

The School Turnaround FIELD GUIDE

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About FSG Social Impact Advisors

At FSG, we are passionate about finding better ways to solve social problems. Originally established in 2000 as Foundation Strategy Group, today FSG works across all sectors by partnering with foundations, corporations, school systems, nonprofits, and governments in every region of the globe. Our goal is to help organizations — individually and collectively — create greater social impact.

Our approach is founded on the beliefs that

- Social sector organizations can play a catalytic role, using evidence-based strategies and strategic evaluation to solve social problems;
- Corporations can create shared value by using their core capabilities in ways that contribute to both social progress and economic success;
- Better alignment within the social sector can lead to collective impact beyond that which individual organizations alone could achieve.

Our team brings the right combination of on-the-ground experience and world-class expertise in strategy development to tackle the world's most challenging problems in three ways:

- **Creating** fresh ideas and practical tools that boost the success of change makers in all sectors.
- **Consulting** with clients to build strategies and practices that lead to powerful results in the areas they care about most.
- **Connecting** peers and communities to each other and to proven practices, so each gains from the knowledge of all.

FSG's **Education and Youth Practice** works with foundations, nonprofits, state agencies, corporations, and school districts individually and collectively to solve education and youth-related issues. We work with clients on strategy development, learning and evaluation, operational planning, research and intellectual capital development. The practice is comprised of individuals who have direct previous experience in the education sector as well as at top strategy consulting firms. The mission of our practice is to improve the academic and personal outcomes of children and youth.

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About The Wallace Foundation

This report was funded in part by The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices to improve learning and enrichment opportunities for children. The report's conclusions are the authors' own. The foundation's current objectives are to: improve the quality of schools, primarily by developing and placing effective principals in high-need schools; improve the quality of and access to out-of-school-time programs through coordinated city systems and by strengthening the financial management skills of providers; integrate in- and out-of-school learning by supporting efforts to reimagine and expand learning time during the traditional school day and year as well as during the summer months, helping expand access to arts learning, and using technology as a tool for teaching and promoting creativity and imagination. For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit its Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

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List of Abbreviations

ARRA — American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

AYP — Adequate Yearly Progress

CBO — Community-Based Organization

CMO — Charter Management Organization

ESEA — Elementary and Secondary Education Act

LEA — Local Education Agency

NCLB — No Child Left Behind

RTTT — Race to the Top

SIG — School Improvement Grants

SMO — School Management Organization

Executive Summary

Despite the tremendous level of activity in the school turnaround field over the past two years, the effort is still in its early stages. The field is growing quickly, but remains highly fragmented. Interventions are moving forward rapidly, but reformers have little knowledge of what is working and how to scale what works. This report aims to increase education reformers' awareness of turnaround issues, to prompt those in the field to think about how to most effectively do turnaround work, and to encourage members of the field to work in concert with each other. If the U.S. is to transform thousands of its chronically underperforming schools, multiple actors must work together to identify and spread effective practices, create the policies and conditions for success, build capacity, and ensure the sustainability of turnaround work at scale.

INTRODUCTION

The Need

More than 5,000 schools, representing 5 percent of schools in the United States, are chronically failing, according to the latest U.S. Department of Education statistics. These schools serve an estimated 2.5 million students. The number of failing schools has doubled over the last two years, and without successful interventions, could double again over the next five years.

Bold Action

To combat this problem, the Obama administration announced its intention to use \$5 billion to turn around the nation's 5,000 poorest-performing schools over the next five years. This is a bold challenge to a system that has succeeded at turning around individual schools, but has never delivered dramatic change at a national scale. To foster urgency and innovation, the federal government is providing unprecedented levels of funding and strong direction for policy changes to support school turnaround. District, state, private, and nonprofit education leaders across the country have responded with an unprecedented level of attention to school turnaround.

The Challenge

The nation is at a critical juncture in its efforts to turn around schools. Over the past year, states and districts have been focused on policy change and planning. With turnaround strategies now in place, the announcement of the Race to the Top (RTTT) and Investing in Innovation (i3) winners, and the distribution of School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds, the emphasis is switching from planning to action. However, the field of actors is fragmented. While a large number of new organizations are entering the school turnaround field, there remain only a handful of proven providers — few of whom are operating at a meaningful scale. The capacity

of state, district, and overall human capital is also limited, while little research exists to identify what works and how to succeed at scale.

This Report

FSG's motivation in writing this report is to ensure that the school turnaround field is well-coordinated, fueled by promising practices, and guided by a focus on results. This report provides an overview of the school turnaround issue, identifies measures of success, surveys the policy and funding environment, compares the major turnaround models, and provides a guide to important actors in the field and a highly visual map of their interrelated roles and funding. We also explore early lessons learned, as well as key issues and gaps challenging the school turnaround field. Finally, we suggest a set of detailed actions that this widely divergent group of stakeholders could take — collectively and individually — to ensure that turnaround succeeds at scale. In writing this report, FSG drew upon more than 100 interviews with turnaround experts, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and funders. Our research also included an extensive review of secondary reports and articles as well as a synthesis of discussions among 275 turnaround focused actors who attended the "Driving Dramatic School Improvement Conference" on January 11, 2010, cohosted by FSG and *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Finally, FSG drew extensively on the guidance and feedback of an advisory group consisting of a broad cross-section of turnaround actors, including state and district leaders, philanthropic funders, human capital providers, school operators, education entrepreneurs, and researchers. Please note that we use the term "school operator" throughout the paper to represent charter, private and other nonprofit school operators and management organizations. The appendices list interviewees and research sources, and advisory-group members are listed on the inside cover of this report.

TODAY'S LANDSCAPE

Defining Turnaround

While questions remain about the term “turnaround,” the definition that Mass Insight Education put forward provides a good beginning:

“Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that:
a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization.”

Based on our analysis we would add to the definition those efforts that *take place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole*. The addition captures the idea that turnaround should include the work of districts and states to continually improve all schools. Finally, we would also recommend expanding this definition beyond individual schools to address the need to turn around schools at scale.

Measuring Success

While many states and districts have established criteria to identify schools in need of turnaround, less clarity exists around how to track progress toward turnaround, knowing when a school has actually been turned around, and if that success has happened in the context of system improvement. Stakeholders also strongly emphasize that turnaround is only successful if it achieves gains with the *same* student population. We heard broad agreement about the following themes surrounding measures of success:

- **At the School Level.** Measure student outcomes and improvements in the school culture and learning environment; employ absolute and value-added measurements; set the bar for success high; and strive for meaningful improvements within two to three years.
- **At the System Level.** Set turnaround-specific goals for students, schools, and the system; track performance of all schools, not just turnaround schools; evaluate state and district self-performance in supporting turnaround efforts; identify and share best practices.

Federal Funding

The size of the U.S. Department of Education's current investments in education, coupled with the acute need of states and districts for funding, has put the federal government in a strong position to incent policy change and to set expectations for the types of turnaround strategies that states and local education agencies (LEAs) use. While the amount of funding is significant, much of it is short term, and states and districts have expressed concerns about how to sustain their turnaround efforts in the longer term. Funding that has an impact on the school turnaround field includes:

- **Race to the Top Funds.** \$4.35 billion in competitive grants to states, with turnaround being one of four focus areas. RTTT has already succeeded in driving state- and district-level policy change across the nation.
- **School Improvement Grants.** \$3.55 billion allocated to states according to a formula based on Title I funding levels, to be granted out competitively to districts within each state. SIG guidelines align with those of RTTT, including the requirement that districts use the four turnaround models.
- **Investing in Innovation Fund (i3).** \$0.65 billion in competitive grants awarded to nonprofits and school districts to expand innovative and evidence-based approaches that significantly improve student achievement, including those related to school turnaround.

The Four Turnaround Models

To promote reforms that are dramatic rather than incremental, the federal government is requiring LEAs to use the following four approaches:

- **Turnarounds.** Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars, schedules, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach that substantially improves student outcomes.
- **Restarts.** Transfer control of, or close and reopen a school under a school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process.

- **School Closures.** Close the school and enroll students in higher-achieving schools within the LEA.
- **Transformations.** Replace the principal, take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

Significant debate surrounds the models. They vary in the cost, human capital, provider capacity, and political will necessary for implementation, and they also may differ in efficacy. Some observers believe the models that require the fewest changes in staff — especially the transformation model, which may be the most widely implemented — are the least effective in turning schools around. And questions have arisen about how to align the needs of a school with the appropriate model and how to implement the models successfully at scale. Although the models are each being pursued at individual schools, as of yet, little research-based evidence exists to help answer these questions.

The Turnaround Sector

While some organizations have been providing turnaround services, or are now emerging with programs and services directed toward turnaround, the number and capacity of proven operators and providers serving the sector is still inadequate to meet demand. Additionally, the recent entry of a large number of new organizations, many of which have varying degrees of direct turnaround experience, has made it harder for states and school districts to assess and select quality turnaround providers. As a result, we found that states and districts are selecting only a small percentage of schools in need of turnaround for active interventions.

Turnaround Actors

In addition to the federal government, whose role as a funder and a catalyst for policy change has been summarized above, key players shaping the turnaround sector include the following organizations:

- **States and Districts.** States are developing turnaround strategies, creating policies, and finding new ways to partner with and build the capacity of districts. Districts are directly implementing turnaround interventions, working with school operators and school support providers, and addressing human capital issues.
- **Unions.** Unions play a critical role in determining working conditions for teachers in many states. While they have been resistant to such approaches as replacing teachers, extending working hours, linking teacher compensation to student performance, and creating new teacher-evaluation approaches, our research and interviews show that a modest, but growing number of unions are now beginning to partner more closely with states and districts to address these issues, particularly as they apply to turnaround schools.
- **School Operators.** Several charter school operators, as well as public or private school operators, have begun to adapt their models to manage turnaround schools. In other cases, new school operators are being created specifically to turn around schools. In addition to managing individual schools, school operators that oversee networks of schools often take on many of the functions that a district traditionally fulfills and so need to think about turnaround at the systemic, as well as at the school level. When working with turnaround schools, school operators are typically granted substantial autonomy and are held accountable for results through a contract or charter.
- **Supporting Partners.** A variety of partner organizations support school reform in general and are evolving to support school turnaround specifically:
 - *Comprehensive School Redesign Specialists.* Work with schools to implement multidimensional turnaround strategies that begin with whole-school redesign and include coaching and implementation support.
 - *Human Capital and Professional Development Providers.* Work to increase the supply of quality teachers and leaders in turnaround schools, and work with districts and states to build their human resources management capacity.
 - *District and School Resource Management Specialists.* Help districts and schools institute financial and operational changes to support turnarounds.
 - *Integrated Services Providers.* Help schools to identify and address the cultural and mental-health issues of students, complementing the changes being made in the learning environment.

- *Community-Based Organizations.* Local nonprofit organizations play a variety of roles in supporting school turnarounds, ranging from providing students with out-of-school-time academic and nonacademic programs to engaging with parents and community members around advocacy issues.
- *Research and Field-Building Organizations.* These organizations conduct research and analysis, share best practices and tools, and help foster dialogue and partnerships among stakeholders to support turnaround activities.
- *Philanthropic Funders.* These organizations provide support to districts and states in formulating their turnaround plans; foster new approaches to turnaround; fund research and knowledge sharing; support collaboration among stakeholders; enhance the quality of teaching and leadership; and build the capacity of school districts, school operators, and supporting partners.

