COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STUDENTS

The goal for America's educational system is clear: Every student should graduate from high school ready for college or a career. Every student should have meaningful opportunities to choose from upon graduation from high school. But while all states have developed and implemented standards as required under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), in many cases, these standards do not reflect the knowledge and skills needed for success after high school, either in further education or in a job. Four out of every 10 new college students, including half of those at two-year institutions, take remedial courses, and many employers comment on the inadequate preparation of high school graduates. And while states have developed assessments aligned with their standards, in many cases theses assessments do not adequately measure student growth or the knowledge and skills that students need, nor do they provide timely, useful information to teachers. We must follow the lead of the nation's governors and challenge students with state-developed, college- and career-ready standards, and more accurately measure what they are learning with better assessments. We must reward the success of schools that are making significant progress, ask for dramatic change in the lowest-performing schools, and address persistent gaps in student academic achievement and graduation rates.

OUR APPROACH

► Supporting college- and career-ready standards, preparing college- and career-ready students.

► Rewarding progress and success.

► Turning around the lowest-performing schools.

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COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STUDENTS

OUR APPROACH

► **Rigorous college- and career-ready standards.** Require states to set standards that meaningfully map towards readiness for college or a career.

► **Rigorous and fair accountability and support at every level.** Reward schools, districts, and states for success, require rigorous interventions in the lowest performers, and allow local flexibility to achieve results in most cases.

► **Measuring and supporting schools, districts, and states.** Use disaggregated data on progress and growth, as well as graduation rates and (if states choose) achievement in subjects other than English language arts and math, to fairly and accurately assess school needs and appropriately target strategies.

► **Building capacity for support at every level.** Build state and district capacity to support schools, school leaders, teachers, and students.

► **Fostering comparability and equity.** Encourage increased resource equity at every level of the system.

Standards and Assessments

State standards and assessments generally do not reflect the knowledge and skills needed for student success in college and careers. The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) established a requirement that each state set standards defining what their students should know and be able to do in critical subjects and assess whether students were mastering those standards. Today, in part as a result of these federal requirements, every state has in place a set of K–12 standards for core subjects as well as an assessment system that measures progress toward math and literacy standards in grades 3–8 and once in high school. However, the current ESEA does not ask states to consider whether those standards are based on evidence of what students need to be successful in college and the workplace. Nor does the law ask that states' standards build grade by grade toward college- and career-readiness. The result is that standards and assessments do not inform

students, parents, or teachers whether students are on track toward college- and career-readiness.

Low standards and inadequate academic preparation of high school graduates result in high costs for individuals and the nation. Among 2003–04 high school seniors who had enrolled in postsecondary education by 2006, 40 percent took remedial courses; in public two-year colleges, the remediation was needed for 51 percent of their entering students (NCES, 2010). The total cost of this remediation is $1.4 billion a year. Because remedial students are more likely to drop out of college, their earning potential falls, which costs the nation's gross domestic product an estimated $2.3 billion a year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006).

Students who do not attend college will need additional workforce training to advance their careers. Nearly eight in 10 future job openings in the next decade in the U.S. will require some workforce training or postsecondary education

(Holzer and Lerman, 2009). Whether preparing for college or a career, high school graduates need to have the foundational skills to enable them to learn additional academic and job-specific skills, both at the entry-level and throughout their careers (Achieve, 2004). A comparison of ACT tests that measure workforce readiness with those that measure college readiness found similar content and expectations on both types of tests (ACT, 2006).

The rigor of standards and assessments varies widely from state to state. Under the current version of ESEA, virtually every state has developed not only its own content standards and assessments aligned to those standards, but also its own definition of proficiency. Because of this lack of uniformity, students with the same actual achievement levels could be considered "proficient" in one state, but may not be in another. Comparing states' performance on the yardstick of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a rigorous assessment that is consistent across all states and is known as "the nation's report card," reveals that states have significantly different definitions of proficiency. Some states reporting a high percentage of students performing at the proficient level actually have lower student achievement than other states with a relatively

small percentage of students at the proficient level. For example, Mississippi's state assessment indicates that 89 percent of its fourth-graders were proficient in reading in 2004–05, compared with only 50 percent in Massachusetts. Yet, on the consistently applied measure of the NAEP, Massachusetts has the highest fourth-grade reading score in the nation; Mississippi ranks next to last (Carey, 2006).

