powerful. Teachers in poorer schools are significantly less likely to have majored in the subject area they are teaching, to have passed tests of basic skills and to be highly qualified. Resource inequity is also much more likely to fuel the "revolving door" of teacher turnover.

Retention and quality problems reinforce each other to the extent that in "schools where more than 90 percent of the students are poor – where excellent teachers are needed the most – just one percent of teachers are in the highest quartile." (Peske & Haycock, 2006)

Note: These three forms of poverty impact receive much more detailed analysis in the Supplemental Report.

2.4 How HPHP Schools Achieve Their Results: The Readiness Model

Nine interlocking elements of schools that serve challenged students well

We were meeting with leaders from a partner district of Mass Insight's, working through the four dimensions of effective reform practice we'd identified through years of research in Massachusetts (www.buildingblocks.org). "All of that makes every kind of sense," said one curriculum director. "But tell me how this one school of ours is supposed to even *think* about all of that when on Monday this week, they got 20 new ELL students from Vietnam, Tuesday they had two unscheduled fire drills, and Wednesday there was a knife-fight in the parking lot?"

Disadvantage, turbulence, and unpredictability are part and parcel of many high-poverty communities and a permanent condition of the vast majority

Here is what emerged from our analysis: HPHP schools do not try to solve the problem of poverty, nor do they use it as an excuse for lower achievement. They do respond with innovative strategies that acknowledge and address the daily disturbances caused by student mobility, learning deficits, disruptive behavior, neighborhood crises, and a host of other poverty-related circumstances. They start with the premise that their students can learn at a high standard, and then they do whatever is necessary to remove barriers to learning as well as create new paths for students to pursue achievement.

The strategies they use to do these things are summarized in the following pages. It is worth stating up

identified as hallmarks of high-performing, *high-poverty* schools, in fact, diverge in important ways from the many lists of "effective-school elements" available today.

The Readiness Triangle

The New-World model of HPHP schooling is a dynamic system that enables schools to:

- Acknowledge and foster students' *Readiness to Learn*,

- Elevate and focus staff's *Readiness to Teach*, and

- Exercise more *Readiness to Act* in dramatically different ways than is typically possible in public schools.

These three essential and interlocking dimensions of HPHP schools are described in the HPHP Readiness Model on the facing page, and the sections that follow this one. Most readers will immediately find familiar territory in the Readiness to Teach leg of the triangle, and in fact, that area is where the vast majority of education reform has focused. The elements that make up Readiness to Learn and Readiness to Act have had their share of attention too, but often as part of reform efforts designed to circumvent

the regular public school system (such as charter schools, or special in-district school clusters with unusual operating conditions).

On the whole, most HPHP research has concentrated with a fair degree of single-mindedness on strategies we have placed in Readiness to Teach. It is all important, vital work: aligning curricula to higher standards, improving instruction, using data effectively, providing targeted extra help to students who need it. By itself, however, this set of strategies is not enough to meet the challenges that educators – and students – face in high-poverty schools. Or, for that matter, to turn around a failing high-poverty school.

Taken together, the Readiness to Teach strategies represent what's widely been known as "whole-school reform." It's clear that the concept of whole school reform has played a critical role in emphasizing the importance of integration – of comprehensive strategies instead of reform projects. But in general, our collective definition of "whole" has not been whole enough.

On the next pages, we explore the three Readiness elements and their associated elements in greater detail.

The nine elements we have identified as hallmarks of HPHP schools diverge in important ways from the many lists of "effective-school elements" available today.

of high-poverty schools. Yet some rare, high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools manage to organize themselves to counter the perfect storm of disadvantage that accompanies many of their students in the door each morning.

front that these methods are substantially different from those familiar in the Old-World model of education found in most public schools today. The nine elements we have

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High-Performance, High-Poverty Education: The HPHP Readiness Model

1 Safety, Discipline & Engagement Students feel secure and inspired to learn	*readiness to* **LEARN**	**4 Shared Responsibility for Achievement** Staff feel deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement
2 Action against Adversity Schools directly address their students' poverty-driven deficits		**5 Personalization of Instruction** Individualized teaching based on diagnostic assessment and adjustable time on task
3 Close Student-Adult Relationships Students have positive and enduring mentor/teacher relationships	*readiness to* **TEACH**	**6 Professional Teaching Culture** Continuous improvement through collaboration and job-embedded learning

readiness to **ACT**

7 Resource Authority School leaders can make mission-driven decisions regarding people, time, money & program	**8 Resource Ingenuity** Leaders are adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships	**9 Agility in the Face of Turbulence** Leaders, teachers, and systems are flexible and inventive in responding to constant unrest

Why "Readiness"?

The converging arrows at the center of the HPHP Readiness Model are the symbol for the "New-World" model of schooling we introduced earlier in Part 2. New-World schooling, we suggest, represents a departure from the linear, teaching-driven model of the 20th century and a leap toward a more student-centered, learning-driven model for this century.

Think of the Old-World model as a factory conveyer belt that students and schools try, with varying degrees of effectiveness, to keep up with. Its essence lies in what's being *taught*. Think of the new-world model as something more like a modern hospital: a whole system of skills, processes, and technologies organized to analyze, diagnose, and serve. Its essence lies in what's being *learned*.

The delivery of good healthcare is all about readiness. The impact of the service depends entirely on the quality of the people providing it and the training they're given, the tools at their disposal, the latitude they have to make appropriate decisions, their ability to form and re-form into teams to provide the highest-capacity response, and (of course) the readiness of the patient to embrace and implement the cure.

Schools, and especially high-poverty schools, are no different in the New-World model. What happens in classrooms between teacher and student is the most critical moment in the delivery of the service. But the quality of that moment depends entirely on the readiness of the system and the people who are part of it to teach, learn, and act effectively and in accordance with the mission.

The HPHP Readiness Model: *Readiness to Learn*

Readiness to Learn

At HPHP schools, whatever stands in the way of learning is fair game to be addressed. Reorienting the focus from what's being taught in schools to what's being learned, HPHP schools proactively address the challenges accompanying their students as they walk in the schoolhouse door: from something as basic as finding an impoverished child socks or a coat, to assisting where possible with transportation or health services and attacking the significant cognitive, social, cultural, and psychological barriers to learning that many students of poverty tend to experience. Good learners must develop "underlying perseverance, strong will, and positive disposition." (Borman & Rachuba, 2001) At the same time, "staff in many [old-world] schools are products of a training model that ignores the importance of child development…. In fact, the whole school structure is not set up to support development." (Comer, 2002)

Readiness to Learn is the dimension on which the HPHP schools differ most appreciably from other schools. While all high-performing schools pay attention to relationships and environment, the lengths to which HPHP schools go to address these concerns for their student populations set them well apart. Those efforts focus on the three elements shown to the right.

1. Safety, Discipline, & Engagement

"A calm and orderly environment [is] a *prerequisite* for learning, reducing the stress and distractions for students and teachers, and creating norms and confidence to enable deeper staff and instructional changes to occur." (Orr, 2005) This sense of safety is the first rung on the ladder, particularly in schools and neighborhoods where crime and chaos are part of everyday life. Clear codes of behavior and well-defined but flexible routines must be applied consistently and transparently to students, parents, and staff.

At the same time, HPHP schools also seek ways to engage their students as fully as possible in their learning, using robust, well-rounded curricula, thematic and project-based teaching, collaborative learning, and field trips. While a precise, laser-like focus on reading, writing, and math forms a vital core of the HPHP approach (see the Personalization of Instruction section under Readiness to Teach), researchers also highlight "explicit involvement of the subjects that are frequently and systematically disregarded in traditional accountability systems – music, art, physical education, world languages, technology, career education… Data reveal that the involvement of these seemingly peripheral subjects in academic achievement is neither serendipitous nor insignificant." (Reeves, 2003) The engagement created in this way produces a virtuous cycle on which the rest of the entire school model depends: where students are first engaged and inspired, then motivated and learning, and finally positive contributors themselves to a safe, orderly, and supportive environment.

Engagement Pays Dividends

In Norfolk, VA schools, teachers took the unit on Mali, home of many of the students' ancestors, "out of the shadows of the final week of school and infused it throughout the school year," using dance, literature, history, song, and other engaging, cross-disciplinary activities. Researchers reported, "It is hardly an accident that these students also displayed astonishing improvements in their performance on state social studies tests." (Reeves, 2003)

Spray Painting Safety

Granger (WA) High School principal Richard Esparza began his principalship with a frontal assault on gang-related graffiti. A storage hut behind the school was a prime target and every day Esparza would drive to the hut, take out the spray paint he kept in his car for just this purpose, and repaint the door, which had been tagged during the night. "I can't have gangs announcing that they control the school," he said. (The Education Trust, 2005b)

HPHP Readiness Model

readiness to **LEARN**

readiness to TEACH

readiness to ACT
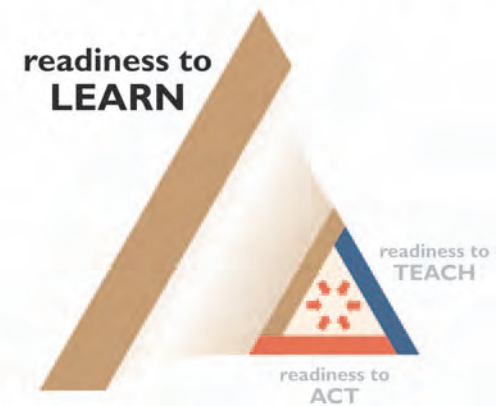
2. Action Against Adversity

HPHP schools make themselves proficient at addressing poverty effects head-on. Research shows that "school-based initiatives that actively shield disadvantaged children from the risks and adversities within their homes, schools, and communities are more likely to foster successful academic outcomes than are several other school-based efforts." (Borman & Rachuba, 2001)

This kind of advocacy is undertaken for needs ranging from the physical and economic to the psycho-social. The schools address a broad range of health and human service needs, offering breakfast, eye exams, and parent training. They connect with a broad range of partners and social service providers to address these needs. HPHP schools even provide explicit guidance and guidelines for the development of behavior and values that have been shown to support learning: teaching how to look someone in the eye while listening, how to work in teams, how to advocate appropriately for oneself. As one HPHP researcher noted, "the essential ingredients are a willingness to examine a new way of thinking, an organizational readiness to fill in the gaps in protective processes through use of effective instructional programs and involvement of parent and community partners, and a way of assessing student factors related to resilience." (Nettles & Robinson, 1998)

The School as Gang Replacement
The required enrichment Saturday School at Codman Academy Charter School in Boston, taught by community members, has explicit benefits, but also a hidden agenda: to root Codman students firmly in the school culture. Head of School Meg Campbell explains, "We're competing against a lot of negative pressures these kids have in their lives – crime, drugs, gangs. So in a way, we're trying to make Codman be the gang." (www.buildingblocks.org, Codman strategy)

Enhancing Student Resilience
Lowell Middlesex Charter School, which serves a population of high school drop-outs aged 15-21 in Lowell, MA, ensures that all of the full-time faculty have experience and/or formal training in human services, to enhance their understanding of their students' challenges. They also offer what they call "psycho-educational courses" designed to directly confront their students' needs. These include: life skills, non-violent conflict resolution, parenting, and men's and women's groups. (www.buildingblocks.org, LMACS strategy)

3. Close Student-Adult Relationships

First and foremost, HPHP schools focus on establishing numerous and intensive relationships between students and adults. In fact, the ability of teachers to forge relationships with children in poverty is cited by some researchers as *the* key factor in high-performing schools. (CPE/Caliber Associates, 2005; Haberman, 1999) The move toward small learning communities is partly intended to enable such relationships. Indeed the most significant positive change reported by students and staff in the extensive evaluation of the Gates Foundation small high schools initiative was an improvement in interpersonal relations. (AIR/SRI, 2005) Students reported feeling better known and supported by staff, and said their teachers had higher expectations for them due to increased knowledge of the students' capabilities.

Schools achieve this sense of connection, and maximize contact and continuity through a number of specific practices, including looping of teachers with students for multiple years, the adoption of "early start" grade six or seven through twelve schools, home visits, and intensive advisory systems. As the principal of the widely studied University Park Campus School in Worcester, MA, told us: "It's *all* about personalization – how many adults in the building touch each child."

The School as Family
University Park Campus School, an outstanding performer in one of the most crime-ridden parts of Worcester, MA, is small to begin with, but is also organized to further strengthen student-teacher relationships. Its grade seven-to-twelve structure allows students to grow with the school for six years, students are looped with the same teacher for a minimum of two years, and staff eat lunch side by side with students. Students acknowledge that they work harder and behave well largely because, as one student remarked, "the teachers are like family" whom they are reluctant to disappoint. (www.buildingblocks.org, UPCS strategy)

Establishing Expectations
Granger (WA) High School had a high dropout rate. When the principal arrived he organized 50 teams of adults from the school and community to visit the 400 homes of every student in the district. To those teachers who didn't want to do home visits, Esparza says he responded, "You are a great teacher. We have a difference in philosophy. I'd be happy to write you a recommendation." The school's dropout rate has improved markedly since then. (EdTrust, 2005)

The HPHP Readiness Model: *Readiness to Teach*

Readiness to Teach

This leg of the Readiness Model encompasses most of the work of school reform over the past 15 to 20 years, at least in terms of scale and investment. Higher expectations and curriculum standards, building capacity to teach to those standards, using data effectively to drive instruction, and developing interventions for students who need special help – these are the core elements of standards-based reform. They represent not only the main ideas driving school improvement processes nationwide, but also the primary (and often exclusive) focus of the vast majority of the effective-practice research we reviewed for this report.

HPHP schools address the length and breadth of these now-common, standards-based reform practices. However, it is clear from our research that HPHP schools approach the Readiness to Teach dimension with more intensity than other schools. At HPHP schools, these strategies are not implemented as discrete projects, but embedded in the schools' DNA. This is particularly true in the expressions of Readiness to Teach that we highlight on these pages: their ability to generate shared responsibility for achievement among every adult in the school; the precision with which they use frequent assessment to personalize instruction; and the priority they give to the development of a professional, collaborative teaching culture.

4. Shared Responsibility for Achievement

Virtually every "schools that work" report we reviewed for this project began its discussion of essential reform elements with the importance of "establishing a culture of high expectations." We deliberately chose not to use this phrase, which has been over-used, mis-used and (sadly) often used simply as a rhetorical device. Sometimes it is so broad as to become meaningless; at other times it acts as shorthand for expectations of student achievement and teacher performance that are out of all proportion with the inadequate support, training, and inputs provided to those individuals.

What we saw emerging from the HPHP research can more accurately be described as an explicitly shared responsibility for achievement. This commitment is *intense* and conveys a sense of ownership, more than bar-setting. It is *inclusive*, involving all students and all adults in the building (including custodians and nurses, for example, in school-wide professional development), as well as parents (sometimes involving home-school contracts), and often community members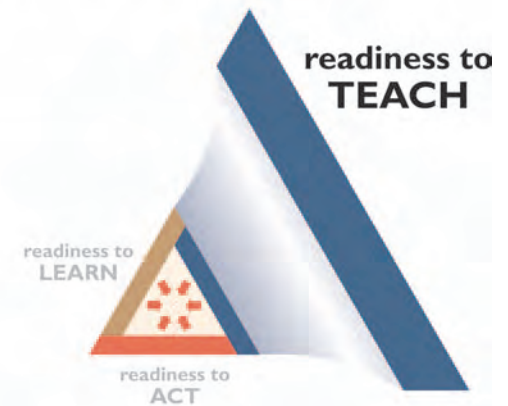. It is *highly focused on learning* and student behaviors that directly affect learning. The 90-90-90 schools analysis of researcher Douglas Reeves, for instance, declared that "first and most importantly, the 90/90/90 schools have a laser-like focus on student achievement." (Reeves, 2003; "90-90-90" refers to schools that score in the 90th percentile, are 90 percent minority, and are 90% free and reduced-price lunch.)

These responsibilities also included *accountability* for students and for teachers, but approached in a flexible way that accounts for the unsettled nature of high-poverty communities. The HPHP principal's response to a student who says "I got no sleep. My dad got taken to jail last night" was: " I'm sorry, study some more and we will give you the opportunity to retake the test." (The Education Trust, 2005b) In the same way, teachers at another HPHP school, according to Haberman (1999), "demonstrate a strong willingness as well as an expectation that they as teachers should be held accountable for their children's learning." They do not let their students use limitations in life experience or language problems as an excuse; neither do they use them as a way of avoiding responsibility as teachers.

Schools Where "Teaching" Means "Learning"

[In the HPHP schools profiled in the book It's Being Done,*] they use the verb "to teach" properly. That is, they do not say what many teachers around the country say: "I taught it, but the kids didn't get it." Although common, this formulation actually makes no sense. If I were to say "I taught my child to ride a bike," you would expect that my child could ride a bike. She might be a bit shaky, but she should be able to pedal and balance at the same time. If she can't do that, you would expect me to say something like, "I tried to teach my child to ride a bike." I won't say that no one in any of the "It's Being Done" schools ever uses the verb "teach" improperly, but for the most part, if teachers say that they taught something, that means their students have learned it.* (Passage quoted from Chenoweth, 2007)

HPHP Readiness Model

readiness to **TEACH**

readiness to **LEARN**

readiness to **ACT**

34 THE TURNAROUND CHALLENGE

2.1 How HPHP Schools Ignite Learning   2.2 Patterns of Proficiency   2.3 Poverty's Impact on Learning   2.4 The HPHP Readiness Model

5. Personalization of Instruction

Much more so than their peers, HPHP schools *are organized to personalize each student's road to academic achievement.* This is the practice that most directly fuels the "new-world" approach they use to reach high performance. When we saw it in action in the HPHP schools we researched directly, we recognized that we were seeing a "new-world" for public education, one that has been described well by Michael Fullan and his co-authors in *Breakthrough* (2006).

Many schools emphasize data-driven instruction or differentiated instruction. But what HPHP schools do is something much more individually-oriented and much more precise. The HPHP schools organize instruction around a short feedback loop of formative assessment, adapted instruction, further formative assessment, and further adapted instruction. The evidence from HPHP effective-practice research on this strategy is overwhelming: Chenoweth's recent case studies (2007), the CPE/Caliber Associates research review (2005), Marzano's meta-analysis of research on student achievement (2000), and most individual studies cite this kind of feedback-based instruction as having profound impact on student achievement.

Its implementation in the HPHP schools we studied was intentional and specific. (For more detail, see the HPHP research in the Supplemental Report.) Core elements include:

- **Formative assessments are frequent – *very* frequent**. In some cases, formative assessments (those given to help diagnose problem areas, more than to generate a grade) are given as often as weekly or bi-weekly.
- **Analysis and feedback is immediate**. The assessments are often brief (for weekly tests, 4-5 questions), so that teachers or coaches can analyze the results within days or hours.
- **Instruction is adapted quickly to address the identified gaps or problems**. High-performing schools use a range of ways to apply the results of the diagnostic data: for example, performance "walls" to strategize for individual students, small-group classroom learning, and individual tutoring.
- **Teachers are provided with the time and flexibility to address the issues**. HPHP schools have not only increased instructional time, but also reconfigure it to construct sometimes dramatically different daily schedules (long blocks, extended days, "re-teach or enrich" time slots) to suit the needs of their students and this personalized instruction.

As an audit member at one HPHP school noted of a particularly successful school, "They teach, they test, they teach, they test." (Kannapel & Clements, 2005) When assessment is properly integrated into instruction and understood to be a tool, students see it as part and parcel of learning and even (as part of a generation raised on the instant feedback of video and computer games) thrive on the instant feedback and opportunity to see their own progress.

6. Professional Teaching Culture

The role of teachers in HPHP schools is highly collaborative, focused on improving instruction, diagnosing student learning challenges, and helping each other improve their practice. At its best, this role is a highly professional one – that of an expert working within a team to coordinate a variety of resources and capabilities to solve problems and achieve results. (The hospital metaphor for "new-world" schooling that we described at the outset of Part 2.4 is relevant here.) To continue to add value to the work of the team, each "expert" must continue to learn as well.

Instead of suffering the stresses and challenges of high-poverty schools in isolation, teachers in HPHP schools work together incessantly and naturally. The HPHP effective practice literature abounds in professional learning communities, common planning time, collaborative professional development, common lesson study, and group reviews of student work. The emphasis within the HPHP new-world model on formative assessment and adaptation of instruction provides additional imperatives for working together, in order to pool expertise and capacity for problem-solving. The most effective schools make time for collaboration very frequently, every week or even every day. Mostly, the time is carved out of administrative meeting time and professional development allocations.

HPHP teachers also see themselves as lifelong learners about instruction and learning. School leaders reinforce this focus through their professional development offerings. "Professional development at high-performing schools differs distinctively from the norm. It is directly linked to changing instructional practice in order to improve student achievement. It is often team-based and school-wide, and it reflects a continual process of improvement." (CPE/Caliber Associates, 2005) Increasingly, it is also embedded into ongoing work on data analysis and instructional development, so that it takes place on site, when and where teachers need it to address the work they're doing.

Standing PD on its Head

At Brighton High School in Boston, professional development has been redefined in a way that has revolutionized the teaching culture at the school. Using (and adapting) Boston's Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) model, Brighton replaced top-down, department-directed PD with an "inquiry team" system that assembles teachers across and within curriculum areas to examine data-driven, achievement-gap priorities that they themselves identify. Brighton expanded the CCL model by extending it across all curriculum areas, allocating a full-time coach, and budget funds for "CCL subs" to free up teachers for the inquiry teams. (www.buildingblocks.org, Brighton strategy)

The HPHP Readiness Model: *Readiness to Act*

Readiness to Act

Rarely does reality on the ground align with theory as well as in this dimension of HPHP schools. James Thompson (1967) revolutionized organizational theory by showing that organizations facing "*the expectation of uncertainty*" – as virtually every urban high-poverty school does – "must resort to a *different sort of logic.*" Thompson prescribed a highly responsive, flexible organization in which a variety of methods are available, "but the selection, combination, and order of application" are determined by constant assessment and feedback." Savvy, timely adjustment of this kind is exactly what we find in HPHP schools where educators deftly respond to all manner of crisis.

Agility in the face of turbulence is part of what we call *Readiness to Act*. This agility is part of an insistence among HPHP schools on organizing and deploying every resource at their disposal entrepreneurially and strategically. At traditional public schools, bureaucratic imperatives frequently impede action that is truly best for students. In HPHP schools, operating conditions altered either by regulation (e.g., charters) or by fiat (maverick principals) allow decisions to be focused on student needs, and incentives to become re-integrated with the "children first" mission.

7. Resource Authority

HPHP schools need broad, local authority over core resources – people, time, money, and program – in order to continually tailor instruction for individual students, maneuver against daily turbulence, and improve their staff. Most public schools currently do not have the authority to make such decisions – or if they do, countervailing incentives (such as fear of collective bargaining issues) undermine their interest in doing so. HPHP schools do have that authority (as charter schools, or special district schools with charter-like conditions), or else they manage to manipulate very unusual combinations of circumstances (outstanding, entrepreneurial school leadership, or unique partnerships with universities or other outside forces) to act as if they *had* such freedom.

HPHP schools' resource authority shows up across the full gamut of school operations: the daily schedule, often the annual school calendar, the way teachers collaborate with each other and participate in school decision-making, the allocation of the school's budget, the very nature of instruction. It also shows up in the extensive care that school leaders put into choosing staff members who are best-suited to the model and their mission. Research overwhelmingly confirms that "teaching quality is the most dominant factor in determining student success." (Reeves, 2003) But most schools serving high-poverty student populations do not have control over teaching and (to some extent) administrative staff. HPHP schools almost uniformly say that recruiting excellent staff members is the most important thing they do. The charters and the charter-likes have that unquestioned authority; the regular public schools that are both high-performing and high-poverty tend to be led by principals who will stand for nothing less.

In some cases, HPHP schools have the freedom to offer teachers incentives that are currently rare or non-existent in more traditional high-poverty school settings: financial incentives, differentiated and performance-based compensation, more flexible working conditions, and perhaps the greatest incentive of all – the opportunity to work with highly regarded colleagues on an important mission in an effective way.

Open Posting Advantage

Principal Michael Fung at Charlestown (MA) High School used fine print within the Boston teachers' contract to achieve open-posting (i.e., the ability to disregard seniority and recruit the best candidate from inside or outside the system) for certain teaching positions, such as those involving stipends and not requiring regular certification. Fung had to get faculty approval, involve a screening committee, and proactively head-hunt candidates. But he credits open posting as a major contributor to his school's impressive improvements. He offers new teachers a two-year contract (allowing them a chance to learn in the first year), but also hyper-manages them to ensure that they absorb best practice and the school's ethos. (www.buildingblocks.org, Charlestown strategy)

HPHP Readiness Model

readiness to LEARN

readiness to TEACH

readiness to ACT

8. Resource Ingenuity

Ingenuity is the quality of being cleverly inventive or resourceful. Our researchers can't identify a single HPHP school or study that fails to underscore that HPHP principals (and staff) are masters at finding hidden and untapped resources. These high-poverty schools have almost bottomless needs and may receive barely adequate allocation of public resources, but HPHP leaders are tireless at finding the people, skills, funds, time, or equipment needed to accomplish what they feel needs to happen. No one escapes their attention: state agencies, businesses, churches, museums, parents, neighbors, social service providers, even student volunteers.

School by school, this is nitty-gritty stuff. Some representative examples we encountered include: reading periods in which every adult in the building is a reading coach; parent coordinators to organize after-school volunteers; church groups maintaining safe passage through dangerous neighborhoods; social workers embedded in teaching teams; computer funds redirected to hire additional teachers; free matinees at area cultural events; and schoolwide teams organized to visit every student's home.

Affirming the Mission

Benwood Initiative schools worked closely with Chattanooga (TN)'s mayor, who provided a $5,000 bonus to any classroom teacher whose test scores grew more than 15 percent more than the expected growth…. He also arranged for high-performing Benwood teachers to get low-interest mortgages. (Chenoweth, 2007)

A Virtuous Cycle

Rather than living within typical resource allocation limits, the MATCH Charter School in Boston has moved to an atypical "resource-raising" approach – expanding adult support and raising additional financial resources. They developed their MATCH Corps of recent college graduates to fulfill the need for intensive tutoring. They entered into partnerships with local universities and nearby high schools. They also looked to a range of public financing options (such as leveraging Federal Tax Credits to secure funding for a new construction), and drew additional funds from private sector companies and private philanthropies. Promotion of their successes initiates a "virtuous cycle" that leads to further interest and funding. (www.buildingblocks.org; MATCH strategy)

9. Agility in the Face of Turbulence

Part 2.3 of this report looked at the factors contributing to turbulence for the student populations of HPHP schools. In turn, these pressures generate a constant unsettledness that is fundamental to the ecology of high-poverty schools and a factor that principals and teachers must overcome – not through rigid standards and control, but through flexibility and persuasion; the ability to adapt, improvise, and triage on the fly; and the skill to build a resilient organization and culture that prides itself on high performance despite the turbulence. Not an impossible challenge, as the HPHP schools demonstrate – just different from the old-world model of conveyer-belt curriculum for all. It takes this agility, together with Resource Authority and Resource Ingenuity, for a school to have any hope of supporting their students' *readiness to learn* and their teachers' *readiness to teach* – because every day will be filled with circumstances and events conspiring to disrupt.

But "turbulence" applies to more than the constant turmoil in high-poverty communities. Orr et al (2005) have taken a parallel look at the challenges that face principals in urban *low*-performing schools, most of which are also high-poverty. They paint a picture of turbulence at the institutional level, characterizing urban districts as loosely structured, with unclear expectations and uneven service to school leaders. Principals of urban schools are heavily engaged in the coordination of non-instructional supports, and spend more time than their suburban peers managing scarce resources and mediating frustrations. Principal leadership in their words encompasses "an ever-changing balance of skills, experience [and] intuition." The HPHP research concurs, citing over and over the importance of leaders being "flexible" and "inventive" in actively reshaping and incorporating districtwide projects and special initiatives for disadvantaged students into their own strategies for maximizing performance, rather than acquiescing to the guidelines and requirements of individual programs. (Orr et al, 2005)

Converting Excuses into Challenges

Sterling Middle School in Quincy, MA used to have a reputation as a tough school, and was considered dysfunctional by many of its own faculty members. Then the faculty and staff stepped closer to perceived obstacles to confront them as problems that could be solved. The paradigm shift, fueled by Principal Earl Metzler's "no excuses" mantra, was from a passive "We can't because …" to an active: "We can, by …," and the enemy was no longer the district, the budget, the parents, or the students. The key to success was in identifying areas where they could make a difference and in incorporating externally mandated challenges [like the state standards assessments] into internal mechanisms for improvement. (www.buildingblocks.org, Sterling strategy)

2.5 Applying the Lessons of HPHP Schools
Change begins with the courage to break patterns

In this concluding section of Part 2, we place the lessons of HPHP schools in the context of the turn-around challenge.

High-performing, high-poverty schools are an innovation of incalculable value. Much studied, they provide essential insight into what it takes to ignite learning in high-poverty schools.

Lacking an effective and replicable school turnaround model anywhere in the country, individual HPHP schools are our trailblazers.

Lacking an effective and replicable school turnaround model anywhere in the country, individual HPHP schools are our trailblazers – the vanguard that extinguishes the debate about unteachable kids, demonstrates best practices, and sets a benchmark against which reform efforts can be measured.

Because they are so important to keep in mind as we build a model for turn-around, the major points from Part 2 are worth reiterating here:

1 **The ecology of high-poverty schools is inherently much more unpredictable, variable, and irregular than that of low-poverty schools.** Accounting for the constant unsettledness as well as the wide range of stu-dent challenges and learning deficits induced by poverty is a prerequisite to successful schools.

2 **Our most common approaches do not help, and in fact sometimes do harm**. Our traditional curriculum-, grade-, and age-based "conveyor belt" is ill-equipped to handle unpredictability and frequently introduces "addi-tional stressors and adversities that place [poor] students at even greater risk of academic failure." (Borman & Rachuba, 2001)

3 **It seems clear that what we are witnessing in the phenomenon of HPHP schools is the evolution of a new species**. HPHP schools have mor-phed into highly adaptable organiza-tions whose staff are expert at igniting learning for each child in spite of the surrounding turbulence; in essence, they are reinventing what schools do.