Collective Impact

Although we have separately discussed the roles of major actors in advancing turnaround efforts, our research and interviews highlight the complexity of the turnaround ecosystem and the need for actors to work

together in new ways. For example, states should define relationships with districts that go beyond compliance. For their part, districts should work with unions to establish new conditions at schools, and they should partner with school operators to create new schools. Greater alignment among key actors will help ensure that resources are best utilized, that lessons learned are shared, and that needed conditions can be put in place.

LESSONS LEARNED

Although many turnaround efforts are in the early stages, lessons are emerging from the work of pioneering practitioners. At the school level, practitioners that have taken on turnaround schools consistently say that they were unprepared for the severity of the student needs and school issues that had to be addressed. As a result, they have had to make fundamental changes in their approaches to building school culture, training and supporting staff, and driving student performance. Exhibit 1 summarizes these school-level lessons learned.

Practitioners also emphasize that successful efforts at the school level must be supported by corresponding changes at the system level, as summarized in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit I: School-Level Lessons Learned

Planning

- Identify school leadership early so as to build in planning time to engage the community, establish the vision, and create a new school culture.
- Prepare to meet student needs that are severe and pervasive — hire specialized staff, recruit and train teachers with specific capabilities, and engage with effective external providers, as appropriate.

Human Capital

- Provide strong classroom and teamwork skills and additional support to teachers.
- Empower principals and leadership teams with key autonomies over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.
- Ensure principals and school leadership teams have the will, skill, and authority to drive change in demanding environments.

Maintaining Support and Building Sustainability

- Signal change early and build momentum by delivering and communicating “quick wins.”
- Build capacity for long-term sustainable results.

Exhibit 2: System-Level Lessons Learned

Planning

- Articulate a powerful vision for turnaround and make tough decisions.
- View turnaround as a portfolio of approaches, with closure as a viable option.

Creating Conditions and Building System Capacity

- Create the necessary school-based conditions for success, partnering with labor unions as relevant.
- Develop turnaround-specific capabilities and capacity.
- Build accountability and data systems to track progress and inform decisions.
- Build systems and structures that allow for sharing lessons across schools.

KEY GAPS

Our interviews highlight significant gaps that must be addressed to ensure that school turnarounds succeed at scale. These are summarized in Exhibit 3. While the gaps apply generally to all turnaround schools, our research and interviews suggest that they are particularly difficult to address in rural schools and in high schools.

Exhibit 3: Key Gaps

Capacity: There are not enough proven turnaround experts or organizations, and existing organizations are still building capacity and infrastructure. Additionally, there is little capacity to assess the quality of the large number of new entrants to the school turnaround field.

Funding: There may be a lack of ongoing operational funding to sustain efforts. Additionally, the requirements for the distribution of federal funds are putting pressure on states and school districts to act without adequate planning time.

Public and Political Will: Key actors find it challenging to make the difficult decisions required for dramatic school turnaround.

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

Research and Knowledge Sharing: There is not enough research or evidence to identify, share, and scale effective turnaround interventions.

High Schools and Rural Schools: While improving the performance of any school is difficult, it is particularly challenging to implement and succeed in school turnaround at high schools and at schools in rural areas.

CRITICAL ACTIONS

To turn around thousands of schools, actors should work collectively and individually to scale nascent efforts, build capacity, and address key gaps. The entire sector should develop common metrics for success, understand and learn from what is and is not working, build capacity and expertise, create conditions for success, and maintain urgency around turnaround efforts to sustain political will. Exhibit 4 summarizes actions that can be taken collectively to address the gaps.

Through our research, interviews and discussion with conference participants, we also identified important actions for each type of actor:

- **U.S. Department of Education.** The federal government already plays a key policy-setting and funding role, but can expand its efforts to support more research, rigorous evaluation, and knowledge sharing.
- **States.** States can focus on developing scalable solutions to human capital and operator capacity issues, creating conditions for success through policy change, assessing the quality of turnaround providers and operators, and investing in the IT and accountability infrastructure that underpins turnaround success.

Exhibit 4: Collective Actions to Fill Gaps

Gaps	Collective Actions
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the entry of new quality providers and scale proven operators. Create training and recruitment approaches to attract and develop turnaround talent. Create and staff distinct turnaround offices or divisions.
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As possible, repurpose current ongoing funding sources to address turnaround needs. Ensure that specific turnaround funding streams are included in ESEA reauthorization. Promote the use of one-time funding to build long-term capacity and infrastructure.
Public and Political Will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build awareness of the need for change among students, parents, educators, policy makers, and communities. Engage and mobilize stakeholders, and build public demand to advocate for needed changes. Establish laws and policies that support those making difficult decisions.
Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change the culture of engagement between schools, districts, and states from compliance to cooperation. Establish laws and policies that ensure needed school and district autonomies and capacity. Develop and implement shared accountability systems at the system and school levels.
Research and Knowledge Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure funding and attention are directed to rigorously studying and comparing the efficacy of turnaround interventions. Document and share turnaround successes and challenges to improve implementation. Create opportunities and infrastructure to collect, organize, and share research and best practices.

- **Districts.** Districts need to create strong talent pipelines, build their accountability and school support capacity, and ensure the availability of critical, high-quality partners, particularly to fill human capital needs and operate schools.
- **Unions.** Unions can consider turnaround schools as a “laboratory” in which they are more willing to experiment with new types of contracts, new ways of collaboratively partnering with districts, new work rules, and new teacher-evaluation and pay-for-performance approaches.
- **School Operators.** School operators can scale existing successful models, identify and train turnaround professionals, and build organizational capacity to run turnaround schools.
- **Supporting Partners.** Supporting partners can build turnaround-specific services. The most pressing need is for greater action from human capital providers. University and alternate-certification programs should focus on developing turnaround-specific training approaches and recruiting and training teachers and school leaders who can drive success in turnaround situations.
- **Community-Based Organizations.** Community-based organizations (CBOs) focused on parent engagement can mobilize community support for turnaround efforts and the difficult political decisions that often need to be made for those initiatives to succeed. CBOs focused on providing out-of-school-time supports should partner with turnaround schools to improve access to academic and personal support programs that help students catch up academically.
- **Research and Field-Building Organizations.** Research and field-building organizations are vital to studying and evaluating existing efforts, identifying tools and effective practices, filling important knowledge gaps, and disseminating findings.
- **Philanthropic Funders.** Foundations can seed innovative models in leadership, teaching, curriculum, support services, community engagement, and other areas vital to turnaround work, as well as invest in partnerships with states and districts in applying these practices at scale.

Introduction

“Instead of funding the status quo, we only invest in reform — reform that raises student achievement ... and turns around failing schools that steal the future of too many young Americans, from rural communities to the inner city.”

— President Barack Obama, *State of the Union Address*, January 27, 2010

In early 2009, the Obama administration announced its intention to use \$5 billion to turn around the nation’s 5,000 poorest-performing schools over the next five years. This was a bold challenge to an education sector that has had some success at turning around individual schools, but has not yet delivered dramatic change at a large scale.

A year and a half later, the school turnaround field is at a critical juncture. A great deal of debate, dialogue, and planning has taken place. Now with federal funds being distributed, as well as turnaround strategies developed at most states and in many districts, the emphasis is switching from planning to action. FSG’s motivation in releasing this report at this moment in time is to help ensure that actions taken will be coordinated, fueled by promising practices, and guided by the evaluation of results.

To those ends, this report provides a guide to the emerging school turnaround field. It includes an assessment of the need; a snapshot of key areas of debate, such as how to measure success; a summary of the policy and funding environment; and an assessment of the sector’s capacity, including a map of turnaround actors and the roles they play. The report explores early lessons learned from turnaround practitioners, summarizes key issues challenging the field, and identifies critical gaps that will need to be filled. Finally, the report recommends actions that hold promise for increasing the likelihood that turnaround efforts can succeed at scale.

In writing this report, FSG drew upon more than 100 interviews with turnaround experts, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and funders. Our research also included an extensive review of secondary reports and articles as well as a synthesis of discussions among 275 turnaround focused actors who attended the “Driving Dramatic School Improvement Conference” that FSG cohosted with *Stanford Social Innovation Review* on January 11, 2010. The event

included representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, state and district superintendents and staff, policymakers, education practitioners, human capital providers, school principals, researchers, and philanthropic funders.

Finally, we drew extensively on the guidance and feedback of an advisory group consisting of a cross-section of turnaround actors, including district and state leaders, philanthropic funders, human capital providers, school operators, and education entrepreneurs and experts. The appendices list the interviewees and research sources, and the advisory-group members are listed on the inside cover of this report.

Given how rapidly the turnaround sector is growing and evolving, parts of this report will likely become out of date immediately after it is published. Regardless, we believe that the main themes, gaps, and lessons identified can serve the field in three ways:

- We hope that for new actors poised to enter the turnaround space — school districts, school operators, education entrepreneurs, funders — the report highlights the importance of the work and illustrates the state of the field, and as a result encourages and eases new entrants.
- We hope that for existing organizations focused on the difficult work of turning around schools, the report provides new ideas, leads them to identify new partners, and helps strengthen their knowledge and capacity.
- Finally, we hope that this report helps the turnaround field as a whole as it spurs additional dialogue and connections, facilitates the creation and sharing of knowledge, and helps multiple actors better understand their own roles and how they most effectively work in concert with others — a prerequisite if the field is to succeed in turning around thousands of failing schools.

“At the end of the day, who can argue with holding schools accountable for all children?” asks Paul Vallas, head of the Recovery School District in New Orleans. “Who can argue with not tolerating failing schools or with giving poor kids the kinds of choices that wealthier kids have?”¹

Part I: Understanding the Landscape

In the first part of this report, we paint a picture of the existing landscape of turnaround efforts around the country. Part I covers four major topics:

- The scope of the turnaround challenge and areas of debate,
- Measures for gauging success in school turnaround at the school and system levels,
- The role of the federal government and a comparison of four turnaround models, and
- The roles of key actors and a snapshot of recent activities.

Since the No Child Left Behind Act was passed in 2001, districts have been identifying failing schools as those that do not demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in improving their performance. These schools face an escalating process of corrective action, which ultimately might lead to replacing the school’s leadership or restructuring the school itself. School failure is a persistent and pervasive reality, as the U.S. Department of Education’s data show.² With more than 5,000 schools in the restructuring stage in 2010, Mass Insight Education recently estimated that more than 2.5 million students — particularly high-poverty students and students of color — are at risk of or are already receiving a woefully inadequate education.³ Out of more than 100,000 schools nationwide, this bottom 5 percent of schools have failed to make AYP for five or more years and often have high staff turnover, high rates of violence, and low graduation rates. The severe impact of school failure on students and on the nation is well documented. Lack of educational attainment is highly correlated with lower lifetime earnings, higher incidences of substance abuse, higher rates of incarceration, and poorer health outcomes.⁴ As a society, citizens pay the price in lost tax revenue, forgone GDP growth, and increased costs related to health care, crime, and social services.⁵ As President Obama said in his January 2010 State of the Union address, “In the 21st century, the best antipoverty program around is a world-class education.”