By translating each state's proficiency standard into an equivalent NAEP point score, researchers have documented the large range of variation across the states. Figure 1 illustrates this variation for eighth-grade mathematics. The range in the NAEP-equivalent proficiency standard between South Carolina (312) and Tennessee (234) is 78 points, more than twice the 37-point difference between the NAEP basic (262) and the NAEP proficient (299) level. Similar patterns were found for fourth-grade reading and math and for eighth-grade reading (Bandeira de Mello, Blankenship, and McLaughlin, 2009). As a result, students who move to another state may find that the standards that guided their education in one state have not prepared them for what they are expected to learn in another state or for the demands of college and a career.

College Readiness Indicators

Increasing numbers of states are tracking student data on college readiness indicators, showing both that States see the importance of such data in judging school quality and that they have already laid the groundwork for including such indicators in public reporting and accountability systems:

- ► AP course-taking (31 states).
- ► Dual credit courses (25 states).
- ► Percentage of high school graduates who go to college (21 states).
- ► College remediation rates of public high school graduates (32 states).
- ► College GPA, credit attainment, or other academic indicators for students from individual high schools (14 states).
- ► SAT, ACT, or AP scores (9 states).
- ► One year college retention rates (9 states).

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2010); Aldeman and Carey, 2009; Data Quality Campaign (2010).

Figure 1
NAEP Scale Equivalent Scores Corresponding to State Standards for Proficient Performance in 8th-Grade Mathematics, by State, 2007
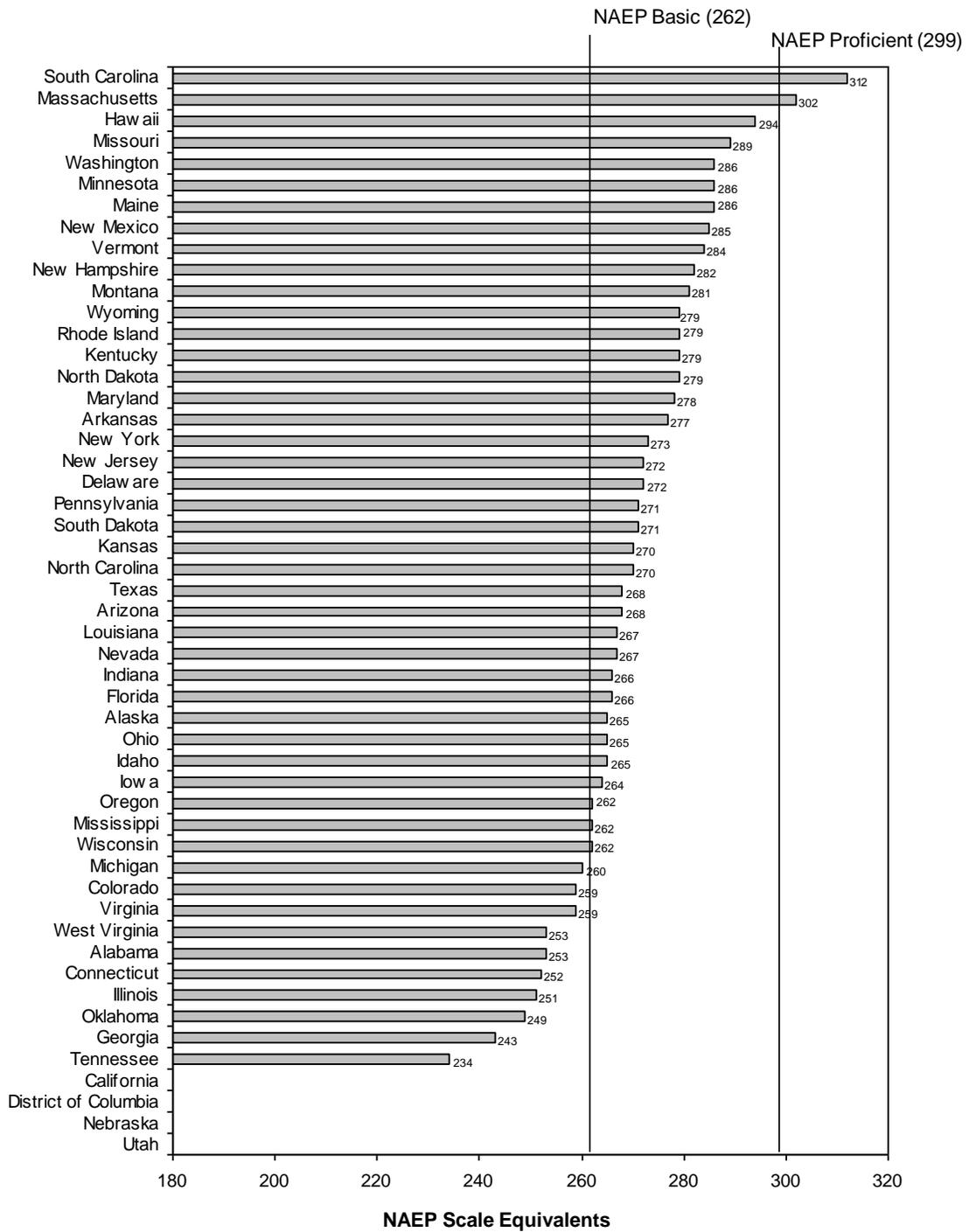
Source: Bandeira de Mello et al., (2009)