4 **The "new-model" of HPHP schooling evokes the sense of a team rallying to each student**. Adults, programs, and resources encircle the student, ready to analyze, diagnose, and serve his or her needs in a flexible and ongoing way.

5 **Income-vs.-performance data reveal that school proficiency drops steadily as school poverty rises**. Just as important: proficiency varies significantly at every income level, and extensively among high-poverty schools, underlining the vital role school quality plays.

6 **Dissecting poverty's role *in exactly why schools fail* establishes a par-tial checklist of design conditions from which solutions and innovations can be forged**. Poverty's "perfect storm" is comprised of three mutually-reinforc-ing forms: individual and family risk factors, community and environment effects, and resource inequality.

7 **The methods used to combat these factors are summarized in the HPHP Readiness Model, a system of nine elements that enable schools to:**

- Acknowledge and foster students' *Readiness to Learn*,
- Elevate and focus staff's *Readiness to Teach*, and
- Exercise more *Readiness to Act* in dramatically different ways than is typically possible in public schools.

Reframing Our Thinking: A Precursor to Real Reform
HPHP schools break convention in two pragmatic yet significant ways:

- They are replacing the traditional old-world, conveyor-belt model with a new-world model with each child at the center and designed to counter poverty's perfect storm; and

- They discard many centralized and bureaucratic management methods in favor of a highly adaptable Readiness to Act, much better suit-ed to the constant unsettledness that marks high-poverty schooling and to targeting precious core resources on real gains in student learning.

What will it take for our education thinking and our education institu-tions to catch up to these departures?

First, we must reframe our under-standing of the high-poverty school. The time is right to acknowledge (per-haps even celebrate) the current con-fluence of research in education, child poverty, cognitive development, and psychological resiliency. If "facts are friendly" and "knowledge is power," the new insights emerging from research place solid new under-

pinnings and possibility under HPHP practice and the turnaround of under-performing high-poverty schools.

Second, we must reframe our understanding of HPHP schools and the lessons they offer. There has been a strong tendency in past HPHP effective-schools research to set the characteristics of high-poverty school settings aside, and to focus on what might be called the "classic" standards-based education reform categories of high expectations, curricula, teaching methods, assessment tools, and strong leadership. Even in several of the studies we found most useful in shaping the HPHP Readiness Model (see Figure 2E), you will see a great deal of attention focused on these Readiness to Teach strategies, almost to the exclusion of the other two dimensions in the Readiness Model. That's understandable, since most effective-practice research has generally followed the most commonly applied reform strategies – and most of those strategies have revolved around Readiness to Teach-style reforms. The research, in other words, has followed the path of reform. Yet all three Readiness elements are powerful themes among principals and teachers in HPHP schools and in the significant new research on child

poverty, cognitive development, mitigation of at-risk factors, and resiliency. In effect, we've been missing crucial elements in what educators in these schools have been telling us.

Third, we must reframe our approach to education reform itself. The rest of this report is predicated on the assumption that what HPHP schools are doing today can be replicated. The HPHP Readiness Model is not only a template for igniting learning in poor students but also a vehicle for fundamental change. However, change will take rethinking our approach to education reform. To that vital task, we turn next.

FIGURE 2E   **Major Effective-Practice Research Informs and Supports the HPHP Readiness Model**

Strong support = ●
Some support = ◉

	It's Being Done Chenoweth (2007)	Building Blocks Initiative Mass Insight (2001-2005)	Research Review: HPHP Schools CPE/Caliber Associates (2005)	90/90/90 Schools Reeves (2003)	Inside the Black Box Kannapel & Clements (2005)	Research Synthesis Cotton (1995)	No Excuses Carter (2000)	Expecting Success Ragland et al. (2002)	CA High School Best Practice Springboard/NCEA (2005)	Victory at Buffalo Creek Haberman (1999)	A New Era Marzano (2000)	Scaling Up: Urban HS Lessons Rennie Center (2003)	Gaining Traction Donahue Institute (2007)
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	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Readiness to ACT													
Resource Authority	●	●		●	●	●	●			◉			●
Resource Ingenuity	●	◉		◉		●	◉			◉		●	◉
Agility in the Face of Turbulence	●					●				◉			

Note: For complete references and information on these sources, see Appendix B.

3.1 What Success Requires: Changing the Odds for Turnaround Schools
Moving beyond marginal to fundamental change

The high-performing, high-poverty schools described in Part 2 provide school intervention strategists with a proof-point, a benchmark, and a vision. They demonstrate what's possible, how far highly disadvantaged kids can go, and what it looks like to get them there.

The rest, to paraphrase education writer Karin Chenoweth (see box), is engineering.

That makes the task in front of us sound deceptively easy. Engineering, after all, is an historical American trademark. We designed and built democracy as a form of government, invented peanut butter, the suburb, and the nuclear bomb, carved out the Panama Canal and put a man on the moon. Surely we can replicate the strategies of successful urban schools.

But so far, after three decades or more of effort – some of it involving billions of dollars of federal aid – the results of our various attempts to apply effec-tive-practice research to improve struggling schools are meager at best. "Why do good ideas about teaching and learning have so little impact on

U.S. educational practice?" Harvard researcher Richard Elmore asked that question in 1996, at the outset of his milestone essay, "Getting to Scale with Good Educational Practice." He could well ask the same question, with added impatience, today.

For this project, we spent 18 months seeking to answer Elmore's question with respect to state- and district-driven interventions in failing schools. Our complete analysis is included in this report as Appendix A, but it boils down to the observations opposite:

"Not a Theoretical Challenge, but an Engineering One"

"After visiting all the [HPHP] schools profiled in this book, I began to feel as if the folks in these schools can be likened to the Wright brothers, who proved once and for all that manned flight was possible. Once Orville and Wilbur demonstrated how to answer the challenges of drag and gravity, getting from their experimental plane in Kitty Hawk to the Boeing 747 was no longer a theoretical challenge but an engineering one. In the same way, the schools profiled here demonstrate that the job of educating kids to high levels – even kids traditionally considered 'hard to teach' – is theoretically possi-ble. The challenges these schools have overcome include the ideas that poverty and discrimination are insuperable barriers to academic achievement; that today's kids are so damaged by television, video games and hip-hop music that they are impervious to books and scholarship; that good, qualified teachers simply won't work in difficult cir-cumstances; and that existing teachers and principals are incapable of improvement. The theoretical arguments pile on, seemingly insurmountable.

"Except that in the case of the schools profiled here, they are proved wrong. When you overcome drag and gravity with enough thrust and lift, you get flight; when you over-come poverty and discrimination with enough thoughtful instruction, careful organiza-tion, and what can only be recognized as the kind of pig-headed optimism displayed by the Wright brothers, you get learning. The schools profiled here are not perfect, any more than the Wright brothers' plane was perfect. But they have tackled the theoreti-cal challenges one by one and proved that those challenges can be conquered."

– Karin Chenoweth, *It's Being Done* (2007)

Current Intervention Strategies: Four Inadequacies that Must Be Addressed

Inadequate Design: Lack of ambition, comprehensiveness, integration, and network support

▶ **Marginal change yields marginal results. The strategies of most school inter-vention efforts have been chronically ill-matched with the need**. The vast majority of what passes for intervention in failing schools can be understood as light renovation – the school-reform equivalent of wallpapering and new siding. What's needed is much more fundamental than repair work on an existing structure: we need instead a thorough rethinking of how the house serves the people who live in it. That much is clear from our study of HPHP schools (see Figure 2E). It's a big issue for school communities, which tend to think and operate in terms of projects, not strategies.

▶ **School intervention strategies generally stop well short of the comprehen-siveness of change required**. Our review of the research on state- and district-driv-en intervention in low-performing schools prompted us to group intervention initia-tives in three categories. Most efforts (by far) focus on *program change* – essentially, providing a range of help to improve the quality of instruction within the current model of the school. Some also build in *people change* – installing a new principal or replacing the staff, but rarely as part of a complete turnaround strategy. Very few go further and attempt to *change the context of operating conditions and incentives* in which all of the work (including the reform effort) takes place. Yet it is precisely this conditions context that tends to undercut the impact of reform, particularly in under-performing schools. (See Figure 3C, page 45.)

▶ **School intervention tends toward silver bullets instead of fully integrated strategies**. A strong principal; a smaller learning community; a longer school day. Individual elements of turnaround may be critically important, but each by itself is nearly always insufficient to produce major, systemic change – i.e., change that sur-vives even after the strong principal leaves or the longer school day shrinks.

▶ **Intervention tends to focus on individual schools, without the intensive out-side support that can be obtained through a cluster or network**. Schools fail in part because their central support network (the district) has failed them. Supremely gifted principals may turn around a school, but turnaround at *scale* requires intensive support from a new network, organized within or across district lines.

Inadequate Incentive Change: Current efforts do too little to change the status quo and are marked more by compliance than buy-in

▶ **School intervention has failed to use carrots and sticks effectively to gener-ate commitment to change**. This failure has ramifications at every level in the sys-tem: policymakers, district leaders, principals, teachers, parents, students. Intervention represents an opportunity for leverage to be applied to change behavior, which as

Fullan (among other researchers) points out, can then lead to changed beliefs. But that leverage – and the consequent sense of urgency – does not take place because state accountability systems have been weak or unclear in establishing firm timelines and consequences for underperformance. Neither have most intervention strategies understood the vital importance of "carrots" (such as increased latitude over deci-sion-making, professional norms for compensation and collaboration, and participa-tion in groundbreaking reform) in enlisting buy-in for turnaround.

Inadequate Capacity: Failing schools get in-service training instead of the all-encompassing *people strategy* and strong external partners they need

▶ **School intervention chronically under-values the importance of recruiting and placing people in the right jobs**. The reasons why are understandable. Changing pro-gram strategies and offering in-service training is safe territory, compared to the com-plexity and controversy inherent in a total human resource strategy. Most intervention initiatives include provisions for professional development, but most often, that is as far as it goes. The choices, changes, and comprehensive "people strategies" that might come from an honest appraisal of current personnel, management, and HR practices including compensation and incentive strategies are set aside for another day.

▶ **Turnaround requires special skills from school leaders and external partners, and the resource base in both categories is glaringly weak**. Turnaround is only now becoming appreciated as a special discipline in education. Training for special-ized school leaders in turnaround management is in its infancy. The lack of a strong base of outside turnaround partners clearly stems from lack of public investment in this critical resource. What little demand there is has been driven by private grants.

Inadequate Political Will: Lack of constituency, lack of turnaround skills, and uncertain outcomes reduce the likelihood of a strong state response

▶ **School intervention has suffered from episodic, confusing policy design, con-sistent under-funding, and indecisive political support**. NCLB, ironically, has not helped. Its five restructuring options include one "wild-card" alternative that has been used as a limited-change escape from the other, more dramatic options. The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provisions are moving so many schools into corrective action and restructuring categories that states have begun reducing their commit-ment to intervention. Because failing schools have no political constituency, financial-ly pressed state governments have found it difficult to launch and sustain the kind of intervention effort that might make a difference. And finally, responsibility for manag-ing intervention has fallen to state education agencies that are already under-resourced and over-extended and, generally, are politically sensitive agencies ill-suited to crafting powerful, imaginative turnaround strategy.

What Success Requires
(continued)

How can the now-emerging field of school intervention address the shortcomings described on the previous page, and in the "map" of the intervention-design landscape on the facing page? Together, they summarize a set of public policy and school reform strategies that appear to have missed the mark altogether on both the nature of the intervention required by failing schools, and the scale of the intervention indicated by the magnitude of the problem.

And yet: the turnaround challenge, we believe, is an addressable public policy problem. Moreover, as we argued in Part 1, we believe that turnaround of failing schools represents an opportunity to bring about fundamental change in education on a broad basis.

That is the focus of the remainder of this report: defining the difference between intervention as it has (mostly) been done to date, and a more complete, ambitious form of intervention we call integrated, comprehensive turnaround design – or, "true turnaround" for short.

The graphic below summarizes our approach.

- First, it is staked to our analysis of the HPHP schools in Part 2 and the Readiness Model for high-poverty schools that resulted from that analysis.

- Second, it focuses (in Part 3) on the elements of turnaround design we believe are critical to its success at the ground level: Conditions,

Capacity, and Clustering, the three 'C's of turnaround design.

- Third, it presents our view (in Part 4) of how these elements can be enabled at scale, through the creation of turnaround zones with special operating conditions and supports, and a coordinated framework of state, district, and outside partner support.

None of this is simple to accomplish. We are fully aware, having been deeply involved in Massachusetts education policymaking for ten years, of the complex political dynamics that can make the organization, launch, and successful implementation of such a public policy initiative a daunting challenge. But we have also seen success come to Massachusetts, first-

hand, from a sustained, statewide commitment to real reform among government, business, community, and education leaders. Part 4 begins with a discussion of these dynamics and the need for states to build a leadership constituency for failing schools. But first, in Part 3, we elaborate on the three 'C's.

FIGURE 3A

Engineering the Framework for Turnaround: Key Steps

THE BENCHMARK — HPHP Readiness Model (see Part 2)

THE REFORM ELEMENTS — Changing Conditions / Building Capacity / Clustering for Support (see Part 3)

THE FRAMEWORK — A Proposed State Approach (see Parts 4 and 5)
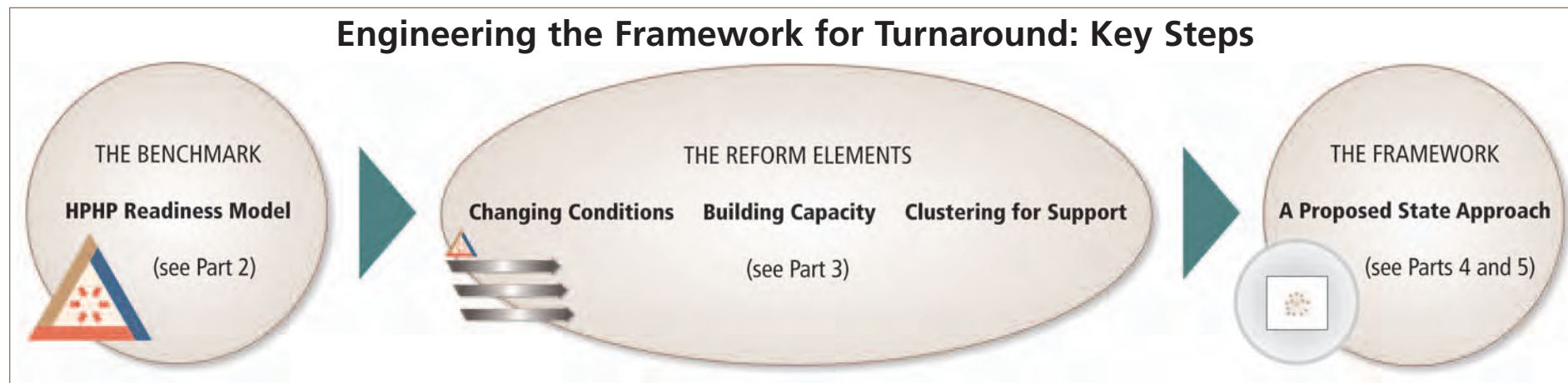
Current Interventions: Some Scale, but Little True Comprehensiveness

3.1

Intervention Comprehensiveness vs. Scale

Comprehensive turnaround (3 "Readiness" elements)

HPHP SCHOOLS
Individual high-performing, high-poverty schools

The Goal:
COMPREHENSIVE TURNAROUND AT SCALE
Integrated system redesign

-PROGRAM
-PEOPLE
-CONDITIONS

Intervention Comprehensiveness

CONDITIONS CHANGE
New rules and incentives

PEOPLE CHANGE
New principal and/or staff

PROGRAM CHANGE
"Providing-help" school improvement strategies

Current forms of school intervention

Narrower, traditional interventions

Single school | District | State

Intervention Scale

This chart plots three current forms of school intervention on a graph indicating the comprehensiveness of each form against its scale.

- **Program Change** initiatives have represented the vast majority of intervention initiatives, including the federal government's massive Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program and the New American Schools (NAS) models. This form of intervention provides help in a vast array of ways – including whole-school modeling – but stops short of changing the system in which the work is undertaken, or the people who are undertaking it.

- **People Change** initiatives imply a judgment that turnaround of failing schools involves more than improving programs; it must include some change in the people implementing the reform as well. Some school districts, notably Washington DC and San Francisco, have experimented with total staff reconstitution: firing everyone and building a new staff. Virginia is experimenting with a Turnaround Specialists program that replaces principals in failing schools with other school leaders who have proven track records of effectiveness. These initiatives go farther than the Program Change models, but still stop short of addressing barriers in the operating conditions that prevent reform from fulfilling its potential.

- **Conditions Change** initiatives provide authority to turnaround leaders to make choices regarding programs and key resources including staff, schedule, and budget. They attempt to reconnect incentive structures to the school's educational mission (through, for example, professional norms for compensation and collaboration).

Comprehensive turnaround, we believe, integrates all three of these forms of change. A handful of major districts have begun to experiment with forms of intervention that try to address all three. The reforms are too new to have produced definitive results. Turn to Appendix A and the Supplement for a more thorough treatment of this analysis and profiles of some of those intervention experiments.

3.2 The First C: Conditions that Enable Effective Turnaround

Reform depends on the context in which it's applied

Changing Conditions: Establishing the operating conditions and new incentives necessary for school-level decisions to be made more on the basis of what's best for students and achievement than on the needs of adults. That means flexible authority over critical resources – people, time, money, and program – and professional incentives that actively encourage people to do their best work.

3 'C's of Effective Turnaround

CHANGING CONDITIONS

BUILDING CAPACITY

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT

Supremely skillful principals with adequate resources pursuing commonly-held, research-based reforms have at least some chance of improving a low-performing school. But their success appears to come *despite* the context of governance, decision-making systems, and operating conditions in which they do their work. As our own seven years of effective-practice research and our analysis of simi-

lar studies show, principals who succeed in high-poverty, high-challenge schools tend to be strategy mavericks and resource entrepreneurs. They extract from the system what's valuable to their school, they find ways around the most dysfunctional obstacles, and they enlist their staff into willingly coming along with them.

It should not have to be that way, and it cannot if we are to meet the challenge of failing schools at the scale of the need. The challenges presented by high-poverty schools are too great, and the supply of supremely skillful principals is simply too small. Hence the first of the three 'C's of effective turnaround at scale: *Establishing the changing conditions.*

By "conditions," we don't mean working conditions in the classic sense of the phrase: temperature in the hallways, rowdy students, number of kids in a class. We mean the large set of systemic operating conditions that actively shape how everyone – adults and students alike – behave in the school. This set of conditions is driven primarily by two forces: authority to make choices (particularly regarding the key resources of people, time,

money, and program); and the nature of the incentive structure.

Authority to Make Choices

One thread that runs through the research on effective schools and high-performing high-poverty schools is the central importance of *allocating a school's resources in ways that maximize student learning*. Four kinds of resources stand out as most critical:[1]

▶ **People**: Abundant research supports the primacy of good teaching in determining student achievement. (Hattie, 2003; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders, Wright, & Horn, 1997) Schools seeking to raise student achievement dramatically put the right people in the right positions to do their most effective work, and then enable that performance with operating conditions and incentives (see below) that support it. Turnaround school leaders must have the ability to shape the staff in their schools, without regard to seniority or other contract bargaining restrictions.

▶ **Time**: Schools that are effective with previously low-performing

students typically use time in substantially different ways from the norm. At the elementary level, they increase the time students spend in core academic instruction (many studies, with Kannapel & Clements 2005 a recent example). At the high school level, HPHP schools are exceedingly deliberate about the use of instructional time – arranging available time to help "catch up" students who arrive behind (Education Trust, 2005) and in some cases rewriting the entire weekly and yearly school calendar. (Mass Insight, 2001-5) Effective schools also rework teachers' time to allow more monitoring, data-analysis, planning, and professional development.

▶ **Money**: Most intervention program leaders are handcuffed by their lack of control over school budgets, which in turn undercuts their ability to implement the most important elements of their turnaround plan. The charter schools among the HPHP schools we studied have the necessary budget authority; principals at other HPHP schools tend to be mavericks with district

[1] It is important to recognize that to some degree, these four resources are fungible. That is, they should not be regarded as separate resource "silos" to be treated separately from each other, but as different articulations of available resources that skillful school and district leaders allocate according to their most important strategies.

policy and "resource entrepre-
neurs," as discussed in Part 2,
in order to gain at least a measure
of flexibility.

▶ **Program**: Turnaround leaders
need sufficient authority to shape
their school's teaching approaches
and related services around the
mission and their local circum-
stances – within a framework of
support and direction provided to
them by network partners (which
may include their district).

Much of this "resource authority"
may seem to pertain mostly to untra-
ditional schools – schools organized
to conduct their work somewhat or
completely outside of normal public
school district structures. And this is,
in many ways, the point: the nature of
school turnaround work requires that
we learn from these outside-the-system
approaches and develop better ways of
applying them inside the system. (See
Figure 3C.) Without the ability to
select and place staff, structure time,
and allocate funds, it becomes
extraordinarily difficult for schools to
succeed, especially in a turnaround
context. Much authoritative research
supports the importance of authority
over resources. In RAND's research
on comprehensive school reform, for
example, schools that were given the

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

FIGURE 3C
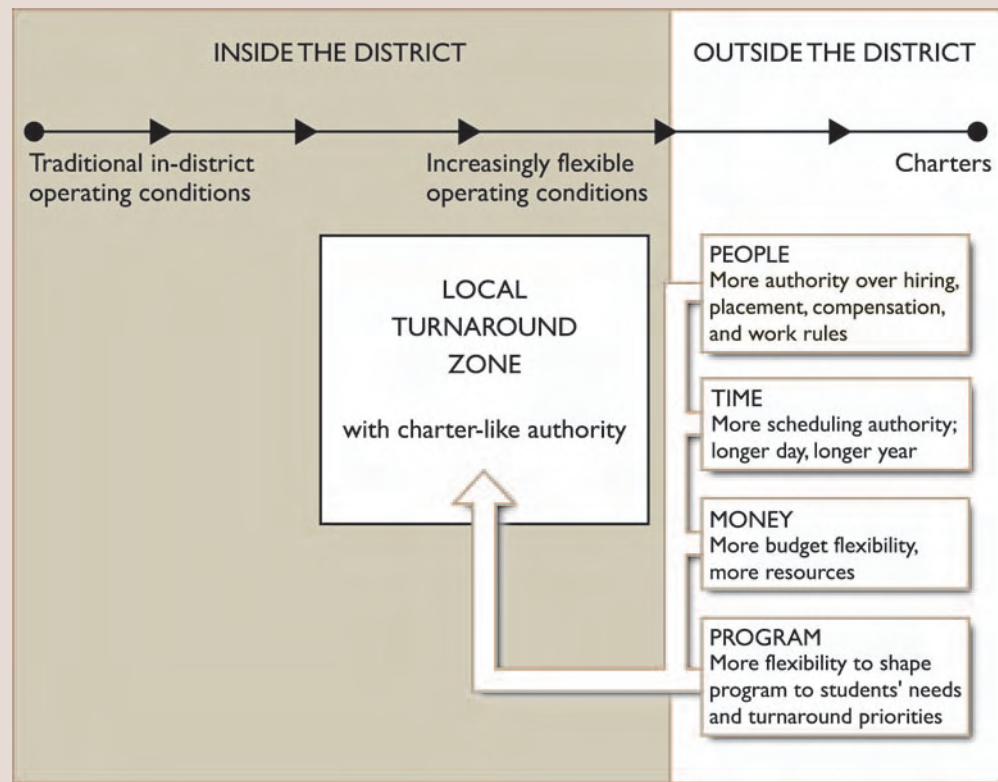
Building the Turnaround Model:

In order to enable school-level reform that incorporates the three "readiness" dimensions of high-performing, high-poverty schools (see page 9), turnaround zones must be created – either within or across school district lines – that change traditional operating conditions that inhibit reform. The zones establish outside-the-system authorities inside the system, within a framework of strong support and guidance from the district and a lead turnaround partner.

freedom to implement their models were more likely to be successful. (Berends et al, 2002) RAND came to similar conclusions in its evaluation of Edison Schools, which also has achieved greater success when allowed the autonomy to implement its program. (Gill et al, 2005) Studies of successful charter schools have pointed to freedom and flexibility as critical to the schools' success. "In effective charter schools," one concluded, "in each case the school program reflects the school's freedom to experiment, to be creative in terms of organization, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction." (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)

Though these examples emphasize school-level autonomy, it is important to note that the concept of "authority to make choices" does not necessarily mean untrammeled school-level flexibility over all aspects of school operations. It may well be sensible, for example, for a district to deploy a research-based reading curriculum in all of its chronically low-performing schools, rather than allowing each school to select its own approach. And it may also be sensible for policymakers to make school-level authority contingent on capacity; e.g., requiring school-level leaders to earn authority by showing their ability to lead well.

Simply granting unlimited powers to incapable school-level actors in such a context is not a winning turnaround strategy. But even where school-level authority is not appropriate or desirable, someone still needs authority over resources in order to effect successful turnaround. *Someone* needs the power to allocate people, time, and money in a way that supports the turnaround effort.

Incentives to Take Action

By "incentives," we mean all of the forces that shape behavior within a school. Too often, incentives run in exactly the wrong direction inside chronically low-performing schools. The incentive challenge is in fact evident at all levels of the system, from those shaping superintendent decision-making to those that define the daily work of individual teachers and administrators – and the engagement of students in their own learning, as was discussed in Part 2.

First, turnaround leaders at all levels need incentives to act decisively in support of fundamental change. Over the past two decades, local leaders have shown a marked preference for less dramatic strategies even when there is little or no evidence that such a strategy will improve the education its neediest students receive. (Brady, 2003; McRobbie, 1998; Wong & Shen, 2003) This preference is predictable: dramatic strategies are by definition more likely to upset strong interests, necessitate policy changes, require the reallocation of funding and people, and otherwise disrupt the status quo. Without countervailing incentives to take bold action, district (and school) leaders can scarcely be expected to do so, though there always will be exceptions. As Brady (2003) found: "While

Dramatic strategies are by definition more likely to upset strong interests, necessitate policy changes, require the reallocation of funding and people, and otherwise disrupt the status quo.

39 states have the authority to take strong actions, and while these same 39 states contain dozens of failing schools that have not appreciably improved for years, we still find strong interventions extremely rare."

It is tempting to imagine that NCLB has created such countervailing incentives, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Though NCLB requires districts to "restructure" schools after five years of failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress, most restructuring appears to be an extension of more incremental reform strategies common in the earlier stages of NCLB intervention.

NCLB delineates four dramatic options: reopening as a charter school, contracting with an external management provider, replacing relevant staff, and state takeover. But it also includes a fifth "other" option, which is the route most districts are taking. Often, "other" means using incremental strategies such as new curriculum programs or staff development. Very few districts seem to be employing NCLB's more dramatic restructuring options.

(DiBiase, 2005) Until and unless the restructuring provisions of NCLB are rewritten, if state policy leaders want districts to have strong countervailing incentives to take bold action, they will have to create them. (See Part 4.2 for more on NCLB's impact on turnaround design.)

Incentives That Support Reform

Second, turnaround leaders and educators in turnaround schools need powerful incentives to act in ways that boost student performance dramatically. Current incentives produce personal and organizational behavior that tends to undercut performance by

students – particularly disadvantaged students attending dysfunctional schools. It would seem reasonable, for example, that students in the lowest performing schools should be taught by the most able teachers. But under current incentive and compensation structures, it would be irrational to expect the most capable teachers and administrators to gravitate to the most dysfunctional schools. New incentives – differential pay, low-interest mortgages, loan-forgiveness, leadership roles – must be developed if we are to match the neediest students with the teachers and leaders most capable of helping them.

There are several different kinds of incentives that policymakers can mobilize to support school turn-arounds, including:

▶ **Resource incentives**: Policymakers can offer additional funding for districts or schools willing to undertake turnaround strategies that are most likely to work, rather then pursuing less promising strategies.

▶ **Positioning incentives**: Too often, systems stigmatize schools that are identified for improvement. Instead, policymakers can seek to create an environment in which being designated a "turn-around school" is valued due to the attention, resources, condition changes, and promise that attach to the status.

▶ **Accountability incentives**: Increasingly, No Child Left Behind and state accountability systems are insisting on more dramatic interventions in under-performing schools, providing ample motivation to proactive school and district leaders – including both management and unions – to find solutions or risk loss of control, budget authority, and membership. While these systems are imperfect in various ways, policymakers can use them as levers to induce action at the district and school level.

▶ **Parent and community incentives**: Parents and community members can mobilize in support of these efforts or detract from them depending upon how they become organized relative to the change. (Kowal and Hassel, 2005; Arkin and Kowal, 2005; Kowal and Arkin, 2005) If change-oriented policymakers and system leaders can harness that mobilization in support of viable turnaround strategies, these incentives can run

How to Establish the Enabling Conditions: Create a Turnaround Zone

They go by different names: Improvement Zone (Miami-Dade). Empowerment Zone (New York City). Opportunity Zone (Houston). Superintendent's Schools (Boston). Renaissance 2010 or "Ren-Ten" schools (Chicago). But they all reflect the same idea: create special, protected space to provide the changing conditions that research and common sense suggest are necessary for effective turn-around of under-performing schools. Create, in other words, a *turnaround zone*.

There is no one model for a turnaround zone. Each of the experiments under-way in the urban districts listed above is different from the others. But their goals are the same: to remove common barriers to reform, propel fundamental (as opposed to incremental) change, reconnect incentives with the schools' educational mission, provide a focus for increased support from the district and from outside partners, and – last but not least – to replace stigmatizing labels with a strongly positive identity. Turnaround zones are efforts to actualize the Readiness to Act leg of the HPHP Readiness school model, and to enable school leaders to expand their staff's Readiness to Teach.

