

Indicator: The LEA has examined current state and LEA policies and structures related to central control and made modifications to fully support transformation. (5170)

Explanation: The evidence review suggests that an LEA is more effective in turning around failing schools when it disrupts its own status quo and radically shifts its behaviors from a compliance mindset to a growth mindset. Adopting a growth mindset includes making “students first” decisions. The LEA must commit to making fiscal, governance, human capital, curricular, instruction, and assessment decisions according to what it knows is best for and will accelerate student achievement.

Questions: How will the LEA examine its current practice and evaluate what is and is not serving students first? What process will the LEA employ to discard and or revamp current policies that show no evidence of accelerating student achievement? How will the LEA contextualize a growth mindset and communicate that to key stakeholders?

Evidence Review:

District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success in Previously Unsuccessful Schools describes changes in LEA culture and actions that can promote success in previously failing schools.

District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success in Previously Unsuccessful Schools

Old District Behaviors	New District Behaviors for Successful Restructuring of Failing Schools
District staff members focus on compliance with current policies (since these policies work for most schools and students).	District staff members focus on measuring learning results and regular major restructuring of failing schools.
Administrators are chosen for complying with rules and getting along personally.	Administrators are chosen for getting results, influencing others to change.
District departments stick to previous practices, even if misaligned with changes elsewhere in the district.	District departments work together to make the changes that restructured schools need for student learning.
School goals are set lower to be achievable by more students – to maintain public support for public schools.	Goals are based on what students need to know, think, and o for personal, economic, and civic success; these goals increase and change.
District lets some schools fail many students for many years – if explained by student population.	District sets and sticks to school goals, including improvement timelines; failure leads to major restructuring.
District is willing to try a change to improve – if teachers, parents, community agree.	District is willing to make dramatic changes to help more students learn – even if teachers, parents, or others disagree.
District uses new research about what works for learning if such research is not offensive to interest groups or difficult to organize; practices that do not work are discarded only after careful study.	District regularly adopts new research about what works, with bias toward well-conducted studies; practices are discarded quickly if they do not show measureable learning results.
District provides help and support to schools	District always provides help and support;

upon request; or district provides the same help to all schools, regardless of their particular needs.	such help and support is always targeted at the improvement needs of individual schools.
Student achievement goals are too hard or too easy; rewards, recognition, and consequences for schools are unfair (or not uses).	Student achievement goals are challenging but achievable; rewards, recognition, and consequences flow from goals.
Poor measurement of student learning is used to excuse failing students and schools; measurement is limited to legally required content.	Continuously improving learning measurement is part of the core work of the district and the schools' measurement includes all content valued by the district and schools.
Extra money for failing schools is used to do even more of what is already being done.	Extra money for failing schools is used to introduce restructuring; strategies that work well and fast are given more funding.

(Learning Point Associates, 2010, p. 85)

Reallocating Resources for School Improvement – Guiding Principles for Allocating Resources is an interactive guide that includes numerous audio clips. The six main principles it lists are:

1. Use staff efficiently and be consistent with the priorities in the school improvement plan.
2. Consider time as the most expensive resource.
3. Use community resources when possible.
4. Devote resources to the prevention of academic problems, rather than to remediation.
5. Organize instructional time to support the school's instructional focus.
6. Incorporate time for professional development and teacher collaboration into the daily life of the school.

(Learning Point Associates, 2009)

According to the Reform Support Network (2014), "Many states and LEAs have increased efforts to retain teachers beyond the first few years in a school, especially in turnaround schools. Frequently followed tactics include teacher induction programs, professional development and various other supports for new and experienced staff. These efforts will have the most impact when they focus specifically on retaining highly effective teachers. In fact, the field's real challenge has been to retain more high performers -- those teachers who achieve outstanding results with students year after year, and who leave classrooms at the same or only slightly lower rates than their average or less-effective peers. As SEAs work to help LEAs and schools cut turnover among highly effective teachers in turnaround schools, states may consider two approaches. A systemic approach has program supports aimed at retaining successful teachers across the board, while a tailored, individualized approach aims at keeping individual teachers who are crucial to a successful school turn around" (p. 3).