Under the accountability system introduced by NCLB, many states have lowered their standards. By comparing the NAEP scale equivalent of each state's standards from 2005 to 2007, researchers documented that in states with a significant change in their NAEP scale equivalent, standards most commonly became easier. In eighth-grade mathematics, for example, among 12 states with a significant change in their NAEP scale equivalent, nine had significantly decreased their expectations; only three significantly increased them. In eighth-grade reading, all seven states with a statistically significant change had lowered their standards (Bandeira de Mello et al., 2009). Recognizing the importance of college- and career-ready standards, almost every state has joined a state-led initiative to develop a common core set of standards for mathematics and English language arts (ELA) that reflect what students need to know and be able to do for success after high school.

Accountability and Support

Current accountability provisions do not take into account growth and progress or reward excellence. Under the current ESEA, schools are labeled and subject to interventions based on whether they have made adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the goal of all students performing

Common Core State Standards Initiative

Governors and state commissioners from 48 states, the District of Columbia, and two territories have joined a state-led initiative to develop a common core set of standards for mathematics and English language arts. Developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, these standards will define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K—12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The standards will be based on evidence of what knowledge and skills are needed to enroll in college courses without remediation and to be successful in careers, internationally benchmarked to the world's highest performing countries, and build on the strengths and lessons of current State standards.

The initiative is being coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. An advisory group providing guidance includes experts from Achieve, Inc., ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

This initiative is intended to benefit:

► *Students*—by providing clear and consistent expectations across all states of what is expected of them to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete globally.

► *Parents*—by improving understanding of what is expected of students for career and college success.

► *Educators*—by focusing pre-service preparation and professional development on the standards and assessments and by having textbooks focused on one set of standards rather than an amalgam of different standards across states.

► *States*—by encouraging the sharing of best practices and enabling cost-sharing and economies of scale in test development and administration.

A public draft of the K—12 standards was released in March 2010 and the final standards are expected in late spring 2010.