Districts have led the way in creating such zones. (See Appendix A and the Supplemental Report for our analysis.) But states now have the opportunity to learn from the district experiments and create statewide zones that bring the changing conditions to every district and school undertaking turnaround. That is one of the foundation ideas in our proposed Turnaround Framework, which is described in Part 5.

in the right direction. Alternately, if opponents of change are more effective at capitalizing on this force, then the incentives will continue to work against change as they so often do.

Condition change may be the most difficult and contentious of the three 'C's we propose as vital ingredients for effective turnaround. It confronts established interests in the form of bureaucratic state and district constraints, teacher unions and, some-times, parent and professional associations. But altered operating conditions and incentive structures are hallmarks of the HPHP schools, and district/union collaborating around turnaround zones in New York, Chicago, Miami, and elsewhere show that it can be done. Turnaround efforts that continuously require decision-making staked to the best interests of children, instead of adults, will be on the right track.

3.3 The Second C: Capacity to Conduct Effective Turnaround

Urgently needed: broader, deeper turnaround capacity at every corner of the system

Building Capacity: Enhancing schools' ability to recruit, train, assign, and support people with the right skills for the right jobs; and building, in particular, new capacity among internal school leadership teams and external turnaround partners in the specialized skills of school turnaround management.

3 'C's of Effective Turnaround

CHANGING CONDITIONS

BUILDING CAPACITY

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT

Turnaround is, at its core, a people strategy. No matter how good a new curriculum is, or how solid the data analysis is, or how imaginatively the school day is organized, or how new the technology is – no matter about *all* of that – schooling is fundamentally a human enterprise. High-performing, high-poverty schools give their highest priority to recruiting the best staff possible and enabling them to do their best work. Failing schools, on the other hand, are a painfully clear reflection of public education's general failure to understand and adopt professional human resource management systems and strategies.

In the realm of capacity-building, effective turnaround requires:

- **A fundamental rethinking of internal HR approaches** – including recruitment, induction, development, allocation, and evaluation – in order to enable people currently in the system to perform at the highest levels and to attract highly dedicated, highly skilled newcomers to the mission. This is true not just at the level of the classroom teacher; it's just as true at every level in the system of supports for that teacher, including principals and coaches, district and school managers of turnaround efforts, and framers and implementers of turnaround policy at the state level.

- **A fundamental rethinking of how external capacity is applied** – how schools, districts, and states work with outside partners, who have an important role to play that would not be supported by the nature and structure of most current school/district/provider relationships.

- **A clear understanding of turnaround management as a discipline with a distinct skill set**; the inadequacy of current turnaround management capacity everywhere in the system; and the state's responsibility to address that gap.

- **Finally: the provision of sufficient funding and resources**. The vast majority of any investment that states and districts make in turnaround will go to building the capacity required to implement the strategies comprehensively. Partial implementation because of insufficient funding will produce, predictably, a dimmer result.

Revitalizing Internal HR

Leaders of outside-the-system schools such as charters and charter-like schools say that perhaps the most important authority they have – the definer of what's different in their schools from the traditional model – is the ability to shape their school staff into the high-performance team that schooling in high-poverty environments requires. (Mass Insight for the NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007) Principals of regular, in-district public schools generally lack the same kind of authority – a crippling blow to any serious turnaround effort. But as the research presented in Part 2 and the Supplemental Report shows, principals leading high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools find ways to exercise that authority, even when they have to work around contractual requirements and longstanding operating habits. "Effective leaders used all available discretion and opportunity to hire the 'right' people," researchers in Massachusetts found, "and maximized staff effectiveness by placing them in the right roles. This sometimes meant pushing people out of their comfort zones." (UMass Donahue Institute, 2007)

This is the intersection of the first two of our three 'C's of effective turnaround, Changing Conditions and Building Capacity. The objection to providing school and district leaders with more authority over hiring, firing, placement, responsibilities, and evaluation is usually that it will lead to unfair practices or to the school's "managers" taking advantage of its "workers." In fact, the HPHP schools demonstrate exactly the opposite effects. A central finding of the UMass Donahue Institute study cited above, which studied matched pairs of high- and low-performing schools in the same urban district, is fairly typical: "Teachers in higher performing

schools frequently characterized their principals as demanding, but also as extremely supportive of teachers who are trying to meet those demands. There was a motivational aspect to principals' support – a sense that they share a common commitment – and this often equated to high morale and energized staff within higher performing schools." Effective HR management is vastly more difficult than it should be in most public schools today. (The Education Partnership, 2005-7) Changing the operating conditions to allow leaders to lead is the first step towards assembling the ground-level capacity required to turn around a failing school.

Redefining External Partnerships

At a meeting of Massachusetts' leading school improvement service providers a couple of years ago, Mass Insight and about twenty other organizations were asked to pin cards describing our initiatives onto separate posters representing the state's largest school districts. This innocent exercise produced a fascinating (and discouraging) result. Many posters looked like pincushions, and many providers – including Mass Insight – were taken aback at the number of other providers who were hard at work in their best partner districts. None of us had any real idea how much "providing" was going on, and nowhere was there any degree of coordination among partners working in the same district.

It is little wonder that teachers famously say, as various streams of reform and partner organizations float overhead, "duck and cover – this too shall pass." Where school culture is weakest, in chronically under-performing schools, this syndrome is deeply felt. In order for turnaround schools to have a chance at success, their relationship with outside partners needs significant restructuring – and the pool and capacity of potential turnaround partners needs to be widened and deepened considerably.

That is the central idea behind Figure 3D: the reorganization of the current, highly fragmented school/partner model into a new one, for turnaround schools, that builds on the "systems-integrator" approach now being used successfully in many other sectors including business and healthcare. In this model, lead turnaround partners take on the responsibility of integrating other providers into a coherent whole. The current model assumes that someone in the school or district will accomplish this integration, but that appears to be more the exception than the rule.
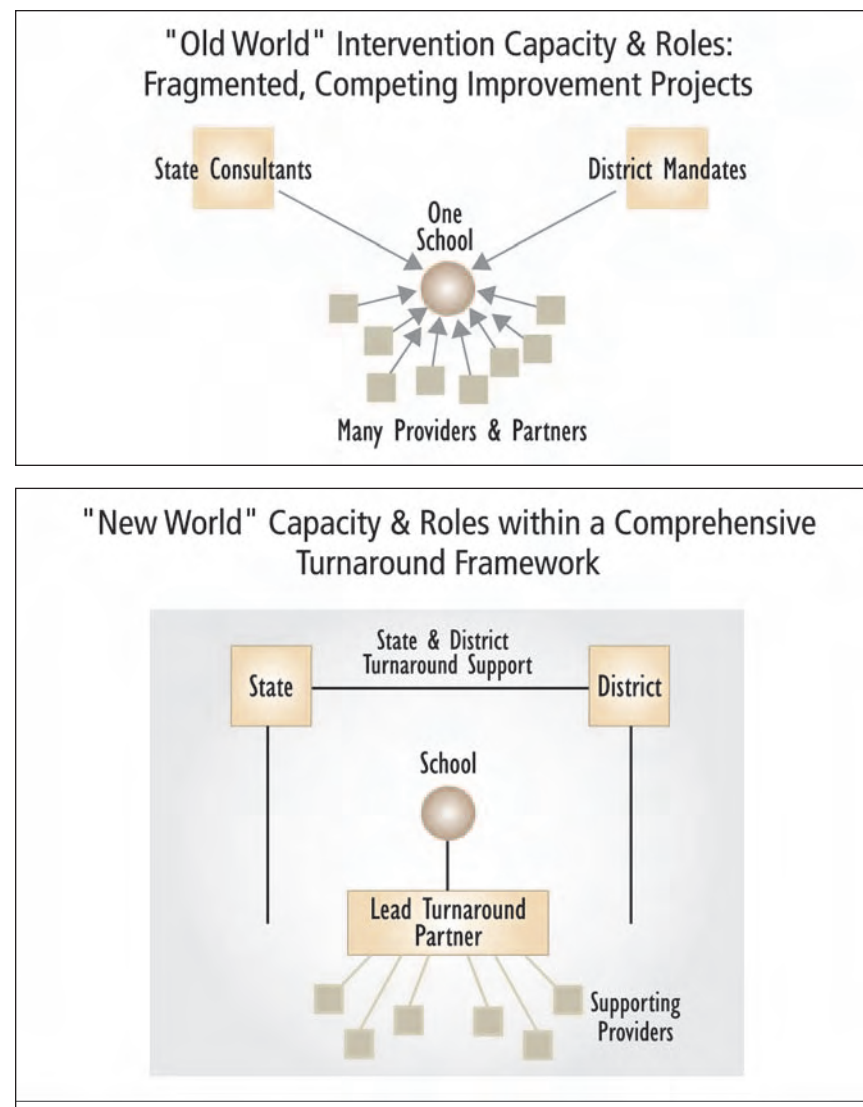
In the "Old-World" model of school/provider partnerships still prevalent today, multiple partners work independently in a fragmented, confusing web of disconnected support. In the "New-World" model most appropriate for turnaround, a lead turnaround partner acts as systems integrator and coordinates the providers. The "New-World" model illustrated here also reflects the greater capacity required for turnaround throughout the system: particularly at the school, but also at the district (through a turnaround zone organized to serve a cluster of schools), partner, and state levels.

Capacity to Conduct Effective Turnaround
(continued)

Lead partners can maximize the value that all outside providers bring to the task of turnaround.

The same logic applies to turnaround schools' need to build strong connections with social services – the other large-scale public investment in disadvantaged communities, which too often takes place without much if any integration with the schools. Through sheer determination and the "resource ingenuity" element of our HPHP Readiness school model, effective principals in high-poverty settings already pursue these connections. The key is lowering the bar so that these connections happen without requiring exceptional leadership.

The final point to make regarding turnaround partners is connected to the need for turnaround capacity-building throughout the system. There is exceedingly little capacity, currently, in the supply of outside turnaround partners. Most states seeking to apply outside expertise to under-performing schools end up hiring recently retired educators as individual consultants, who then most often perform their responsibilities with very little training or coordination with their fellow consultants, or, for that matter, results. There is an important time consideration for

states in considering how they might expand provider capacity for turnaround – in effect, playing a role on the demand-side to stimulate the development of higher-capacity turnaround organizations. Just as NCLB triggered an enormous (and somewhat chaotic) expansion of the provider network for Supplemental Education Services on behalf of under-performing students, so may it, soon, trigger dramatic expansion of turnaround assistance for under-performing schools. That expansion, inevitably, will also be somewhat unmanaged and chaotic. But states can maximize provider effectiveness through intentional, highly developed collaborations with outside partners and districts and an explicit strategy to expand provider capacity. Some districts – notably New York and Chicago – are already showing the way in working with foundations and local organizations to expand outside partner capacity. It is not a role that states are familiar with, for the most part. But it is a vital one.

Building Turnaround Management Capacity

Decades of research on schools has firmly established the central importance of school leadership quality,

accounting by one prominent estimate for 25% of differences in student learning. (Waters et al, 2003) The importance of leadership appears even greater in a school requiring dramatic improvement. American Institutes for Research and SRI International's evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's high-school reform ini-

tiative, for example, found that leadership was one of the key determinants of successful reform in high schools. (AIR/SRI, 2005) According to a cross-industry literature review of "turnarounds," about 70 percent of successful turnarounds involve changes in top management. (Hoffman, 1989)

States and Districts May Contract with Two Forms of Lead Turnaround Partner	
Contract Manager	• Assumes control over all aspects of school management (overall design, curriculum, HR, staff development, budgeting, scheduling, assessment, back-office services) on a contract basis with the district or the state. • Usually multiple-year contract, renewable on attainment of performance benchmarks.
Consulting Partner	• Control remains with school district, but within turnaround framework and conditions/reform elements required by the state. • Partner is deeply immersed in all aspects of developing and collaboratively executing the turnaround plan. • Partner and district are jointly held accountable for fidelity to the plan and attainment of performance benchmarks.

Note: With its "Performance," "Contract," and "Charter" schools, Chicago provides good examples of these different forms of providers and district/provider relationships. Some providers there, like the Center for Urban School Improvement at the University of Chicago, have begun filling both kinds of roles in different schools. See the Supplemental Report for more information.

Turnaround requires more than just good leadership; it requires leadership that is adept at the particular challenge of turnaround. A wide range of research suggests that leaders who will be effective in efforts to achieve dramatic improvement are likely to have characteristics that are very different from those of typical school leaders and take actions that diverge significantly from those required in more stable leadership situations. (Kowal and Hassel, 2005; Arkin and Kowal, 2005; see box)

Though the research is fairly clear on this point, policy and practice have yet to apply it on any kind of scale. Some states, major school districts, foundations, universities, and non-profit organizations have put new energy into recruiting and training new principals for urban schools. But very few programs are specifically preparing leaders for the challenge of school turnaround. The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program, created by the education and business schools at the University of Virginia at the behest of then-governor Mark Warner, is one exception. States making a commitment to turnaround will need to address this capacity gap at the state level, because few districts have the resources necessary to do it themselves.

Finding the Money for Turnaround

Reforms significant enough to generate dramatic improvement in chronically low-performing schools will in most cases require substantial investment of financial resources. To the degree possible, system leaders will want to find this investment by reallocating existing resources first. As Harvard researcher Richard Elmore (2002) argued: "The evidence is now substantial that there is considerable money available in most district budgets to finance large-scale improvement efforts that use professional development effectively. The money is there. The problem is that it's already spent on other things and it has to be reallocated to focus on student achievement… Adding money to a system that doesn't know how to manage its own resources effectively means that the new money will be spent the same way as the old money." Miami-Dade pursued this strategy in funding its 39-school Improvement Zone in its first year (2004-2005), finding reportedly close to $1 million per school from existing line items in the budget (see the profile in the Supplemental Report).

A reallocation-first strategy also exerts discipline on system and school leaders to focus initially on the highest-value-added changes. This kind of focus is one of the hallmarks of successful turnarounds across industries.

How Effective School Turnaround Leaders Work

For their useful report, *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff* (Learning Point Associates, 2005), Kowal and Hassel distilled findings from more than a dozen different sources to produce a set of desired attributes for effective turnaround leaders in school settings. Such leaders, they suggest, tend to pursue common actions including the following:

Major Actions
- Concentrate on a few changes with big, fast payoffs
- Implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students without seeking permission for deviations from district policies

Support Steps
- Communicate a positive vision of future school results
- Collect and personally analyze school and student performance data
- Make an action plan based on data
- Help staff personally see and feel the problems students face
- Get key influencers within district and school to support major changes
- Measure and report progress frequently and publicly
- Gather staff team often and require all involved in decision-making to disclose and discuss their own results in open-air meetings
- Funnel more time and money into tactics that get results; halt unsuccessful tactics
- Require all staff to change – not optional
- Silence change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes
- Act in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success

That said: the costs of school turnaround (including money for new staff, incentive and responsibility-based compensation, new program materials, outside partner services and support, and especially additional time in the school day or year) range from $250,000 to a million dollars per school, per year over three years, with declining investment in subsequent years. (See the "Sample Turnaround Costs" box in Part 5.) On strictly financial terms, these investments are more than justifiable. It's probable that successful turnaround, viewed as a percentage increase of overall school spending, would more than pay for itself in terms of savings on social services and the increased productivity of successfully maturing students. We don't know this for sure only because it hasn't yet been done.

3.4 The Third C: Clustering for Support

It's not just about autonomy. Failing schools need intensive network support.

Clustering for Support: Organizing turnaround for effectiveness and efficiency in school clusters by need, type, or region. Educators engaged in turnaround need particularly strong support networks, located either within their district or (in low-capacity districts) across district lines. These mini-district clusters, created in conjunction with district leaders and turnaround partners, provide specialized support to schools engaging in turnaround under special operating conditions established by the state.

3 'C's of Effective Turnaround

CHANGING CONDITIONS

BUILDING CAPACITY

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT

Schools need networks. They need them for reasons of both efficiency and effectiveness. Regular public schools, of course, have been organized into district networks for better than a hundred years. Even notoriously independent charter schools have begun to organize networks of like-minded schools, and charter management organizations are creating new schools

in clusters – witness KIPP Academies' recent announcement of its goal to open a total of 42 schools in Houston.

Failing schools have been failed by their networks. By NCLB's definition, schools in restructuring have failed to meet their goals for at least six years. The presence of failing schools in a district does not necessarily mean that the district is incapable. (Boston, the Broad Prize winner for urban school district effectiveness in 2006, has more than two dozen schools in which more than half of the students have failed either English/Language Arts or math over multiple years.)

But *something* needs to change, fairly dramatically, in order for schools that have been failing for six years to turn around. In our three 'C's model, we have argued that the operating conditions need to change, and that various capacity challenges need to be addressed. We are convinced that another, equally important part of the answer lies in a third C: *clustering for support*. In other words: intentionally organizing for school turnaround at the network level.

Clustering for Efficiency

As Irving Hamer, the educator who created the 39-school Improvement

Zone in Miami-Dade under Superintendent Rudy Crew, has continually reminded us in his role as an advisor on this project, turnaround "is

Effective turnaround at scale requires a transparent, deliberate blending of "loose" and "tight" in implementation and design.

past the time for onesies and twosies." The number of schools in need is too great – and the advantages of clustering are too compelling.

Virtually all of the most far-reaching district turnaround efforts underway today are using some sort of cluster approach. (See Attachment A and the Supplemental Report for profiles of the initiatives in Miami-Dade, New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia.) The clustering is often tied together with each district's "portfolio" of intervention strategies, involving different forms of school management: one turnaround cluster being organized by the teachers' union, other clusters being managed by universities or other intermediary organization, and other clusters managed by a turnaround office within the district itself.

State intervention efforts, on the other hand, appear to have largely refrained

from clustering. Many states offer staff and leadership development programs to selected high-need districts and schools; many provide guidance and change coaches to schools in Restructuring or Corrective Action. But few take a more managed approach to creating networks of schools along strategic lines: **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 can take several forms, as shown in Figure 3E:

- **Cluster Example 1**: 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 models and approaches – for example, grade 6-12 academies.

How Different Clusters Support the Work of Turnaround Differently

Clusters are small (5- to 20-school) reform networks organized with intention around a common attribute: school type, student need, reform approach, geography, or feeder patterns. The cluster organizer (which could be a district or a turnaround partner) adjusts its support in part around the nature of that attribute.

This graphic presents three possible clusters. They can be loosely grouped as "horizontal" (schools by type) or "vertical" (schools by feeder patterns).

- **Cluster 1 (horizontal)** could serve a set of specialty schools – grade 6-12 academies, middle college schools, Montessori elementaries – across several districts

- **Cluster 2 (horizontal)** could serve middle schools in three contiguous, small-city school districts

- **Cluster 3 (vertical)** could represent a special turnaround "carve-out" or zone within a large urban district, serving schools at all K-12 levels and potentially following district feeder patterns

We could find no research that points to an optimum size for school clusters. New York City caps its school cohorts at 25. In the words of one advisor to this project: they should be large enough to be an enterprise, and small enough to be successful.

Turnaround Zone

Turnaround schools organized into 3 clusters

District A

District B

District C

District D

District E

District schools outside the turnaround zones

Cluster 1   Cluster 2   Cluster 3
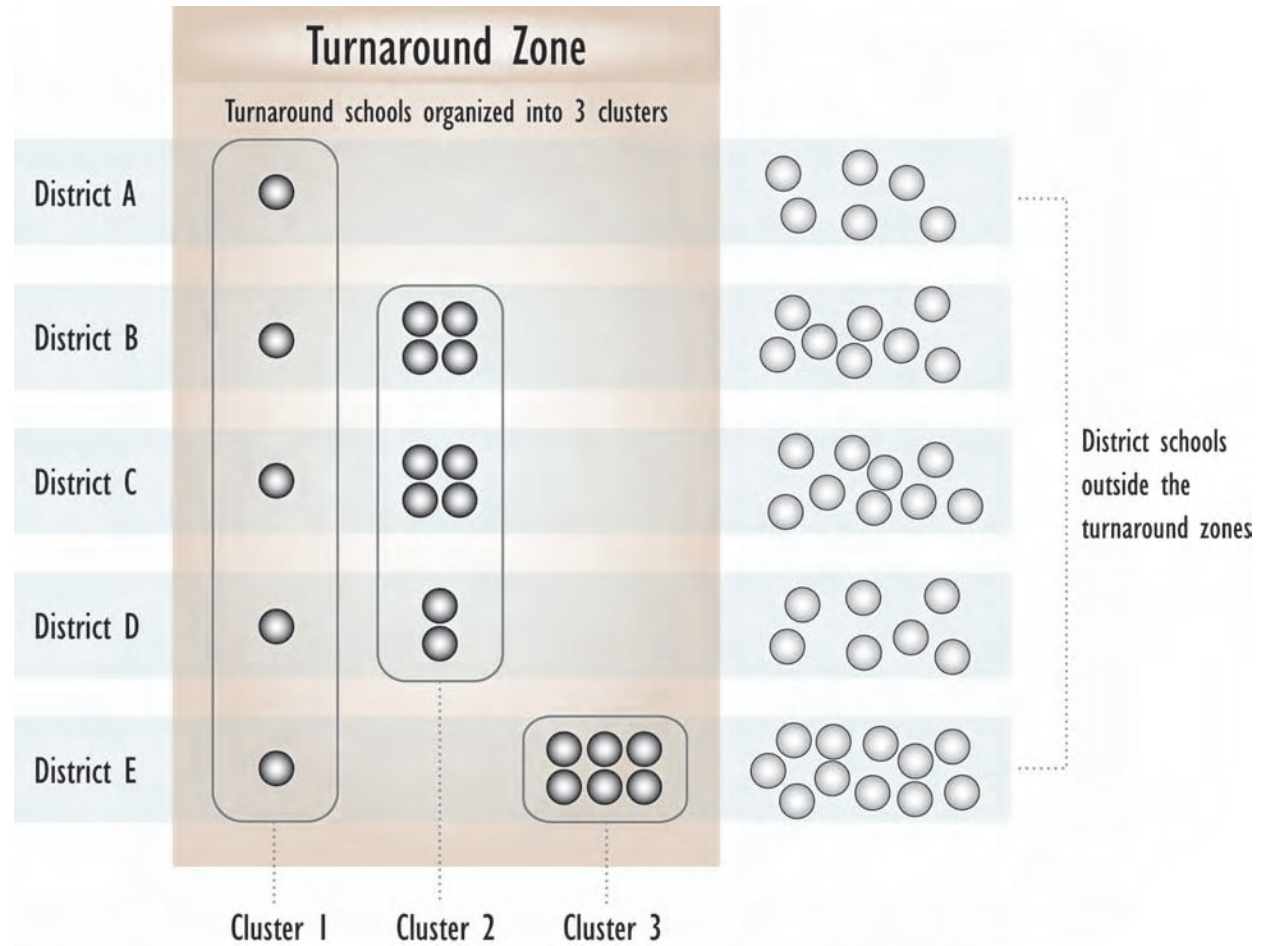
Clustering for Support: Organizing the Change
(continued)

- **Cluster Example 2**: two to four districts, organized and supported by the state, where combined turnaround work makes sense because of geographic proximity or because the work focuses on schools that share particular attributes.

- **Cluster Example 3**: 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).

Clustering for Effectiveness

Effective turnaround at scale requires a transparent, deliberate blending of "loose" and "tight" in implementation and design. The loose/tight dynamic has come under some study in recent years, most notably in a report funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and prepared by leaders from the foundation, NewSchools Venture Fund, and the Bridgespan Group, a Boston-based non-profit. (Colby et al, 2005) "Loose" refers to latitude in management or design, with decisions being made out in the field; "tight" in this context means more centralized control. Questions of looseness and tightness can be applied across the full range of school management and design dimensions (see Figure 3F) – as, in fact, they always are by districts on behalf of their schools, in quite often a fairly constant source of organizational tension.

The loose/tight dynamic deserves much deeper study, as it is a linchpin of reform across clusters of schools. There is no one right "blend" that will serve every circumstance; higher-capacity schools and districts deserve and sometimes even get broader latitude (or looseness) to make their own decisions, while clusters of some kinds of schools – new 6-12 academies, for example – might insist on tighter control while implementing a new model.

Applying the loose/tight dynamic in the turnaround context presents an immediate contradiction in terms. The changes in operating conditions outlined earlier in this report are necessary to allow the people closest to the work to have a strong say in how it is done. The HPHP schools 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. Turnaround requires a careful balance that doesn't undercut the power of site-based decision-making but provides strong support, backed by shared authority, for the work from the cluster-network provider and the state.

FIGURE 3F

"Loose" vs. "Tight" Across Eight Dimensions of School Management and Design

	Overall Design & Approach	Curriculum	Recruiting/ Hiring	Staff Development / Evaluation	Budgeting	Scheduling	Performance Assessment	Back-Office Services
Loose cluster	School	School	Cluster/ School	School	School	School	School	School
Blended cluster	Shared	Shared	Cluster/ School	Shared	School	School	Shared	Shared
Tight cluster	Cluster	Cluster	Cluster	Shared	Shared	Shared	Shared	Shared

The essential question is: which functions are best left to the site and which are best organized by the network? Edmonton, Oakland, New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia, among others, are all conducting experiments on this question. There is no one best answer – more likely, different answers for different contexts – but for schools undergoing turnaround, the difference between a loose, blended, and generally tightly managed cluster might look like this, in extremely simplified form.

"What's gone around has come around. After a decade or so spent largely on setting academic standards against which to hold schools accountable, states are themselves being held accountable for helping schools figure out how to meet them.

"The result is a huge leadership challenge."

— Jeff Archer, "Leading the Learning,"
Education Week, 2006

4.1 Organizing at the State Level For Turnaround of Under-Performing Schools
Towards a framework that offers good support for good design

How can states most effectively organize a school turnaround initiative that reflects everything we have learned about what works – and what doesn't?

That is the central question of this report, and the focus of Part 4.

The graphic for the proposed "New-World" turnaround framework that has emerged from our research, shown at right, is where we will end up. On the way there, we will discuss elements in the framework that have less to do with the business of turnaround (that's addressed by the three 'C's) in Part 3, and more to do with the business of planning, launching, and managing a statewide initiative campaign.

For that is what's needed to tackle the challenge posed by failing schools: an initiative that looks less like compliance with state and federal accountability mandates, and more like an inclusive, high-visibility, entrepreneurial partnership aimed at solving an urgent public dilemma.

The Current Landscape of State-Led Initiatives
Profiles of ten representative state intervention efforts appear in the Supplement to this report. In each state initiative, there are elements of promise. But none of the states we looked at (which have all been at the forefront of this issue, in one way or another) had been able to marshal the broad leadership commitment, sustained public investment, and comprehensiveness of strategy required to bring about effective turnaround at the scale of the need.

Generally, with some caveats for progress being made in some states, current state intervention initiatives appear to lack:

- **Sufficient intensity, comprehensiveness, and sustainability**. We saw little state engagement in changing operating conditions within turnaround schools; little attention to helping schools develop an overall *people strategy*, as opposed to providing limited forms of staff development; little clustering of schools with similar attributes or turnaround strategies; insufficient engagement in building, statewide, capacity for turnaround management both inside schools and districts and among turnaround partners; and only limited connections between school-level turnaround efforts and parallel efforts to improve struggling districts.

- **Incentives powerful enough to drive major change**. We saw few states establishing clear, aggressive performance targets for restructuring schools that carried equally clear terminal consequences; and far too little emphasis on positive incentives that can motivate buy-in to more fundamental kinds of reform.

- **Strong public and private sector commitment to turnaround**. We saw individuals (the occasional governor, commissioner, or state board chair) or state policymaking bodies taking the lead in advocating for turnaround, but not many signals of the kind of public/private consensus that has produced real impact in other areas of school reform, such as higher standards. In a few states, courts are playing a role in focusing attention to the issue, but business, community groups, and universities have for the most part not been deeply engaged.

- **Willingness to think outside of the box regarding management of the initiative**. With a couple of exceptions, school intervention

Can it be done? *We are convinced that it can – if states approach the challenge with commitment and inventiveness.*

initiatives primarily have been organized and operated through the most traditional channel, meaning the accountability or technical service wing of the state education agency. Virginia and Alabama are two states that have tried (in very different ways; see Supplemental Report) to address the turnaround challenge with a different kind of management approach.

The Way Forward

Much of this is understandable, given the nascent nature of accountability-driven school turnaround. It is only in the past couple of years that under-performing schools have begun hitting No Child Left Behind's most extreme categories – Corrective Action or Restructuring. But there is a growing recognition in the states we studied that 2007 and 2008 are watershed years for state responsiveness on this issue. The dimensions and complexity of the challenge are clear enough, and so now is the urgency as more and more schools move into each state's category for the most dramatic forms of intervention.

Can it be done? We are convinced that it can – if states approach the challenge with commitment and inven-

tiveness. The framework we present in this section of the report encompasses, at the tactical level, the three 'C's discussed in Part 3. But it also includes two other elements we believe are fundamental to success:

- **Statewide and community coalition-building**: Creating a constituency and leadership consensus for turnaround that is strong enough to sustain the effort and retain a focus on what works for students, more so than adults.

- **Freedom and authority to manage the initiative creatively**: Providing the same degree of operating authority to the statewide management of the initiative that the framework insists school turnaround leaders need – perhaps through the creation of new kind of coordinating agency.

These elements are explored in Part 4.3 and in the proposed framework that follows. First, in Part 4.2, we discuss the state policymaking context in which this – or any – kind of turnaround framework would be implemented, one shaped more than anything else by the impact of No Child Left Behind.

