



The Turnaround Challenge

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



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

Prepared through a grant from
the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

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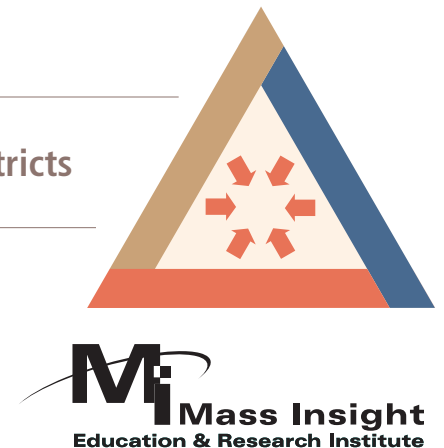
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By Andrew Calkins, William Guenther, Grace Belfiore, and Dave Lash

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Profiles of Four School District Strategies for Under-Performing Schools

Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York City, Philadelphia

HPHP Schools in Action: Lessons from High- Performing, High-Poverty High Schools

Five Schools Drawn from Mass Insight's *Building Blocks*
Effective-Practice Research

Poverty's "Perfect Storm" Impact on Learning and the Implications for School Design

An Expanded Analysis

Resources for Advocacy and Research on School Turnaround

An Annotated Bibliography of Turnaround Resources

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

Foreword

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

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

It is a poignant and troubling irony. Just as we discover that demographics need not determine destiny, the nation's new school-quality measurement tools reveal that for students attending our worst-performing schools... in fact, it does. By the end of the decade, at current rates, about five percent of all U.S. public schools will be identified as chronic failures in need of what NCLB calls "restructuring." (See chart, displayed with more detail on page 16.) The vast majority of students at these schools "graduate" to the next level with a skills and knowledge deficit that all but cripples their chances at future success.

Chart projections are based on actual 2005-2006 data for schools in Restructuring Status under NCLB with the assumption that the rate of schools leaving that status will remain constant over the next four years. Source of 2005-06 data: Center on Education Policy (2006).

How can we interrupt this cycle?

That was the charge given to us by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in September, 2005: examine the landscape of current effort to turn around the nation's most chronically under-performing schools and develop a new framework for states, working in partnership with communities and districts, to apply

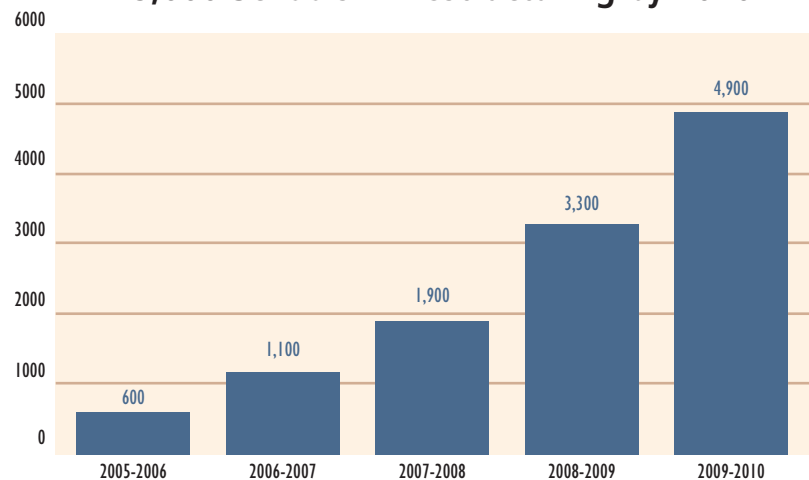
to school turnaround. The Mass Insight Education & Research Institute represented a compelling choice for the foundation to conduct this work: a non-profit organization that has been deeply involved in policy facilitation, education reform advocacy, effective-practice research, and intensive school-improvement services simultaneously at the state level for ten years. All of these capacities informed this report, as did the fact that our home and our work over that decade has been in Massachusetts – a national model, in many ways, for effective standards-based reform.

But on the issue of school turnaround there is much to be done, here in the Commonwealth and in every state, bar none. There are no easy answers – except one. To the question, *Will current intervention strategies produce the results we want?*, the research returns a definitive "No." The

analysis, conclusions, and framework presented in *The Turnaround Challenge*, we hope, will help educators, school reformers, and policy leaders across the country develop a new generation of turnaround strategies that carry, at the very least, the possibility of success.