(Common Core State Standards Initiative, www.corestandards.org)

at the proficient level on state reading and math assessments by the 2013–14 school year. To make AYP, schools must meet annual measurable objectives based on reaching the 2014 goal for every student demographic subgroup in the school as well as for the school as a whole, must assess at least 95 percent of students in every subgroup, and must meet annual objectives for an "other" academic indicator (e.g., attendance rates or graduation rates). If a school fails to make AYP for two or more consecutive years, NCLB requires that they be identified as in need of improvement and implement specific interventions. With each additional year a school fails to meet AYP, it must implement new requirements. Schools move through the stages of being identified for school improvement, corrective action, and restructuring.[1] The accountability system predominantly focuses on failures and interventions, and does not emphasize rewarding success. Schools that begin with low achievement but make significant progress toward proficiency in most cases do not receive recognition for that progress.

NCLB's accountability measures do not adequately differentiate among schools based on their specific challenges. All low-performing schools are not the same: some may be making significant gains, while others may be stuck in a pattern of chronic low performance. For example, a recent study of low-performing schools found that in Indiana and Maryland, a

sizeable proportion of schools that were in the bottom quartile of reading performance in 2005 made gains over the next four years that put them among the top-improving schools in their state (Ushomirsky and Hall, 2009). Nevertheless, NCLB treats low-performing but improving schools the same as low-performing schools that have had stagnant performance year after year. In addition, while some schools have been identified for improvement based on low achievement of students throughout the school, others have been identified based on achievement gaps. Among schools that did not make AYP in the 2005–06 school year, 24 percent missed AYP due to the achievement of a single subgroup, while 35 percent missed AYP for the achievement of the school as a whole; the remaining schools missed for multiple subgroups or failing to meet a combination of indicators (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). Despite these differences among schools, NCLB uses the same labels for each type of school and prescribes the same series of interventions for all schools that do not meet one or more AYP status-based targets for two or more years, regardless of how many student subgroups are low-performing, the amount by which they missed achievement targets, or whether the school is making progress.

Under current law, large numbers of schools are identified for improvement, and the number of schools is likely to continue to

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[1] In the first year that a school is identified for improvement, NCLB interventions include requirements for professional development, technical assistance, and offering students the option to transfer to a non-identified school in the district. If the school misses AYP again after being identified, the district must give students from low-income families the option to receive supplemental educational services (e.g., tutoring) from state-approved providers. If such schools miss AYP for another year after identification, districts must take at least one of a series of corrective actions at the school, such as requiring a new curriculum or replacing school staff members. If a school does not make AYP after one year of corrective action, NCLB calls for major restructuring of the school, beginning with a year of planning for restructuring followed by actual restructuring the next year if the school misses AYP for a sixth year. NCLB lists specific interventions that schools in restructuring status must implement, including replacing all or most of the staff, turning operation of the school over to the State, reopening the school as a charter school, or entering into a contract with a private entity to manage the school—but the law also allows for "any other major restructuring of the school's governance arrangement." Identified schools and districts exit improvement status when they make AYP for two consecutive years.

grow rapidly, undermining the credibility of the law and straining the ability of states and districts to intervene effectively to address school needs. From 2004–05 to 2008–09, the total number of schools in improvement status rose by 30 percent (from 9,699 to 12,597), while the number in restructuring status more than tripled (rising from 1,180 to 5,017) (ED*Facts*). As 2014, the year in which NCLB expects all students to be proficient, approaches, these numbers will likely grow dramatically. The increases are expected to be especially large in the 27 states that set low annual achievement objectives in the early years of NCLB implementation and whose objectives now require large increases each year (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). Moreover, states that have set high standards and have rigorous definitions of proficiency already have a high proportion of schools identified under NCLB as needing intervention. In 2006–07, 12 states had identified more than one-third of their Title I schools.