This is also a growing crisis. In the 2008-2009 school year, the number of schools in restructuring increased 26 percent from the previous year, and jumped an alarming 325 percent over the number from five years earlier, as shown in Exhibit 5.⁶

Since the number of schools that enter “school improvement” each year is well over 5,500, combined with low success rates in turning around schools, more schools will continue to fall into restructuring. Extrapolating from the latest trends from 2006 to 2009, Exhibit 6 shows that without successful interventions, the number of schools in restructuring could grow 143 percent over the next five years, reaching more than 12,000 by 2014-2015.

¹ Tehrani, Alex, “How to Fix No Child Left Behind,” *Time*, May 24, 2007.

² U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts.

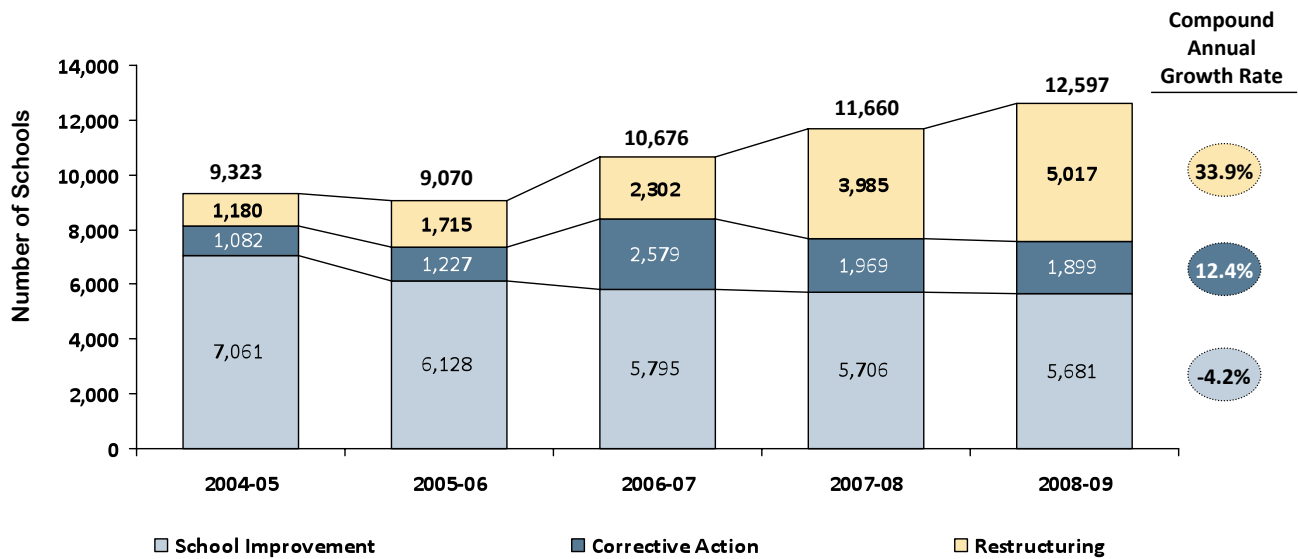
³ Mass Insight Education, “The Turnaround Challenge,” 2007.

⁴ Cheeseman Day, Jennifer, and Eric C. Newberger, “The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings,” U.S. Census Current Population Reports, July 2002; Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse, and Mental Health Statistics Web site; Department of Justice Web site; Maynard, Rebecca A., ed., *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1996).

⁵ Cohen, Mark A., “The Monetary Value of Saving High Risk Youth,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1998; McKinsey & Company, Social Sector Office, “The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America’s Schools,” 2009; Maynard, Rebecca A., ed., *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1996); Department of Justice Web site.

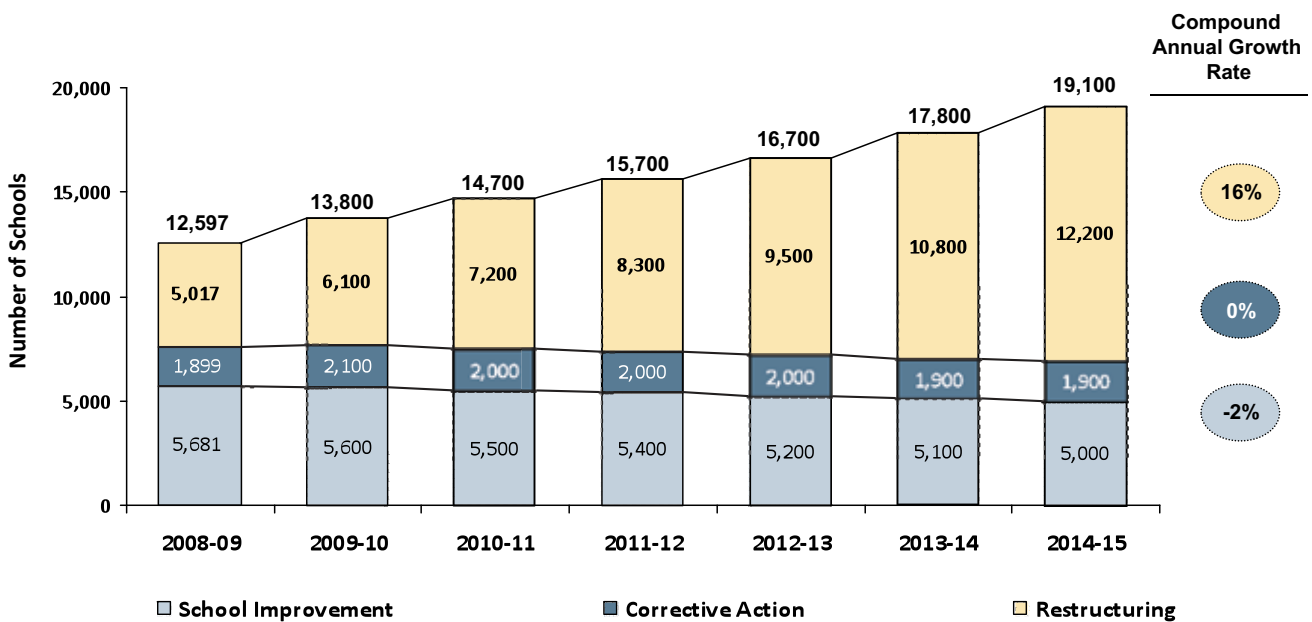
⁶ U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts.

Exhibit 5: Number of Schools in Need of Improvement, 2004-2009



Source: U.S. Department of Education, EdFacts.

Exhibit 6: Projected Number of Schools in need of Improvement, Corrective Action, and Restructuring, 2008-2015



Key Assumptions:

- Schools enter school-improvement status at a slightly declining rate, reflecting the 2005-2006 to 2008-2009 CAGR of -2 percent.
- An estimated 37 percent of schools progress from improvement to corrective action every year, reflecting the average rate from 2005 to 2009.
- Fewer and fewer schools exit the restructuring category, reflecting the 2005 to 2009 trends.

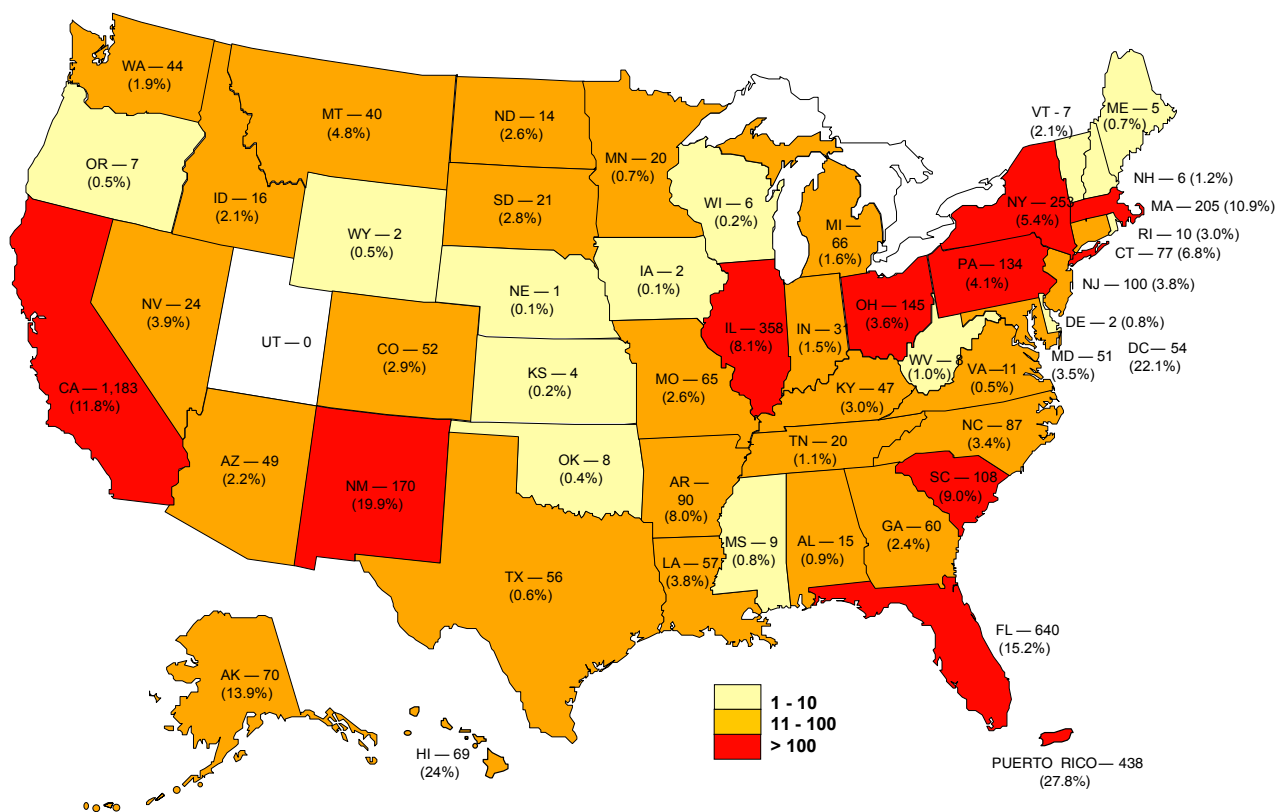
Source: FSG analysis.

Of the 5,017 schools currently in restructuring, 72 percent are concentrated in 11 states or territories: California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and South Carolina. At least 100 schools in each of these states, shown in Exhibit 7, have failed to meet AYP for five or more consecutive years, with California topping the list with 1,183 schools. Four other areas, while having lower absolute numbers, have high densities of failing schools: Hawaii (24 percent), the District of Columbia (22 percent), New Mexico (20 percent), and Alaska (14 percent).