*William Guenther and Andrew Calkins
Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts*

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



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

12 Tough Questions

A Self-Audit for States Engaged in School Turnaround

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

Evaluating Your State's Commitment

1. Has your state visibly focused on its lowest-performing five percent of schools and set *specific, two-year turnaround goals*, such as bringing achievement at least to the current high-poverty school averages in the state?
2. Does your state have a plan in place that gives you confidence that it can deliver on these goals?
3. If not: Is there any evidence that the state is taking steps to accept its responsibility to ensure that students in the lowest-performing schools have access to the same quality of education found in high-performing, high-poverty schools?

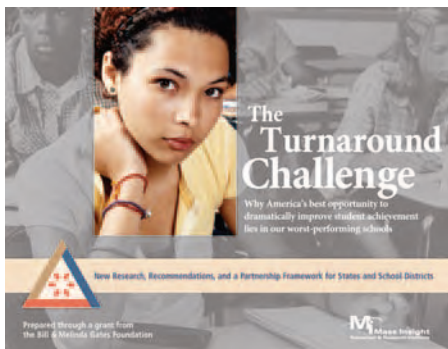
Evaluating Your State's Strategy

4. Does your state recognize that a turnaround strategy for failing schools requires fundamental changes that are different from an incremental improvement strategy?
5. Has your state presented districts and schools with:
 - a sufficiently attractive set of turnaround services and policies, collected within a protected turnaround "zone," so that schools actively *want* to gain access to required new operating conditions, streamlined regulations, and resources; and
 - alternative consequences (such as chronically under-performing status and a change in school governance) that encourage schools and districts to volunteer?

6. Does your state provide the student information and data analysis systems schools need to assess learning and individualize teaching?
7. *Changing Conditions*: Does your state's turnaround strategy provide school-level leaders with sufficient streamlined authority over staff, schedule, budget and program to implement the turnaround plan? Does it provide for sufficient incentives in pay and working conditions to attract the best possible staff and encourage them to do their best work?
8. *Building Capacity – Internal*: Does your state recognize that turnaround success depends primarily on an effective "people strategy" that recruits, develops, and retains strong leadership teams and teachers?
9. *Building Capacity – External*: Does your state have a strategy to develop lead partner organizations with specific expertise needed to provide intensive school turnaround support?
10. *Clustering for Support*: Within the protected turnaround zones, does your state collaborate with districts to organize turnaround work into school clusters (by need, school type, region, or feeder pattern) that have a lead partner providing effective network support?

State Leadership and Funding

11. Is there a distinct and visible state entity that, like the schools in the turnaround zone, has the necessary flexibility to act, as well as the required authority, resources, and accountability to lead the turnaround effort?
12. To the extent that your state is funding the turnaround strategy, is that commitment a) adequate and b) at the school level, contingent on fulfilling requirements for participation in the turnaround zone?



The Main Ideas in *The Turnaround Challenge*

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

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

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

A Specialized Discipline

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

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

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

- Require failing schools and their districts to either pursue more proactive turnaround strategies or lose control over the school.
- Make fundamental changes in the conditions under which those schools operate.

- Develop a local marketplace of partner/providers skilled in this discipline.
- Appropriate the \$250,000-\$1,000,000 per year required to turn around a failing school.

A Special Zone for School Turnaround

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

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

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

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

1. **Change conditions.** Create a protected space free of bureaucratic restrictions and overly stringent collective bargaining agreements. Provide incentives to challenge and motivate people to do their best work.
2. **Increase capacity** internally on school staffs, especially among school leaders, and externally through a strong marketplace of local providers with the experience and ability to serve as lead turnaround partners (see below).
3. **Organize clusters of schools** – either within a district or across districts – with their own lead turnaround partner providing comprehensive services focused on turnaround. These clusters can be grouped by need, school type, region, or other characteristics.