State officials have frequently expressed concern about their capacity to provide continued support to the increasing number of schools being identified for improvement and the growing number of schools moving into corrective action and restructuring (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). In a survey of state education officials conducted by the Center on Education Policy in 2006, most state educational agency respondents reported that insufficient numbers of staff limited the state's capacity to provide technical assistance to districts with schools in improvement either to a "great extent" (27 states) or a moderate extent (18 states). Large numbers of states also pointed to lack of in-house expertise, inadequate federal funds, inadequate state funds, and an inability to attract and retain qualified staff (Minnici and Hill, 2007).

States are looking for ways to provide the

most intensive assistance where it is needed most, especially to chronically underperforming schools. In July 2008 and January 2009, the Department approved waivers for nine states to implement differentiated accountability pilot plans that allow them to vary the intensity and type of interventions provided in Title I schools identified for improvement (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, and Ohio). Participating states reported that differentiated accountability has improved the state's capacity to provide technical assistance and support that was more appropriate to the individual needs of schools, particularly for the lowest-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, forthcoming).

Building Capacity for Support at Every Level

State and district capacity to support educators in areas like data-driven decision-making and effective use of technology are important elements of school improvement. Districts and schools that are improving generally show a commitment to the use of student assessment data to diagnose weaknesses and guide improvement efforts. They provide data to teachers and principals in a timely manner, train teachers in how to use these data effectively and give the teachers time to analyze the data (Datnow, Park, and Wohlstetter, 2007; Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy, 2002). But few districts have the capacity to realize the full potential of student data. While nearly all districts have student information systems, fewer than half have data systems that allow staff to link outcomes to inputs and processes that lead to continuous improvement. Despite a dramatic increase in teacher access to student data in the past few years, in most cases the data systems available to teachers do not provide the information and tools they need for ongoing instructional decision making. Only 37 percent of

all teachers in 2007 had achievement data from a data system for their current students, and only 11 percent had access to longitudinal achievement information for current students (U.S. Department of Education, 2009c).

State and district supports for high-quality early learning programs and promoting family engagement can strengthen school performance. High-quality preschool programs and smooth transitions to kindergarten can help prevent and reduce gaps in skills and achievement, reduce grade retention and the over-identification of students as children with disabilities, and ensure that high-need children are successful in school and life (Pungello et al., 2010; Frede, Jung, Barnett, and Figueras, 2009; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Schulting, Malone, and Dodge, 2005; Bogard and Takanishi, 2005; Ramey and Ramey, 2004). Many researchers have found that parental involvement in a child's education is positively associated with increases in student academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005; Fan and Chen, 2001; Henderson and Berla, 1994), and school-sponsored parental involvement programs may indirectly improve student achievement by increasing parents' expectations or improving parenting skills related to education (D'Agostino, Hedges, Wong, and Borman, 2001). Allowing districts and states flexibility over how they support their schools in implementing these strategies will enable them to tailor specific approaches to the individual needs of each school.

Comparability and Equity

The current Title I comparability requirement is intended to ensure that Title I funds are supplementing an equitable base of state and local resources, but it is not having that effect. Since 1970, Title I has required districts to assure that state and local funds provided to Title I schools are comparable to those in non-Title I schools. However, the comparability provisions have been diluted over the years, and current law allows districts to meet the requirement by providing a written assurance that they have a districtwide salary schedule and polices to ensure equivalence among schools in various types of resources (McClure, 2008).

In addition, the law specifies that staff salary differentials for years of experience shall not be taken into account, so comparability calculations are based on average salaries across the district rather than actual salaries of staff within each school. As a result, the provision allows significant within-district disparities in school resources, and a high-poverty Title I school with less experienced, lower-paid teachers can be deemed "comparable" under the law to a low-poverty non-Title I school with more experienced teachers (Hall and Ushomirsky, 2010; Luebchow, 2009; Roza, 2008).

Nationally, teachers in the highest-poverty schools received salaries that were 10 percent lower, on average, than those for teachers in the lowest-poverty schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b). An in-depth study of five urban districts by Roza and Hill (2004) found that four out of five urban districts spent less on the highest-poverty schools than on the lowest-poverty schools. The difference ranged from 10 percent to 23 percent of a school's budget. These disparities were largely driven by the ability of more experienced, higher-salaried teachers to obtain teaching assignments in lower-poverty schools while newer, lower-salaried teachers were assigned to higher-poverty schools.