DEFINING TURNAROUND

The word *turnaround* is used broadly and means different things to different people. Confusingly, it is currently applied to both the discipline of improving school systems and individual schools, as well as to a particular approach that the U.S. Department of Education calls the “turnaround model.” Some observers question the very applicability of this term to describe schools that have never been highly performing in the first place.⁷ Others are skeptical about the comparison to turnarounds in the private sector, where low rates of success are the expected norm.⁸

Exhibit 7: Number of Schools in Need of Restructuring, 2008-2009



Source: U.S. Department of Education, EDfacts.

⁷ FSG interviews.

⁸ Hess, Frederic, and Thomas Gift, “School Turnarounds: Resisting the Hype, Giving Them Hope,” *Education Outlook*, February 2009.

Some have even called turnaround a “fallacy,” at least at the school level.⁹ “The history of urban education tells us emphatically that turnarounds are not a reliable strategy for improving our very worst schools,” writes Andy Smarick, a former distinguished visiting fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.¹⁰ He suggests that the best way to ensure an effective, well-functioning school is to start one from scratch. Justin Cohen, president of the turnaround division at Mass Insight Education, believes schools can be turned around with strategies that create clusters of schools within a district that operate with charterlike conditions and are managed through lead partners. Brian Hassel, codirector of Public Impact, argues that the key to success is to deploy multiple strategies and intervene quickly if early indicators fail to show promising signs of success.

Even as the means continue to be debated, the term “turnaround” has quickly gained traction and is now used broadly to describe a movement to positively transform the performance of chronically failing school systems and schools.

To ensure that we are collectively working to solve the same problem, FSG tested Mass Insight Education’s definition of turnaround with interviewees:¹¹

“Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that: a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performing organization.”

While we heard general support for this definition, interviewees also identified areas where debate exists about particular components (see Exhibit 8). Additionally, based on our interviews and research findings, we would add this phrase to the Mass Insight Education definition:

“c) takes place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole.”

The addition captures the emerging consensus that turnaround should not be a zero-sum game in which one school succeeds at the expense of others. Districts and states must focus continually on improving all schools. Finally, we would also recommend expanding this definition beyond individual schools to address the need to turn around schools at scale.

Exhibit 8: The Definition of Turnaround

*“Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive **intervention** in a low-performing **school** that: a) produces **significant** gains in achievement **within two years**; and, b) readies the school for the **longer process** of transformation into a high-performance organization.”*

How do you determine what is significant?

Will a focus on quick results overshadow capacity building to sustain improvements?

Is turnaround part of an ongoing performance-management system at the district level?

Should building district and state capacity also be addressed?

Is the time frame longer? Does it vary by type of school?

⁹ Smarick, Andy, “The Turnaround Fallacy,” *EducationNext*, Winter 2010, Vol. 10, No. 1, <http://educationnext.org/the-turnaround-fallacy/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See appendices for a list of all interviewees.

While the debate continues, the current set of prevailing perspectives can be summarized into the following set of questions and suggested answers:

- *Is turnaround part of an ongoing performance-management system at the district level?* Yes. Turnaround strategies are at the extreme end of, but nevertheless a part of, a continuum of school improvement. Districts need to turn around failing schools, ensure low-performing schools don't fall into turnaround status, and improve the quality of every school.
- *Should building district and state capacity also be addressed?* Yes. Although focused on school-level interventions, turnarounds must be supported with increased capacity at the district and state levels. Otherwise, the underlying conditions that led to chronically underperforming schools will continue to result in repeated failures.
- *How do you determine what are significant gains?* We are not sure yet. This is an area currently generating significant debate in the field. There is agreement that the ultimate indicator of turnaround success is student academic results. Stakeholders also agree that measuring both growth rates and absolute results are important. However, indicators of progress and the end point at which a school can be considered to be turned around are still being broadly discussed. The next section on measuring success explores this debate more fully.
- *Is the time frame longer? Does it vary by school type?* We are not sure yet. Many people argue that academic improvements should be seen in the first two years of a turnaround for an elementary or middle school, and within three years for a high school. However, the absolute performance of the school may still take an additional two to three years to reach district and state standards (depending on the rigor of the standards). Many believe that the insistence on a shorter time frame lies at the heart of differentiating turnaround from other, slower improvement strategies and is a key step in maintaining political will and funding for turnaround efforts.
- *Will a focus on quick results overshadow capacity building to sustain improvements?* Hopefully not, but interviewees cited this as a danger the field is paying close attention to. Most stakeholders believed that quick results are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of funding, political will, and community support.

Measuring Success

While many states and districts have established criteria to identify schools in need of turnaround, there is less clarity around how to track progress toward turnaround, knowing when a school has actually been turned around, and if that success has happened in the context of system improvement. The field should identify clear interim and long-term success metrics at the school, district, and state levels. Without expectations for success at both the school and system levels, resources may be withdrawn before gains are made or solidified.

DEFINING SUCCESS FOR SCHOOLS

Our interviews unearthed four themes around measuring school-level success:

- **Determining *What to Measure*.** Schools should track interim progress and ultimate outcomes related to both school environment (including school culture, connectivity, and teacher and leader engagement and effectiveness) and student performance (including student progress and student outcomes). Stakeholders emphasize that a turnaround is only successful if it achieves gains with the same student population.

Examples of school environment metrics that demonstrate progress include lower rates of violence or suspension, increased student and faculty attendance, lower dropout rates, and higher retention of effective staff. Examples of student performance metrics that demonstrate progress include increases in student performance on formative assessments, improved standardized test results, and higher graduation rates.

Interviewees also emphasized that results not only should be evaluated in absolute terms, but also should be benchmarked against past performance and expected performance using value-added measures. Exhibit 9 summarizes commonly referenced measures of school improvement.¹²

- **Identifying *How to Measure*.** A school undergoing turnaround needs timely access to information about student performance and turnaround implementation. “Annual achievement data comes out too late,” says Eileen Reed, deputy executive

director of the Region XIII Education Service Center at the Texas Education Agency. “We need to invest in early-warning systems to get data along the way to see if students are making progress. Are they advancing at a fast enough rate to catch up on their deficits? Are they on track to make graduation requirements?”

Timely feedback can be collected through classroom observation and through tools — often electronic — that provide interim assessments of whether students are mastering course content. Nontraditional methods are often used in turnarounds to re-engage students in learning and address long-standing deficits, so the field needs new cross-content measures that go beyond test scores to evaluate such areas as student work and performance, interactions between teachers and students, and improvements in critical thinking. Information about the progress of implementation can be collected through staff, parent, and student surveys and measures of observed behavior.

States and districts, meanwhile, need efficient assessment processes that enable comparisons and allow them to learn about what works in turning around schools. This is a challenge, as interviewees noted that known measures have variable levels of sophistication and are often inconsistently collected across schools, districts, and states.

¹² Sources of these measures include scorecards from Chicago Public Schools and the Texas Education Agency, as well as discussions among “Driving Dramatic School Improvement” conference attendees.

Exhibit 9: Measures of School Improvement

I. School Environment

School Culture

- Student attendance rates
- Rates of serious misconduct and violence
- Assessments of follow-through on implementation plans by school administration and staff
- Infrastructure improvement (such as dollars invested and response time to maintenance problems)

School Connectivity

- Parent engagement and satisfaction metrics (such as participation in meetings)
- Partnerships (such as funding raised from philanthropy and community satisfaction survey metrics)

Teacher and School Leader Engagement and Effectiveness

- Teacher attendance and retention rates of effective staff
- Rates of participation in collaborative decision making and planning time
- Desire for and implementation of targeted professional development
- Focus on student learning based on content and time on task
- Value-added academic measures based on interim assessments of student progress
- Use of data to improve the quality of teaching
- Amount of principal's time spent on improving teaching and learning

II. Student Performance

Measures of Student Progress

- Rates of earning credits and grade-level advancement
- Absenteeism and dropout rates

Outcomes for Students

- Rates of students performing at grade level by subject area
- Rates of proficiency on state assessments
- Graduation and college-going rates

- **Setting the Bar.** How high to set the standard for whether a school has been turned around is an area of ongoing debate. Some people fear that if the bar is set too high, not enough schools will succeed and the entire turnaround movement will be viewed as a failure.¹³ Others fear that an insufficiently ambitious definition will lead to efforts that are not aggressive enough to achieve meaningful results.¹⁴

There are a number of options for setting the bar. For some, making AYP is a good starting point. However, many actors spoke more ambitiously about goals for dramatic improvement, such as a 50 percent improvement in graduation rates or double-digit gains on state performance tests. As one of its goals, Mastery Charter Schools aims for at least 85 percent of graduates to enroll in

¹³ "Driving Dramatic School Improvement" conference discussion.

¹⁴ Ibid.

higher education.¹⁵ Many interviewees went so far as to say that even large gains were not enough — a school was not truly turned around until it had completely closed the achievement gap when compared with other schools in the state. Closing the gap used such measures as exit exams, standardized assessments, ACT/SAT scores, and graduation rates.

- **Timeline to Success.** In general, interviewees believed schools can be turned around in two to four years, with improvement in the school environment and culture occurring within two years and improvements in student performance starting by the second or third year. However, this timeline will vary and is expected to be longer in high schools.

Practitioners urge patience in the first year or two of turnaround, as some performance indicators may actually decline once significant changes are enacted in a school. “We have seen a school look quantitatively worse before it improves,” says Don Fraynd, turnaround officer at the Chicago Public Schools. “We have seen huge spikes in suspensions while discipline in the building was being reset. We aren’t going to expect a jump in test scores in the first year.” Some signs of progress may also look counterintuitive. For example, increased attendance and participation, which in the long term will improve student performance, may in the short term lead to a decline in average test scores, as students with poor attendance, who are often far behind their peers academically, begin to regularly attend school.

Beyond the importance of defining, tracking, and learning from measurable indicators, many experienced practitioners note that a successful turnaround can be palpably sensed upon entering the school. Practitioners note visible changes in students, who positively interact with their peers, are more fully engaged in classroom activities, and express optimism and pride in their conversations with teachers and other adults in the building. They describe hallways and lunchrooms that are peaceful and ordered. They see evidence of a positive culture and high expectations for students in posted goals and progress reports, in classroom-management systems, and in how teachers speak about their students.

DEFINING SUCCESS FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS

We heard broad agreement around the importance of tracking success at the system level. Still, few states and districts have established specific goals. Emerging themes include:

- **Setting Turnaround-Specific Goals for the System.** Districts should set specific goals and affiliated measures of progress and success for students and schools, as described in the previous section. At the system level, districts and states need to set improvement goals for themselves, along with corresponding milestones and timelines across their portfolio of schools, and then compare results across schools and districts.

The Massachusetts Department of Education is sending a clear message to its districts, for example. “Our idea about turnaround is that the district has ultimate responsibility to turn around its schools,” says Karla Baehr, deputy commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. “For us, a district earns the label of its lowest-performing school — clearly sending the message that each district is only as strong as its weakest school.”