FIGURE 4A

Preview of the Proposed State Framework for School Turnaround
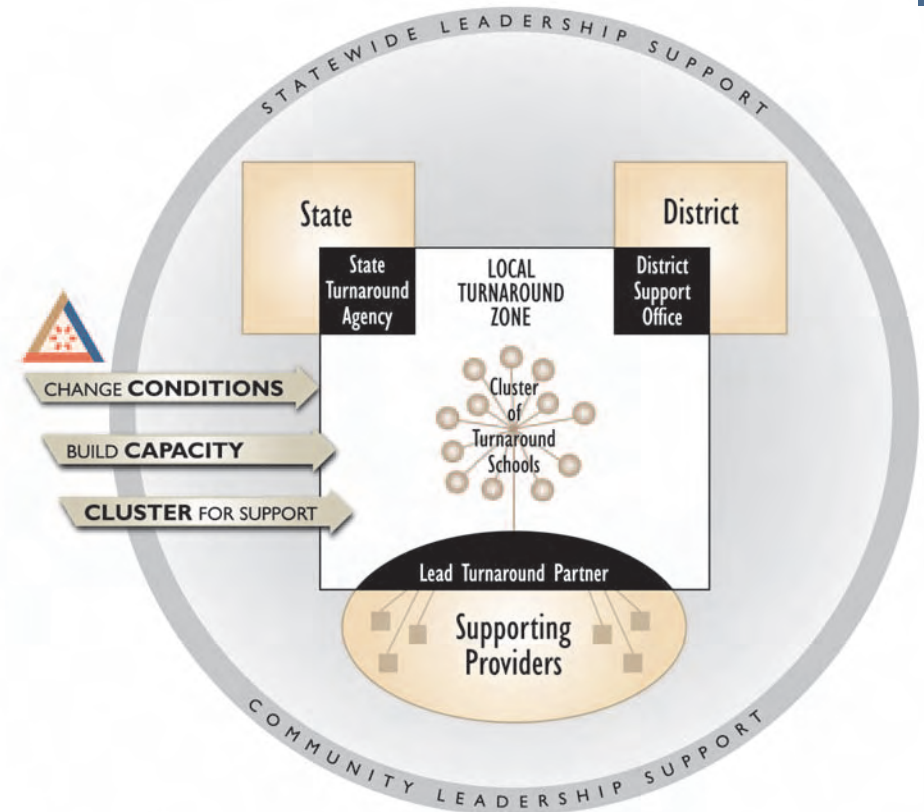
The proposed framework, presented in Part 5, incorporates the three 'C's of effective turnaround and two additional elements: the building of statewide and community coalitions necessary to sustain support; and providing for effective coordination of the initiative.

4.2 NCLB's Mixed Impact on School Intervention

NCLB has forced the issue, but has not catalyzed an adequate response

The federal No Child Left Behind Act has brought accountability to public education, as its framers hoped. A critical element of that new emphasis on accountability is the law's provisions for schools that fail to meet their achievement targets. The urgency produced by solid, unarguable performance data identifying struggling schools, coupled with a set of mandated, escalating intervention strategies, was supposed to usher in a new "no-excuses" era of state-driven turnaround in our most chronically under-performing schools.

That's not the way it has turned out. At least: not yet.

NCLB's unfulfilled impact on school turnaround is a classic example of unintended consequences. Three aspects of the law, in particular, have produced responses at the state and local levels that are different from what supporters of the legislation were undoubtedly envisioning. They relate to the timing and sequencing of NCLB's consequences for underperformance; the nature of the intervention options presented by the law; and the scale of the schools heading through the accountability pipeline. (A fourth aspect – the lack of targeted funding for the more intensive forms

of intervention – has more to do with politics and budget-making than with policy design, and may improve with NCLB's forthcoming reauthorization.

Seven Years to Action

Figure 4B shows the sequence and timeline for the steps required of under-performing schools under NCLB. The steps provide for a gradually escalating series of measures designed to improve struggling schools, serve currently enrolled students with additional help, and offer them the opportunity to switch to a different (presumably better) school.

Some aspects of the steps in years 3-5 of the series have come under scrutiny for failing to produce desired results, including the Supplemental Educational Services programs and the school choice provisions. But our principal focus here is on the "final step" – NCLB's provisions for schools that have failed to improve despite the interventions set in place by interim steps.

On paper, the escalating consequences for under-performing schools might seem logical and appropriate. In practice, though, a chronically failing middle school could pass two complete generations of students through grades 6-8 before NCLB's

FIGURE 4B **The NCLB Intervention Timeline: Seven Years to Intensive Intervention**

Years Not Making AYP	Improvement Status Under NCLB	Action To Be Taken
1	None	None
2	None	After second year of not making AYP, school is identified as "In Need of Improvement"
3	In Need of Improvement (Year One)	School choice for enrolled students Develop and implement improvement plan
4	In Need of Improvement (Year Two)	Continue choice Supplemental educational services (SES) to low-income children Develop and implement improvement plan
5	In Need of Corrective Action	Continue choice Continue SES Implement corrective action plan (may include replacing school staff, instituting new curriculum, extending the school year or day, bringing in outside experts)
6	Planning for Restructuring	Continue choice Continue SES Develop a 2-year restructuring plan *(see in box on next page)*
7	Restructuring	Continue choice Continue SES Implement restructuring plan

Adapted from Center on Education Policy (2006) and the Commission on No Child Left Behind (Aspen Institute, 2007)

most intensive forms of intervention are introduced. While those students are muddling their way through their years at the school – developing neither the skills nor the knowledge required to succeed in high school – the school undergoes, in most states,

an extensive series of reviews and light-touch forms of planning assistance that have little significant impact. The "Call to Action" chart on page 7 provides a vivid portrait of policy "fiddling" while student achievement lags.

NCLB's Five Restructuring Options Extend from Incremental to Major Change

TAXONOMY 1

4.2

INCREMENTAL CHANGE **SYSTEM CHANGE**

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
including 2 of NCLB's options for restructuring

MAJOR RESTRUCTURING
including 3 of NCLB's options for restructuring

Revision

Theory: program needs improvement

NCLB OPTION 5

Reconstitution

Theory: staff is insufficiently skilled

NCLB OPTION 2

Contract Management

Theory: change school management, along with program, people, conditions

NCLB OPTION 3

State Management

Theory: state must assume control as district has abrogated its right to manage the school

NCLB OPTION 4

Charter Conversion

Theory: best to circumvent entire system

NCLB OPTION 1

Each option applies to schools retained and restructured, as well as schools closed and reopened. For brief explanation of options, see box overleaf on NCLB restructuring options.

Same School

New Start

Although these are two of NCLB's restructuring options, our research shows they are insufficient to produce effective turnaround.

For a brief explanation of the NCLB Restructuring options, see box on the following page.

This is the first installment in our Intervention Taxonomy, designed to help clarify school-intervention's terms and to place NCLB's five Restructuring options within the context of our analysis.

We have assigned labels to each option and ordered them differently from their appearance in the law (in order to match the analysis coming in Taxonomy 2). These "Same School" options (see the folder tabs at extreme right) all share one thing: everything else may change – governance, management,

teachers, programs – but the student population at the school essentially remains the same. There is another option, though, being undertaken by some districts – most notably Chicago, under its Renaissance 2010 initiative. That "New Start" option is to simply close under-performing schools, distribute their students, and literally start over from scratch (usually as a charter, contract, or special in-district school).
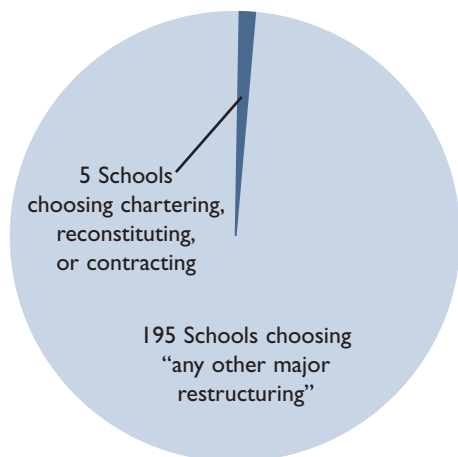
NCLB's Mixed Impact

(continued)

The "Other" Restructuring Category: Taking the Easy Way Out

The box on this page spells out the five options for restructuring that NCLB requires of schools entering their sixth consecutive year of under-performance (defined as not making Adequate Yearly Progress, their annual achievement target). The options also appear on the Intervention

FIGURE 4D

Schools in Restructuring Choose Incremental Over Fundamental Reform
Chicago Schools in Restructuring, 2005

5 Schools choosing chartering, reconstituting, or contracting

195 Schools choosing "any other major restructuring"

Source: Chicago Public Schools

In the fall of 2005, there were approximately 200 schools in Chicago in NCLB-mandated planning for restructuring or in restructuring itself. The state allows only four of the five NCLB options for restructuring: chartering, reconstituting staff and principal, contracting, and the fifth "any other major restructuring" category. Illinois does not allow for a school to be turned over to the state. Of those schools, none chose to charter, 1 replaced the staff and principal, 4 replaced only the principal, none chose to contract, and 195 chose "other major restructuring."

Taxonomy 1 and 2 charts on pages 59 and 61. Three of the options involve management change; the school would be turned into a charter school, or taken over by the state, or assigned to an independent contractor. One option, widely referred to as reconstitution, calls for the replacement of school staff and (potentially) leadership; and the fifth option provides for the implementation of "any other major restructuring of the school's governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms."

This fifth option, which we call Revision on our Taxonomy charts, has achieved a degree of notoriety over the past several years as more and more schools have moved through NCLB's intervention steps. A host of policy studies produced by the Center for Education Policy and other groups has shown the extreme propensity of schools in restructuring (or their district leaders) to choose this "wild card" option – the least intrusive, by far, among the five. Out of 200 Chicago public schools that had entered the restructuring planning phase in 2005, for example, 195 chose this option. (See Figure 4D.) In California, 76% of schools in restructuring in 2005 had chosen the option (see Taxonomy 2, facing page).

The fifth NCLB option, many researchers suggest, has been used essentially to extend the reliance upon incremental strategies common in the earlier stages of NCLB intervention – new curricular programs or additional staff development. (DiBiase, 2005; CEP, 2006) What is intended under the law to be a fundamental restructuring of a school's operations, management, and approach to teaching and learning, in other words, has most often stayed comfortably within the realm of incremental reform. We examine these strategies more closely in Appendix A.

A host of policy studies … has shown the extreme propensity of schools in restructuring (or their district leaders) to choose this "wild card" option – the least intrusive, by far, among the five.

Schools' Response to NCLB's Options: The Less Change, the Better

TAXONOMY 2

Increasing comprehensiveness of change ➡

CONDITIONS CHANGE

Research found conditions change to be a crucial element for effective turnaround

4.2

GOVERNANCE CHANGE

MANAGEMENT CHANGE

PEOPLE CHANGE

PROGRAM CHANGE

Revision	Reconstitution	Contract Management	State Management	Charter Conversion
Theory: program needs improvement	Theory: staff is insufficiently skilled	Theory: change school management, along with program, people, conditions	Theory: state must assume control as district has abrogated its right to manage the school	Theory: best to circumvent entire system
NCLB OPTION 5	NCLB OPTION 2	NCLB OPTION 3	NCLB OPTION 4	NCLB OPTION 1

Each option applies to schools retained and restructured, as well as schools closed and reopened. For brief explanation of options, see box opposite on NCLB restructuring options.

Same School / *New Start*

CA: 0%   MI: 0%   CA: 0%   MI: 2%

CA: 20%   MI: 14%

MI: 28%

Popularity of choice is inversely proportional to the comprehensiveness of change

CA: 61%

MI: 76%

CA: 93%

0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%

This chart, adapted from one that appears in the Winter 2007 issue of *Education Next* ("The Easy Way Out," S. Mead), demonstrates educators' and local policymakers' propensity to choose the "path of least resistance" among the five NCLB Restructuring options, using data from 533 schools in California and Michigan. The vast majority conduct Revision work (NCLB's "any other major restructuring" choice), focusing on program change. Very few adopt any of the choices that involve changes in management or governance, or that fundamentally alter operating conditions (authority over staff, time, and money). *California data 2005-6 and Michigan data 2004-5 are from the Center on Education Policy 2005, as cited in Mead.*

NCLB's Mixed Impact
(continued)

In some states, NCLB has propelled so many schools through the accountability pipeline that policymakers… have begun watering down restructuring plans.

The Scale Problem: Too Many Schools in the Pipeline

NCLB has had another unintended effect on turnaround design, particularly in states that already had developed intervention efforts as part of their own standards and school accountability systems. To begin with, NCLB's mandates (and the federal

already created their own system. Trying to ascertain exactly what each state is doing in the area of school restructuring is a challenging exercise in itself; some states appear to have created parallel school accountability plans (one of their own design, one designed for compliance with NCLB), while others have tried to merge the

But, even more discouraging: in some states, NCLB has propelled so many schools through the accountability pipeline that policymakers – wary of promising a level of intervention far beyond what their current budgets could possibly support – have begun

considered intervention plan of several years ago has more recently (in the face of the now more than 700 schools statewide facing restructuring) become a pale imitation of its former self. (See the Supplemental Report for more information on California and other states.)

NCLB, one could argue, cannot be held to blame for the rising tide of schools entering restructuring – that would be akin to holding the weight-scale responsible for the ten pounds gained over the holidays. But large numbers of schools are moving through that accountability pipeline because they are not making AYP on behalf of a student subgroup – English Language Learners (ELL), for example, or Special Education students or one or more demographic groups. While these schools clearly can use some help in serving the student subgroups in question, in some states they may be overloading the accountability and intervention system, with the result that the truly dysfunctional, under-performing schools don't receive the more fundamental restructuring help they need.

From the Front Lines of State Intervention:

At the start of the 2006-2007 school year, **Arizona** identified sixty-four schools that were deemed "failing to meet academic standards." This figure represents an approximately six-fold increase in the number of schools in the restructuring phase in Arizona. As these schools begin to undertake restructuring activities, the effectiveness and viability of Arizona's team-based and aggressive approach to centralizing school restructuring power will face an increasingly difficult capacity test….

During the 2005-2006 school year, 401 schools in **California** were in either the planning or implementation stages of restructuring. Entering the 2006-2007 school year, this number jumped by approximately 75 percent, to 701 schools. In response to the challenges of scale, California has changed course dramatically, adopting an approach to NCLB restructuring that focuses heavily on local control of school turnaround efforts. In fact, California does not require approval of restructuring plans and primarily provides technical assistance to local education agencies regarding the procedural considerations of devising a restructuring plan….

The growing issue of scale has caused **Hawaii** education officials to begin re-evaluating its privatized approach to restructuring schools. Projected increases in the number of schools entering restructuring have caused concern over increases to already expensive private restructuring programs. One official indicated her belief that the system was slowly moving toward a scenario in which all Hawaii schools would enter the restructuring phase….

Note: These are excerpts from state profiles included in the Supplementary Report. See that report for more.

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government's unwillingness to be flexible about compliance, in the years after the law was passed) created another layer of regulations, labels, timelines, and consequences for underperformance in states that had
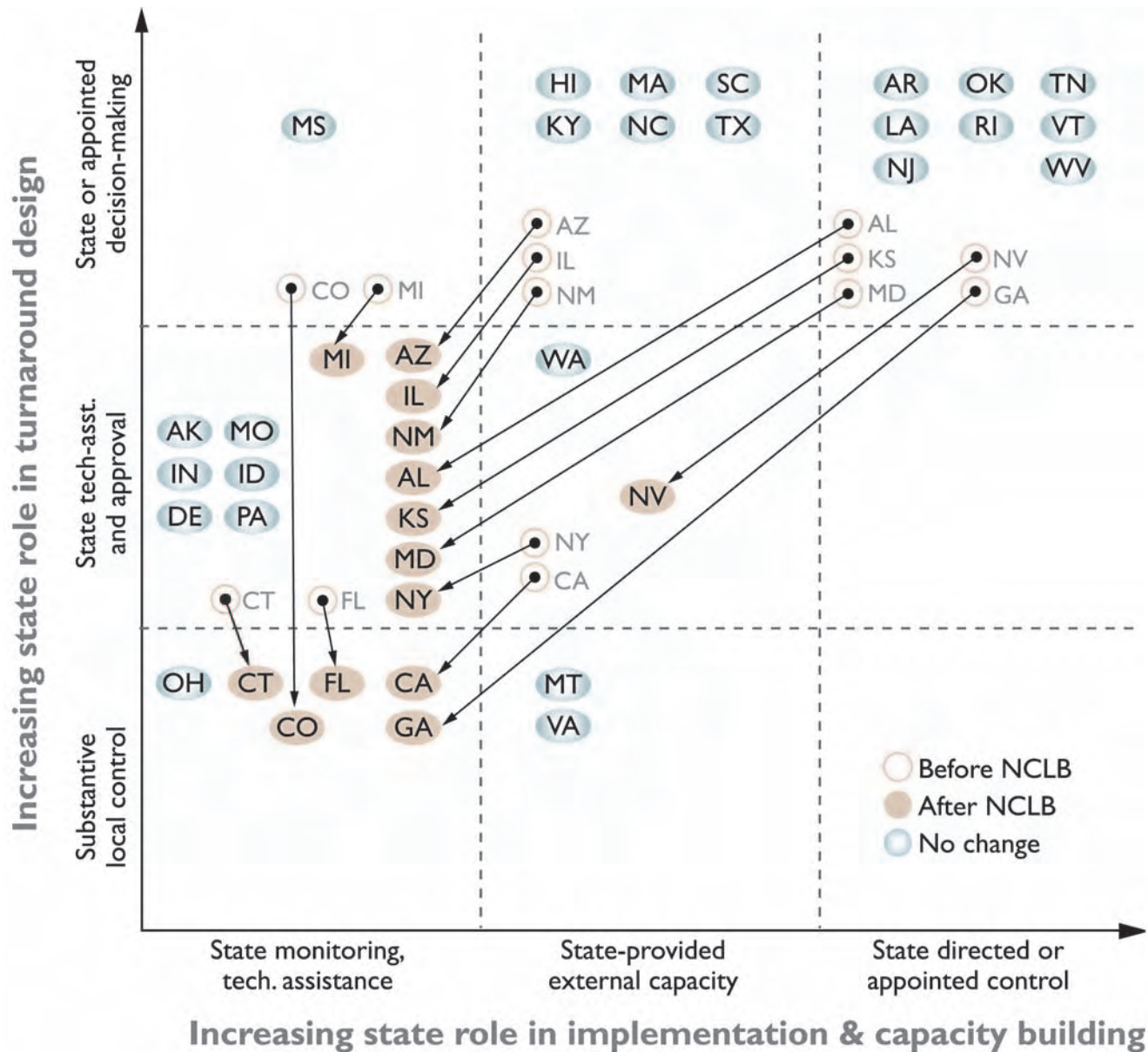
two, with sometimes conflicting results. One California policymaker last year counted five separate accountability systems in place at once in that state, creating confusion at every level.

watering down restructuring plans, severely curtailing the degree and duration of state intervention support. (See Figure 4F, opposite.) California is perhaps the most visible example of this trend; its extensive, thoroughly-

4.1 Organizing at the State Level   4.2 NCLB's Mixed Impact   4.3 State Turnaround Management

NCLB's Impact on State Planning for Intervention:
Diminished State Roles in Design and Implementation

From upper-right to lower-left: the magnitude of the turnaround challenge is forcing states to weaken the anticipated state role. This chart places selected state plans for restructuring, based on publicly available information, within a nine-cell grid. State plans that are in the lower left cell specify a minimal state role, both in terms of restructuring design (the Y axis) and in terms of involvement in implementation (the X axis). State plans that are in the upper right cell, on the other hand, call for a much more significant state role.

States' original restructuring plans for under-performing schools were in many cases more "interventionist" than they have become in recent years – since the passage of NCLB and the burgeoning number of schools entering the restructuring pipeline. That migration towards a limited state role is reflected by the arrows in this chart, showing states that appear to have moved from the center and upper right down towards the lower left.

Two caveats. The chart is somewhat subjective, as many state plans call for a range of intervention options and roles that could place them in multiple cells; we have placed these states as accurately as we could, as of the winter of 2006-7. Secondly: this chart depicts *state plans* for restructuring, and in many cases there is some distance between the plans and the subsequent follow-through. States were selected because they appeared to be broadly representative of various types of approaches to restructuring, discussed in Appendix A of the report and in detail in the Supplementary Report.

4.2

4.3 **Proactive Policymaking Is Not Enough**

A state turnaround initiative requires entrepreneurial management and broad coalition-building

State leaders eager to create a more effective initiative to turn around failing schools will find, as we did, guidance on what turnaround might look like at the ground level, based in part on the strategies of high-performing, high-poverty schools. And they'll find an emerging research base on the impact – or more accurately, the lack of impact – of most state intervention efforts to date on chronically under-performing schools.

They *won't* find much guidance at all on two aspects of the work we view as critical to the success of any serious state-led effort to turn around failing schools:

- **The need to free up state government's management of the turnaround initiative from typical public-agency constraints; and**

- **The need to build coalitions of leadership support for turnaround at the state and local levels**.

The first is required to provide the state (and districts) with the same operating flexibility to manage school turnaround as that which schools need in order to implement it successfully on the ground. The second is required in order to create a constituency for turnaround that is strong enough to upset the status quo – and sustain sizable and continuing state investment.

Freeing Up State Government to Lead Turnaround Effectively

Policymakers often chafe (often justifiably) when business principles are applied to the affairs of state. So do public school educators. Discussions quickly devolve into arguments about why producing successful students is different from producing successful widgets.

At the classroom level, the differences may be important. But at the level of managing and implementing change at scale, the differences remain relevant only if one assumes that education cannot conduct its business any differently from the ways it always has. Business has learned, far better than education, how change happens and what prevents it from happening. When a failing IBM sought to reinvent its business model in the 1970s, it did so by identifying change agents and separating them from the structures and culture that had brought the company to its knees. The unit that produced the IBM PC was a "skunkworks" lab based in Boca Raton – far from company headquarters in Armonk, NY. The business literature, from Tom Peters (*In Search of Excellence*, 1988) to Jim Collins (*From Good to Great*, 2001), is rife with examples of companies that understood how to successfully incubate fundamental change. Public policymaking and the implementation of new policy, for the most part, have been slow to incorporate these lessons.

State education agencies are the default managers for any turnaround initiative. But they are in many ways ill-suited to conduct a dramatic-change strategy by using their customary structures and approaches – just as IBM was ill-suited to redevelop its own business model from within. Restraints over hiring, salaries, and authority in state agencies, coupled with similar restraints over how work is conducted in schools, have conspired to make it difficult for education policy and practice to duplicate business's occasional success at reinventing itself.

What would a different model look like? There is precedent in the approach that some states have taken in creating public-private, semi-autonomous authorities to undertake important public initiatives, including infrastructure improvements and transportation management. A turnaround "authority" might well be connected with a state education agency and its commissioner – but be granted sufficient operating flexibility to be able to work effectively with turnaround schools implementing fundamental change strategies. It would not

Like school leaders working on the ground, turnaround's statewide implementers need to be freed to do their best work.

become a bureaucracy itself, with a large staff of service providers, but would take on the role of coordinating the central state functions in turnaround as defined in the proposed framework that begins on page 69: particularly, establishing and implementing the condition-changing criteria for turnaround design, and supporting the development of turnaround leadership capacity among educators and turnaround partner organizations.

As with the thinking behind the existing public authorities, an agency to coordinate a state turnaround initiative should be able to recruit the very best leadership possible, and provide them with the tools and latitude necessary to complete an important public-service priority. The directors of state initiatives we spoke with while producing this report tended to feel that their hands were somewhat tied behind their back. Like school leaders working on the ground, turnaround's statewide implementers need to be freed to do their best work.

Building Leadership Coalitions of Turnaround Support

Beyond questions of state turnaround management is the matter of leadership commitment, at both the state and local levels. Failing schools have no natural constituency. They tend to be situated in higher-poverty neighborhoods and communities that have fallen into a continuous cycle of low expectations. Low test scores do not, as they might in more affluent communities, spark activism from parents. There is little ground-level demand for state or district intervention in struggling schools. What demand there is, comes from state policymakers monitoring the economic and racial achievement gap; non-profit and community leaders seeking to

Building Leadership Consensus for Turnaround
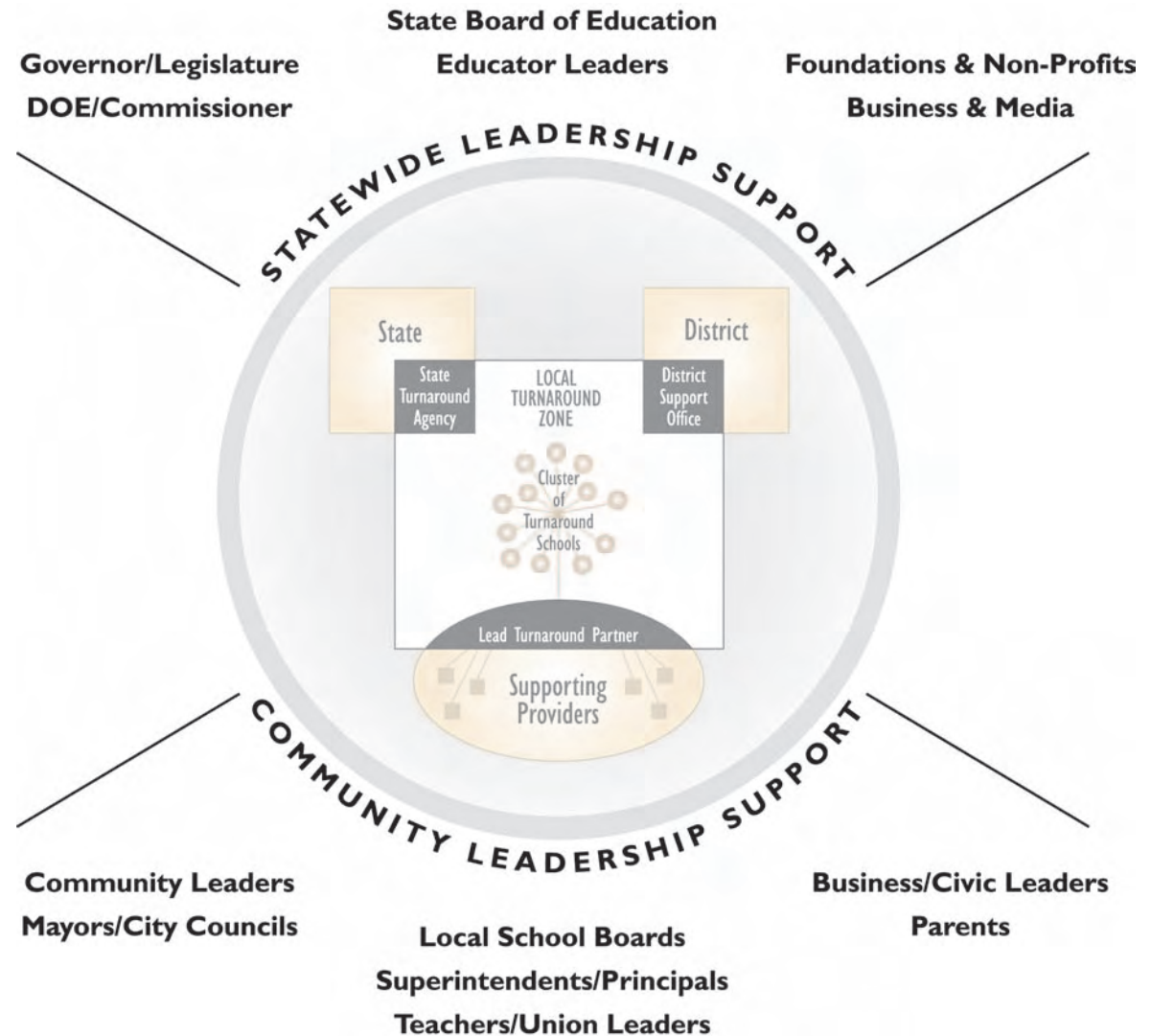
Inventing a Constituency: Turnaround of failing schools has no natural set of supporters. The support required to initiate and sustain strong state investment in intervention must be generated by statewide and local leaders who are willing to take a stand. There are many convincing arguments for it, on grounds of equal opportunity, civil rights, and social and economic need – all of them addressed in this report.

4.3

Proactive Policymaking

(continued)

revitalize communities through improved public education; and business leaders concerned about local economies, skill levels in their recruitment pools, or the social costs of dropouts and unemployable high school graduates.

state's urban superintendents, whose public support for the requirement and for higher-standards reform (organized in part by Mass Insight's Great Schools Campaign) provided the "air cover" that policymakers needed to maintain their commitment during the years of

Urban superintendents' public support for Massachusetts' graduation requirement provided the "air cover" that policymakers needed to maintain their commitment during the years of controversy before the requirement was implemented – and since.

There is logical precedent here; these potential supporters are the same coalition partners that, in many states (Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Texas, North Carolina, Michigan, and Florida, to name just a few) championed the cause of standards-based reform, even before the federal government got into the act with No Child Left Behind. In Massachusetts, business leadership along with rare bipartisan consensus in the state's legislative and executive branches led to the Commonwealth's successful implementation of an ambitious high school graduation requirement in 2003. The effort received a vital boost from the

controversy before the requirement was implemented – and since.[1]

Figure 4G shows the roster of potential actors in a statewide coalition to advocate for turnaround of failing schools. Proponents of a more proactive turnaround initiative need to consider the agendas and likely roles of each one.

- **Mission-driven supporters**: Selected foundations, non-profits, and business leaders; some education leaders, including policymakers and practitioners. These are the key instigators required to even get a coalition off the ground.

Preparing a "Manifesto" for Turnaround

Drawn and adapted from "How to Start an Insurrection," in Leading the Revolution *by Gary Hamel (2000).*

1. **Convincingly demonstrate the inevitability of the cause**: Here's why turnaround is necessary, right now.

2. **Speak to timeless human needs and aspirations**: Here's why you should care about failing schools and the students they serve.

3. **Draw clear implications for action**: Here's where the need suggests that we start.

4. **Elicit support**: Here's how you can contribute.

5. **Search for "data bombs"**: Find memorable local statistics on failing schools that are strong enough to illustrate the need, and simple enough to enter the language.

6. **Find simple phrases and powerful analogies**: Create "handles" for people to learn to use as shorthand for the effort.

7. **Stay constructive**: Don't rehearse past intervention failures unnecessarily.

8. **Provide broad recommendations only**: Don't become trapped by a single, do-or-die course of action.