New State Agency and Commitment

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

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

New Model of Turnaround Partners

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

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

The Benchmark: High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

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

Readiness to Learn

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

Readiness to Teach

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

Readiness to Act

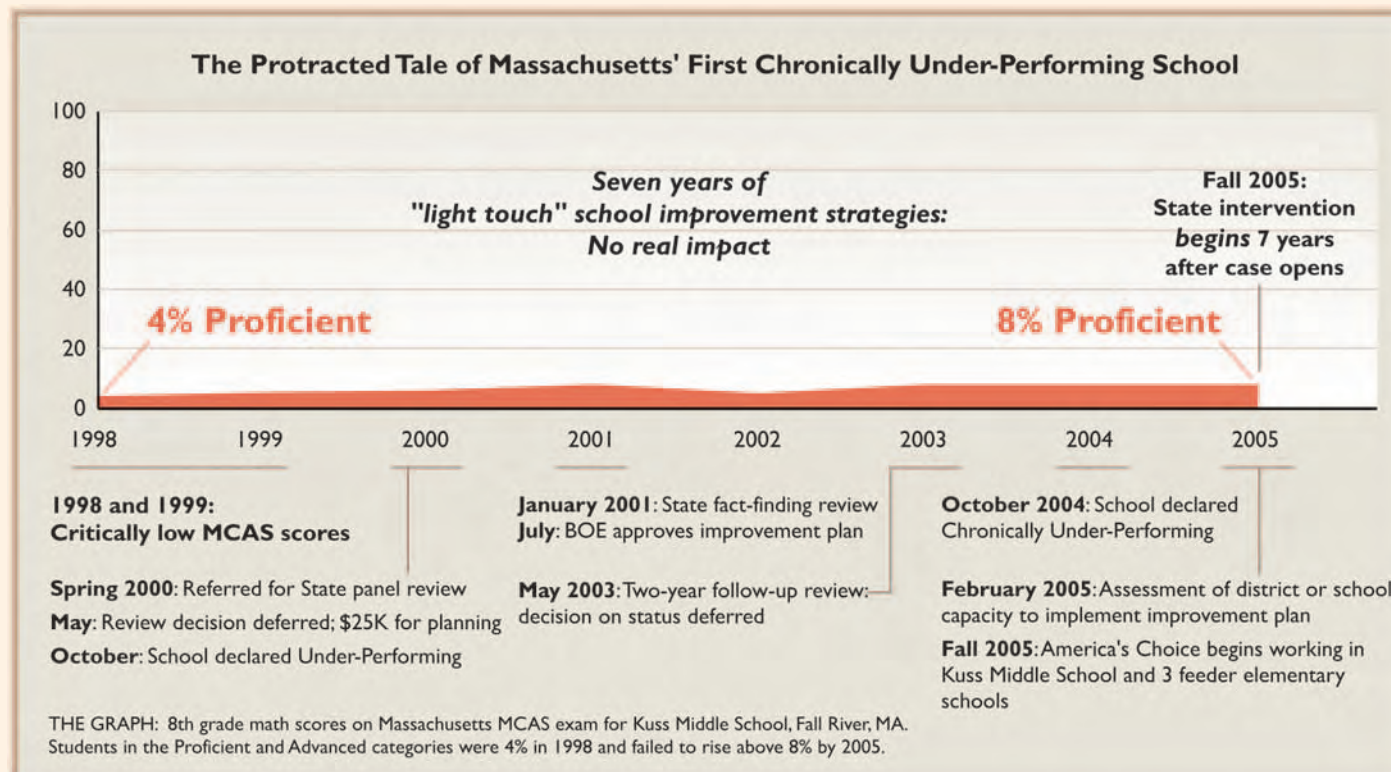
- Ability to make mission-driven decisions about people, time, money, and program
- Leaders adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships
- Creative responses to constant unrest