- **Tracking the Performance of All Schools, Not Just Turnaround Schools.** Districts need to ensure that while some schools are being turned around, others do not themselves become turnaround candidates. Additionally, districts should be careful that interventions at turnaround schools, such as teacher replacement, do not adversely affect other schools in the system. Interviewees consistently stated that turnaround schools need to be managed within the context of overall district performance and that districts need to track performance across and between all schools.
- **Evaluating the District’s Performance in Supporting Turnaround Efforts.** Districts and states need to evaluate themselves on their ability to lay the foundation for turnaround success with governance, financial, human resources, and leadership systems that enable schools to achieve sustained improvement. “Fixing individual schools is not going to fix the issue,” says Cohen of Mass Insight Education. “We need to measure system performance and conditions.”

¹⁵ Mastery Charter Schools, “2008-2009 Mastery Charter School Overview.”

While not a supporter of turnaround, Smarick argues that success at the systems level includes closing low-performing schools and providing high-performing alternatives to replace them.¹⁶ Exhibit 10 provides an example of measures that one state department of education has used to evaluate district turnaround capacity.

- **Finding and Sharing Best Practices.** It is clear from stakeholder interviews that practitioners in the field do not feel they know enough about how

to do turnaround work at scale. To compound the challenge, turnaround work requires new behaviors and capabilities.

These two challenges are fueling a strong imperative for finding and sharing effective practices, as well as comparing results of different interventions to identify what is and is not working and why. This should happen at the local level, at the state level, and across geographic boundaries.

Exhibit 10: Sample Measures of Success at the District Level

Criteria for a District to Exit Turnaround from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

1: Improved Student Achievement

Evidence that student achievement has been on the rise for three years for students overall and for each subgroup of students:

- Increased student achievement as measured by state testing (such as average student growth, third-grade reading, eighth grade mathematics, first-time 10th-grade proficiency rate)
- Higher graduation and higher-education-enrollment rates

2: District Systems and Practices That Meet State Standards

Evidence that the district can continue to improve student achievement, because it has well-functioning and sustainable district systems and practices in the areas of:

- Curriculum and instruction
- Leadership and governance
- Human-resource development
- Financial and operational management
- Student support.

3: School Conditions That Support Student Learning

Evidence that the district will continue to improve student achievement, because the conditions for school effectiveness are in place in schools and classrooms, with particularly strong evidence of:

- Effective leadership
- Effective instruction
- An aligned taught curriculum

Source: Massachusetts DESE District Standards and Indicators, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/>

¹⁶ Smarick, Andy, "The Turnaround Fallacy," *EducationNext*.

Federal Funding and the Four Turnaround Models

The federal government — with significant funding and strong policy direction — is setting the pace for school turnaround. This section outlines the sources of federal funding for school turnaround efforts, as well as the four approaches to turnaround that the U.S. Department of Education expects LEAs to follow as they put RTTT and SIG funds to work.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Education-reform efforts are hardly new (see Exhibit 11). However, the Obama administration's unprecedented investment in education reform through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 has significantly, if temporarily, expanded the federal role in education. The sheer size of the investment, coupled with the magnitude of the budget deficits facing states and districts, has put the federal government in a position to incent policy change at the state level and to set guidelines for the turnaround strategies of states and LEAs. Funding that has an impact on turnaround efforts includes:

- **Race to the Top Fund.** \$4.35 billion in competitive grants to states, with turnaround being a key focus. Guidelines for the turnaround section specify that LEAs must implement at least one of the four turnaround models outlined below. LEAs with nine or more turnaround schools must use multiple models. Of the 41 applications submitted in the first phase of RTTT, 16 applicants proceeded to the final round: Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Of the 16 finalists, Delaware and Tennessee were the winners of the first phase of RTTT. The three states with the highest scores on the turnaround section of the application were Washington, D.C. (50.0), Illinois (49.4), and Tennessee (48.0).¹⁷ Thirty-six states submitted Round 2 applications. Of the 19 states that were selected as second-round finalists, 10 were awarded grants, including the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island.
- **School Improvement Grants.** \$3.55 billion allocated to states according to a Title I formula, with the funds to be granted out competitively to districts. Guidelines align with RTTT, including the need to use the four turnaround models. SIG funds may be awarded to all Title I schools, as well as schools that are eligible for but do not receive Title I, Part A funds, if those schools have not made AYP for at least two years or are in the state's lowest-performance quintile. States decide the amount of SIG funding an individual school receives, based on district applications, and funding can range from \$50,000 to \$2 million.
- **Investing in Innovation Fund (i3).** \$650 million in competitive grants awarded to nonprofit-LEA partnerships to expand innovative and evidence-based approaches that improve student achievement, close achievement gaps, and improve teacher and principal effectiveness — all areas related to turnaround. Of nearly 1,700 applicants, 49 were chosen as winners — four at the up-to-\$50 million “scale-up” level, 15 at the up-to-\$30 million “validation” level, and 30 at the up-to-\$5 million “development” level. Of the winners, 13 were primarily focused on turning around the lowest-performing schools.

All told as a result of ARRA, schools received approximately \$14 billion over their regular Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) appropriation. School-improvement funding received an additional \$5 billion boost in 2009 due to RTTT and i3 funding. However, ESEA funding in 2010 is expected to drop to its previous levels.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Education.

This speaks to the concerns that states and districts express about the “funding cliff” that will follow the sudden and significant infusion of federal education dollars in 2009, as well as the urgent need for this funding to be invested in developing long-term capacity rather than being allocated to ongoing operational costs. An additional concern is that the federally mandated timing for distributing and employing SIG and other turnaround-related funding does not provide states and school districts with adequate time to develop and implement thoughtful turnaround plans for high-need schools.

Schools may receive another infusion of funding in 2011 from a potential increase in i3 and SIG funds and a proposed \$1.35 billion extension of RTTT, with competition extended to include districts.¹⁸ President Obama is also seeking an additional \$900 million for School Turnaround Grants available for the districts that are home to the 2,000 schools which produce more than half of the nation’s dropouts. “We know that the success of every American will be tied more closely than ever to the level of education that they

achieve,” Obama said in March 2010 at an America’s Promise Alliance event.¹⁹

The sizable federal-government investment in education, as well as the competition for RTTT (where turnaround accounts for 10 percent of the RTTT application-scoring rubric), has already driven state- and district-level policy change across the nation. Many states, such as California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and Tennessee, have passed legislation to link teacher evaluation and student data. Illinois raised its charter cap.²⁰

Lawmakers in Massachusetts passed a major bill granting the state education commissioner authority to intervene in low-performing schools when local district and union leaders are unable to agree on issues, such as replacing teachers and lengthening the school day.²¹ Illinois has created 12 “super LEAs” in which superintendents and union leaders have agreed to work around existing collective-bargaining agreements to adopt new evaluation systems and implement more aggressive reform in low-performing schools.²²

¹⁸ McNeil, Michele, “Obama to Seek \$1.35 Billion Race to Top Expansion,” *Education Week*, January 19, 2010, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/01/19/19rtttbudget.h29.html?tkn=ZLWFBhgvmHK9uODtQEYiVGhxmOdOs5npKgH6>.

¹⁹ “Remarks by the President at the America’s Promise Alliance Education Event,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 1, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-americas-promise-alliance-education-event>.

²⁰ Maxwell, Lesli, “Digging Through States’ Race to Top Bids,” State EdWatch blog, *Education Week*, January 27, 2010, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2010/01/from_my_notebook_colleague_stephen.html; Robelen, Eric W., “‘Race to Top’ Driving Policy Action Across States,” *Education Week*, December 23, 2009, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/12/23/16states.h29.html?qs=race+to+top>; Sawchuk, Stephen, and Lesli A. Maxwell, “States Vie to Stand Out in Race to Top Proposals,” *Education Week*, January 27, 2010, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/01/27/19rtt_ep2.h29.html?tkn=NMPF6aXGRAGbnWrCck%2FtVrI0kQ2YiqIVFQf3.

²¹ Maxwell, Lesli, “Digging Through States’ Race to Top Bids,” State EdWatch blog, *Education Week*, January 27, 2010, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2010/01/from_my_notebook_colleague_stephen.html.

²² Race to the Top Fund, “Applicant Info: States’ Applications, Scores, and Comments for Phase 1,” <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/index.html>.

Exhibit II: The Link to Past Reform Efforts

The Obama administration is attempting to both build on the lessons of past education reforms and to distinguish itself from them. The current reform effort has differentiated itself from previous initiatives through its use of large pools of funding (RTTT, SIG, i3), a competitive process to allocate education dollars to states and districts, and more prescriptive guidelines to dictate the reform strategy. At the “Driving Dramatic School Improvement” conference, Joanne Weiss, former director of RTTT, summarized the current approach: “[The federal government] is thinking about competition as a force for change — as a way to maximize impact.”

The major previous reform efforts since the influential 1983 “A Nation at Risk” report are listed below, along with examples of how they have shaped today’s thinking:

- **Effective Schools Research.** In the 1980s, a team of researchers led by Ronald Edmonds, director of the Center of Urban Studies at Harvard University, identified seven “correlates” that determine a school’s success: clear mission; high expectations; instructional leadership; frequent monitoring of student progress; opportunity to learn and student time on task; safe and orderly environment; and home-school relations. Edmonds’ research helped shape current thinking about what makes schools effective and provided an early basis for many of the requirements of the current reform initiative.
- **School Choice.** The school choice program gained momentum in the 1990s and empowered students and parents with options that in turn raised the standard of education. It introduced a philosophy of competition to the effort and a belief that students should have compelling options for education. These ideas have carried through to the development of the four current turnaround models and the use of charter, private and public contract, and district providers to serve as turnaround operators.
- **Charter School Movement.** Charter schools are free from the staffing, curriculum, and programmatic restrictions imposed on most traditional district schools. They are viewed as prime candidates to take over and turn around failing schools, given the autonomy and flexibility they bring to budget, staffing, curriculum, and schedule.
- **Small Schools.** The Small Schools Movement was predicated upon the belief that a personalized learning environment in small schools can make a significant difference in the academic achievement of high-needs students. When implemented effectively, this personal attention can have positive results. Operators like Green Dot demonstrated the approach when it broke up Locke High School in Los Angeles into smaller units as part of its turnaround plan for the school, for example.
- **No Child Left Behind (NCLB).** The federal government’s NCLB Act of 2001 required all public schools to administer statewide standardized tests annually to students in certain grades and subjects. NCLB represented the most sweeping changes to ESEA since its 1965 enactment. In addition to a focus on stronger accountability, the act increased school choice and local control, and placed an emphasis on proven teaching methods.
- **Comprehensive School Reform (CSR).** The federally backed CSR Program began in 1998. It helps public schools raise student achievement as they implement effective, comprehensive models. The current reform initiative builds on the CSR Program’s strengths: its philosophy of dramatic and systemic reform; and its expectation that districts integrate specific components into their reform plans to qualify for funding. At the same time, the current effort provides states and districts with more detailed guidance about turnaround approaches, and significantly more funding to support reform efforts — two areas where critics of the CSR Program have often focused.

Source: FSG research and analysis.

THE FOUR TURNAROUND MODELS

The federal government is requiring LEAs to use the following four turnaround models in order to qualify for RTTT and SIG funding:

- **Turnarounds.** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school's staff; adopt a new governance structure; provide job-embedded professional development; offer staff financial and career-advancement incentives; implement a research-based, aligned instructional program; extend learning and teacher planning time; create a community-orientation; and provide operating flexibility.