9. **Keep your manifesto short**: The more concise, the better.

10. **Make the manifesto opportunity-focused**: Where's the big win to focus energy and resources on first?

11. **Sometimes you need a stick**: Identifying a bad outcome from status-quo approaches can provide urgency and incentive.

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[1] The initiative was then called the Campaign for Higher Standards; it became the Great Schools Campaign after the first decade and phase of Massachusetts' standards-based reform drive was completed in 2003-4. See www.massinsight.org for more information.

- **Conditional supporters**: Statewide political leaders including the governor, state board chair, chief state school officer, and legislative leaders; and local leaders, depending on whether and how their communities would benefit (or not) under a proposed state turnaround initiative. Support from this group requires a merging of multiple self-interested agendas.

- **Potential opponents**: The most obvious candidates here are local school boards and teacher unions, both caught up in concerns about losing authority. But in fact, major school districts such as Chicago, Miami-Dade, Philadelphia, and Boston have demonstrated the feasibility of partnering with their union locals (with support from school boards) over turnaround initiatives focused on their most struggling schools. Massachusetts' Commonwealth Pilot Schools initiative (see Appendix A) was designed in large part to encourage local collaboration around a major-change turnaround strategy, and was modeled on a ten-year-old agreement between the Boston Public Schools and the district's American Federation of Teachers union affiliate.

As for other potential opponents: Some legislators in communities without failing schools may oppose dedicating state funding for turnaround, knowing that none of that funding will ever show up in their communities. Perhaps most importantly, legislators and advocates for other investment targets (within the realm of education reform or not) will oppose sizable increases in public funding for underperforming schools, usually on the grounds that the state money they're already receiving is being ill-spent.

How to Start an Insurrection

Insurrection is an incendiary term not often heard in public policy circles. But in his influential book, *Leading the Revolution*, researcher and business strategist Gary Hamel (2000) provides a blueprint for engineering dramatic

strategists from his book, which is based on research into business turnarounds and grassroots movements:

- **Win small, win early, win often**. In turnaround terms: Don't try to address every failing school at once. Choose to work intensively with a manageable group of schools, districts, and clusters; establish some success first, and then expand from there.

- **Co-opt and neutralize**. In the context of turnaround, this is true at the tactical level, in schools, and at the strategic and policy levels as well. At both levels, in general, turnaround cannot succeed and endure without broad engagement and buy-in. "Researchers agree that reform only works if those most
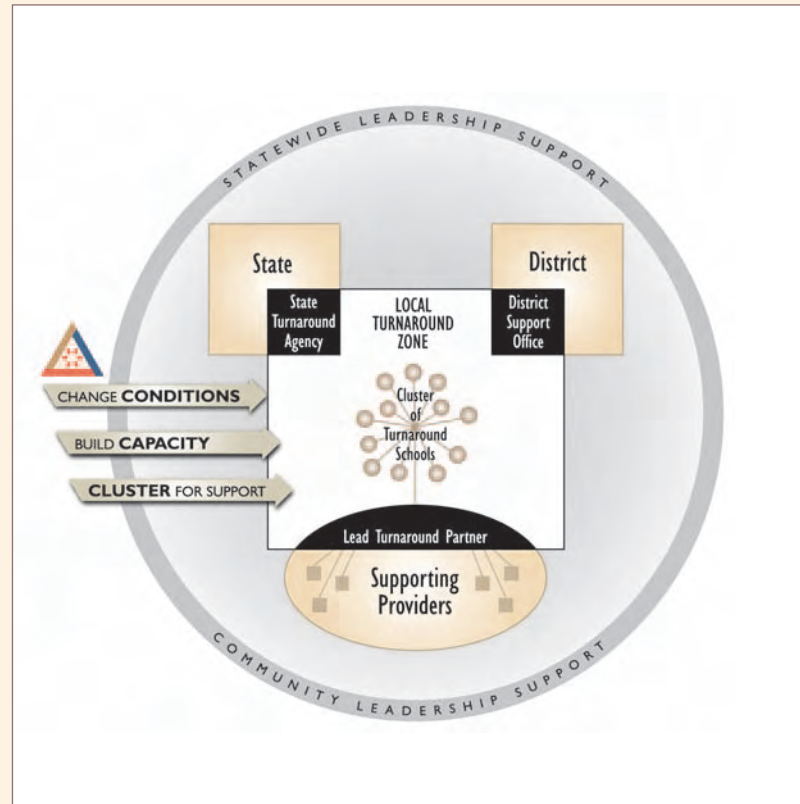
cent schools, the status quo has not worked and urgently needs to be changed. Important elements in the proposed turnaround framework beginning on page 70 address this issue of buy-in.

- **Find a translator**. The work of turnaround is extraordinarily complex. Yet its basic principles – and the needs among failing schools that drive them – must be made clearly and memorably to decision-makers and practitioners alike. Hamel describes the need for a "translator" to serve as a bridge between the strategists who are immersed in the work and everyone else.

Coalition-building, as should be clear from the discussion above, needs to happen at two levels – statewide and community. Statewide leadership consensus can bring about productive policymaking and investment, but successful, sustained implementation on the ground requires support from educators, municipal leaders, parents, and students. How the state can catalyze that support, while requiring a level of change that upsets the status quo, is the balancing act that lies at the center of the state turnaround policy framework that follows.

Win small, win early, win often. In turnaround terms: Don't try to address every failing school at once.

change that turnaround advocates would do well to review. The "manifesto" he describes (see box) as a launchpad for "starting an insurrection" within a corporation could serve just as well as an 11-point guide for building the case for turnaround. Other relevant advice for coalition-builders and statewide turnaround

directly involved in it (teachers, school staff, school leaders, parents, and students) buy into it. Researchers… go so far as to say 'No Buy-in, No Reform.'" (Cohen and Ginsburg, 2001) The key to gaining buy-in at both levels is establishing, at the outset, consensus that in these bottom-five-per-

"There are some things we know and a host of unanswered questions, but this is the laboratory of the future."
– Michael Fullan, *Leadership and Sustainability*, 2005

Plan for Action

Recommendations for Policymakers,
Educators, and Turnaround Advocates

School Turnaround: a dramatic and comprehensive intervention
in a low-performing school that produces significant gains
in student achievement within two academic years.

Turnaround must also ready the school for the lengthier,
subsequent process of transitioning into a truly high-performing organization.

Part 5 presents our recommended framework for a state initiative to turn around the most chronically under-performing public schools.

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 over a compressed time frame, as the first of a two-phase restructuring process.

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 paradigm of aligned, integrated support.

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 capacity.

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

STATEWIDE & COMMUNITY COALITIONS: The Necessary Leadership Consensus

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

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

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

A Framework for Turnaround of Under-Performing Schools

This suggested framework for a state initiative to turn around chronically under-performing schools draws from the findings and conclusions reached by Mass Insight's researchers for this report, and from vetting with educators, policymakers, and reform experts nationwide. Its guiding assumptions rest on evidence from research on school interventions and effective education practice over the past ten years. The ten elements in the framework represent both a summary of this report's findings and a synthesis, applied to the challenge every state currently faces in addressing chronically under-performing schools.

The framework rests in part on the conclusion to our analysis of NCLB's restructuring options, presented in the final chart in our Intervention Taxonomy series on page 75. The research suggests avenues for turnaround that NCLB does not, at present, clearly and actively support. In particular: the turnaround strategy we label "Superintendent's Schools" in this chart reflects the thinking behind the statewide turnaround zone and school clusters in the proposed framework.

There is no single state that has assembled, funded, and begun to implement a turnaround strategy incorporating all of the elements of this framework. Aspects have been drawn from several state intervention efforts – chiefly Massachusetts and somewhat from Florida, Maryland, and several of the other states profiled in the Supplemental Report – and from districts with pioneering intervention programs underway, including Chicago, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia.

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 under-performing schools. The framework is intended – like the entire 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.

Introduction to the Framework | Defining the Approach | The Three 'C' Strategies | Organizing the State Role

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.** Turnaround is understood to be distinct from *school improvement* because it: a) focuses only on the most consistently under-performing schools – essentially the bottom five percent; and b) involves system-transforming change that is propelled by an imperative – the school must significantly improve its academic outcomes or it will be redefined or removed. Interventions focused on one particular strategy – staff development, a new curriculum, a reconstituted teaching staff – are unlikely to produce the desired result. *Turnaround* is the integrated, comprehensive combination of fundamental changes in program, people, conditions, and (sometimes, but not necessarily) management and governance required to interrupt the status quo and put a school on a new track towards high performance.

Because most chronically under-performing schools serve high-poverty, high-challenge student populations, turnaround involves much more than "fixing" organizational dysfunction; it requires intensive tuning of strategy and culture to address learning deficits, behavioral challenges, and the effects of environmental deprivation. This is (in part) turnaround's larger role: providing exemplar strategies for the *significantly* increasing numbers of high-poverty schools projected over the next ten years.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ Governor, commissioner, and/or state board of education chair ask for summary report on impact of state intervention programs to date, and on the pace of schools entering the failing categories under NCLB/state accountability.

▶ Simultaneously: state prepares a new turnaround initiative, incorporating strategies drawn from *The Turnaround Challenge* and other sources. High-performing, high-poverty schools and promising turnaround exemplars in the state are identified as "proof points."

▶ Basic elements of the initiative are vetted with stakeholders, collaborators, key decision-makers, potential outside funders (see #10 on page 86 for more).

▶ Results of the study are announced, together with the initiative; state's commitment to turning around failing schools is reaffirmed; focus is placed on moving beyond marginal intervention to much more dramatic changes that will turn failing schools into models for reform statewide.

▶ *Emphasis*: on positive change, rather than negative labeling.

Turnaround is the integrated, comprehensive combination of fundamental changes in program, people, conditions, and (sometimes, but not necessarily) management and governance required to interrupt the status quo and put a school on a new track towards high performance.

A Framework *(continued)*

2 **Successful school turnaround produces significant improvement in student achievement over a compressed time frame** (no more than two years) and, in high schools, significant gains in attendance and graduation rates as well. Turnaround of these lowest of the low-performing schools can be seen as a two-phase process, each phase requiring different (though complementary) elements and skill sets. Phase one estab-

Turnaround can be seen as a two-phase process, each phase requiring different (though complementary) elements and skill sets.

lishes the conditions necessary for fundamental reform to take root – in particular, providing for sufficient authority to allocate critical resources (people, time, money) to support a turnaround plan staked to the research-based practices of high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools. It provides for placing people with the right skills in the most critical positions: leadership with expertise in school turnaround and teachers drawn to working in high-challenge (but high-reward) environments, all as part of an innovative, highly collaborative reform initiative and a dynamic school design. Reaching district performance averages in this first phase – within two years – is a reasonable goal. Phase two comprises the hard work of steady improvement, sustaining incremental growth over time and transitioning into a truly high-performing organization.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ State turnaround initiative sets a specific, ambitious, but reasonable and understandable goal for significant achievement gains within two years (i.e.: meeting district averages).

▶ Following the two-year turnaround period, the school is returned to normal state/federal accountability requirements and timelines.

▶ State initiative requires schools meeting certain, fairly extreme under-performance criteria to become turnaround schools (i.e.: schools with undeniably, indefensibly poor achievement records over multiple years). The initiative invites less severely under-performing schools to volunteer into the program as a means of "pre-emptive turnaround." (See #8 on page 82.)

▶ State initiative requires districts, working with turnaround partners, to submit a turnaround plan meeting certain criteria (see #3, next page). Plans that fail to meet the criteria are denied; those schools are declared chronically under-performing and are subject to management and governance change as directed by the state.

▶ *Emphasis*: This is the last chance, over two years, for current managers (district, teachers union) – with assistance from the state and an external turnaround partner – to show they can produce significant results.

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 (curricular improvement and alignment with standards, teacher capacity-building, effective leadership, focused use of performance data, etc.), but it depends equally on the *conditions into which those reform elements are applied* – mainly, gaining authority over critical resources and levers for improved achievement. The state can play a crucial role in enabling these conditions in turnaround schools.

- **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 for chronic under-performance.

- **Time:** The authority and money required to expand time on learning for students – 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. 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. Control over scheduling (double-block periods, special enrichment/remediation periods, or more far-reaching options) is critical as well.

- **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. Estimates for the cost of successful turnaround run from $250,000 to $1 million annually for three years (see box, page 79).

- **Program:** Authority to adapt and implement research-based strategies shown to be effective with the high-poverty, high-challenge students who attend most chronically under-performing schools. Leaders at HPHP schools and turnaround exemplars say this flexibility over program approaches is important for several reasons: matching services with student needs and local circumstances, prioritizing scarce resources and time, and building staff buy-in around a vision for the school. Turnaround school leaders need program flexibility within a larger framework of district-wide consistency (where student migration between schools is an issue), 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 rather than by individual school teams).

Gaining flexible control over the application of resources – and using that control – can be controversial. That is why most turnaround and improvement reform models avoid the issues surrounding *changing the conditions* and focus simply on changing programs and providing help (i.e., planning assistance, training, and all forms of coaching). Chronically under-performing schools under NCLB in fact represent an opportunity for policymakers, educators, and partners to move towards more transformative reform – i.e., models and policy frameworks that address the conditions in which instructional reform is applied. Some school districts (New York, Chicago, Miami-Dade, Philadelphia) already have moved in this direction.
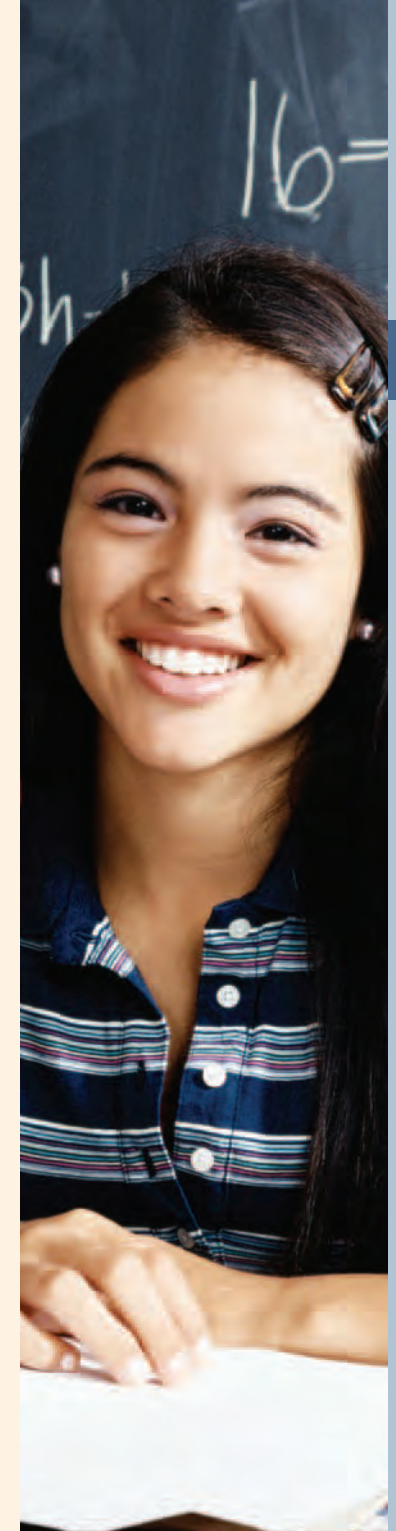
A Framework *(continued)*

To ensure broad access to conditions supportive of effective turnaround, however, state governments and education agencies will need to play the crucial role. They can do so by establishing (as Arizona, Florida, and Massachusetts have done) criteria for turnaround design and implementation, and requiring districts – and outside providers – to shape their turnaround work accordingly. Superintendents routinely ask for the authority to intervene in struggling schools with powers like those granted to charter school managers. By creating a statewide turnaround space with rigorous design criteria (such as Massachusetts' first "enabling condition" – granting principals authority over staff without regard to seniority), state governments can clear aside roadblocks to reform and produce an intervention zone that education leaders actively want to *join*, instead of avoid.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ State initiative codifies, in regulations, protected space for local "turnaround zones" that a) set requirements for schools implementing turnaround; b) provide assistance, models, and contract language for districts and unions to use in creating necessary waivers to collective bargaining rules; and c) provide other forms of assistance for turnaround as detailed elsewhere in this framework.

▶ Turnaround requirements define the elements identified by the state as essential for effective, comprehensive turnaround. They specify important changes in operating conditions, including flexible authority for turnaround leaders over critical resources: people, time, money, and program. They may also specify other elements deemed vital to the turnaround process, i.e., additional time for learning and common planning time for teachers. (See box for one real-world example – Massachusetts' ten changing conditions.)

▶ *Emphasis*: state-required criteria make successful turnaround plausible; local implementation control enables all-important buy-in.
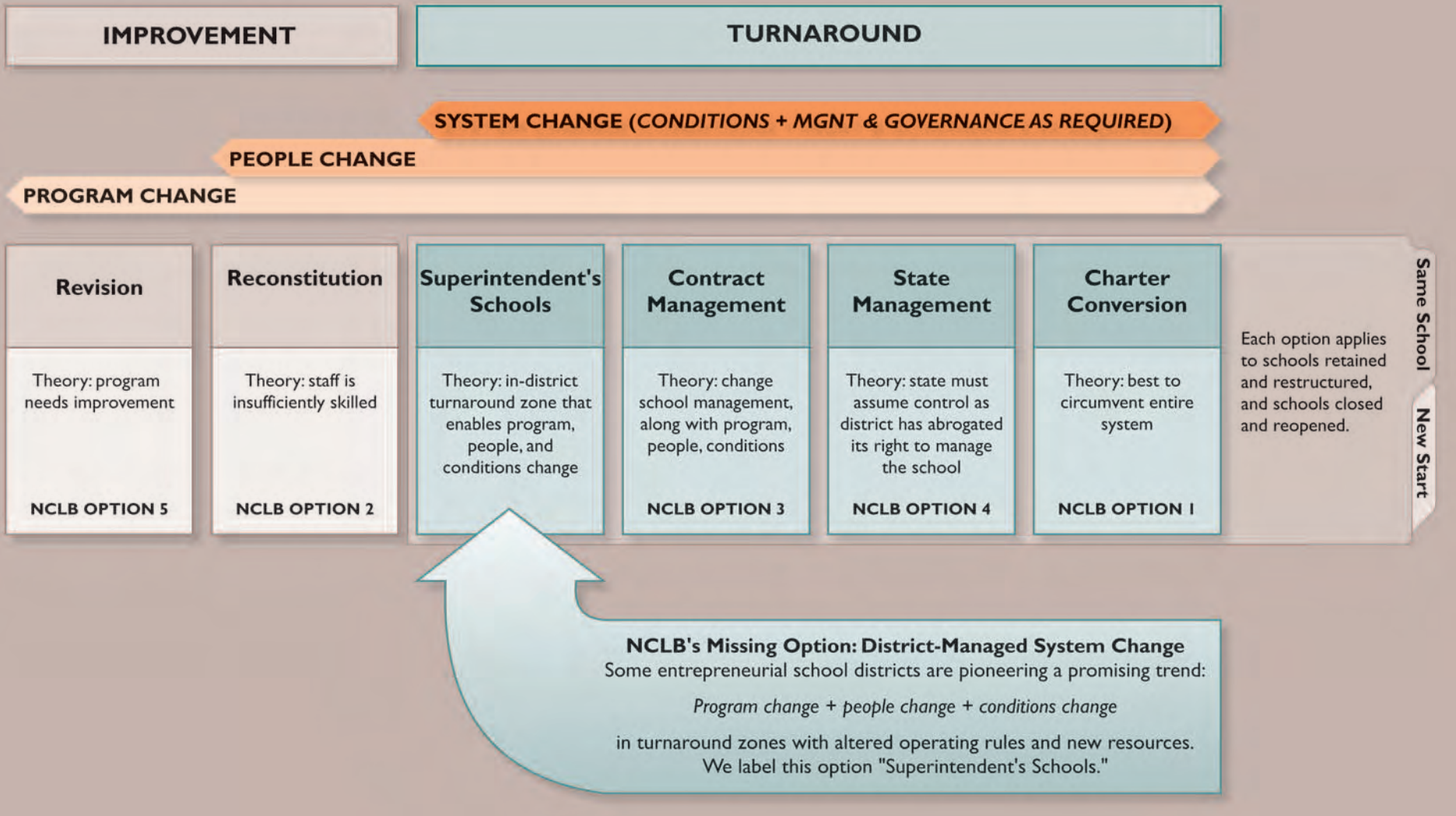
Condition-Changing State Policy: An Example

These ten requirements form the basis of Massachusetts' new turnaround policy, passed in October 2006. Schools entering "Priority" status in the state (following four years of failure to make AYP) must submit restructuring plans that incorporate these ten "enabling conditions." Because of insufficient state allocation for the initiative in FY2008 ($12 million, a third of the DOE's request), the state will only be able to partially implement the plan. But the approach and language can serve as a potential model for other states – as might Massachusetts' "Commonwealth Pilot" experiment, described on pages 106-7.

1) The school's principal has authority to select and assign staff to positions in the school without regard to seniority;

2) The school's principal has control over financial resources necessary to successfully implement the school improvement plan;

3) The school is implementing curricula that are aligned to state frameworks in core academic subjects;

4) The school implements systematically a program of interim assessments (4-6 times per year) in English language arts and mathematics that are aligned to school curriculum and state frameworks;

5) The school has a system to provide detailed tracking and analysis of assessment results and uses those results to inform curriculum, instruction and individual interventions;

6) The school schedule for student learning provides adequate time on a daily and weekly basis for the delivery of instruction and provision of individualized support as needed in English language arts and math, which for students not yet proficient is presumed to be at least 90 minutes per day in each subject;

7) The school provides daily after-school tutoring and homework help for students who need supplemental instruction and focused work on skill development;

8) The school has a least two full-time subject-area coaches, one each for English language arts/reading and for mathematics, who are responsible to provide faculty at the school with consistent classroom observation and feedback on the quality and effectiveness of curriculum delivery, instructional practice, and data use;

9) School administrators periodically evaluate faculty, including direct evaluation of applicable content knowledge and annual evaluation of overall performance tied in part to solid growth in student learning and commitment to the school's culture, educational model, and improvement strategy;

10) The weekly and annual work schedule for teachers provides adequate time for regular, frequent, department and/or grade-level faculty meetings to discuss individual student progress, curriculum issues, instructional practice, and school-wide improvement efforts. As a general rule no less than one hour per week shall be dedicated to leadership-directed, collaborative work, and no fewer than 5 days per year, or hours equivalent thereto, when teachers are not responsible for supervising or teaching students, shall be dedicated to professional development and planning activities directed by school leaders.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education

Turnaround Zones Offer Superintendents the Restructuring Option They Have Lacked

TAXONOMY 3

IMPROVEMENT	TURNAROUND

SYSTEM CHANGE (CONDITIONS + MGNT & GOVERNANCE AS REQUIRED)

PEOPLE CHANGE

PROGRAM CHANGE

Revision	Reconstitution	Superintendent's Schools	Contract Management	State Management	Charter Conversion	
Theory: program needs improvement	Theory: staff is insufficiently skilled	Theory: in-district turnaround zone that enables program, people, and conditions change	Theory: change school management, along with program, people, conditions	Theory: state must assume control as district has abrogated its right to manage the school	Theory: best to circumvent entire system	Each option applies to schools retained and restructured, and schools closed and reopened.
NCLB OPTION 5	NCLB OPTION 2		NCLB OPTION 3	NCLB OPTION 4	NCLB OPTION 1	

Same School / New Start

NCLB's Missing Option: District-Managed System Change
Some entrepreneurial school districts are pioneering a promising trend:

Program change + people change + conditions change

in turnaround zones with altered operating rules and new resources.
We label this option "Superintendent's Schools."

This third installment in the report's Intervention Taxonomy presents our view of a more complete set of turnaround options than simply the current five presented by NCLB. Two options (Revision and Reconstitution) may spark substantial movement in some respects, but the research shows insubstantial outcomes. Charter Conversion, State Management, and Contract Management tend to incorporate program change, people change, and conditions change – and also require management or governance change. The "Superintendent's Schools" option provides for comprehensive system change – including changes in operating conditions and incentives – initiated by the district (i.e., without management or governance change). This option is unproven, but would appear to support the characteristics widely found in high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools. The folders on the right indicate that these options can be pursued in two ways: by transforming existing schools or through a close-and-reopen "fresh start" strategy.

5

A FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL TURNAROUND

A Framework *(continued)*

BUILDING CAPACITY:
People Before *Programs*

4 **Maximizing leadership and staff capacity is the most important element in success – and the state's most important role.** The task is multi-dimensional: creating conditions that enable people to do their best work; leading recruiting, preparation, and licensure processes to ensure a high-quality pipeline of educators at all levels; and investing in continuous skill-building in high-impact areas of reform and high-need positions in the schools. Developing the highly skilled principals and teachers needed in turnaround schools adds another dimension to this crucial state role. Most importantly: turnaround requires an infusion of specialized new leadership capacity. The emerging research on high-performing, high-poverty schools and promising turnaround schools confirms the central importance of very strong leadership as probably the most critical factor in their relative success. Leading the process of turnaround clearly requires a special skill set in education (as it does in other

> *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.*

fields). Most school districts, except for perhaps the largest 100 or so, 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 respon-

sibility of the state, working with outside partners including higher education, foundations, and non-profits (such as New Leaders for New Schools). The state must also address the need for capacity development among high-impact positions in schools (e.g., coaches, lead teachers, and performance assessment specialists); among outside providers of turnaround and related services; and among local policymakers including school board members. This is not to imply a vast increase in state education agency bureaucracy; the key is to build on the contracting and partnering that SEAs are already doing, focusing on expanding capacity throughout the entire system and on using outside partners more effectively than is currently the case (see #5 on page 78).

State-driven turnaround work needs to convey a sense of innovation, providing compelling career options for more entrepreneurially-minded educators. The effectiveness and long-term sustainability of turnaround depends on transformation of the incentive structures that govern behavior in public schools. At the district, school, and student levels, during and long after turnaround work is completed, the incentives and operating conditions must drive a continuous focus on improved student achievement. To be successful, turnaround initiatives must draw high-capacity educators and partners and must elicit the best work possible from staff who continue on at the school. Positive incentives for different stakeholders in the system include changes in working conditions, opportunities for leadership, increased autonomy, and increased compensation. Sanction-oriented incentives include prospective loss of governing control, revenue, or "headcount" (including, from the point of view of local union leaders, potential loss of union membership).

Introduction to the Framework | Defining the Approach | The Three 'C' Strategies | Organizing the State Role

Building the Framework:
The Three 'C' Levers of Fundamental Change

What This Might Look Like:

▶ State initiative's requirements for turnaround design allow turnaround leaders much greater authority to shape school staff, through recruitment, hiring, firing, placement, development, and differentiated compensation.

▶ State turnaround initiative is promoted nationally and in-state to position it as a cutting-edge reform effort and to attract high-capacity recruits.

▶ State provides intensive training, with non-profit/university partners, in turnaround management for current and aspiring principals and school leadership teams.

▶ State connects turnaround initiative to related state programs in curriculum mapping, data analysis, remediation, staff and leadership development, and social service connections, giving schools in turnaround zones highest priority.

▶ State initiative specifically supports the development of higher-capacity external turnaround partners to support districts' turnaround planning and to provide intensive, integrated services in direct support of the turnaround plans (see #5, next page).

▶ *Emphasis*: turnaround zone schools as magnets for mission-driven, highly capable individuals.
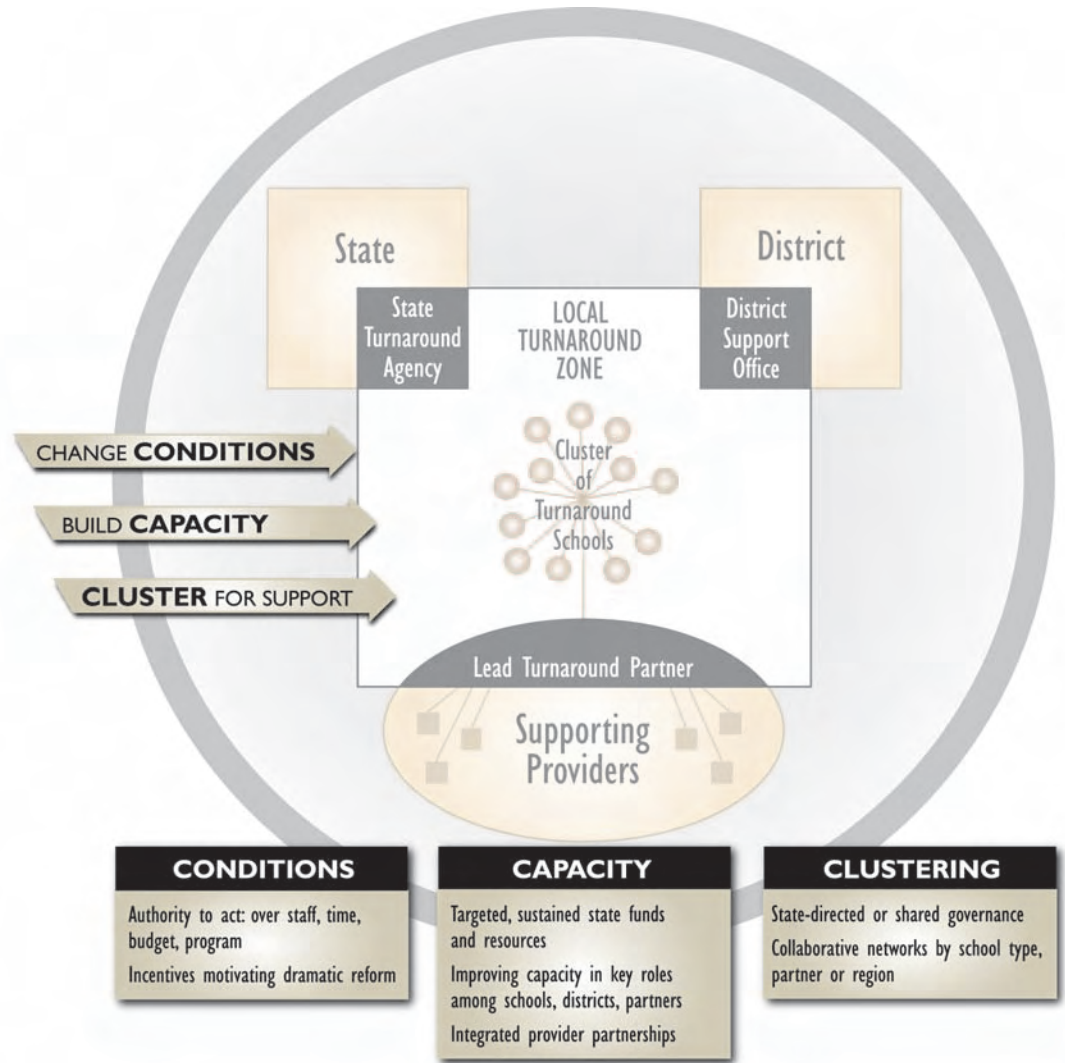
The three 'C's represent the state's primary roles in shaping school turnaround and enabling it at the ground level. For more, see numbers 3 through 8 of the Framework description on these pages.