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

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

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

Call to Action



Marginal change = marginal results for under-performing schools

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

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

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

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

1. The Problem – and the Vision

THE PROBLEM

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

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

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

THE BOTTOM LINE

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

Why Schools Fail

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

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

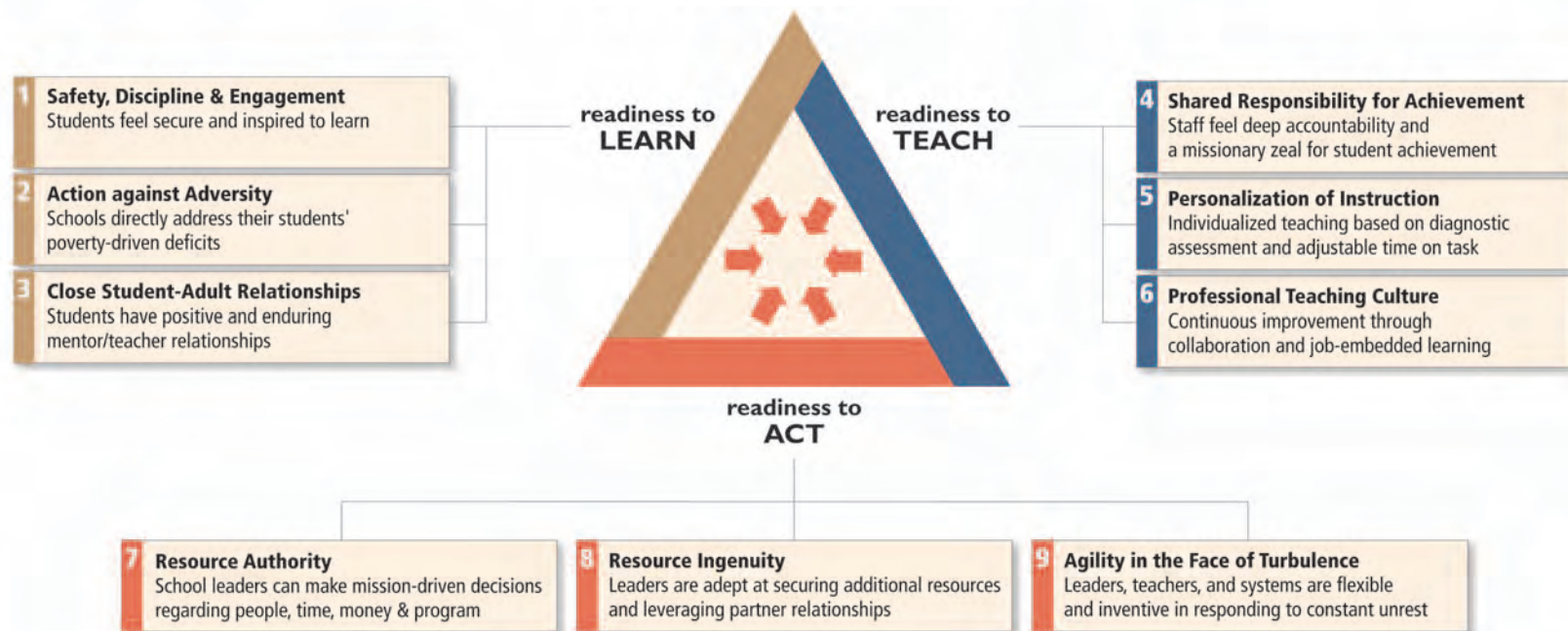
Turnaround: A New Response

Standards, testing, and accountability enable us, for the first time, to identify with conviction our most chronically under-performing schools.

***Turnaround* is the emerging response to an entirely new dynamic in public education: the threat of closure for underperformance.**

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

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



The Benchmark

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

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

A "New-World" Approach

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

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

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

2. The Challenge of Change

WHAT'S BEEN TRIED

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

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

Turnaround vs. “School Improvement”

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

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

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

The Inadequate Response to Date

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

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

- ▶ **Inadequate design:** lack of ambition, comprehensiveness, integration, and networking support
- ▶ **Inadequate capacity:** fragmented training initiatives, instead of an all-encompassing people strategy and strong, integrated partnerships that support the mission
- ▶ **Inadequate incentive change:** driven more by compliance than buy-in
- ▶ **Inadequate political will:** episodic and sometimes confusing policy design; under-funding; and inconsistent political support

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

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

What Success Requires: A “Zone” for Effective Turnaround

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

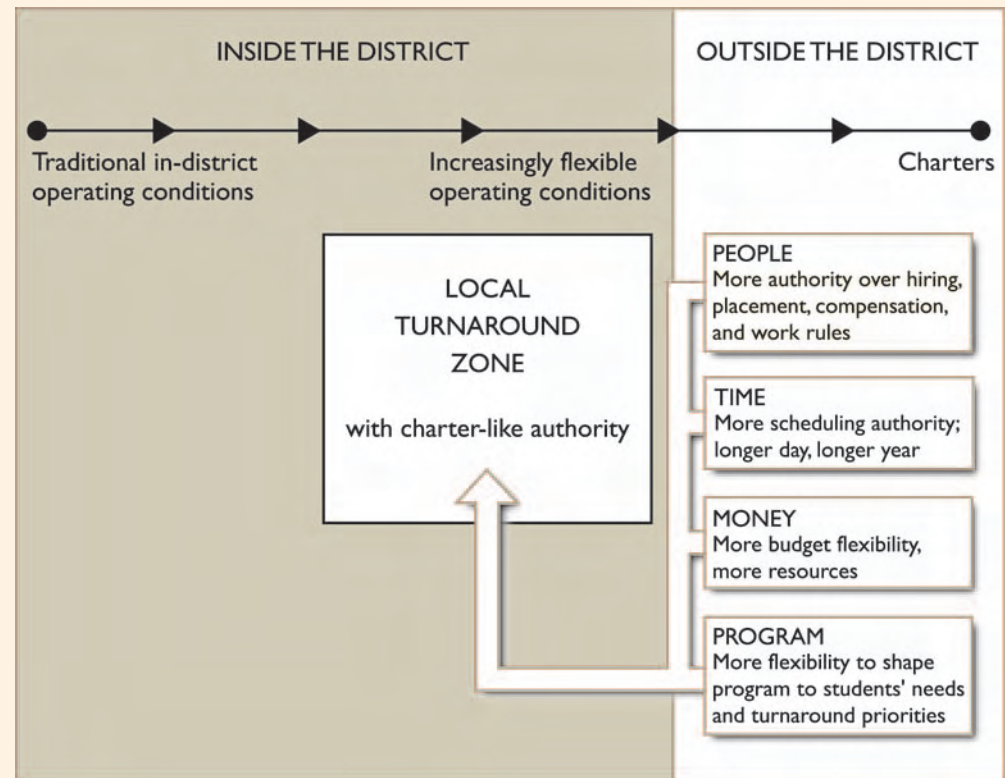
The high-performing, high-poverty schools we studied tend to reflect characteristics of highly entrepreneurial organizations. That makes sense. These schools are succeeding either by working outside of traditional public education structures (charters); or by working around those structures, internally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