***Case Example:** Highland Elementary School in Montgomery County, Maryland, replaced its principal and half its staff, as well as introduced new instruction methods, data analysis for student instruction, and staff accountability for student achievement. As a result of this intervention, the school performed strongly enough to receive the 2009 National Blue Ribbon awarded for placement in the top 10 percent of state assessments or dramatic improvement in assessment scores over a five-year period.²³*

- **Restarts.** Transfer control of, or close and reopen, a school under a school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process. A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend.

***Case Example:** Mastery Charter School Shoemaker Campus in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was taken over by Mastery Public Charter Schools in 2006. Mastery's model includes a strong focus on individualized instruction, teacher coaching and professional development, a culture of high expectations, rigorous academic standards, and problem-solving and social-emotional skills. In three years, the school more than tripled reading scores from 20 percent proficient to 71 percent proficient and raised math*

scores from 15 percent proficient to 88 percent proficient — completely closing the achievement gap and even outperforming state averages.²⁴

- **Transformations.** Replace the principal (no requirement for staff replacement); provide job-embedded professional development; implement a rigorous teacher-evaluation and reward system; offer financial and career advancement incentives; implement comprehensive instructional reform; extend learning- and teacher-planning time; create a community-orientation; and provide operating flexibility and sustained support.

***Case Example:** Benwood Schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee, introduced merit-pay plans, teacher-linked data collection, teacher evaluation, embedded professional development, teacher coaching on using student data, and leadership development. As a result, the percentage of third-graders scoring proficient or advanced in reading jumped from 53 percent in 2003 to 81 percent in 2007, and the Benwood schools outgained 90 percent of all schools on the state's value-added test scores.²⁵*

- **School Closures.** Close the school and enroll students in other, higher-achieving schools.

***Case Example:** In 2007, the Denver Public School District (DPS) closed eight schools due to underenrollment and poor student performance, relocating 2,000 students to three schools within DPS. The closures generated \$3.5 million in savings, of which \$2 million was directed to the three middle schools where students were relocated. The 2008-2009 Colorado Student Assessment Program indicates that the relocated students are showing increased academic growth in their new schools, although not to the extent the school district had hoped.²⁶*

²³ FSG research.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Exhibit 12: Is School Closure a Turnaround Strategy?

Of the four models, school closure has generated the most significant debate. Educators point to its demoralizing effect on the community and the lack of high-quality alternative schools to which students from the closed school can be moved. Many opponents of the model even question whether it can be considered a turnaround strategy, given that it advocates shutting down a school rather than improving its performance.

Proponents of school closure say it is an important turnaround approach at the district or system level. “When conscientiously applied strategies fail to drastically improve America’s lowest-performing schools, we need to close them,” writes Smarick. “Done right, not only will this strategy help the students assigned to these failing schools, it will also have a cascading effect on other policies and practices, ultimately helping to bring about healthy systems of urban public schools.” Proponents argue that districts must look at their schools as part of a portfolio, and that closing down some schools may enable the district to improve its overall performance.

When districts close schools, particularly in districts that face declining student enrollment, they are able to concentrate limited financial and staff resources on fewer schools. Proponents recognize that it is always difficult for parents and students of the schools targeted for closure, but point out that these schools have been chronically underperforming for years. Closing the school may be the best thing for students, who may be moved immediately to a more productive learning environment.

Source: FSG interviews; Smarick, Andy, “The Turnaround Fallacy,” *EdNext*, Winter 2010.

Comparing the Models

The federal government introduced these four models so as to ensure that RTTT and SIG funding is spent on dramatic rather than incremental reform.²⁷ However, significant debate surrounds the models — and around school closure, in particular, as summarized in Exhibit 12. Concerns have been raised that the overall framework of options does not adequately address the operating constraints of rural states and does not reflect other important elements of a turnaround strategy, such as the need for parent and community involvement.²⁸ Also, interviewees said the timetable for the distribution and use of SIG funds is causing states and school districts to employ less dramatic turnaround approaches.

Many questions also surround the use of the models: How to implement them, how effective they are in turning around schools, and how to choose the right model to fit school and local conditions. Little research-based evidence exists to answer any of these questions, representing a significant gap for the field.²⁹ When comparing the models, at this time we can only offer observations based on their specifications and on a limited number of experiences that interviewees shared:

By definition, the four models have different requirements for new principals and teachers:

- *Turnarounds* and *restarts* require the replacement of the principal and many teachers.
- *Transformations* require replacement of the principal.
- *School closures* do not necessitate new staff on site.

In addition, the four models also have different requirements for providers and school operators:

- *Restarts* depend on outside providers who can take over the school.
- *Transformations* and *turnarounds* rely on organizations that can provide professional development tailored to the severity of the turnaround situation.
- *School closures* do not depend on outside providers, but do depend on the availability of higher-performing schools.
- The four models may differ in start-up and ongoing operating costs:
- *Restarts* can be costly, as districts may need to do capital improvement and perhaps even donate property, as well as pass on potentially augmented per-student funding to the school operator brought in to run the turnaround school. The district incurs the cost of planning for the transfer and may pay the school operator ongoing management fees. However, the same operator may have the ability to attract additional resources to the school from philanthropic or private funding and may contract with the district and pay for some district services.

²⁷ U.S. Department of Education.

²⁸ Klein, Alyson, “School Turnaround Models Draw Bipartisan Concern,” *Education Week*, May 21, 2010.

²⁹ See the appendices for a list of research reports that specifically address turnaround options.

- *Turnaround* costs are largely the responsibility of districts, including compensation for new principals and teachers, costs connected with the release of current tenured teachers (which depend on the terms of collective-bargaining agreements), capital-improvement costs for site renovation, and other supports for new staff in the building. In the near term, SIG funding is expected to cover a large portion of these costs, which allows districts to do this work in-house. Over time, districts that choose this model must realize economies of scale to lower their costs.
- *Transformations* require districts to provide professional development to teachers (paying for the expert advice and compensating teachers for time spent on professional development), as well as to change evaluation systems and implement instructional reform.
- *School closures* have the lowest cost in the long term and may conserve district resources if consolidation is needed based on enrollment trends. However, initial costs to release tenured teachers as part of school closure could be significant and could linger two to three years, depending on the specific terms of a district's collective-bargaining agreements. Another hidden cost is the need to guard against theft and ensure that school resources are liquidated or distributed. Finally, districts may incur significant transportation costs if higher-performing schools are not available in the neighborhood of the school to be closed.
- The cost to implement each of the models will vary state to state and even district to district due to different labor costs, labor contract terms, agreements with school operators and service providers, and facilities and renovation costs.

The four models differ, as well, in the need for political will to overcome resistance to implementation:

- *School closures*, for many community stakeholders, signal that the district has given up on that school's staff, students, families, and community, and causes students to transfer and travel to new schools.
- *Restarts* involve transferring control of a school outside of district control, frequently to a charter operator.

- *Turnarounds* generate resistance given the requirement for staff replacement.
- Transformations are less controversial because they require the least disruption to school operations or staff.

Finally, the models may vary in how quickly and deeply they affect school culture, and ultimately, student achievement:

- *Restarts* may have the greatest potential for rapid impact in terms of culture and academic achievement, because a third-party school operator brings with it an entirely new staff, a fresh culture, and in the case of experienced operators, tested techniques for improving school and student performance.
- *Turnarounds* may potentially generate the second-highest level of impact, due to the large changes in staff and the ability to reset the culture of the school.
- *Transformations* are perceived to have lower potential for impact than other models. They are seen as most similar to many of the restructuring reforms tried, unsuccessfully, under NCLB, and many observers do not view them as a dramatic enough intervention to achieve significant results.
- *School closures'* impact is entirely dependent on the ability to relocate students to more highly performing schools.

The models requiring fewer resources are also the ones perceived to have lower potential for impact.³⁰ This relationship is troubling, if the evidence collected in the future substantiates it, because transformations are the most commonly implemented strategy among states and districts. Currently, this choice is being made largely based on resource constraints, such as the availability of new principals or high-quality school operators, and on the need to quickly employ SIG funds. In their RTTT applications, many states — particularly rural states like Idaho, Iowa, Oregon, and West Virginia — wrote that human capital challenges limit their ability to pursue turnaround and restart models. Closure is likely not an option, given the limited number of schools in rural areas.

In spite of these limitations, some rural states have proposed to leverage all of the models. Georgia is entering into partnerships with Teach for America, the New Teachers Project, and UTeach to build its teacher pipeline specifically to help rural areas adopt the turnaround and restart models.³¹ Our interviewees consistently cited a desire to build enough capacity and to perform enough evaluation so that in the future they could choose a model for individual schools based on its potential for impact.

³⁰ FSG interviews.

³¹ Ibid.

Turnaround Actors

While a number of actors are working in the field, not enough proven organizations exist to meet demand. Nor do the existing actors have enough capacity to turn around schools at scale. This section assesses the landscape of key players shaping the turnaround sector.

THE SECTOR

The vast majority of states and districts are just beginning to develop the infrastructure, accountability systems, and partnerships to launch and implement turnaround strategies. A handful of school operators and supporting partners already provide school turnaround services, and new organizations are now emerging to offer their services, as well.

However, the number and capacity of proven operators and providers serving the turnaround sector is still inadequate to meet the demand. For example, our research and interviews identified fewer than 15 turnaround-focused school operators managing multiple schools, none of which were managing more than 10 schools.³² Finally, the recent entry of many new organizations with varying degrees of turnaround experience is making it more complicated for states and districts to assess and identify high-quality partners and providers.

Given limited internal and external capacity, states and districts are targeting only a small subset of schools for turnaround. Based on our interviews, FSG found that states and districts are currently selecting few schools in need of turnaround for active interventions. At Chicago Public Schools, just 13 of the district's 241 schools in restructuring have been selected for turnaround, and in South Carolina, only four of the state's 108 schools in restructuring have been selected for turnaround in the 2009-2010 school year.³³

THE ACTORS

In addition to funding and catalyzing policy change, the federal government has recently indicated that it may play a role in vetting the quality of the many new entrants to the school turnaround space. Other key players shaping the turnaround sector include states and districts, unions, school operators, supporting partners, research and field-building organizations, and philanthropic funders.

The sections that follow provide a high-level summary of activities under way among these groups. As you read through the examples, please keep in mind that the field is rapidly evolving and the effectiveness of highlighted and emerging efforts will need to be assessed over time.

States and Districts

Across the country, state and district education leaders are playing central roles in school turnaround. Increases in funding are fueling greater momentum among established efforts in cities like Baltimore, Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C., as well as in states like Colorado, Delaware, Louisiana, and Texas.

In addition, many states and school districts are launching new efforts and mobilizing in response to federal priorities and funding. States are developing turnaround strategies, creating policy (see Exhibit 13), and finding new ways to partner with and build the capacity of districts. Districts are directly implementing turnaround interventions; addressing human capital issues; and working with school operators and school support providers. Notably, states with large rural populations, such as Mississippi and South Carolina, are playing more of a "districtlike" role. They are engaging directly with schools to determine approaches and provide individualized support, as well as partnering with providers to develop statewide human capital solutions.