A Framework *(continued)*

5 **Fragmented, episodic assistance from outside partners must be replaced by a new paradigm of aligned, integrated support.** By the time a school reaches NCLB's restructuring stage, it has probably hosted literally dozens of separate reform programs and partners, with little or no integration happening to form a coherent whole. That is due partly to funding streams that operate in separate "silos"; partly to schools' (and districts') habit of pursuing projects instead of sustained, integrated reform; and partly to organizational dysfunction. There most often is no one within a school's leadership structure whose job is to align its myriad partners – except the principal, who lacks the time to do so effectively.

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 (see the graphic on page 85). Turnaround partners can include non-profit and for-profit organizations, professional associations, and colleges and universities. In addition, an important role of any partner serving the "systems integrator" role in turnaround schools is establishing strong connections with social service providers and agencies, which tend to play strong, visible roles in the communities served by chronically under-performing schools.

These social services help provide important counterweights to the effects of poverty on families and children through home visiting, workforce training, high-quality child care and early education, after-school programs, substance abuse treatment, community policing, and homelessness prevention strategies. All of these supports, following the high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) Readiness model we developed in Part 2 of this report, are part of the set of services that enable high-poverty students to be *ready to learn*. While they cannot realistically all be managed through one lead partner organization, their work can play a critical role in high-poverty school success. Lead turnaround partners and school leaders need the latitude and the opportunity to work with them effectively.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ State creates an RFP for turnaround assistance from lead turnaround partners, i.e., organizations that would act as the integrator for other partners in supporting the creation and implementation of a turnaround plan, on behalf of schools or school clusters. Idea is to galvanize the creation of such partner organizations, filling the capacity gap that exists right now.

▶ State turnaround regulations require districts to work with state-approved lead turnaround partners in developing and executing their plans.

▶ State initiative supports capacity-building and practice-sharing among turnaround partner organizations.

▶ *Emphasis*: This isn't a radical new idea by any means. It's simply the turnaround corollary of contractual relationships schools and districts already have with outside providers (e.g., textbook publishers).

By the time a school reaches NCLB's restructuring stage, it has probably hosted literally dozens of separate reform programs and partners, with little or no integration happening to form a coherent whole.

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

The cost of school turnaround will vary by school, based on size and its own particular needs. Experience to date with turnaround initiatives suggests costs in the range of $250,000 to a million dollars per school per year over the first three years, in order to implement a turnaround effort incorporating the strategies discussed in this report. As an illustrative example, an effective state initiative serving 50 persistently under-performing schools in turnaround "zones" is likely to include costs such as those in the following table.

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 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. Large schools, obviously, would require more support staff than smaller schools. (The table is based on a school with 500 students.) In general, comprehensive high schools will be more expensive propositions than middle schools, which will in turn be more expensive than elementary schools – because of size and the complexity of the turnaround work involved. 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. (For more on the state turnaround initiative administration, see Part 4.)

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.

5

A FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL TURNAROUND

A Framework *(continued)*

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT:
Organizing the Change

6 **Effective turnaround solutions focus on producing change at the school level – and through it to the level of classroom instruction**. That is where reform is shown to be meaningful and productive – or not. In the absence of a relentless school-level focus, it is too easy for "deck-chair-rearranging" syndrome to set in: reorganization that for all of its good intentions, fails to exert much impact in classrooms or, ultimately, on learning.

However, turnaround work is best organized in clusters of schools, working in partnership with school districts and partners, in order to meet the scale of the need. While turnaround solutions need to focus on instituting change at the school level, a number of factors – the number of schools

Individual school turnaround successes are heroic. Turnaorund success across multiple schools is strategic –and necessary.

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. (In these ways, clusters have all of the same advantages as school districts. They should be large enough to be an enterprise, to paraphrase researcher and project advisor Rick Hess, but small enough to succeed – and to avoid issues that can arise as bureaucracies grow.)

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 can take several forms:

- 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 because the work focuses on schools that share particular 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 models and approaches – for example, grade 6-12 academies.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ State initiative, working together with district leaders, organizes turnaround schools into clusters as described above.

▶ Clusters of turnaround schools implement their turnaround strategies under the operating conditions and other criteria set by the state for the statewide turnaround zone.

▶ Clusters are served by lead turnaround partners assigned by the state (or recruited by districts), who integrate and align the services of other outside providers in the implementation of the plan.

▶ Clusters might also include higher-performing, volunteer schools that match the profile of the schools needing assistance, thereby providing models and change-colleagues for the turnaround schools.

▶ *Emphasis*: Individual school turnaround successes are heroic. Turnaorund success across multiple schools is strategic – and necessary.

7 **Effective turnaround at scale requires a transparent, deliberate blending of "loose" and "tight" control 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 like that described in #3, above, states have the opportunity to mix **"loose"** (providing latitude) and **"tight"** (controlling more systematically within the cluster, often through the application of leverage) in, for example, the following ways:

- **"Loose"** in allowing school/district leaders to develop their own turnaround plans; **"tight"** in insisting on certain essential elements and, in some cases, on working with 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;

- **"Loose"** in enabling school leaders to shape their staff and implement turnaround strategy as they see fit; **"tight"** in insisting on certain parameters for the work and to organize some aspects of turnaround centrally – either by the school district or by a systems-integrating turnaround partner leading a cluster of schools across district lines.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ State turnaround criteria (see #3 on page 73) empower school turnaround leaders to make ground-level judgments on design and overall approach, and in the execution of the turnaround strategies – but within the framework for turnaround established by the state.

▶ Districts judged by the state to have sufficient capacity (in conjunction with a lead turnaround partner) and that have been able to produce turnaround plans that meet the state's criteria may be granted more latitude, with less state oversight, in implementing the plan. (See #8, next page.)

▶ *Emphasis*: Turnaround depends on a deliberate blend of structured, systematic program strategies ("tight") and school control and ownership ("loose").

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.

A Framework *(continued)*

8 **States should differentiate their support by the degree of local capacity – and allow districts and schools to volunteer into a turnaround zone.** 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 opening up the turnaround zone to volunteer schools and districts ready to undertake "pre-emptive turnaround." Superintendents clamor for the ability to intervene more vigorously in schools *before* they have entered the most extreme categories of under-performance under state and NCLB accountability systems. Schools that are not yet in the bottom five percent but that are proactively looking to undertake fundamental change will improve the mix in their turnaround cluster. Their presence will help underline the positive positioning states will be seeking to give to the entire initiative, and they could be useful "colleagues" for other schools in the cluster. The volunteer schools represent an important way for states to scale up the impact of their turnaround zone, as well.

The state's protected space for turnaround would thus be differentiated in two different ways, as shown in the chart at right: first by voluntary vs. mandatory participation, and then by management authority. "Shared Direction" means that management of the turnaround would be conducted by district, school, and turnaround partner personnel (through contracts that can include whole-school management and charter conversion), but within the turnaround criteria required by the state. "State-Managed" means the state would directly subcontract management authority to a turnaround partner or charter school operator.

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.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ See the chart at right. State initiative has two broad categories for participation: Voluntary and Mandatory.

▶ **Voluntary**: for schools in NCLB's "Improvement" or "Corrective Action" categories that want access to changing conditions of a state-protected turnaround zone – and can produce a turnaround plan (potentially with a partner) that meets state criteria. State would not necessarily provide monitoring beyond regular AYP processes for these schools, though it might provide guidance and additional resources and supports.

▶ **Mandatory**: for schools in Corrective Action or Restructuring that the state *requires* to implement turnaround with a lead partner. These schools would receive the full benefit of additional resources and supports.

▶ State makes every effort to support and enable local management of turnaround within the turnaround criteria ("Shared Direction" in the chart); reserves the alternative of management change for schools that a) cannot produce a plan that meets the state's criteria or b) produce an adequate plan but then fail to meet achievement goals and other benchmarks over two years. State would mandate, at that point, use of an outside partner for school management under contract or through charter conversion (perhaps using a close-and-reopen strategy). Contract period of five years, with annual performance benchmarks.

▶ *Emphasis*: This initiative provides local leaders with their last, best shot at turning around failing schools, and gives them the tools they need to succeed.

How State Policy Can Activate and Shape a Strong Local Response

Step 1. Assess district capacity to undertake turnaround

Assess local capacity using school performance and other measures. The greater the district capacity, the more latitude (within prescribed criteria) should be granted to district leaders to design and implement turnaround. Lesser capacity brings greater involvement from the state.

Strong District Capacity:
District takes the lead

Weak District Capacity:
State takes the lead

Step 2. Require participation by some schools; invite participation by others

Participation in turnaround is mandatory for schools that have reached Restructuring under NCLB. But a much larger number of schools in Improvement or Corrective Action, drawn by the benefits of the state-supported turnaround zone, may opt into the system and undertake "preemptive turnaround."

Voluntary Participation

Mandatory Participation

Step 3. Establish a clear consequence that promotes stronger turnaround action

Motivating a vigorous response from districts and schools requires the prospect of a *State*-Managed turnaround process after two years of unsuccessful turnaround effort. This "ultimate consequence" buttresses a critical state role: catalyzing the most proactive response possible from all local stakeholders.

Shared Direction (State & District)

Schools in need of Improvement or Corrective Action, but wanting access to the protected turnaround space and producing a plan that meets the state's criteria

Schools in Restructuring that are required to produce a turnaround plan and can meet the state's criteria

State-Managed

Schools failing to meet goals after two years of restructuring and where trendlines do not meet objective criteria

Step 4. Provide school management options

Under Shared Direction, districts and their lead turnaround partners should be empowered to employ any of three school management options to meet state turnaround criteria. State-Managed schools would receive a "fresh start" through the contracting or charter conversion options.

Superintendent's Schools

Contract Management

Charter Conversion

This graphic presents, in four steps, how states can use an intensive turnaround strategy focused on the most poorly-performing schools (the bottom 5%, or fewer) to catalyze proactive local response on behalf of those schools – *and* the much larger number of schools that have been identified for state intervention at lesser levels of intensity. Schools that are mandated to implement the state-defined turnaround process could do so under Shared Direction, if they and their lead partner can produce a plan that meets the state's criteria. Schools not yet mandated to implement the process can opt into it, undertaking "preemptive turnaround" using the benefits of the state's protected turnaround space. In both cases, state policy has catalyzed a more proactive local response.

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.** 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 agencies created by some states to take on infrastructure challenges) 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 to bring about the appropriate, enabling condition-set, rather than leaving these sometimes 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 its average per-pupil expenditure in these schools

- **Investing strategically in capacity development**, both internally in districts and schools and among external providers of turnaround assistance:

  - Supporting the development of educational turnaround leadership as a discipline with a particular skill set

  - Supporting the development of a marketplace of high-capacity providers to assist districts and schools with turnaround work, and district efforts to create effective turnaround support offices of their own

  - Creating 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 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.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ Proposal for new coordinating agency is created as core element in overall turnaround strategy for the state. (See Figure 5F.)

▶ State education agency leaders enlisted as supporters as a way of garnering the necessary authorities, flexibilities to undertake the strategy.

▶ Agency is included in legislative package and/or budget line item as a requirement for increased funding for turnaround.

▶ *Emphasis*: The state needs the same level of operating flexibility to coordinate turnaround work as schools need to implement it effectively on the ground.

The state needs the same level of operating flexibility to coordinate turnaround work as schools need to implement it effectively on the ground.

Building the Framework:
New Structures for States, Districts, and Providers
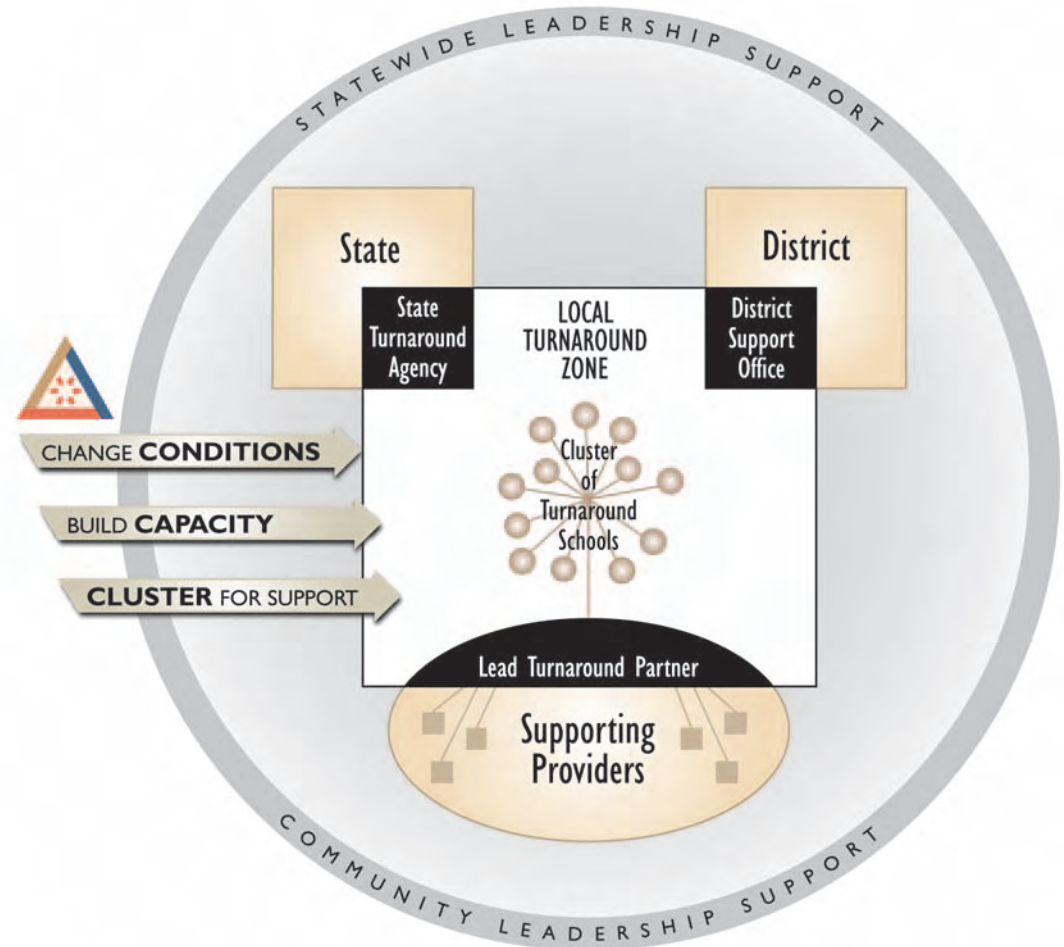
States, districts, and the outside provider community all need new organizational structures in order for turnaround work to succeed at scale. At the state and district level, turnaround management must have more operating flexibility than current structures tend to allow. Among providers, lead turnaround partners should work with 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.

A Framework *(continued)*

STATEWIDE & COMMUNITY COALITIONS: The Necessary Leadership Consensus

10 **Tough challenges require tough – and united – leadership.** While some effective turnaround work may take place in scattered locales, states under NCLB cannot leave it to accidents of good fortune or geography to assure the right of every child to receive an adequate education. 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, non-profit, higher-education, and business communities, as well as from the media. Such a coalition is necessary in order to produce the policy changes and sustained funding commitments (see Figure 5D) necessary for effective turnaround.

Coalition-building at the grassroots level is important as well, in order to sustain leadership support in the legislature and to build community connection to, and ownership of, the goal and process of building a higher-performing local school. Community buy-in is particularly essential in the second phase of turnaround – the improvement phase, when new investments are reduced and change (along with achievement gain) is more incremental. In cities where long lists of parents wait for openings in magnet and/or charter schools, they represent a potentially potent advocacy group for highly visible, comprehensive turnaround of under-performing schools.

What This Might Look Like:

▶ Lead advocate for comprehensive turnaround of failing schools (governor, commissioner, state board chair, key legislator, leading CEO or foundation head) initiates high-level discussions with potential allies, creates workgroup.

▶ Workgroup assembles turnaround experts; builds a case for turnaround, using statewide research and strategies from *The Turnaround Challenge.*

▶ Workgroup identifies a driver for this turnaround coalition – an existing statewide organization, foundation, or consortium – or establishes one. Coalition driver adopts comprehensive turnaround as a central goal.

▶ Key advocates and decision-makers are identified and enlisted.

▶ Media effort showcases gaps between highest and lowest performing schools (with similar high-poverty demographics) in the state.

▶ Outreach to key superintendents, school board chairs, and mayors in affected districts to secure their support, to statewide teacher union managers, and to other teacher leaders statewide.

▶ Twin strategies, working with the state education agency and state board of education, to generate necessary changes in state regulations on school intervention and enlist state legislature to support the changes (if necessary).

▶ Intensive lobbying effort during legislative budgeting cycle to secure adequate funding for turnaround.

▶ *Emphasis*: Turnaround of failing schools is a civil rights obligation and economic/social imperative of the state.

Meeting the Turnaround Challenge: A Framework for Statewide Action

Turnaround Requires:

New Approaches within Turnaround Zones

Changing Conditions
Authority to act over staff, time, budget, program
Incentives motivating dramatic reform

Building Capacity
Targeted, sustained state funds and resources
Focus on turnaround expertise in partners, schools, and districts

Clustering for Support
Collaborative networks by school type, partner, region
Reforms integrated through lead turnaround partner

New Support Structures at All Levels

State Turnaround Agency
Same operational flexibility for state management as for school implementation

District Support Office
"Mini-district" network support in collaboration with lead turnaround partners

Lead Turnaround Partners
Integrator of services, intensive full-time engagement in turnaround schools

New Commitment among Leadership Groups

Statewide Coalition
Officeholders, policymakers, educators, business, foundations, non-profits

Community Coalitions
Superintendents, school boards, school/teacher leaders, community leaders, parents
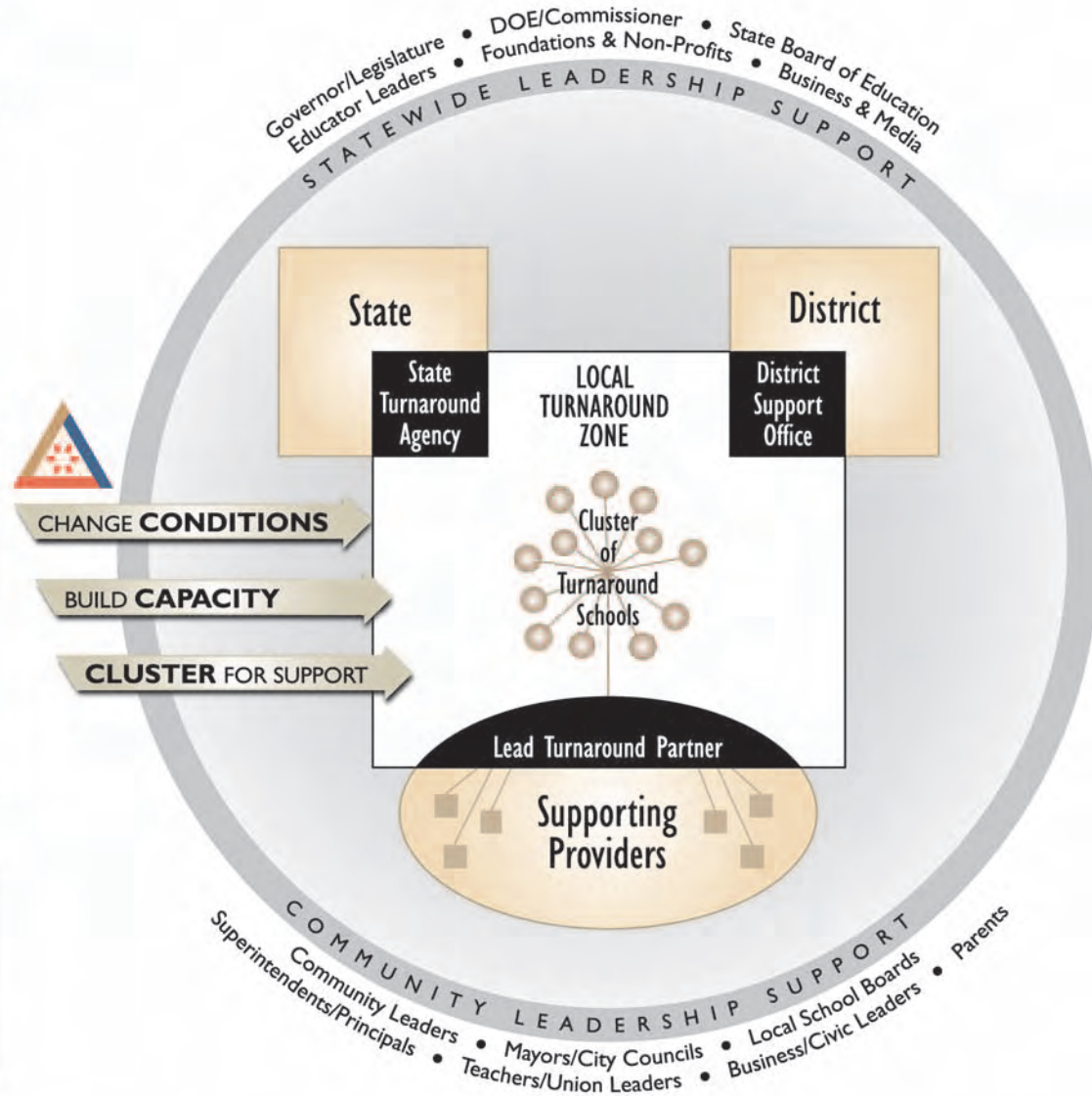
The Complete Framework: A comprehensive state initiative depends on every one of the structures indicated here. Statewide and community leadership coalitions and consensus (outer ring) are needed to drive the necessary policy changes and targeted public funding. The centerpiece of the initiative is the establishment of protected space for local turnaround zones, where the three 'C' reforms – changing conditions, building capacity, and clustering for support – suggested by our "Readiness" triangle-model research into high-performing, high-poverty schools can gain traction. In order for those reforms to be implemented effec-tively, each of the primary turnaround agents (the state, the district, and outside providers, along with the schools themselves) needs to adopt new structures and approaches (repre-sented by the darkly-colored areas where these agents overlap with the turnaround zones. States and districts need special sub-agencies dedicated to turnaround; providers need to be aligned by lead turnaround partners. The schools need fundamentally new approaches, assisted by all of the agents.

The Tough Questions, Revisited
"Can Turnaround Be Successful at Our School?"
A Ten-Point Audit for Policymakers (and Manifesto for Principals)

This set of questions is the school-building-level corollary to the "12 Tough Questions" that opened this report. It can serve as a short set of indicators for use by policymakers and turnaround advocates: *Are* the operating conditions and supports in place that would allow principals and leadership teams to successfully turn around a failing school? It could (and should) also be used by principals being asked to undertake school turnaround: Do I have what I need – and what any turnaround manager would need – to be successful? If not....

1. Have you and key members of your staff had a leadership role in shaping your school turnaround plan? Has the planning team benefited significantly from knowledgeable outside support? Has the process moved swiftly in order to meet an external deadline, and has it been driven in part by clear guidelines and criteria set by the state?

2. Is your work supported by a lead turnaround partner that, in your judgment, will help put your school in the best possible position to meet your student achievement goals? Does your district, state, community, or partner provide you with support services tailored to high-poverty settings and to your school's priorities?

3. Do you and your school's lead turnaround partner have the authority to shape school staff so as to implement the plan? In the following HR areas, can you use these (among other) practices drawn from research in high-performance, high-poverty schools?

   • Recruiting, hiring and placement: freedom from seniority rules, bumping and force-placing; ability to adjust positions to suit student needs

   • Removal: discretion to excess teachers who are not performing or are unwilling to participate fully in the turnaround plan

   • Compensation: ability to differentiate through incentives to attract high quality teachers and/or performance- or responsibility-related pay

4. Do you, your partner, and your leadership team have the authority (and resources) to adjust your school's schedule to suit the needs of your students and instructional approach?

5. Do you and your turnaround leadership team have discretion over budget allocation to support your mission? Is your turnaround plan sufficiently supported by extra funding and outside resources? Are those resources sufficient to provide for substantial planning, collaboration, and training time for staff?

6. Do you have the authority to adjust curriculum and programming to suit your school's priorities and support the turnaround plan, within a larger framework of program-related decisions made by your district or cluster/network? Are you free to make choices and respond to crises with a minimum of compliance-driven oversight?

7. Do you have the authority to shape the way your school works by creating teacher leadership positions and differentiating responsibilities? Will you and your leadership team be provided, as part of the turnaround plan, with professional development to increase your expertise in turnaround management?

8. Do you currently have the technology, systems, and analysis expertise necessary to implement the frequent formative assessment and feedback that is central to increasing performance in high-risk populations?

9. Will you be provided, as part of your turnaround status, with the support of a network of schools involved in similar turnaround initiatives, along with higher-performing schools that can serve as colleagues and models?

10. Do you feel that you have been provided with unambiguous expectations and clear measures of accountability to help you bring urgency to the work of turning around student performance at your school?

APPENDICES

A.1 School Intervention to Date: Goals, Strategies, and Impact
We know where we want to go. The journey's the issue.

Line up 100 reform-experienced educators and researchers in a room, ask them to write down their own top ten elements of effective standards-based reform, and odds are that you'll see 80% agreement across their lists.

We haven't proved that clinically – but it seems quite plausible from our exhaustive scan of the effective-practice and intervention literature. Adherence to standards and high expectations; effective mapping of curricula to those standards; a professional and collaborative teaching culture; in-school, job-embedded professional development; strong school leadership (individuals and teams); on-going formative assessment; data-based decision-making; proactive intervention for students who need extra help; productive connections with social services, parents and community… There is general consensus on the importance of these dimensions of effective schools, and an acknowledgement that within this palette, actual implementation can appear in a wide range of colors.

In other words, we know it when we see it. But getting there – the whole change management process – is much more of a mystery.

Change management in education is chronically under-studied. That's ironic, for an enterprise that is so focused

> *"While 39 states have the authority to take strong actions, and while these same 39 states contain dozens of failing schools that have not appreciably improved for years, we still find strong interventions extremely rare."*
> *– Researcher Ronald Brady*

on human dynamics and personal development. Turnaround in other domains, especially business, is the object of much careful scrutiny. There are lessons to be learned from this work – though with caution, because of the substantial differences between the private and the public sectors.

Our Intervention Taxonomy (included in Parts 4 and 5) introduced the three general categories we have

developed for this analysis of school intervention strategies. They are:

- **Program Change:** *Providing help to improve programs and performance within the current set of systems and conditions.* This constitutes the major portion of school intervention activity to date. This approach offers consultants, assistance teams, professional development, or new curricula and other program-related tools to help existing school personnel improve their students' performance, primarily (though not necessarily) within the current general model of teaching and learning employed by the school.

- **People Change:** *Reconstitution – the replacement of leadership and school staff.* The core idea here is that the caliber of the people working in the system is the most important element to success (which may be the right idea, except when it also is the only idea being applied).

- **System Redesign:** *Changing the conditions and incentives that shape how work gets done – as well as allowing for changes in programming and personnel.* This cumulative category includes the other two, but also redesigns the operating conditions in which staff and leadership implement programs and reform strategies.

These categories mirror, in general, the several others that have been developed and used by other researchers examining the emerging track record in school interventions under NCLB (among others: Brady, 2003; DiBiase, 2005). Brady's analysis, conducted for the Fordham Foundation in the early years of the law's implementation, provides a useful grouping of intervention strategies mandated by NCLB (see box). Our grouping, described in more detail over the following pages, emphasizes interventions' impact on the daily life of schools, more than on questions of governance. We discuss governance and management more fully in Part 4.

The interventions in the "Mild" and "Moderate" categories, these and other reports make clear, are conducted much more frequently than those in the "Strong" category for several reasons. There are great

Given the option to do so, people and organizations (even those in some distress) will tend toward less change, rather than more – with perhaps predictable results.

political uncertainties and the risk of significant political costs associated with them (witness Maryland's effort to take over several under-performing schools in Baltimore in 2005-6, which was undercut by the mayor and the state legislature – see the Supplemental Report for more). In addition, there are virtually no "reward" incentives in place to motivate educators and policymakers to undertake such a risky effort. As Brady puts it, "While 39 states have the authority to take strong actions, and while these same 39 states contain dozens of failing schools that have not appreciably improved for years, we still find strong interventions extremely rare." (Brady, 2003) DiBiase's study follows Brady's by more than two years but it does not have importantly different conclusions. Given the option to do so, people and organizations (even those in some distress) will tend toward less change, rather than more – with perhaps predictable results, as we shall see over the following pages.