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SCHOOL TURNAROUND GRANTS

OUR APPROACH

► **Large grants for significant changes.** Support states, districts and schools in implementing the rigorous interventions required in each state's lowest performing schools.

► **District choice of four models.** All models require dramatic change, but districts have substantial flexibility in choosing which model best fits school and community needs.

► **Capacity building.** Build state capacity to support schools, such as through school quality review teams.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), states and districts frequently chose the least intensive reform options. Less than one quarter of the schools in the second year of restructuring status under NCLB reported using the four specific interventions in the law, suggesting that the vast majority were implementing an "other" strategy as allowed by current law (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). An in-depth study of five states found that the "other" option was used from 86 to 96 percent of the time, depending on the state (Center on Education Policy, 2009).

Incremental reforms have failed to turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools. Few schools in restructuring status have succeeded in moving out of school improvement status. Among schools that were in restructuring status in 2004–05, only 19 percent had moved out of restructuring status by 2006–07 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Districts often approach persistently low-performing schools by utilizing serial, siloed reforms, which are ineffective. For example, over the past 11 years, a particular middle school in California has experienced a variety of incremental reforms. Yet, achievement has

Forest Grove High School
Forest Grove, Oregon

Forest Grove High School is the only high school in the town of Forest Grove and serves over 1,900 students. Starting in 2002, the school hired a new principal, who set high expectations for student achievement, emphasized data-driven decision-making and provided targeted professional development for all teachers. Forest Grove has also implemented a small learning community to personalize the high school. Components include an award-winning "Links" program for incoming ninth-graders, "student houses" for all ninth and tenth grade students and career pathways for juniors and seniors. In addition, Forest Grove has increased its offerings in AP courses from eight to 24.

Prior to 2002, fewer than half of students were meeting or exceeding standards in reading, and less than a third were proficient in math. By 2008–09, 76 percent of students met or exceeded proficiency in reading, 83 percent met or exceeded proficiency in math, and in both subjects Forest Grove students outperformed their peers at the state levels. Between 2003 and 2009, the percentage of Hispanic students meeting or exceeding standards jumped from 19 percent to 60 percent in reading and from 13 percent to 73 percent in math, while for low-income students the percentage increased from 18 percent to 63 percent in reading and from 10 percent to 73 percent in math. Forest Grove received the state's "Closing the Achievement Gap" Award four years in a row, and has reduced the dropout rate from 7 percent in 2002 to 2 percent in 2008.

remained stagnant, with only 3 percent of students proficient in math and 11 percent in English in 2009 (Manwaring, 2010). Research indicates that turning around a persistently low-performing school requires intensive effort and strong support from school districts and partner organizations (Center on Education Policy, 2009; Pinkus, 2009; Mass Insight, 2007). Incremental reforms are unlikely to be successful (Mass Insight, 2007).

Persistent failure is not inevitable—around the nation there are high-poverty, chronically low-performing schools making dramatic improvements in achievement, rates of student growth, and graduation rates. Emerging research on recent efforts finds that low-performing schools that dramatically improve student results rely on common strategies to turn around.

Build a positive culture of high expectations. In high-poverty, high-performing schools, school staff have high expectations for all students and hold themselves accountable for their students' success (Woodworth et al., 2008; Mass Insight, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Chenoweth, 2007; EdSource, 2006; Kannapel and Clements, 2005;

Education Trust, 1999). Staff in successful turnarounds do the same and build a positive school culture of high expectations, whereas chronically low-performing schools do not (Brinson, Kowal and Hassel, 2008; Mass Insight, 2007; EdSource, 2006; Duke, 2006).