The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy (2012) holds, "In an era of aggressive public education reform, it is important to ask not only whether new initiatives are effective in raising student achievement, but also how they can best maximize current investments in teaching and learning. While school districts ideally should use comprehensive information systems to develop data-driven budgets that link school spending to desired educational

outcomes, examples of this practice are rare. Instead, school budget models have been mostly constructed piecemeal over decades to meet the increasing demand, and conflicting priorities, of the modern education system. What is needed is a more strategic and deliberative approach to school budgeting, as well as tools and resources to help challenged districts make more efficient and effective spending decisions” (p. 1).

References and Resources

Learning Point Associates. (2009). *Reallocating Resources for School Improvement – Guiding Principles for Allocating Resources*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/reallocation/>

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Reform Support Network. (2014). *Recruiting and Retaining Highly Effective Turnaround Teachers*. Philadelphia, PA: Author. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/recruiting-retaining-turnaround-teachers.pdf>

Rennie Center for Educational Research & Policy. (2012). *Smart School Budgeting: Resources for Districts*. Cambridge, MA: Author. Retrieved from <https://rhsprincipal.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/smartschoolbudgeting.pdf>

Evidence Review:

Successful School Turnarounds: Seven Steps for District Leaders draws from the cross-sector research base on successful turnarounds to offer seven steps for district leaders to support turnaround principals and maximize their chances of success:

1. Commitment to Success

Turnarounds are one of the only proven strategies for quickly achieving success in very low-performing organizations. But they can be difficult and controversial. School board members and district leaders who commit to this strategy must prioritize student learning needs over custom, routine, and established relationships. They must view turnarounds not as a one-time solution but part of a sustained effort that ultimately eliminates chronic low-performance.

2. Choose Turnarounds for the Right Schools

Dramatic change strategies – including turnarounds – are necessary in schools where student performance is extremely and chronically low and where incremental efforts to improve results (e.g., professional development, external coaching, or adoption of new instructional programs) have failed. Determining which schools fall into this “dramatic change” category is a critical step for district leaders.

3. Develop a Pipeline of Turnaround Leaders

Up to 70 percent of successful turnarounds begin with a change in top leadership. Districts can actively build their supply of turnaround principals by seeking out, training, and placing candidates who have characteristics specific to turnaround leaders, including the ability to engage in consistent patterns of action to carry out the turnaround.

Competencies of a Turnaround Leader

- **Driving for Results** – the turnaround leader’s strong desire to achieve outstanding results and the task-oriented actions required for success.
- **Influencing for Results** – motivating others and influencing their thinking and behavior to obtain results. Turnaround leaders cannot accomplish change alone, but instead must rely on the work of others.
- **Problem Solving** – including analysis of data to inform decisions; making clear, logical plans that people can follow; and ensuring a strong connection between school learning goals and classroom activity.
- **Showing Confidence to Lead** – staying visibly focused, committed, and self-assured despite the barrage of personal and professional attacks common during turnarounds.

Leader Actions in a Turnaround

- **Focus on a few early wins.** Successful turnaround leaders choose a few high-priority goals with visible payoffs and use early success to gain momentum, motivate staff, and disempower naysayers. These wins relate to high-priority, not peripheral, elements of organization performance. In schools, examples might include achieving very high attendance and low disciplinary rates in the first two months of the school year; or huge leaps in learning progress in a targeted academic area, such as aiming by the end of the first semester to have 90 percent of fifth graders to make grade level by year’s end.
- **Break organization norms.** In a failing organization, existing practices contribute to failure. Successful turnaround leaders break rules and norms. Deviated to achieve early wins shows that new action gets new results.
- **Push rapid-fire experimentation.** Turnaround leaders press a fast cycle of trying new tactics, discarding failed tactics, and investing more in what works. They resist touting mere progress as ultimate success.
- **Get the right staff, right the remainder.** Successful turnaround leaders typically do not replace all or even most staff at the start, but they often replace some key leaders who help organize and drive change. For remaining staff, change is mandatory, not optional.
- **Drive decisions with open-air data.** Successful turnaround leaders are focused, fearless data hounds. They choose their initial goals based on rigorous analysis. They report key staff results visibly and often. They require all staff who participate in decision making to share periodic results in open-air discussions from excuse making and blaming to problem solving.
- **Lead a turnaround campaign.** Leaders use a consistent combination of motivating and maneuvering tactics that include communicating a positive vision of success; help staff personally feel the problems customers feel; working through key influencers; and silencing critics with speedy success.