Three Flavors of School Intervention

(From *Can Failing Schools Be Fixed?*, by Ronald Brady, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003)

- **Mild:**
  - Identification
  - Planning
  - Technical assistance/ External consultant
  - Professional development
  - Parental involvement
  - Tutoring services

- **Moderate:**
  - Add school time (block scheduling, reducing non-academic core classes, longer school day, longer school year)
  - Reorganize the school (voluntary)
  - Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)
  - Change the principal

- **Strong:**
  - Reconstitution (replacing all or most of a school's staff and leadership)
  - School takeover (state assuming governance of a school)
  - District takeover (state assuming governance of a district)
  - Closing of the school
  - Choice (vouchers)
  - Major curriculum change
  - Outsourcing on a contract basis
  - Redirecting, withholding school or district funds
  - Closing failing districts

A.2 **Why *Program Change* Falls Short of Turnaround**

Providing help to improve programs is vital – and insufficient by itself

*P*rogram Change is by far the most common state and district response to underperformance in schools. This category encompasses a range of approaches, but what ties them together is the idea of external assistance to incumbent school staff, with the aim of improving their performance and/or installing

• Needs assessments

• Improvement planning

• Implementation support.

States have chosen to organize this kind of intervention work differently. Massachusetts has had a separate office conducting district and school

> *"Assigning Highly Skilled Educators for more years in these schools is unlikely to increase HSE success unless other conditions change."*
>
> *– David et al, 2003*

new education programming – curricula, instructional approaches, assessments and the like. Two kinds of external assistance have been most prevalent: direct state help with developing and implementing a school improvement plan, and "comprehensive school reform" using an external model provider.
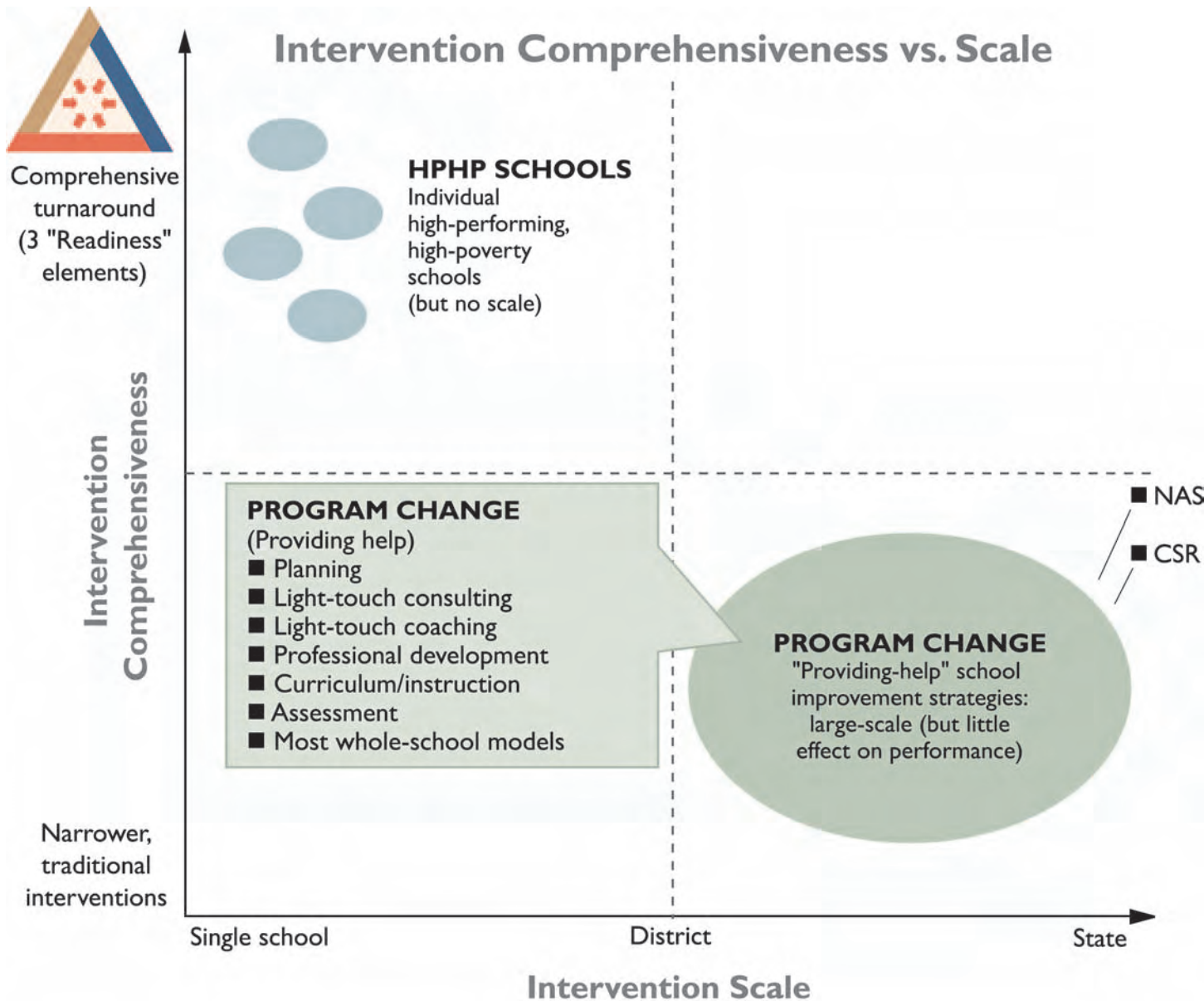
Direct State Assistance

Researchers have posited that there are three broad categories in which states attempt to shape the content of school improvement efforts. (Lane & Gracia, 2005; Laguarda, 2003) These are:

audits (the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability) that reports to a separate board (the Education Management Audit Council). These reviews or audits are fashioned after the British inspectorate system and are deliberately designed to reflect or monitor a district's or school's condition but not to provide direct assistance. (This system regularly comes under fire from state budget-setters and may in fact be modified this year.) Other states, like North Carolina or Kentucky, do not make such distinctions between those who conduct audits and those who supply assistance.

However organized, implementation support represents all of the efforts that make up a state-approved school improvement plan. Lane & Gracia (2003) provide a particularly useful description and categorization of these supports. (The following is directly quoted from them.)

• **School-based coaching**: Facilitation of school improvement teams; leadership development and mentoring administrators; job-embedded professional development; including modeling instruction

• **School-based data analysis**: Ongoing support to school teams/committees related to the analysis of data planning

• **Professional development**: Professional development targeted towards identified needs (for example, curriculum development and standards alignment, classroom and behavior management, diversity training, etc.)

• **Additional resources**: Some states prioritize federal programs (e.g. Reading First, Comprehensive School Reform) or state-sponsored initiatives to low-performing schools.

The first type of assistance in this list – school-based coaching – represents the most intensive version of this kind of providing help, since it involves direct, ongoing, hands-on work at schools by experienced individuals or teams. Perhaps the most prominent example of this approach is Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educators program (HSE), formerly known as Distinguished Educators (DE). Under Kentucky's accountability system, devised in the early 1990s, schools are required to achieve a certain level of improvement toward meeting proficiency. The lowest-performing schools receive assistance from DEs, now HSEs, beginning with a Scholastic Audit of the school. (David et al, 2003) Evaluators of the HSEs work have broken HSEs' work into seven major categories: professional development, curriculum alignment, classroom instruction, test preparation, leadership, school organization and decision making, and resource procurement.

The most recent available formal evaluation (David et al, 2003) concludes that while the HSE program has an impact on schools served, that impact is limited in two important respects particularly relevant to this analysis.

Providing Help to Accomplish *Program Change*:
Interventions with Great Scale but Modest Impact

Intervention Comprehensiveness vs. Scale

Comprehensive turnaround (3 "Readiness" elements)

Intervention Comprehensiveness

HPHP SCHOOLS
Individual high-performing, high-poverty schools (but no scale)

PROGRAM CHANGE
(Providing help)
■ Planning
■ Light-touch consulting
■ Light-touch coaching
■ Professional development
■ Curriculum/instruction
■ Assessment
■ Most whole-school models

PROGRAM CHANGE
"Providing-help" school improvement strategies: large-scale (but little effect on performance)

Narrower, traditional interventions

Single school   District   State

Intervention Scale

■ NAS
■ CSR

A.2

This graphic provides an informal, conceptual "map" of school intervention efforts that we will use over the course of the analysis in this Appendix. The map plots the degree to which different intervention efforts appear to incorporate the three "readiness" dimensions of High-Performing, High-Poverty schools described in Part 2 – along with the HPHP schools themselves – along the Y axis, against the scale of these intervention efforts along the X axis. Interventions in the upper right quadrant are the goal; they would represent the promise of both effectiveness and scale. Interventions in the other three quadrants, conversely, either lack scale-ability or, we would argue, all of the elements required to be successful. The plotting on the map is directional only, and is not staked to numerical values; the intent here is to illustrate broad ideas, not closely comparable data.

Program change initiatives, as shown in this section, have not demonstrated effectiveness in significantly improving performance – particularly in chronically under-performing schools. While some prominent programs, especially the federal government's $1.5 billion Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program and the New American Schools (NAS) initiative have certainly achieved scale, they have not generated the impact their framers envisioned. Nor, by and large, have much smaller program-change initiatives operated by state education agencies. (See the Supplemental Report for more information on selected state programs.)

Program Change
(continued)

First, on average, HSEs have been more successful at the elementary level than at the middle or high school level. Though the researchers base this finding on a sample of HSE-assisted schools that included only one high school, they do reach some conclusions about the limits of the HSE strategy in the high school setting. Working closely with 10-12 teachers to improve instruction, they argue, is a plausible challenge for an HSE. By contrast, working closely with 40-50 teachers (or more) is probably impossible for one person. An added challenge is the need for an HSE to be a content expert in the various disciplines at the high school or even the middle school level.

Second, the evaluation finds that HSEs had less impact at schools with the lowest capacity – exactly the sort of chronically under-performing schools that are the subject of this analysis. David et al (2003) write: "The impact of HSEs is considerably weaker in schools with the most severe problems with faculty morale, school leadership, and district support – which also tend to be those in the most economically depressed areas." In a sobering statement, the authors conclude, "Assigning HSEs for more

years in these schools is unlikely to increase HSE success unless other conditions change" (p. 27).

Importantly, HSEs have had no authority to change broader conditions. Their role is strictly advisory. There has been one exception in the program's history: for schools labeled "in crisis," due to steep declines in test scores, DEs had the authority to evaluate and recommend dismissal for staff. According to one of the program's architects, however, that power was never implemented (Connie Lestor interview, January 2006).

The Supplemental Report profiles a number of state efforts that fall into this broad category. States such as Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Michigan, Massachusetts, and North Carolina have geared intervention-support strategies around regional school improvement coaches, peer mentors, school improvement specialists, "solutions teams," or "School-Wide Assistance Teams" (also known as SWAT teams). There has been no rigorous, performance-based analysis, at least that we could identify, of these programs and similar initiatives in other states. But our survey uncovered much dissatisfaction in these states with the outcomes of these interven-

tions to date. HSEs and programs modeled after the Kentucky approach, it appears, can be helpful in schools with some level of pre-existing capacity to improve, especially at the elementary level. Their efficacy at higher levels of schooling, and in the particular subset of chronically under-performing schools that we are examining here, appears to be much less promising. In these cases, simply providing expert assistance without the ability to make more substantial changes happen falls short of the magnitude of the task.

American Institutes for Research… found only three out of the twenty-four whole school [CSR] reform models studied had strong evidence of increased student performance.

Comprehensive School Reform

The other major way states have provided help to under-performing schools is by offering funds to enable schools to adopt "comprehensive school reform" (CSR) models. The idea behind CSR is that high-performing schools typically have a clear, coherent mission and design that guides all of the schools' activities. If schools are failing, they need a new

school design, and they need an external partner with expertise in the design to help them implement it. CSR achieved prominence in the 1990s under the sponsorship of New American Schools (NAS), a nonprofit that provided funding for the development and scale-up of research-based school designs such as Success For All and Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound. CSR received an enormous boost in the late 1990s when Congress began appropriating funds for a federal Comprehensive School Program – over $1.5 billion through FY2006.

Since these funds flow through states to schools, every state now has a comprehensive school reform office that administers the program and its brand of program change.

The impact of CSR, however, has been severely limited, especially on chronically low-performing schools. Part of the challenge stemmed from the lack of research base undergirding many of

the comprehensive reform models themselves. American Institutes for Research, for example, found only three out of the twenty-four whole school reform models studied had strong evidence of increased student performance. (AIR, 1999)

Equally troubling have been the difficulties schools have faced in implementing the reforms, even with the massive infusion of funding and support related to CSR. After a decade of implementation and careful evaluation of the NAS effort, RAND researchers (Berends et al, 2002) concluded:

- The hypothesis that adopting a whole school design would lead a school to improve its performance was largely unproved. For many reasons including significant implementation problems, researchers found a lack of strong improvement in most schools in their samples.

- External interventions need to address capacity issues such as lack of teacher capacity, lack of leadership capacity, and a lack of coherent district infrastructure to support such efforts.

- The schools most likely to be targeted by the federal Title I program (for schools serving students in poverty) are most likely to face obstacles to implementing whole school designs to improve student performance.

- Externally developed interventions cannot "break the mold" and be implemented successfully in most districts or schools because these contexts are simply not supportive of these efforts. For example, many districts were unwilling to grant schools the authority needed to allocate funds, people, and time as

In the case of program change in chronically under-performing schools, the "zone of wishful thinking" is vast.

needed to implement the designs. For another, some would not take steps to assign to CSR schools principals supportive of the chosen CSR model.

These findings resemble those cited above related to the direct support provided by HSEs in Kentucky. The comprehensive school designs, like the assistance of HSEs, could only go so far in light of the pre-existing level of capacity in schools and the prevail-

ing conditions in which the schools operated. Since CSR models were generally not themselves designed to change those conditions, they often could not overcome these formidable obstacles. While CSR has had some notable successes, its promise as a "solution" to chronic underperformance has remained unfulfilled.

The Zone of Wishful Thinking

As Paul Hill and Mary Beth Celio have written (1998), every approach to school reform has a "zone of wishful thinking": a set of conditions or actions that are essential to the success of the reform, but that are not

actually brought about by the reform. In the case of program change in chronically under-performing schools, the zone of wishful thinking is vast. It also has two parts. First, for program change to work, the people working in chronically low-performing schools must have the capacity to improve. Not that they must already have all the skills and knowledge necessary to make their schools better; the whole point of providing program-change assistance is to impart

those skills and knowledge. But they must have the capacity to use that assistance well and turn it into significantly different operating approaches and performance results in their schools. Too often, state assistance teams, distinguished educators, and comprehensive model providers have found that school personnel, and especially the leaders of chronically under-performing schools, have lacked that basic capacity. In these cases, the notion that simply providing assistance could turn around these schools was, in fact, wishful thinking.

Second, help is likely to convert to results only if schools are working within conditions that allow and encourage them to activate the advice, to implement what their assistance-providers are suggesting. Without authority to do what helpers advise, and without strong inducements to do so even when change is difficult or controversial, schools may not move forward according to the plans they devise with their assistance-providers.

As a result of these zones of wishful thinking, states and districts have sometimes sought to go beyond program change, as discussed in the following two sections on *people* and *system redesign*.

A.3 Why *People Change* Falls Short of Turnaround

Providing for new leadership and new staff is also vital – and also insufficient

The second broad category of intervention design focuses on changing people – usually along with changing programs. Because capacity issues have hindered many efforts to provide help to chronically under-performing schools, it is natural that some states and districts have sought to supplement that assistance with actual changes in the people staffing and leading the schools. Given the well-documented importance of both leaders and teachers to the outcomes a school achieves, changing people is a plausible strategy for boosting per-formance. But, as we found with interventions focusing on program change alone, efforts that address peo-ple change (even as part of a larger effort that includes program change) without also addressing the systems and conditions in which people work have not, by and large, produced the desired results.

People-change initiatives, in general, take two forms: bringing in a new principal, and bringing in a more or less entirely new staff for the school ("reconstitution"). These initiatives fall within NCLB's second option. (Note: Another way states have sought to "change people" is to change leader-ship at the district level via state takeovers or by granting control of a

district to the mayor or to a control board. These strategies are most often part of broader initiatives designed to restructure failing districts, and are discussed in the district profiles in the Supplemental Report.)

Changing Leadership

The importance of the school leader in determining a school's success has a long-standing research base and wide acceptance among practitioners. (Waters et al, 2003; Leithwood

Turnaround experience in other sectors reinforces an additional point: that managing turnaround effectively requires a particular set of skills, beyond those generally acknowledged to be required for effective leadership.

et al, 2004) Experience with turn-arounds across industries reinforces this notion, since successful turn-arounds typically involve a change in top management. (Hoffman, 1989) Turnaround experience in other sec-tors reinforces an additional point: that managing turnaround effectively requires a particular set of skills, beyond those generally acknowledged to be required for effective leadership.

At one level, leadership change as a response to low performance in schools is routine – so routine, in fact,
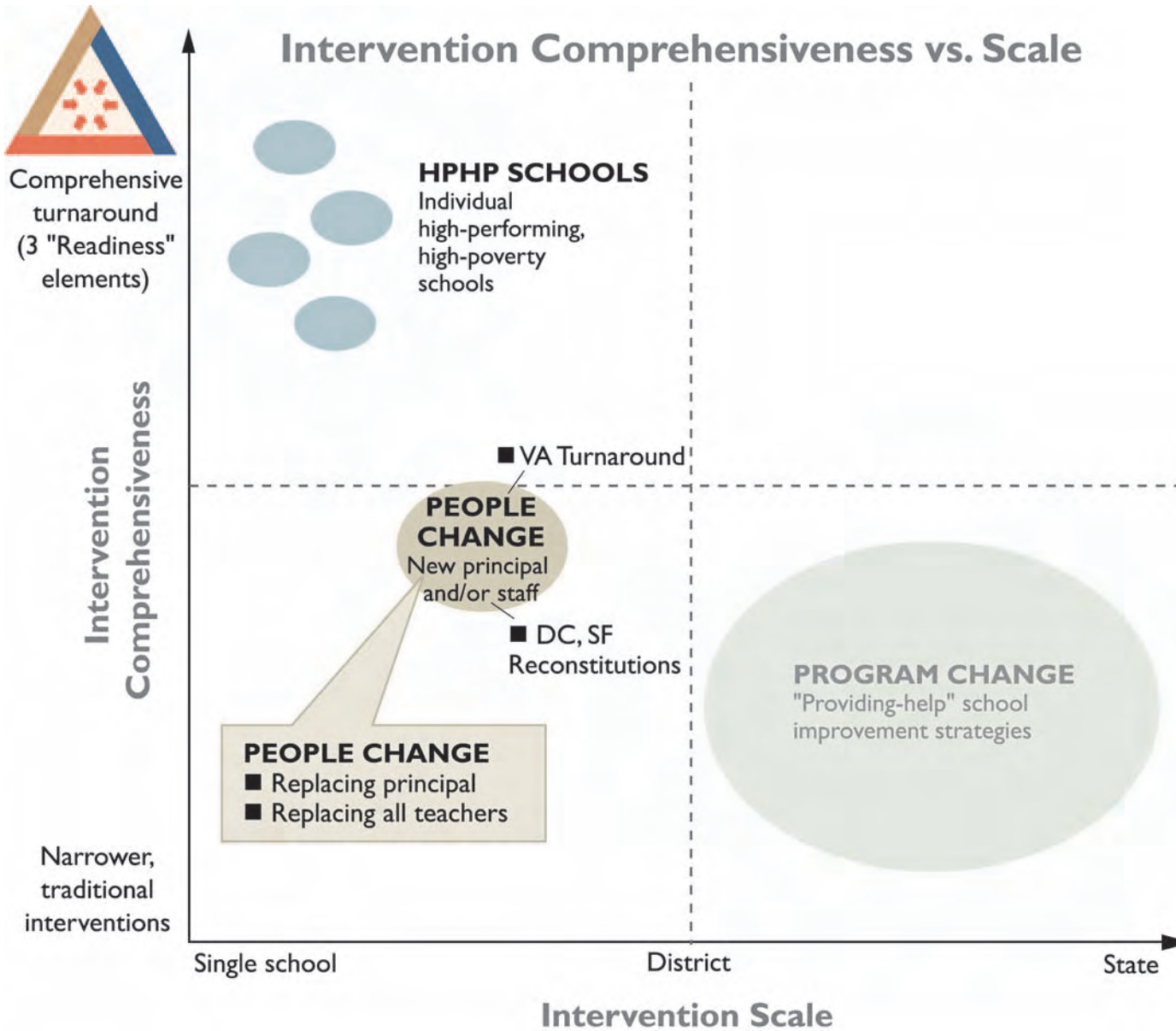
that it has not been documented and studied rigorously. It is therefore impossible to cite a research base about whether, and under what con-ditions, changing a school's leader is likely to lift it out of chronic under-performance. Cross-industry research on turnarounds, however, provides useful insights about two issues: the qualities of leaders who appear most likely to succeed in a turnaround con-text, and the types of actions leaders appear to take en route to turn-arounds that achieve some impact. (Kowal and Hassel, 2005)

Based on these cross-organizational findings, it appears that the most promising "changing leadership" strategies would be those that seek to install new leaders who bring the underlying capabilities of successful turnaround leaders and receive spe-cialized training on turnaround lead-ership actions most likely to lead to success. The leading state-based exem-plar of this approach is the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist

Program (VSTSP), a joint venture of the University of Virginia's schools of business and education. This program identifies high potential turnaround leaders (from among high-performing urban principals) and provides them with specialized training as they take up posts in chronically low-perform-ing schools. Specialists can earn bonuses of $5,000 for completing the training and $8,000 differentials if their schools make AYP, achieve state accreditation, or reduce the failure rate in reading or math by 10%. Differentials of $15,000 are available in years two and three of the principal's work if the school continues to make AYP or obtains state certification. The program initially focused on Virginia, but is now working with three large school districts from other states as well, with assistance from Microsoft Corporation. The program is relatively new, and no external evaluation has been completed yet, although the program has issued its own com-pendium of "stories" from the first cohort of 10 specialists, with some analysis of their self-reported experi-ences. (Duke et al, 2005) The pro-gram's promising first year was fol-lowed by a somewhat more challeng-ing sophomore year, with a number of turnaround leaders leaving their new schools (as reported in

Betting on *People Change*: Still Not Changing the System

Intervention Comprehensiveness vs. Scale

Comprehensive turnaround (3 "Readiness" elements)

Intervention Comprehensiveness

Narrower, traditional interventions

HPHP SCHOOLS
Individual high-performing, high-poverty schools

■ VA Turnaround

PEOPLE CHANGE
New principal and/or staff

■ DC, SF Reconstitutions

PEOPLE CHANGE
■ Replacing principal
■ Replacing all teachers

PROGRAM CHANGE
"Providing-help" school improvement strategies

Single school   District   State

Intervention Scale

The second of our conceptual maps of the school intervention landscape places initiatives focused on changing people largely in the lower lefthand quadrant. These initiatives have tended to lack scale (limited, as they are, by the available capacity for new staff and leadership) and they also stop short of changing the conditions in which newly reconstituted staffs and/or new leaders work. Their track record of impact is limited, at best (although Virginia's Turnaround Specialist program shows solid improvement in some of its schools).

A.3

People Change

(continued)

Education Week and elsewhere; see the Supplemental Report for more).

The changing-leadership strategy, in fact, faces a number of obstacles. First, since turnaround leadership appears to be a specialty requiring specific competencies and skills, it is likely that the supply of individuals capable of taking on this role successfully is limited. Programs like the VSTSP are seeking to address the supply issue in one way – though the scale-ability of that model is limited at best. District-

The Chicago experience at reconstitution prompted the district to halt implementation of this strategy in other schools.

based leadership academies in places like New York City, San Diego, and Boston, while less focused on "turnaround," are also aiming to increase the supply of capable school leaders. External efforts, notably New Leaders for New Schools, are scouring the country for high-potential leaders and offering them training and support. But if the nation shortly will have 5-10,000 chronically under-performing schools, the demand for capable turnaround leaders swamps the supply these efforts can currently offer. For the changing leadership strategy to work, then, policymakers, funders, and

entrepreneurs will need to do much more to increase the pipeline of individuals ready and able to fill these posts.

A second and related challenge is that for many reasons, the conditions for leadership in chronically under-performing schools are often far from ideal. As noted above, principals in these schools typically lack authority over the critical resources of people, money, and time, hemmed in as they are by district and state policies and by collective bargaining agreements.

While a hallmark of successful turnaround leaders is their ability and willingness to accomplish results despite such constraints, these barriers make the job less attractive – and the potential for impact more uncertain. Isolated examples like the bonuses paid by VSTSP notwithstanding, there are also few countervailing incentives for talented turnaround leaders to take up these jobs. Though there may be intrinsic rewards to taking on the toughest jobs in public education, there is no prospect for higher pay, special recognition, opportunities for advancement, or

other inducements that typically attract high-performing individuals into jobs. (Hay Group, 2004) In that context, recruiting the required pipeline of leaders looks even more challenging. The conditions and lack of authority over resources and strategies also make sustaining capable leadership over time exceedingly difficult.

All of this is not to say that changing leadership should not be an integral part of districts' and states' turnaround strategies. There are no silver-bullet strategies in effective turnaround, but effective leadership may well be the most important single element. Given the importance of school leadership in general, and turnaround leaders more specifically, policymakers must attend to this dimension of change in their turnaround approaches. But to do so successfully, the strategy must also include attention to priming the pipeline of leaders and changing the conditions of leadership – the authority and incentive structure – in order to make the turnaround job as attractive and viable as possible for capable people.

Reconstitution

Reconstitution is a more thoroughgoing version of changing people,

involving wholesale replacement of all or most of a school's staff, not just the principal. The theory of reconstitution is that chronically under-performing schools need a fresh start with a more or less completely new team of people who can build from scratch a school program that works.

Experiments with whole-school reconstitution have been limited to date, with generally abysmal results. Prominent examples include:

- **San Francisco.** The most cited case is San Francisco's 1983 reconstitution of six schools as part of a court-ordered desegregation effort. The district, in addition to changing the staff, also set about recruiting the best teachers available, adding technology and other resources, and focusing on improving the lot of underserved students. Researchers found that African American and Latino students in these initially reconstituted schools were performing better than those from similar backgrounds in other parts of the city. (McRobbie, 1998) However, in the eight schools reconstituted after 1994 in San Francisco, there has been little if any improvement in standardized test scores. (Ziebarth 2004)

San Francisco moved away from the strategy and has pursued more of a program-change approach featuring the use of coaches to improve under-performing schools.

- **Chicago.** Chicago attempted reconstitutions of high schools in 1997. Hess (2003) explains that although all teachers in reconstituted schools were technically fired, they were allowed to reapply and be hired back. While the opportunity to fire and replace teachers sounds plausible in theory, in practice Chicago's experience suggests the process was too rushed to allow administrators or teachers to make thoughtful or perhaps even meaningful hiring decisions. The final result was that varying but fairly high levels of staff remained in the same buildings despite being reconstituted. There are a variety of reasons for this variation, including the flawed hiring process, a lack of desire on teachers' part to work in a school that might close, and the need for any school district to continuously serve all of its students – i.e., the pressure under this kind of strategy to recruit and deploy a new staff immediately.

After three years of study, the researchers in Chicago (Hess, 2003) reported that there had been little change in the structure of the high schools, and little change in the quality of instruction despite the efforts of external partners. As the researchers found little had actually changed except for the changes in personnel, they were not at all surprised to find lower-than-average gains in reading achievement (roughly half the increase that the city of Chicago gained during this time period). The Chicago experience at reconstitution prompted the district to halt implementation of this strategy in other schools.

- **New York.** According to information assembled by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the New York Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) program of corrective action led to more than 40 schools being reconstituted in the early years of the program. The results of this aggressive program, of which reconstitution is but a part, are mixed. According to Mintrop and Trujillo (2005), less than half of the SURR schools have exited the program. And Brady (2003) points out that the criteria for exiting the SURR

program are considerably less stringent than what the state requires for NCLB. New York's experience, then, appears to be another disappointing one for reconstitution.

It appears from this research that reconstitutions suffer from the same twin problems that undermine other efforts to turn around low performing schools: insufficient capacity and obstructive conditions. The capacity challenge appears at two levels. First, districts attempting reconstitution have struggled to find more capable teachers to replace the ones let go during reconstitution. If the failing faculty is replaced by one with equal or lesser capability, there is no reason to think reconstitution alone will improve school performance dramatically. Second, reconstituted schools have typically lacked the leadership capacity and resources to effect a successful turnaround. The usual reconstitution timetable is to dismiss staff as one school year ends and re-hire over the summer, a timetable that leaves little opportunity for essentially a new school start-up effort to be undertaken.

Reconstitutions do involve some change to the condition set. In particular, the act of reconstitution itself requires someone to have the authority to dismiss members of the school

staff – a critical aspect of condition change. But this doesn't mean that the school, post-reconstitution, lives within a new condition set. The schools' new leaders may or may not have ongoing authority to build and change their teams, to allocate resources strategically, to set schedules and otherwise use time in ways that benefit their students.

The broader research on organizational turnaround suggests that wholesale replacement of staff, while sometimes used effectively, is not a necessary ingredient of turnaround success. Indeed, one recent review of the turnaround literature found that "successful turnarounds often combine new employees with old to introduce new energy and enthusiasm without losing skill and experience," citing six research studies in support of that conclusion. (Kowal and Hassel, 2005) In that light, the disappointing experience with school reconstitution is not at all surprising. While leadership change is often central to turnaround success, and the ability to shape school staff around a turnaround strategy is a critical authority for turnaround leaders to hold, broad-scale all-at-once staff replacement appears less viable as a strategy – or even as one element in a larger initiative.

A.4 System Redesign: Program, People – *and Conditions Change*
The operating context for intervention is as important as the intervention itself

There is enough research on the more typical forms of intervention, summarized in the two previous sections (and in the Supplemental Report), to conclude that they are generally insufficient to produce exemplary results on a broad scale – at least in the ways they have been implemented to date. Providing advice and continuous review, implementing new curricular/instructional/assessment programs, supporting staff development, even changing leadership and school staff: none of this work has produced a clearly delineated pathway that educators and policymakers might adopt to turn around the lowest-performing schools successfully.

What's missing?