- ▶ **Clearly defined authority to act** based on what’s best for children and learning – i.e., flexibility and control over staffing, scheduling, budget, and curriculum
- ▶ **Relentless focus on hiring and staff development** as part of an overall “people strategy” to ensure the best possible teaching force
- ▶ **Highly capable, distributed school leadership** – i.e., not simply the principal, but an effective leadership team
- ▶ **Additional time** in the school day and across the school year
- ▶ **Performance-based behavioral expectations** for all stakeholders including teachers, students, and (often) parents
- ▶ **Integrated, research-based programs and related social services** that are specifically designed, personalized, and adjusted to address students’ academic and related psycho-social needs

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

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

FIGURE B



Building the Turnaround Model:

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

3. The Way Forward

A CALL TO ACTION FOR STATES

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

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

The Three ‘C’s of Turnaround at Scale

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

Changing Conditions

Turnaround requires protected space that dismantles common barriers to reform. Chronically under-performing schools offer a politically defensible opportunity to create such a space. A few entrepreneurial school districts (Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York) have created such condition-changing zones or “carve-outs” for their neediest schools. But others (Philadelphia, Oakland) have needed intervention from the state to mount similar initiatives.

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

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

Building Capacity

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

FIGURE C

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

Clustering for Support

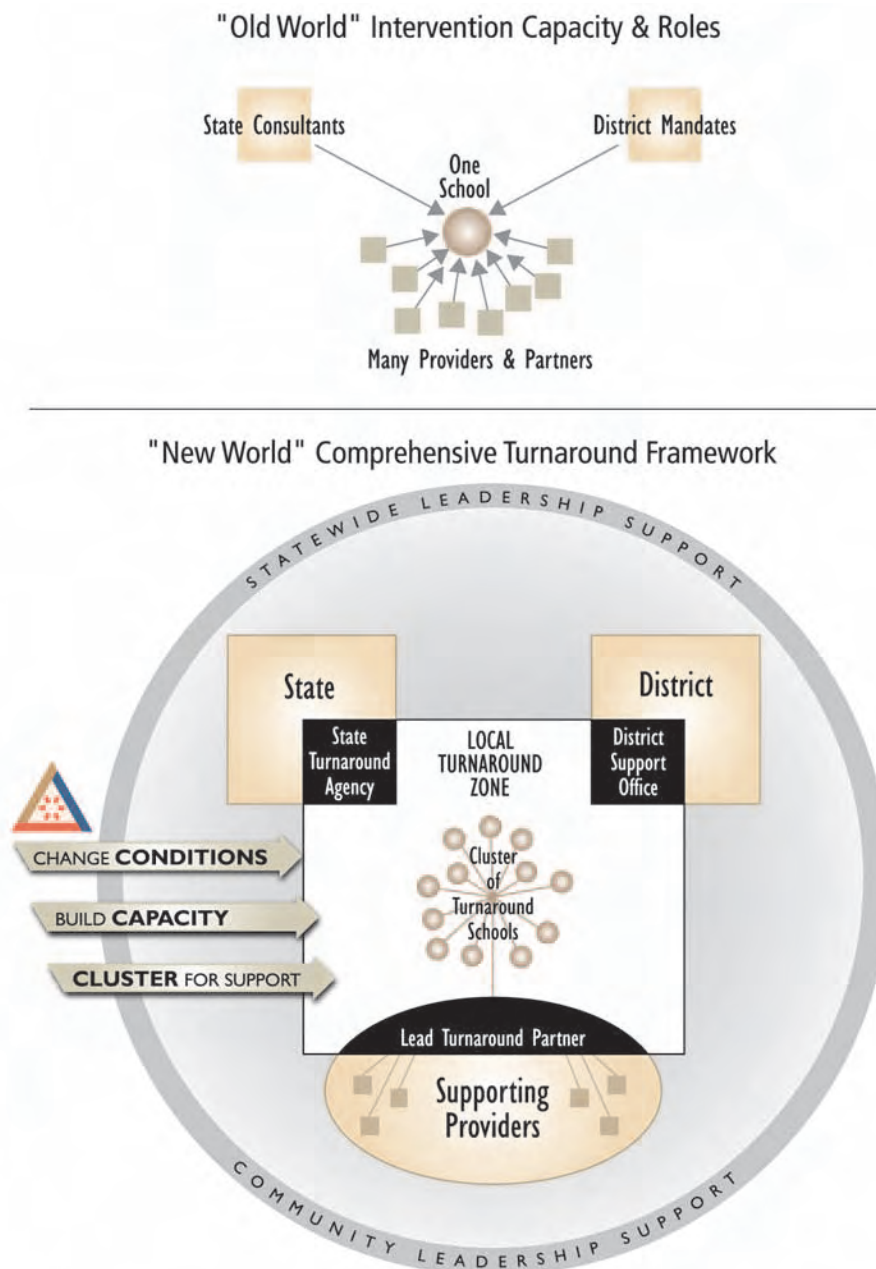
Turnaround has meaningful impact at the level of the school building, but turnaround at scale cannot be accomplished in ones and twos. States and districts should undertake turnaround in clusters organized around identified needs: by school type (e.g., middle schools or grade 6-12 academies), student characteristics (very high ELL percentages), feeder patterns (elementary to middle to high school), or region. Clusters should be small enough to operate effectively as networks, but large enough to be an enterprise – i.e., to provide valuable, efficient support from the network center.