What follows are specific examples of actions states and districts have taken:

- **Creating a Supportive Policy and Political Environment for Turnaround Work.** The promise of federal funding has prompted a number of states to pass new legislation to create more favorable conditions for turnaround, which in turn affects district-level policies and conditions. For example, in Colorado, the Innovation Schools Act of 2008 strengthens school-based decision making and offers more autonomy from district and state education regulations. The act allows schools to apply for innovation-school or innovation-school-zone status, which enables them to make their own decisions on spending, the length of the school day and year, course content, hiring, and teacher compensation. "These schools and districts of innovation will have the potential to instruct students in exciting new ways," said Peter Groff, then-president of the Colorado State Senate, after the legislation passed. "We have the potential to improve student achievement by offering

³² Secondary research on organizations highlighted by the U.S. Department of Education.

³³ 2008 Illinois District Report Card, City of Chicago SD 299.

flexibility in the way education is administered.”³⁴ While any school may apply for status as an innovation school or zone, the act was designed to enable low-performing schools to act swiftly and with greater autonomy, as well as to attract capable leaders.

Some states and districts are responding to a growing recognition in the field that turnaround will not succeed unless accountability structures and relationships, which have been traditionally focused on compliance, shift instead to a focus on building strong partnerships, developing capacity, and using data to drive improved performance.

For example, the Center for School and District Accountability of the Massachusetts Department of Education recently created a new accountability framework that assesses school effectiveness and reviews district performance. For districts in need of intervention, the center collaborates with districts and the assistance units of state school boards to develop recovery plans. It also monitors plan implementation. In addition, the center plans to train districts to analyze and compare practices and outcomes according to a common set of standards. “We want to build the capacity of districts so that they are leading the work,” explains Deputy Commissioner Baehr.

- **Building the Capacity to Do Turnaround Work.** State and district leaders agree that developing a human capital pipeline for teachers and principals is one of the keys to achieving turnaround success. Developing that talent pipeline requires a coordinated effort at the state and district levels. As RAND found in a recent study about school leadership, “A cohesive leadership system (CLS), defined as well-coordinated policies and initiatives across state agencies and between the state and its districts, appears to be a promising approach to developing school leaders engaged in improving instruction.”³⁵ Talent development also requires preparation for the challenges of a turnaround situation.

Yet few human capital providers — universities or nonprofit organizations — are set up to train the large number of teachers, principals, and support staff needed to succeed in chronically low-performing schools. As a result, some districts and states have integrated professional development programs into their local turnaround strategies, while others have partnered with external human capital providers.

For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools launched in 2008-2009 its Strategic Staffing Initiative, which provides a mix of financial and hiring incentives for principals and their staffs to build highly effective leadership teams in seven of the district’s lowest-performing schools. The principals make a three-year commitment to their new schools, and receive a 10 percent merit-pay supplement and bonus if their school shows high growth by the second year. “Effective leadership at the school level is essential,” says district Superintendent Peter Gorman. “We can’t raise student achievement without strong leadership.”³⁶

In addition to strengthening human capital within schools, states and districts are also building their own, currently limited, capacity to support turnaround efforts and work directly with schools. As a specific example, Virginia’s Department of Education requires its districts to develop a plan for supporting their lowest-performing schools. The department partners with each district to monitor implementation of the plan.

To aid this effort, the state has brought in administrative coaches to work with districts, and has built a learning community for turnaround principals to discuss issues and best practices across districts. “We won’t just work with the schools — we require the districts to be a partner,” says Kathleen Smith, director of Virginia’s Office of School Improvement. “And I think it’s made all the difference.”

³⁴ Office of Gov. Bill Ritter of Colorado, “Gov. Ritter Signs Innovation Zones Bill Into Law,” press release, May 28, 2008, <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/GovRitter/GOVR/1211966060528>.

³⁵ RAND, “Improving School Leadership: The Promise of Cohesive Leadership Systems,” 2009.

³⁶ Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, “CMS Names New Leadership at Seven Schools,” press release, February 10, 2009, <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/news/Pages/CMSnamesnewleadershipatsevenschools.aspx>.

Exhibit 13: State Policy Changes to Support School Turnarounds

Over the past year, dramatic changes have taken place in state and local policies related to school turnaround. The Obama administration's education priorities and Race to the Top guidelines precipitated many of these policy changes, which include an expectation that states will create policies that improve the conditions for school turnaround to take place. The turnaround-related reforms largely fall into two categories: teacher-tenure and evaluation policies, and implementation policies.

Policies on Teacher Tenure and Evaluation

- **Florida's** bill, which did not pass, would have put all teachers on annual contracts. After a teacher's fifth year in the district, a further annual contract would only be awarded if the teacher was ranked within the top-two performance tiers. The legislation would also have required districts to establish performance-pay plans.
- **Colorado's** SB 10-191, which passed, requires tenured teachers earning multiple consecutive "unsatisfactory" ratings to revert to probationary status, as well as stipulates mutual consent for teacher placement in schools. It bases more than half of a principal's evaluation and 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation on student-achievement gains.
- **Rhode Island** passed legislation that allows schools to select their teachers, demands that no child be taught for two consecutive years by teachers rated ineffective, and requires that teachers who are rated ineffective two years in a row be released from employment.
- **Maryland, Ohio, and Washington** passed laws extending the time before a teacher could receive tenure. **Delaware** and **Tennessee** passed laws requiring that student achievement form a significant portion of a teacher's evaluation.

Policies Governing Implementation

- **Colorado's** SB 09-163 (Education Accountability Act) creates a new accountability system for the state's schools. Districts will be accredited at different levels, with improvement plans required and state turnaround assistance offered to districts at the lowest levels. Over time, new performance measures — such as student and school improvement, dropout rates, student performance on precollegiate tests, and other measures — will determine a district's accreditation, as well as what's reported to the public. Additionally, Colorado's SB 08-130 (Innovative Schools Act) allows schools to petition the local school board for increased autonomy in turnaround schools.
- **California's** Open Enrollment and Parent Empowerment Act requires that a turnaround model be implemented if a school is in corrective action, if it has an API of less than 800, and if at least 50 percent of the parents at the school request the change.
- **Illinois** established its authority to set up a series of "Partnership Zones," through which the state will partner with outside organizations and allow new evaluation systems and staffing autonomy in failing schools.
- **Massachusetts'** SB 2247 increases school-level autonomy in failing schools and doubles the number of charter schools in its lowest-performing districts.
- **Tennessee** passed legislation to create an "Achievement School District" akin to the Recovery School District in **Louisiana**. Low-performing schools would be removed from their home districts and placed under the state's authority.

Additional information on recent state education policies can be found on the Education Commission of the States Web site at www.ecs.org.

Sources: Mass Insight Education; FSG interviews and research; state Web sites; RTTT applications.

Unions

Both unionized and nonunionized states have large numbers of schools in need of turnaround. The presence or absence of unions does not in and of itself lead to the failure of schools. However, unions have been resistant to many of the changes that are seen as core to turnaround solutions — changes such as replacing teachers, extending working hours, linking teacher compensation to student performance, and creating new teacher evaluation approaches. Union support for RTTT applications varied greatly. Some states, like Delaware, were able to secure broad-based union support, while other unionized states like Florida had less success.

Despite this, our interviews and research revealed that unions and districts can and are beginning to find creative approaches to creating the conditions needed for turnaround success. For example, in October 2009, teachers in New Haven, Connecticut, ratified a new contract for the district's lowest-performing schools. According to the agreement, "Schools deemed 'turnarounds' would be reconstituted with new leadership and staff. Teachers would have to reapply, and principals would select those to be hired. These schools would also be freed from most contract provisions and could be operated by third-party management organizations, including charter school operators."³⁷

The contract provisions have been criticized for not tackling tenure and pay-for-performance issues, but many observers believe that this was a breakthrough in the dialogue between management and unions. "This is an incredibly progressive contract," says Joan Devlin, senior associate director for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). "It addresses teacher voice, and it gives the district the flexibility it needs to make [these reforms] work."³⁸

Unions are also beginning to examine other central issues of high-needs schools, such as teacher evaluation. The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and New York State United Teachers have been awarded an AFT grant to establish a multidistrict approach for more rigorous teacher evaluation, in partnership with state education leaders and local unions. According to the AFT, the grant will help Rhode Island and New York to "design

an educator-evaluation system based on state teaching standards, evidence of student learning, and measures of learning environment conditions."³⁹

As seen in the selection of Delaware and Tennessee as first-round RTTT winners, the U.S. Department of Education is placing a premium on union and district buy-in for school turnaround and other reform approaches. And states, districts, and unions are responding with an unprecedented level of dialogue. However, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's clear message to states as they developed their second-round RTTT applications was that bold reform takes precedence over district and union consensus. In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, Secretary Duncan said, "Watered-down proposals with lots of consensus won't win, and proposals that drive real reform will win."⁴⁰

School Operators

Outside of the traditional district-managed public schools, turnaround schools can be run by school operators, including single-school operators and school management organizations (SMOs). The latter group includes for-profit and nonprofit education management organizations (EMOs) and charter management organizations (CMOs) that deliver to a network of schools such management services as curriculum development, assessment design, professional development, systems implementation, back-office services, teacher recruitment, and facility services.

For example, Mastery Charter Schools (Mastery) currently operates four charter schools in Philadelphia, three of which are district turnarounds. Mastery's model integrates management and educational practices to drive student achievement. It includes continuous training for teachers; assessments linked to direct instruction; and problem-solving, social-emotional, and workplace skills training for students. Other school operators, such as AUSL, are not converting schools to charters, but rather contracting with the district to run turnaround schools on their behalf. When working with turnaround schools, operators are typically granted some level of autonomy, assume responsibility for student results, and are held accountable through a contract or charter signed with the district or state agency.

³⁷ Sawchuk, Stephen, "Teacher Contract Called Potential Model for Nation," *Education Week*, October 21, 2009, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/21/09union.h29.html?r=829946276>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ American Federation of Teachers, AFT Innovation Fund, <http://www.aft.org/innovate/ny-ri.htm>.

⁴⁰ King, Neal Jr., and Stephanie Banchero, "Unions, States Clash in Race to Top," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2010.

Supporting Partners

A variety of partner organizations help support school-reform efforts, and they are evolving to support school turnaround specifically at the school, district, and state levels. The range of supporting partners currently working in both school reform and turnaround include:

- **Comprehensive School Redesign Specialists.** These organizations work with schools to implement turnaround strategies. For example, the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) partners with underperforming high schools for a five-year planning and implementation period, which begins with the development of a comprehensive school-design plan and continues with ongoing coaching and professional development for faculty and administrators and implementation support. “We have a wraparound turnaround model,” explains Gerry House, CEO of ISA. “ISA provides extensive, customized professional development and on-the-ground support for districts, principals, and teachers engaged in school turnaround.”