Ensure strong leadership and staff who have the commitment and skills to increase student achievement. Great teachers matter. Studies suggest that a student who has a good teacher for several years in a row will be on a path of continued growth and success, while a student who is taught by a succession of less effective teachers will continue to lag behind (Hanushek, 2009; Rivkin et al., 2005; Nye et al., 2004; Aaronson et al., 2003). Strong school leadership is also essential. Second to classroom instruction, school leadership is the most important school-based variable affecting student achievement – and key to creating a school culture focused on learning and high expectations and to providing support for staff (Leithwood et al., 2004 and Murphy et al., 2006). In fact, teachers cite a principal's support and effectiveness as a leading factor that contributes to their decision to remain in teaching (Futernick, 2007). Where schools have been

Benwood Initiative
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Prior to the start of Chattanooga's Benwood Initiative, the eight Benwood schools were ranked among the state's 20 lowest-performing elementary schools. With the initiative, the district placed most of their emphasis on strengthening staff, replacing most principals in the original eight Benwood schools and requiring all teachers to reapply for their jobs, although many were rehired. As part of their talent-focused strategy, the initiative invested in teacher professional development to improve the quality of instruction, offered incentives to attract and retain effective staff, and provided leadership coaches to help principals and assistant principals guide and evaluate teachers.

Among the gains in student achievement: from 2003 to 2009, the percentage of Benwood third-graders scoring proficient or advanced on state reading tests rose by 20 percentage points, from 53 percent to 73 percent, and in math, students gained 19 percentage points from 50 percent to 69 percent. During that same time fifth-graders made even greater gains with large jumps in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in reading and math. Students gained 27 percentage points from 62 percent to 89 percent in reading and 32 percentage points from 57 percent to 89 percent in math.

Denver Public Schools
Denver, Colorado

Denver Public Schools has engaged in a comprehensive strategy of school performance management since 2004. As a part of that strategy, the district has provided supports and interventions in schools with declining enrollment and persistently low academic performance, including offering financial and program supports to turn around struggling schools, transforming chronically underperforming schools, and closing historically underperforming schools. In 2007, as part of this broader strategy to turn around schools with declining academic performance and enrollment, the district closed eight schools and placed students in higher-performing or new schools. The district also approved significant interventions for six additional schools in 2009 and will begin the implementation of each of the four school intervention models in fall 2010.

In the schools that were closed in 2007-2008, data shows that students moved to other schools are performing better, on average than they did before the school closures. Rates of student growth in 2008-2009 exceeded rates from previous years in all three tested subjects, and exceeded the state average, in all three tested subjects and increased 8 percentiles in math and 11 percentiles in writing. For example, Stedman Elementary School received students from school closures, and students who were transferred have shown much academic progress. These students' proficiency rates increased from 14 percent to 42 percent in writing, 43 percent to 57 percent in reading, and 29 percent to 79 percent in math.

struggling for years, research shows new leaders need to be able to build effective teams that are able to accomplish this critical work. Thus, turnarounds often begin with significant changes in school leadership and staff in order to create a new school culture that emphasizes achievement and shared responsibility for student success (Herman et al., 2008; Silva, 2008; Mass Insight, 2007; Duke, 2006; Kowal and Hassel, 2005). Successful turnaround leaders make it a high priority to recruit and retain strong staff while

replacing low performers (Kowal, Rosch, et al., 2009; Herman et al., 2008; Silva, 2008; Mass Insight, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Duke, 2006). And, many successful turnarounds provide focused and intensive professional development (Silva, 2008; Herman et al., 2008; Murphy, 2007; EdSource, 2006).

Strengthen the instructional program, extend learning time and engage families and communities. Many turnarounds also take steps to strengthen their instructional programs by aligning their curriculum with standards and by facilitating teacher collaboration (Herman et al, 2008; Silva, 2008; Walberg, 2007; Duke, 2006). Additionally, many turnarounds monitor student progress frequently, use data on student learning to inform and drive instruction, extend learning time, and engage parents and communities to support student success (Brinson, Kowal, and Hassel, 2008; Herman et al, 2008; Silva, 2008; Mass Insight, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Walberg, 2007; Duke, 2006; EdSource, 2006; Kannapel and Clements, 2005).