The Political Realities: Enabling the State Role

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

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

From Fragmented Improvement Projects to Integrated Turnaround Strategies



Part 1 examines:

1.1 The Challenge of School Turnaround

How this report works, and what you can get out of it

1.2 The Magnitude and Nature of the Turnaround Challenge

Many schools need assistance. The bottom 5 percent need much, much more

1.3 A Turning Point for Turnaround – and an Entry Point for Real Reform?

Failing schools offer a chance to do things differently. Will we take it?

1.1 The Challenge of School Turnaround

How this report works, and what you can get out of it

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

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

Accordingly, the study was designed not only to learn as much as possible from past and current reform efforts, but to broaden the analysis by looking

at specific root causes and at those rare schools that defy the odds in addressing them. This included:

- Researching the nature of under-performance in schools serving disadvantaged, high-poverty enrollments (which represent the bulk of failing schools);
- Examining the well-documented practices of individual high-performing schools serving these enrollments and distilling the strategies they use to achieve their results;
- Analyzing a wide spectrum of scaled-up school intervention, from those simply providing guidance and added capacity to more extensive initiatives involving staff or principal replacement, closure/reopening, and the establishment of special turnaround “zones” with altered operating conditions;
- Isolating the key elements, intensity, duration, resources, and funding required for turnaround of under-performing schools to take root; and
- Developing a framework for state policymakers and school district leaders to use in developing the systems, approaches, expanded capacity, and resource levels required to

bring about dramatic transformation in struggling schools.

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

Tools for Practical Use

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

- **Main report:** This summary of our major findings, conclusions, and recommendations, divided into five Parts and Appendices A and B.
- **Supplemental report:** Additional support for the most important points made in the main report, along with profiles of ten representative state intervention initiatives and four district efforts, with artifacts and resources from several of those initiatives. Available in print and at www.massinsight.org.
- **Downloadable presentations and resources:** Also available at www.massinsight.org are presentation decks you may download and customize to make the case for coherent, well-supported turnaround action in your state or district. In addition, our website offers a directory of available turnaround resources which we will be continually updating.