Beyond the nature of the programming and effectiveness of the people, there is the context in which a school's leadership and staff are pursuing their mission – the set of conditions that shapes how decisions are made and the extent to which, in any operation, people are enabled to do their best work. Providing extensive help to schools whose leaders lack the authority to make change (or strong inducements to do so) appears limited in effect. Attracting and placing talented new leaders is more challenging when the conditions of leadership in a turn-around school are not designed to make

real leadership possible. The same is true of teachers: why would talented, experienced people be drawn to classrooms in these schools under the same conditions that have conspired to produce so much failure, so consistently?

Ways to Create New Conditions
This is the line of thinking that has fueled the nation's charter school movement over the past ten years: in order to free up educators and school leaders to do their best work, the dysfunctions of the current public education system – so clearly evidenced by the learning outcomes produced in the bottom five percent of public schools – must be skirted entirely and a new system (and new set of conditions) must be put in its place. As discussed in the box on page 104, results from the nation's charter experiment are mixed, depending to a strong degree on the strength of the authorizing/accountability framework in which individual charter schools have developed. But this completely-outside-the-system model has not been the only response to the increasing conviction that the *conditions context* of reform is as important as the nature of the reform itself and the people implementing it. Decision-makers in a number of large school districts, and a growing set of policymakers at the state level, have

begun to experiment with a hybrid approach that imports the *outside-the-system* thinking that characterizes charter schools – and attempts to implement it *within* the system.

As described in Part 3, the conditions change that has been the focus of these newer efforts can be thought of in two broad categories. One is ensuring that someone within the system, most likely school-level leaders or leadership teams, holds clear authority over the key resources that affect school performance and the implementation of

Philadelphia, Miami-Dade, New York, Oakland, and Boston. The initiatives are often gathered under the mantel of autonomy, with the Edmonton, Canada school district's experience cited as a primary model. (Beginning in the late 1990s, Edmonton pioneered an approach to district governance that placed substantial decision-making authority in the hands of school principals and that has produced promising results.) Increased authority at the school leadership level is sometimes used as a reward for relative high achievement, on the theory that

Decision-makers… have begun to experiment with a hybrid approach that imports the outside-the-system thinking that characterizes charter schools – and attempts to implement it within the system.
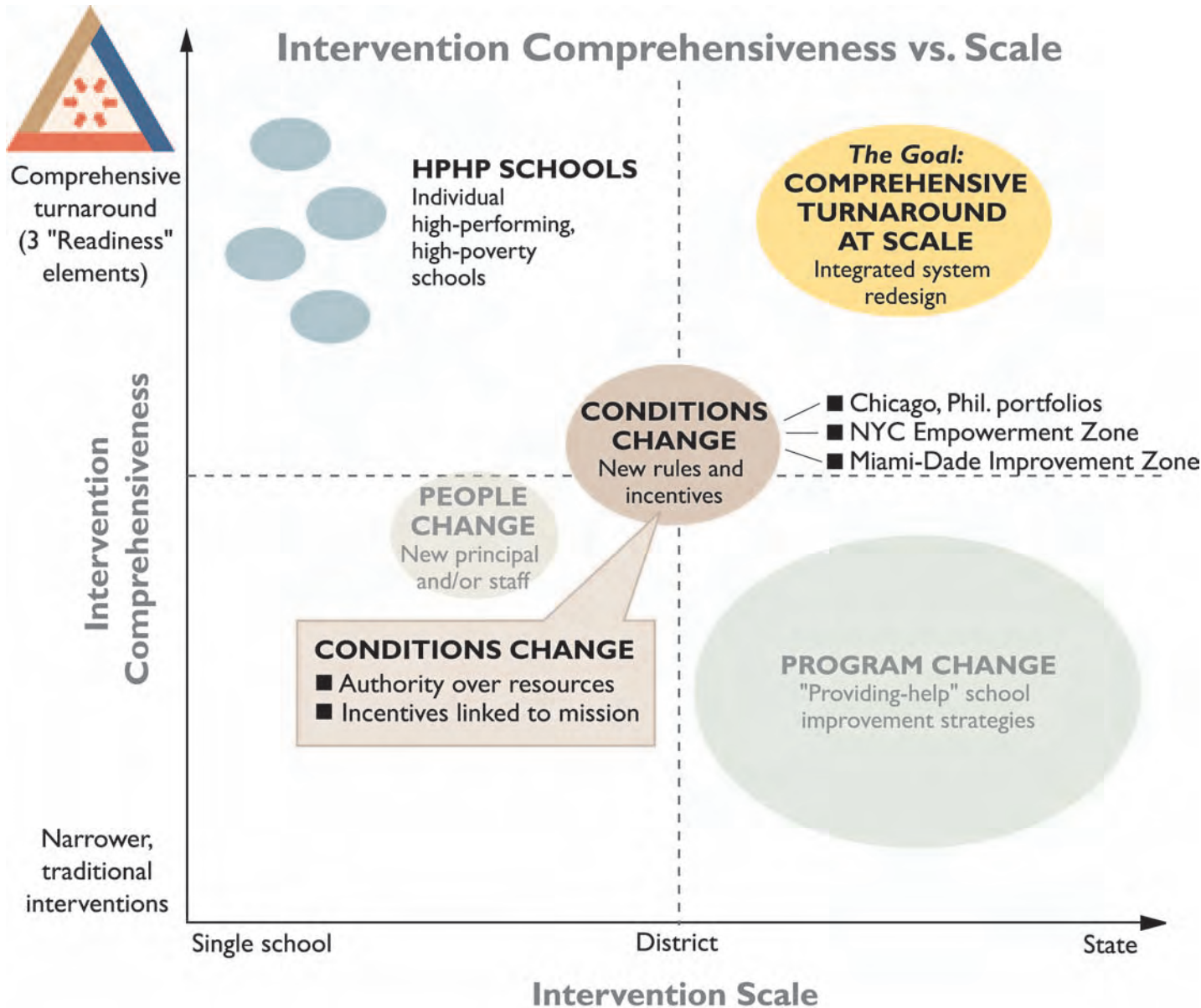
any turnaround plan: people, money, and time. The other is creating strong incentives for people to take on the challenge of turning around chronically under-performing schools, and to do so successfully. The research on the central importance of both authority and incentives is cited in Part 3 as well.

Most of the experimenting with condition change has been undertaken at the district level, by leaders in large urban districts including Chicago,

higher-performing schools could and should be given latitude to pursue their own strategies for improvement. But experiments are also underway to provide that authority (usually along with tighter accountability) to schools that volunteer for it – and, in some cases, to chronically under-performing schools as a central part of a turn-around strategy. These district-based reform efforts are discussed in subsequent pages of this section and in the Supplemental Report.

Getting to *System Redesign* by Incorporating Changes in Operating Conditions

Intervention Comprehensiveness vs. Scale

Comprehensive turnaround (3 "Readiness" elements)

Intervention Comprehensiveness

Narrower, traditional interventions

HPHP SCHOOLS
Individual high-performing, high-poverty schools

The Goal:
COMPREHENSIVE TURNAROUND AT SCALE
Integrated system redesign

CONDITIONS CHANGE
New rules and incentives

■ Chicago, Phil. portfolios
■ NYC Empowerment Zone
■ Miami-Dade Improvement Zone

PEOPLE CHANGE
New principal and/or staff

CONDITIONS CHANGE
■ Authority over resources
■ Incentives linked to mission

PROGRAM CHANGE
"Providing-help" school improvement strategies

Single school   District   State

Intervention Scale

A.4

In this third version of our intervention-vs.-scale "map" of the current landscape of turnaround reform efforts, we place a number of initiatives that attempt to incorporate basic changes in operating conditions, work rules, and incentives as part of their approach to school intervention. By and large, we found, initiatives that include conditions change tend to allow for significant program and people change as well – but that is not always the case.

The initiatives shown here are district-based strategies because these selected, large urban districts have been more entrepreneurial than state policymakers in attempting this multi-dimensional kind of reform. Their experiments are too new to show definitive results, so it is too early to declare that they have found demonstrably effective turnaround pathways for chronically under-performing schools. But they do reflect a more comprehensive, systems-oriented approach that appears to more fully embrace, in our view, the characteristics of the HPHP (High-Performing, High-Poverty) schools profiled in Part 2. These initiatives are briefly described over the following pages and in greater detail in the Supplemental Report.

System Redesign
(continued)

"Inside" and "Outside" Strategies to Transform Operating Conditions

Efforts to change the conditions context in which intervention takes place fall along a continuum from *inside* to virtually *outside* the normal school district governance and management structures, as portrayed in Figure AD.

At the "inside" end of the continuum are strategies that seek to change the conditions for turnaround schools, but largely within existing school district structures and arrangements. Schools remain district operated; staff members remain district employees and members of collective bargaining units; most district and collective bargaining policies still apply to the schools. But there are some special rules, some exceptions to policies that allow these schools to do things differently. Miami's School Improvement Zone, described more fully below and in the Supplemental Report, is a prime example of the inside approach to conditions change. New York's Chancellor's District (an initiative that operated in the 1990s),

The Continuum of *Outside*-the-System Approaches, Applied to Various Degrees *Inside* the System
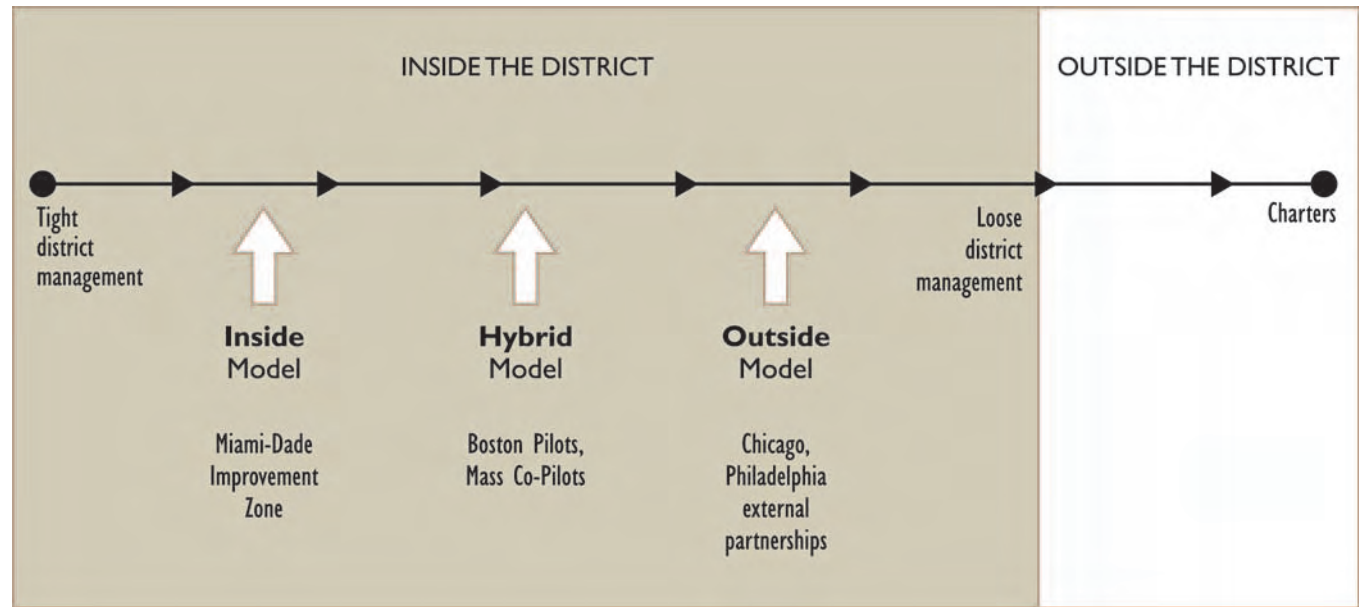
Philadelphia's district-operated low-performing schools, and Chicago's "Performance Schools" fit into this category as well.

At the "outside" end, districts and states effect conditions change by turning over control of schools to outside providers. Through a charter or a contract, these providers gain authority over the key resources of people, time, and money. And through that same contract or charter, they shoulder potentially powerful incentives to succeed or else face revocation or non-renewal of their agreement. While there are many isolated examples of this approach to improving chronically under-performing schools, a small number of districts have begun using this instrument across multiple schools. Philadelphia and Chicago, for example, have entered into contracts and charters with a wide variety of nonprofit and for-profit entities to operate chronically low-performing

schools. In San Diego, four schools facing "Restructuring" under No Child Left Behind were closed and reopened as charter schools under former superintendent Alan Bersin.

In between these two extremes are hybrid efforts to use in-district but charter-like structures to create a condition set that similarly combines authority and incentives (including increased accountability). A leading example of this general approach is Boston's network of "pilot schools" – though Boston has used the pilot mechanism primarily to start new schools rather than to turn around low-performing schools. In pilot schools, teachers remain union members, but the schools receive greater latitude in five areas – curriculum, staffing, budgeting, scheduling, and governance (see box at the end of this section) – to pursue learning models developed individually by staff and leadership at each pilot school. Other districts have created similar arrangements for single schools, such as Worcester, Massachusetts' University Park Campus School, profiled extensively in the Supplemental Report and at Mass Insight's effective-practice research website, www.buildingblocks.org.

The following descriptions profile these approaches – inside, outside, and hybrid – and their emerging results in more detail.

An *Inside* Turnaround Zone Model: Miami-Dade's Improvement Zone

Upon becoming Miami-Dade's superintendent of schools in 2004, Rudolph (Rudy) Crew created the Miami School Improvement Zone, a cluster of 39 schools with chronically low test scores. (Crew had pioneered this approach with the Chancellor's District in New York City, previously.) Schools in the Zone receive the whole range of interventions described in this report. The district provides a great deal of assistance to Zone schools, in the form of intensive teacher training around district-selected curricula. The district also enabled fairly extensive people change, replacing 15 principals at the 39 schools and turning over a significant number of teachers. And the district also changed the schools' operating conditions, negotiating with the teacher's union for the authority to pay Zone teachers 20 percent more to compensate them for working an extra hour per school day and a ten-day-longer school year. (Farrell, 2005)

In contrast to the other approaches described below, conditions-change in the Zone has not revolved around granting more authority to school-level managers. On the contrary, schools in the Zone are subject to more intensive centralized control over such matters as curriculum, scheduling, and teacher training. The conditions-change has had more to do with increased authority in these areas at the district level, via negotiations with the teachers' union. The key idea here is thus not simply the delegation of power to schools, so much as it is *ensuring conditions that support the district's strategies for intervention*. That set of strategies, developed in part by former Miami-Dade deputy superintendent Irving Hamer (who was a principal consultant on this report), involves a suite of nine interlocking elements ranging from new curricula and assessments to close collaboration with social service agencies.

A critical hallmark of Miami-Dade's approach has been the re-establishment of an identity for Zone schools that has helped to make them places where people *want* to work. The district held a successful national recruiting fair for teachers that set that tone even before the Zone opened for its first year – and convinced some teachers who'd thought they might transfer out of the schools to stay. Since then, the schools in the Improvement Zone (which completed its third year in 2006-7), have shown appreciably stronger achievement gains than other Miami-Dade schools in the same time period, though many remain below district averages. See the Supplemental Report for a more detailed analysis.

Outside Forms of Turnaround Zones: Chartering and Contracting

In contrast to Miami's *inside* strategy, the approach of "outsourcing" management – contracting or chartering with outside organizations – places authority and account- ability directly with the school, or with the school operator in the case of contracts with multi-school education management organizations. While 3,600 charter schools operate nationwide, only a small number of schools have been closed and reopened as charter schools in response to chronic low performance. The states of Louisiana and Colorado have taken this step, as has the San Diego school district. (Ziebarth and Wohlstetter, 2005) The Chicago and Philadelphia "portfolio" approaches include complements of schools run by charter management organizations, through these arrangements look more like contracts than independent charters, strictly speaking; the Oakland school district, meanwhile, went so far as to collaborate with outside partners to create a new charter management organization (called Education for Change) to take over two struggling elementary schools.

More common has been the contracting approach, where districts have entered into agreements with an outside entity to manage low-performing schools. These entities come in both for-profit (education management organizations, or EMOs) and non-profit (charter management organizations, or CMOs) varieties, and they also differ substantially in the types of instructional programs they offer and how they are managed. (Colby, Smith, & Shelton, 2005) Many districts have contracted out the management of individual schools, but some have gone farther in an attempt to use contracting as a more scaled-up strategy. These include Baltimore, MD, and Chester, PA, which contracted with Edison Schools for the management of some struggling schools; Philadelphia, which contracts with a range of for-profit EMOs as well as universities and non-profits to manage some of its toughest schools; and Chicago, which is closing low-performing schools and reopening them under a variety of arrangements including contracts. Some states (e.g., Maryland) have experimented with the approach as well, though in the majority of cases (e.g., Hawaii and Massachusetts), the contracting has stopped short of outsourcing authority to run the under-performing schools.

The research on contracting, in general, closely parallels that on chartering – meaning, the results are mixed. A number of charter schools and some contract schools have produced extraordinary results with previously unsuccessful students, but the performance of many other charter and contract schools is similar to or lower than that of comparable schools. Key distinguishers appear to match the conditions context and related analysis outlined above, with flexibility, incentives, and resources – especially human resources – emerging as important factors. At the system level, a rigorous provider selection process, strong accountability for results, and extensive school autonomy appear to support effective chartering. (National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2005) According to a U.S. Department of Education study of successful charter schools, the authority to do things differently is a critical success factor for the schools examined. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004) At the school level, effective school design and highly capable leadership both appear to distinguish successful charter schools, though the specific character- istics of a capable start-up leader are different from those of a capable leader of an on-going school. (Arkin & Kowal, 2005)

With results very mixed, contracting has not proved to be a panacea for districts seeking dramatic improvement. Some experiments, such as Chester, PA's attempt to contract out the management of almost all the system's schools, have failed miser- ably. (Rhim, 2004) In other cities, such as Philadelphia and Baltimore, contracting has achieved mixed but somewhat more encouraging success. (Rhim 2005a, 2005b; Gill et al, 2007); see the profile of Philadelphia in the Supplemental Report for more detail.) But system-level conditions similar to those in chartering appear to facilitate success, including rigorous upfront selection, freedom to act for chosen contractors, and clear contracts that instill results-based accountability. (Rhim 2005a, 2005b) In Chester, for example, the contractor (Edison Schools) did not receive substantial authority over the critical resources, especially staff.

The issues surrounding chartering and contracting as strategies for intervention mirror the challenges facing struggling schools in general. As a study completed by Mass Insight for the NewSchools Venture Fund (2007) showed, the provider "marketplace" currently lacks both the capacity and, to a strong degree, sufficient interest in contracting with school districts to run turnaround schools. Most of the

executives at the 50 CMOs and EMOs interviewed for that study expressed skepticism that the contracts would provide them with the autonomy and the resources they believe would be required to turn around a struggling school. The experience of those who had done some contract work for school districts, in fact, bears out that skepticism. (Mass Insight, 2007) In one noteworthy example, the Green Dot charter management organization elected to create a set of small charters within the enrollment draw area of Jefferson High School in Los Angeles, because it could not arrive at an agreement with the LAUSD for turnaround of Jefferson High that gave Green Dot the authority it felt it needed. In other large districts, even when the commitment to autonomy from district red tape was strong at the superintendent level, contract operators reported that this commitment did not necessarily extend into the middle layers of the district bureaucracy, which precipitated issues around facility use and non-educational services such as transportation and food.

In short, chartering and contracting have not proved, *by themselves*, to be the answer to the problem of chronically under-performing schools. While these "outsourced-management" arrangements show promise in sometimes bringing together important elements for intervention – in the form of program, people, and conditions change – the track record for experiments being pursued under this approach is too mixed (and is still too young) to have yielded conclusive results. These strategies present, in addition, other questions that are difficult to address: for example, what happens when a contract for management of an under-performing school expires? If the work has been successful, is the contract extended or is the now adequately-performing school returned to the school district – and under what kinds of conditions?

Outcomes emerging from some larger district/partner collaborations, such as the First Things First program being implemented by the Kansas City, KS school district with the non-profit group IRRE (Institute for Research and Reform in Education), indicate that sustained, comprehensive partnerships encompassing all three forms of change, in some manner, can produce improvement. The question is whether – and how – school districts and states can combine effective partnering with outside-of-the-system conditions and a comprehensive, integrated reform approach to turn around the most dysfunctional, most consistently under-performing schools. That question is taken up in Part 5 of this report.

How Ready Are Districts to Contract Successfully with Turnaround Partners?

Mass Insight's 2007 study for NewSchools Venture Fund identified four variables that indicate school districts' readiness to contract effectively with outside partners to pursue turnaround in under-performing schools:

1. **Interest in using outside providers for restructuring:** district leadership commitment to shake up the status quo, along with legal/regulatory "permission"

2. **Willingness to grant providers sufficient autonomy:** through chartering or contracting – with autonomies clearly spelled out in the contract language

3. **Stability and clout of educational and political leadership:** strong mayor as important as strong superintendent, in some cases buttressed by state intervention providing additional powers

4. **Financial/contractual viability of turnaround initiative:** adequate funding (see page 79) and appropriate contracting mechanisms and capacity.

Source: Considering School Turnarounds: Market Research and Analysis in Six Urban Districts, Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007

A.4

A *Hybrid* Inside/Outside Model: Boston's Pilot Schools

As shown in Figure AD, there is a continuum of possibilities between Miami-Dade's internal, district-centric effort to transform operating conditions in struggling schools and the outsourcing strategies of chartering and contracting. Some districts have pursued a strategy that combines inside and outside approaches to conditions change, the best example of which may be Boston's "pilot schools" strategy. Pilot schools first opened in 1995 through an unusual agreement between the district, the teachers' union, and other parties. Under this agreement, pilot schools enjoy five "autonomies": budget, staffing, scheduling, curriculum/instruction/assessment, and governance/policies – in short, precisely the sort of authority associated with conditions change we have studied in this report. Yet unlike charter and contract schools, pilot schools are still squarely within-district schools, and staff remain members of the city's collective bargaining unit.

A recent evaluation of Boston's pilot schools found that they use their autonomy to make time for faculty collaboration, reduce class sizes and teacher loads, increase the length of instructional periods, create a "nurturing" school culture, and require competency or mastery beyond statewide requirements for graduation. (Center for Collaborative Education, 2006) The evaluation also cites strong student performance results for the pilot schools, relative to regular district schools. (For example, 84% of pilot school students passed the state 10th grade English Language Arts exam in 2005, compared to 58% of Boston Public School students overall. The study also points to better attendance and fewer discipline issues as signals of these schools' success.) Skeptics of their success note that they are "opt-in" academies (as are charter schools) that serve more motivated students (and fewer trouble-makers) than regular public schools.

The pilot school approach was not originally developed as a way to conduct turnaround of under-performing schools; like charter schools, and like other initiatives such as Edmonton's school-level autonomy approach, New York City's Empowerment Zone, and Oakland's Results-Based Budgeting program, it reflects the idea that decentralizing some forms of decision-making authority will ensure that "those closest to the students... get to make the key decisions" (to quote from New York's description of its *Children First* initiative, announced in January 2007). If all of this sounds a bit like the site-based management wave of reform that had its heyday in the late 1980s and early 1990s, that's because it *is* a descendent in many ways of that movement, but with more careful attention being paid, generally, to the mix of "tight" (centralized) and "loose" (decentralized) authorities across the various domains in which schools operate: instruction, assessment, human resource management, facilities management, transportation, policy compliance, etc. We study the loose-tight blend of authority in our discussion of a potential state and district framework for school turnaround in Part 4, and in the profiles of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Miami-Dade in the Supplemental Report.

Boston's Pilot School model has recently become the centerpiece of a new experiment by the Massachusetts State Board of Education – one that merits close attention. Seeking ways to motivate districts to pursue more dramatic, transformational turnaround of failing schools, Board chair Christopher Anderson invited three districts (Boston, Springfield, and Fitchburg) to use a new Commonwealth Pilot (or "Co-Pilot") turnaround option to avoid having the "chronically under-performing" label pinned on four schools. The schools were essentially given two alternatives: take ownership of a substantial conversion process into a Co-Pilot School, or accept much more intensive state intervention. All four schools elected, with union support and 80% faculty votes, to enter into Co-Pilot status and submitted plans that met the state's ten "enabling conditions" (see page 74) and other criteria. They were to reopen in the fall of 2007 as Co-Pilots with many of the autonomies described here, supported by their district and a Co-Pilot network managed by the Center for Collaborative Education. It's an interesting experiment in achieving the right balance of local control/buy-in, state-specified turnaround criteria, and network support. The keys to success will lie in adjusting the Pilot model to suit a turnaround context – which would mean firmer support and direction from the network – and ensuring that the network provider has the necessary resources to provide the required external capacity.

The Five Autonomies of Boston's Pilot Schools

Staffing: Teachers who work in Pilot Schools are exempt from teachers' union contract work rules, while still receiving union salary, benefits, and accrual of seniority within the district. Teachers voluntarily choose to work at Pilot Schools; when hired, they sign what is called an "election-to-work agreement," which stipulates the work conditions for each school for the coming school year. The agreement is revisited and revised annually with staff input.

Budgetary: Rather than receiving most of their budget through staffing allocation formulas set by the district, Pilot Schools receive a lump sum per pupil amount equal to other BPS (Boston Public) schools that each Pilot School is able to allocate as they see fit. As well, Pilot Schools can decide whether or not to purchase discretionary central office services from the district. If a service is not purchased, the per pupil amount for that service is added to the school's lump sum per pupil budget. The total amount of central discretionary services is approximately $500 per pupil.

Curriculum and Assessment: Pilot Schools… are not required to follow district-mandated curriculum or assessments. Pilot Schools often create or modify curriculum to fulfill each individual school's mission. For example, one Pilot School is focused on expeditionary learning, and staff planned a whole curriculum around the idea of survival. Staff engagement [reportedly has] increased with their increased decision-making capabilities.

Governance: Several different decision-making bodies exist in Pilot Schools, drawing on the voices of staff, students, and families. Staff decision-making groups may include leadership teams, curriculum teams, and committees. Governing boards in Pilot Schools have more authority than traditional school site councils. Pilot School governing boards consist of the principal, staff (at least four), family representatives, community members (including from higher education, business, community organizations), and for middle and high schools, students. Their respective peers elect staff, family, and student representatives, while the overall governing board selects community members.

Scheduling: Schools vary the length and schedule of instructional periods, which allows staff more flexibility in their teaching. Many Pilot Schools choose to increase the length of instructional blocks to improve teaching and learning. Extra time allows staff and students to pursue a subject more deeply. Teachers also have the possibility of teaching an interdisciplinary curriculum and team-teaching. Pilot Schools are [also] able to modify the school schedule and calendar. High schools may determine start and end times for their schools (elementary and middle schools are still constrained by the district bus schedule); as a result, most Pilot high schools start later in the day than regular BPS schools.

Excerpted from *The Essential Guide to Pilot Schools*, Center for Collaborative Education; available at www.cce.org

A Demanding Strategy

Two broad points about conditions change as a key element in turning around low-performing schools appear warranted from our examination of what's been tried. First: the nature of this principle and the newness of its application within a turnaround context point to the need for much more research into which authorities can effectively be decentralized and which should more logically remain the province of a centralized network operator – in most cases, a school district – and how this loose-vs.-tight equation should be adjusted for higher, lower, or the most chronically poor-performing schools. "Loose-vs.-tight," in our view, may well become the critical school reform research question of this decade. (For a compelling analysis already published, see Colby, Smith, and Shelton, 2005. Mass Insight is planning an in-depth research-and-development process to produce a set of recommendations on this issue for school networks.)

Second: districts and states need substantial capacity of their own to engage in successful conditions change, even if it is part of a strategy that devolves authority to schools or to outside providers. It is tempting to think of changing conditions as a low-investment strategy, one that involves changing rules and policies but otherwise not requiring the substantial funding and related support associated with such approaches as providing guidance via school assistance teams. Research and experience with conditions change, however, tell another story. Chartering and contracting, for example, require significant investment in systems to recruit and develop providers, select qualified operators, design RFPs and contracts that reflect research-based reform criteria, monitor contract performance, and take action when contract performance falls short. Failure to develop such systems underlies many of the problems that have emerged with chartering and contracting approaches nationally. (Kowal and Arkin, 2005; Arkin and Kowal, 2005) The importance of such systems would be doubled when a district or state wants to undertake conditions change for the purpose of school turnaround – and doubled again when turnaround is undertaken at scale, across a number of schools and districts simultaneously.

A.4

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Mass Insight
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BUILDING BLOCKS
The Building Blocks Initiative
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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 under-performing public schools.

We are:

Synthesizers and providers of research. Mass Insight is a national resource for practical information on how to effectively implement standards-based education. *The Turnaround Challenge* represents a new form of educational policy research: highly graphical, presented in varying user-formats (print, presentation, web), and expressly designed to spur action on both the policy and practice fronts. Our *Building Blocks Initiative* (www.buildingblocks.org) has been cited as a model for effective-practice research by the U.S. Department of Education. The landmark *Keep the Promise Initiative* studied urban, at-risk high school students in the first three classes subject to Massachusetts' MCAS graduation requirement and district strategies for serving them.

Policy facilitators. We are a leading statewide convener and catalyst for thoughtful, informed state education policymaking. Mass Insight's *Great Schools Campaign* and its predecessor, the *Campaign for Higher Standards*, have played a highly visible role in shaping the priorities of Massachusetts' second decade of school reform. Mass Insight consults on education policy formation outside Massachusetts as well - most recently helping to design school turnaround programs in Illinois and Washington State.

Leaders in standards-based services to schools. We provide practical, research-based technical services, staff and leadership development programs, and consulting services to schools and school districts - particularly to members of the *Great Schools Coalition*, a 10-year-old partnership of nearly 30 change-oriented Massachusetts districts. Our field services have focused on math and science, and over the next five-to-ten years will revolve principally around using increased access to AP® courses and improved performance on AP tests to catalyze dramatic cultural and instructional change in schools across grades 6-12. The effort will be funded in part through the National Math & Science Initiative, which recently awarded Mass Insight $13 million as the Massachusetts lead on a competitive national RFP.

See www.massinsight.org for more details.

School Turnaround: *a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that produces significant gains in student achievement within two academic years.*