4. Give Leaders the “Big Yes”

In chronically failing organizations, the changes required to turn performance around can be substantial. Successful turnaround leaders often achieve results by working around rules, notoriously asking for forgiveness after their strategy has worked rather than seeking permission beforehand. One of the best ways for the district to support principals in their

- turnaround efforts is to give them the “big yes” over critical decisions up-front.
- 5. Hold Leaders Accountable for Results**
External pressure for speedy results is a key factor in successful turnarounds. Districts must hold turnaround principals to high standards and a short timeline for results. School turnaround leaders who are likely to succeed will embrace this challenge.
 - 6. Prioritize Teacher Hiring in Turnaround Schools**
A critical district role to support successful turnarounds is to prioritize teacher recruitment, hiring, and placement for turnaround schools. Staff replacement in a turnaround tend to be limited; but when they occur, principals must have a ready pool of qualified candidates to replace them.
 - 7. Proactively Engage the Community**
Turnaround efforts can be very controversial. The community in which a school is located – parents, community leaders, partner organizations, and other stakeholders – can play a pivotal role in supporting or undermining turnaround efforts.

(Kowal, Hassel, E& Hassel, 2009, pp. 1–6)

In their three-year analysis of school and district practices, systems, policies, and use of resources contributing to successful turnaround efforts in Massachusetts, The Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning (2014) found, “Districts have continued to play a central role in supporting and monitoring school-level turnaround efforts and there is clear evidence that districts have become more thoughtful and strategic with respect to how they are working with schools. Specifically, districts have reorganized and re-tasked central office staff to work directly with schools, developing systems that allow for monthly and sometimes weekly monitoring of turnaround efforts. An important distinction is that the “monitoring” provided by district leaders is predicated on having a solid relationship with the school principal, to the extent that district/school interactions are supportive and intended to promote professional improvement and growth, rather than focusing solely on monitoring the implementation of a written plan” (Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning, 2014, p. ii).

References and Resources

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Evidence Review:

Granting Waivers and Exemptions

Research on change efforts such as the New American Schools comprehensive school reform initiative (Berends, Bodily, & Nataraj Kirby, 2002) and Edison Schools (Gill et al., 2005) document the importance of giving educators the flexibility to implement significant changes. States have established advisory processes to examine existing regulations and propose changes to remove barriers to improvement, replacing regulation with results-based accountability. States have also provided waiver and exemption processes that allows districts to request relief

from particular regulations that restrict their innovation.

Collective bargaining agreements between districts and staff organizations can also create obstacles to change (Hannaway & Rotherham, 2006), as can local policies set by school boards (Hill, 2003). One barrier to improvement identified by California's state policymakers, for example, was the set of collective bargaining provisions allowing senior teachers to transfer within school districts until very close to the start of school. This made it difficult for districts to hire and place new teachers on a reasonable timeline. The state enacted new legislation in 2006 that allows principals to hire teachers after April 15 regardless of whether they are seniority-based transfers (Scott & Rhee, 2006). Vermont established standards that guide state department of education policies, including one requiring that "any rule or law should advance student performance, but not in such a rigid manner as to foreclose alternate means of achieving goals" (State of Vermont Board of Education, 1992, January 21, pp. 3-4 in Lusi, 1997).

As to the question, "Are charter schools bound by school district collective bargaining agreements?" according to Christie (2014), "At the present time, 42 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have enacted charter school laws, so this database contains information only for them. It does not contain any information for the 8 states that have not enacted charter school laws." The state-by-state answers to this question range from 'Yes' to 'No', with most somewhere in between, the answer for Arkansas being typical of most of the others: "Open-enrollment charter schools are exempt from participation in school district personnel policies. Conversion charter schools are bound by school district personnel policies."

Action Principles

For State

1. Establish a process for continuous review of state regulations and examination of proposed legislation and regulation to reduce regulatory burden on districts and schools.
2. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby districts can petition for relief from regulations that restrict innovation.
3. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround or transformation.
4. Amend state collective bargaining statutes and regulations that limit the ability of districts and schools to make justifiable changes in staffing policies and procedures.
5. Use state policy- and rule-making authority to place constraints on the barriers thrown up by districts.