FIGURE 1A

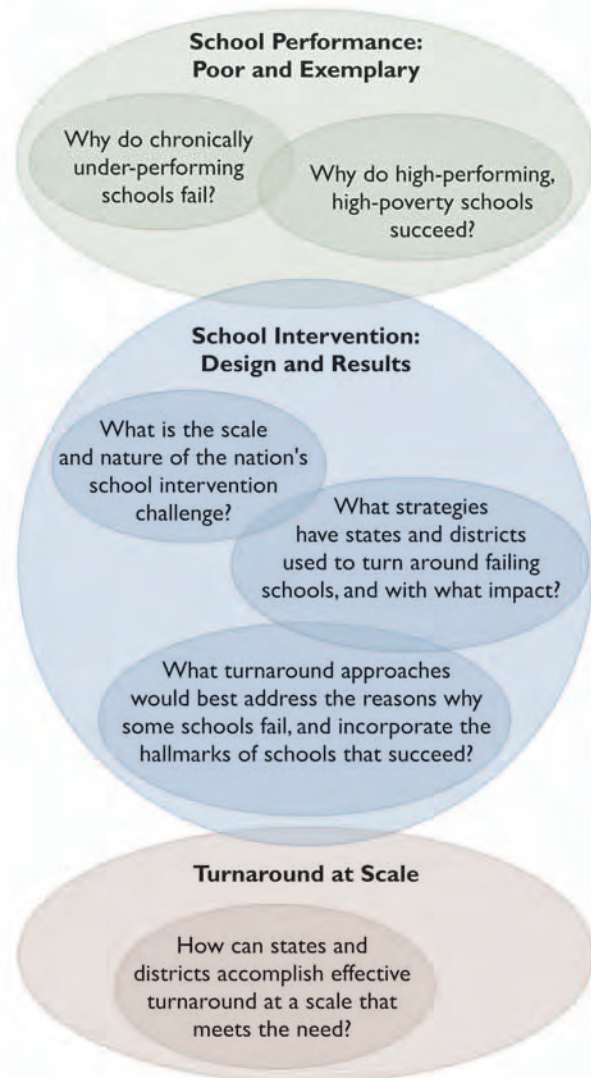
Map of *The Turnaround Challenge*

Research Methodology

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

- **Literature analysis:** More than 300 research reports, news articles, and other resources on school intervention, related federal and state policymaking, effective schools, poverty impacts, change management, and organizational turnaround
- **Individual and group interviews** with practitioners, researchers, leading policymakers, and reform experts in more than a dozen states
- **Extensive interviews** with directors of school intervention in six major urban districts and with 50 school management and/or support organizations, through a related research project supported by the NewSchools Venture Fund
- **Review of the report's major findings and recommendations** by more than two dozen national reform leaders and project partners (see Acknowledgements in the Introductory Material section of the report)

Research Investigations



Report Elements

Part 1: The Challenge of School Turnaround

Understanding the nature and scale of the nation's turnaround challenge; the reasons for hope; and the present opportunity to make the practice of school turnaround a model for change in public education

Part 2: How High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Ignite Learning Under Adverse Conditions



Three dimensions – Readiness to Learn, Readiness to Teach, Readiness to Act – in which exemplary high-poverty schools excel, and what we should learn from them

Part 3: What Success Requires: Changing the Odds for Turnaround Schools (See also: Appendix A)



Key lessons from existing, inadequate restructuring efforts, resulting in a focus on three critical elements of turnaround design: conditions, capacity, and clustering.

Part 4: Organizing at the State Level for Turnaround of Under-Performing Schools



Why NCLB has failed to catalyze effective, high-impact intervention strategies; how state leaders can marshal the support required to implement comprehensive turnaround

Part 5: A Framework for Turnaround of Under-Performing Schools



The core elements of a suggested statewide framework for effective turnaround at scale

1.2 The Magnitude and Nature of the Turnaround Challenge

Many schools need assistance. The bottom five percent need much, much more.

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

Number of Failing Schools Rising Sharply

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

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

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

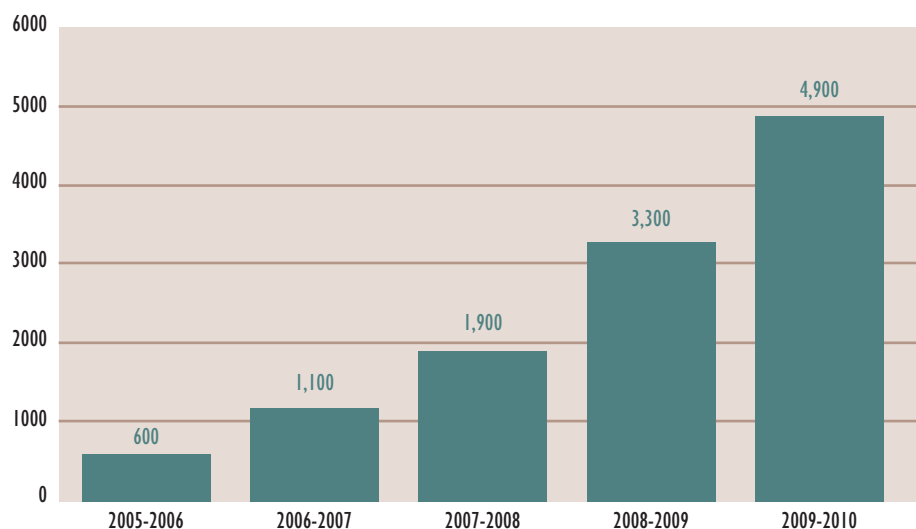
These are not schools that have been labeled "low performing" because of issues with a single student subgroup. These are schools that any reasonable observer would agree are

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

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

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

FIGURE 1B Nearly 5,000 Schools Are Projected to Be in Restructuring by 2010



Projections are based on actual 2005-2006 data for schools in Restructuring Status under NCLB with the assumption that the rate of schools leaving that status will remain constant over the next four years. Source of 2005-06 data: Center on Education Policy (2006).