Change governance to provide flexibility for needed reforms. Governance changes such as creating a turnaround zone or providing schools with additional operational flexibility over budgets, schedules and staffing provide schools with needed reform tools (Mass Insight, 2007). Converting a persistently low-achieving school to a public charter school, another type of governance change, can also lead to significant improvements when the charter school is of high quality (Woodall, 2009; Mass Insight, 2007; Arkin and Kowal, 2005).

Mastery Charter Schools
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Mastery has restarted three low-performing schools in Philadelphia, which will all eventually serve grades 7–12. Also, Mastery serves the same percentages of students with disabilities as its feeder schools; 12 percent at Thomas, 16 percent at Shoemaker and 21 percent at Pickett. To maintain an achievement-driven environment and culture, all schools have a strict schoolwide disciplinary system in addition to a college prep curriculum that includes career training and college admissions seminars. These charter schools also tailor courses to meet students' different skill levels and provide extended learning time as needed, so that all students are ready for college when they graduate.

These efforts have paid off, as Mastery has succeeded in turning around all three campuses that it manages. In the year before Mastery began managing these schools: 29 percent of Thomas students were proficient in reading and 39 percent in math; 43 percent of Shoemaker students were proficient in reading and 31 percent in math; and 22 percent of Pickett students were proficient in reading and 14 percent in math. As of the 2008–09 school year: 66 percent of Thomas students were proficient in reading and 72 percent in math; 78 percent of Shoemaker students were proficient in reading and 87 percent in math; and 64 percent of Pickett students were proficient in reading and 69 percent in math. In all schools within two years of their restart, the percentage of students scoring proficient in reading and math has almost doubled, and in some cases tripled, across all grade levels. Furthermore, in 2009, in all grades tested, Mastery students outperformed the district average in the percent of proficient students in both reading and math. Meanwhile, African-American and low-income students outperformed the state average in these subjects in 7th, 8th and 11th grade.

George Hall Elementary School
Mobile, Alabama

After years of low achievement, George Hall Elementary was identified for restructuring, and the Mobile school district decided to start from scratch. Beginning in the 2004–05 school year, they hired a new principal, and the entire staff was asked to reapply for their jobs. Few members of the former staff returned; the majority of the staff were new to the school. The new staff signed contracts to stay at the school for at least five years. The principal focused on developing staff cohesion, a positive culture, and a curriculum that was aligned with state standards and connected from one grade level to the next.

Since then student achievement has risen sharply. In reading, the percentage of students scoring at or above the proficient level almost doubled from 24 percent in 2003–04 to 43 percent in 2004–05; math gains were even larger, rising from 34 percent to 69 percent. By 2008–09, the percentage of students that scored proficient or above reached 90 percent in reading and 94 percent in math. George Hall has won numerous accolades, including an Education Trust Dispelling the Myth Award in 2009, designation as a U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School in 2008, and Alabama Torchbearer Recognition in 2007 and 2008.

PS 230 (Roland N. Paterson ES)
Bronx, New York

In 2003, PS 230 was designated as a School Under Registration Review (SURR) by the state of New York and would be forced to restructure if its test scores did not improve. That same year, PS 230 hired a new principal to turn around the school. Teachers were reassigned to different roles based on their strengths and weaknesses, with ten released or counseled out after the first year. After establishing clear expectations among the teachers, a Staff Development Consultation Committee made up of the strongest teachers in each grade level was created to conduct peer observations and provide feedback. Teachers sought and received more planning time to draft lesson plans collaboratively. The school aligned its interim assessments with state standards. Teachers also worked together to strengthen the school's curricular materials while implementing New York City's math and English language arts curricula.

In 2003, only 18 percent of fourth-graders scored proficient on state exams and only 12 percent in reading. By 2009, 82 percent of fourth-graders were proficient in math, while 54 percent were proficient in reading.

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