For District

1. Establish a process for continuous review of district policy to reduce burden on schools and principals.
2. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby schools can petition for relief from district policy that restricts their innovation.
3. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround.
4. Negotiate for changes in collective bargaining agreements to provide principals with greater control over the hiring, placement, and retention of staff.

(Perlman & Redding, 2011, p. 67)

References and Resources

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Evidence Review:

Providing Flexibility in Staffing, Scheduling, Budget

State legislatures, governors, state boards of education, SEAs, and districts are uniquely positioned to create the conditions for change. As a result, states and districts also need to attend to the opportunities that state and district policy providers for districts and schools to do what they need to do to improve student performance. According to the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute's *The Turnaround Challenge*, "States and districts focused inside the system" (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 11). Its top lesson learned from high performing, high-poverty schools is, "Clearly defined authority to act based on what's best for children and learning – i.e., Learning Point Associates. (2009). *Reallocating Resources for School Improvement – Guiding Principles for Allocating Resources*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/reallocation/>

Flexibility can take many forms. Schedules might be modified to accommodate longer school days or years to provide longer periods for some subjects or to set aside time for teachers to meet to discuss student work. Schools might elect to allocate money to hire extra reading teachers or curriculum coordinators or use some funds to pay teachers for extra hours spent examining and discussion data or engaging in professional development activities. Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (2003) states that, for the best likelihood of sustained improvement, "the school has control over the majority of its budget. To the extent possible all funds from different sources are combined and directed in support of school goals."

In a case study of improvement in the Kansas City, Kansas schools, Lane (2009) found that one of the key strategies supporting dramatic improvement was providing schools with “defined autonomy,” in which principals had flexibility and control in the areas of staffing, budget, and scheduling. Specifically, to help them address the challenges of increased accountability, principals and teachers were given autonomy to decide how best to implement improvement activities in their schools. For example, to facilitate changes in staffing and scheduling, the district and the teachers’ union added a provision to the teachers’ contract, “contract flex,’ that allowed on a school-by-school basis” (p. 28). This required that the central office place considerable trust in local school staff, but the defined autonomy engendered “an atmosphere of trust and an emerging culture of improvement” (p. 29) and also “reinforced the idea that the district and schools share the responsibility for what happens in schools and in classroom” (p. 32). The district set non-negotiable goals, but allowed schools the latitude to decide for themselves how best to attain those goals.

Action Principles

For State

1. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby districts can petition for relief from regulations that restrict their flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting based on local needs (Redding & Walberg, 2008).
2. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround (Barber, 2008).
3. Amend state collective bargaining statutes and regulations that limit the ability of districts and schools to make justifiable changes in staffing, budgeting, and scheduling policies and procedures (Massachusetts Commonwealth Pilot School Model).
4. Use state policy- and rule-making authority to place constraints on the barriers caused by district policies (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

For District

1. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby schools can petition for relief from district policies that restrict their flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting based on local needs (Redding & Walberg, 2008).
2. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround (Barber, 2008).
3. Negotiate for changes in collective bargaining agreements to provide principals with greater control over budgeting, scheduling, and the hiring, placement, and retention of staff (Massachusetts Commonwealth Pilot School Model; Lane, 2009).
4. Give principals the flexibility to act based on what works for the school’s student population – including making decisions about scheduling, staffing, and budgeting (Kowal et al., 2009).

(Perlman & Redding, 2011, p. 69–70)

According to Gonzalez (2014), “Many cities have benefitted from the implementation of charter schools. In New York City and Chicago, charters have replaced under-used and struggling public schools. The state has been able to take money from failing public schools and reinvest in alternative options, including charters. In New York City, many charter schools in struggling districts have proven to outperform traditional public schools. For example, a charter school in the South Bronx outperforms every school in the state outside of New York City, including in the wealthy suburbs. The success of these NYC charters has been attributed to the system’s “greater flexibility in staffing and scheduling” as well as their “more rigorous classrooms” (Harris, 2014)” (Gonzalez, 2014, p. A31).

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