Similarly, Partners in School Innovation (PSI) brings together teams of experienced educators to collaborate with principals and teacher leaders to improve core instructional programs in high-needs public schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. PSI works side by side with turnaround leaders and teachers on-site and in cross-school networks for three to five years to drive continuous improvement adapted to each school’s needs.

These approaches trace their origins back to the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. The program identified the qualities of effective schools and then provided \$50,000 annual grants to Title I schools to help them align with effective qualities. In the District of Columbia Public Schools, several comprehensive school-redesign providers partner with the district to run turnaround schools, as well as six other types of whole-school reform models. Additionally, organizations like Cambridge Education, B&D Consulting, and SchoolWorks provide consulting services to districts and school operators that range from diagnostics to planning to implementation support.

- **Human Capital and Professional Development Providers.** These organizations and programs work to increase the supply of quality educators in turnaround schools through recruiting, training, and supporting turnaround principals and teachers. Human capital and professional development organizations working in the turnaround space include university and district-based programs, as well as independent nonprofits.

For example, the University of Virginia developed a comprehensive two-year School Turnaround Specialists Program to provide executive education and support for leaders in turnaround schools. The New York City Leadership Academy was launched as a 501(c)(3) with the explicit purpose of training leaders to serve the New York City Department of Education’s low-performing schools. New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) is a national nonprofit that partners with school districts in 20 cities to train, place, and support principals. NLNS requires its partners to provide high levels of autonomy and flexibility to its candidates. What these programs have in common is their focus on providing not just training, but also induction support, mentoring, networking opportunities, and ongoing professional development to their graduates.

In addition to training candidates, some of these organizations have also begun to conduct and publish research to understand what makes their teachers and leaders successful in turnaround environments. For example, Teach for America (TFA) recently published its first book, *Teaching As Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher’s Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap*, which presents the organization’s findings on what distinguishes the TFA teachers who are most effective at driving dramatic student gains. The book and its accompanying Web site, www.teachingasleadership.org, serve as a how-to guide for new teachers in low-income communities.⁴¹ NLNS published similar research on what distinguishes those principals who achieve “breakthrough gains” in its report “Principal Effectiveness: A New Principalship to Drive Student Achievement, Teacher Effectiveness, and School Turnarounds.”⁴²

⁴¹ Teach for America, “Teaching As Leadership Framework,” http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/teaching/teaching_leadership_framework.htm.

⁴² New Leaders for New Schools, “Principal Effectiveness: A New Principalship to Drive Student Achievement, Teacher Effectiveness, and School Turnarounds with Key Insights from the UEFTM,” <http://www.nlins.org/ueftm.jsp>.

Many of these organizations have evolved from focusing on school leader or teacher training and support to also building the capacity of districts and states to manage the human capital pipeline and to ensure that conditions are in place to support the success of trained educators. The University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialists Program has now collaborated in this way with over 40 school districts across 10 states and major cities. It most recently partnered at the state level to work with the Missouri Department of Education on 29 urban and rural schools across the state. “Our approach has really evolved over time,” says Executive Director Leann Buntrock. “We are now working with not only districts and schools, but also with states and regional centers.”

Human capital providers focused on professional development for teachers entering high-needs schools have also expanded their models. For example, the New Teacher Project not only offers programs to train teachers, but also works with school districts to develop new-teacher recruitment and hiring strategies for underperforming schools.

- **District and School Resource Management Specialists.** District and school resource management organizations help districts and schools institute financial and operational policies and practices to support turnaround. These organizations offer services that include diagnostic analyses tailored to district needs, Web-based tools developed to assess school performance, and research and training for improved instruction.

For example, Education Resource Strategies works closely with leaders of urban public-school systems to rethink the use of district and school-level resources so as to provide targeted assistance and increased autonomy to failing schools. Alvarez and Marsel has worked with multiple districts across the U.S. since 2003 to support system-level turnaround through resource mapping and operations management.

- **Integrated Services Providers.** Turnaround schools often have high rates of student violence and disruptive behavioral issues. Integrated services providers help schools identify and address the cultural and mental-health factors that drive chronically poor performance. Organizations such as Turnaround (formerly Turnaround USA) work with school staff to help them understand

child development and to integrate social and behavioral support directly into the learning environment. Turnaround’s model is based on four mechanisms to help students with the highest needs: partnering with principals to hire social workers; developing student intervention and instructional support teams; accessing resources for extensive case management; and knowledge and skill building around child development. The organization works at the individual teacher level, providing them with training, coaching, and on-site observation. “Our model looks at the complex demands in these schools that lead to astoundingly poor performance,” says Greg Greicius, senior vice president for education initiatives at Turnaround. “We address behavioral issues by addressing student needs — socially, emotionally, and academically.”

Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations can aid turnaround efforts in a number of important ways. Most students in turnaround schools are significantly behind academically. After-school tutoring, summer academic programs, and mentoring programs can help accelerate a student’s academic progress. For example, Boston Public Schools works with Citizen Schools to implement after-school programs at seven of its lowest-performing schools. Independent research on the program suggests that, although participants enter the program behind their peers on state exam results, by the end of seventh grade, they outperform their peers on those same tests.⁴³

CBOs can also play an important role in working with the community to build support, or mobilize pressure, for the district to make difficult decisions like replacing principals and teachers, or even closing schools. Parent Revolution has built a parent union in Los Angeles to advocate for dramatic reform. The group was instrumental in lobbying L.A. Unified to turn over 250 of the district’s worst-performing schools to outside operators. America’s Promise has organized 105 summits across the country to raise parent and CBO awareness of the local dropout crisis and to help local partners develop community-action plans to address the issue. “Engaging the parents and community deeply is the way to make turnaround efforts sustainable,” explains Carmita Vaughn, chief strategy officer at America’s Promise.

⁴³ Citizen Schools Web site.

Research and Field-Building Organizations

These organizations analyze data, extract lessons and effective practices, and provide tools to support turnaround work. They also foster partnerships and dialogue among education decision makers. The research base to guide the field is limited, given that many efforts are still in early stages of development. But some research groups are now turning their attention to school turnaround. Organizations such as Mass Insight Education, Public Impact, the Center on Education Policy, NewSchools Venture Fund, the Aspen Institute, and the U.S. Department of Education have been researching and writing about school turnaround. An appendix lists the turnaround-specific reports and articles we collected as part of our research.

Philanthropic Funders

Private, corporate, and community foundations play a key role in driving education reform, and turnaround is no exception. To date, funders have been involved in the following areas:

- **Supporting Research and Knowledge-Sharing.** The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was a lead funder for “The Turnaround Challenge” report from Mass Insight Education. Similarly, a collaboration of funders, including The Wallace Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Stuart Foundation, the Rainwater Charitable Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, funded this report and the “Driving Dramatic School Improvement” conference. Carnegie Corporation of New York and a number of other funders supported a recently released study from MDRC about New York City’s small schools of choice, which have replaced traditional comprehensive high schools in historically disadvantaged communities.⁴⁴
- **Providing Support to Districts and States.** The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded 15 states to employ consulting firms to help complete RTTT applications. Several foundations supported state applications in their regions, including the Joyce Foundation in Indiana, the Kauffman Foundation in Missouri, and the Donnell-Key Foundation in Colorado.
- **Supporting New Turnaround Approaches.** Carnegie Corporation of New York announced plans in January 2010 to fund Mass Insight Education’s Partnership Zone Initiative with a \$1.5 million, two-year grant that was partially matched by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The funding will support Mass Insight Education and a group of national collaborators to create scalable and sustainable strategies for turning around clusters of the lowest-performing schools in six states: Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and New York.
- **Enhancing the Quality of Teaching and School Leadership.** The Wallace Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and the Rainwater Charitable Foundation have all made significant investments in improving the quality of school leadership, supporting highly effective training programs, and working to identify and create systemic conditions that support school leader success. “As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership,” says Ken Leithwood, professor of educational leadership and policy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.⁴⁵ In line with research findings on the vital role that quality teaching plays in student achievement, foundations are making major investments in improving teacher effectiveness. The most prominent example is a \$335 million investment announced by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2009 to fund experiments in tenure, evaluation, compensation, training, and mentoring.⁴⁶
- **Funding the Capacity of School Districts and Human Capital and Technical Assistance Providers.** The Los Angeles Unified School District received funding for staff positions from private foundations, including the Wasserman Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, including one position to oversee the takeover of low-performing turnaround schools. In Chicago, Boeing has funded a variety of partners working on districtwide initiatives, including AUSL, NLNS, and Renaissance 2010. “We have focused our giving on a model or idea that will ultimately lead to a systemic or impactful change,” says Nora Moreno Cargie, director of global corporate citizenship at the Boeing Company.

⁴⁴ MDRC, “Transforming the High School Experience: How New York City’s New Small Schools Are Boosting Student Achievement and Graduation Rates,” June 2010.

⁴⁵ Leithwood, K., K. Louis, S. Anderson, and K. Wahlstrom, “How Leadership Influences Student Learning,” Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, September 2004, <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocusEducationLeadership/Pages/HowLeadershipInfluencesStudentLearning.aspx>.

⁴⁶ Anderson, Nick, “Gates Foundation Gives \$335 Million to Raise Teacher Effectiveness,” *The Washington Post*, November 20, 2009.

Despite the individual grants outlined above, relatively few foundations have prioritized school turnaround as a major area of investment or program area. This may change as federal funding decisions are made and turnaround work continues to build momentum.

THE LANDSCAPE OF TURNAROUND ACTORS

Although we have discussed the roles that major actors play in advancing school-turnaround efforts separately, these actors are working in close relationships with each other. Our turnaround landscape map (see Exhibit 14) depicts this ecosystem of activity. The map shows the significant actors and how they relate in terms of their roles and how funds flow between them:

- *Federal funding* is flowing to states in the form of RTTT and SIG, as well as to districts and nonprofits in the form of i3 grants and SIG. The SIG and district funding then flows to school operators. Philanthropic funding is currently supporting the work of school operators, states, and districts, as well as an array of support providers.
- *Accountability relationships* are reflected by the flow of data from schools to districts, and from districts to states. Additionally, district and state accountability systems analyze that data and return reports and findings to schools so that they can understand and improve on their work.
- *Conditions at schools* are being determined by school operators, state and district policies, and the collective-bargaining agreements negotiated between districts and teachers' unions.
- Districts and school operators (labeled as school management organizations on Exhibit 14) need to build *complementary capacity and accountability systems* for turnaround schools. Districts can either build their own capacity to do turnaround work or buy that capacity through partnerships with school operators.
- CBOs and parents can *rally to support turnaround efforts* in the school and build public will for dramatic reform efforts. Districts must work to engage parents and community groups and raise their awareness of the opportunity that significant funding from the federal government presents.
- Philanthropic funders can *invest in individual actors in the ecosystem* — states, districts, school operators, CBOs — who all need to build capacity for turnaround. Philanthropic funders can also support the ecosystem as a whole through funding research and efforts to bring actors together and share lessons across stakeholders and geographies.

While we have used the map in this section to highlight relationships between actors, we also encourage readers to reference the map later in the report, when we call attention to issues and capacity gaps.