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

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

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

The Roots of School Failure

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

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

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

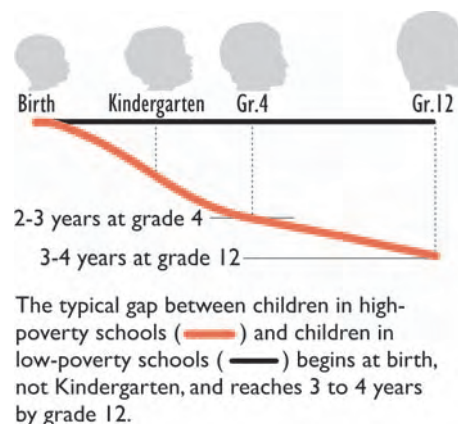
These schools fail because the challenges they face are substantial; because they themselves are dysfunctional; and because the system of which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of the high-poverty student populations they tend to serve.

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

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

FIGURE 1C

Poverty Has an Early and Continuing Impact on Achievement



their counterparts by two to three grade levels in reading – the essential skill for future learning. (NCES, 2005) By the time they reach grade 12, if they do so at all, poor and minority students are about four years behind other students in reading. (Haycock et al, 2001)

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

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

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

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

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

The Magnitude and Nature of the Turnaround Challenge

(continued)

The Inadequacy of Current Intervention

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIGURE 1D A “Pacing Guide” to Standards-Based Reform: At the End of the Sequence Is Intervention in Failing Schools

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

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

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

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

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

The seven-year timeline, presented in the Call to Action on page 7 of this report, for Massachusetts' response to the first school to nudge its way into the state's Chronically Under-Performing category is, unfortunately,

and lack the comprehensive "people" strategies needed to accompany dramatic change. School intervention has been consistently under-funded and provided with inconsistent political support. While most involve only

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

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

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

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

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

Why It Matters

When Public Schools Consistently Fail the Children They Serve

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

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

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

High school dropouts:

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

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

1.3 A Turning Point for Turnaround – and an Entry Point for Real Reform?

Failing schools offer a chance to do things differently. Will we take it?

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

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

And yet.

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

- The promise of high-performing, high-poverty school success
- A new generation of comprehensive intervention strategies by a few major urban districts on behalf of their struggling schools
- The growing sense of urgency and acceptance that in these schools, the status quo is indefensible and everything has to be on the table.

The Promise of High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

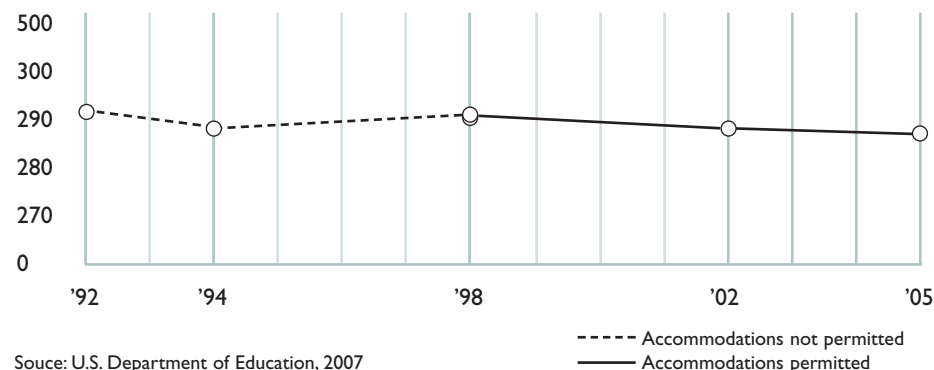
“When educators do succeed at educating poor minority students up to national standards of proficiency, they invariably use methods that are radically different and more intensive than those employed in most American public schools.”

– Paul Tough, *The New York Times*

FIGURE 1E

What Marginal Change Has Wrought: Static Achievement Since 1992

Trend in 12th-grade average NAEP reading scores



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

The Promise of District Experiments in Comprehensive Intervention

The HPHP Readiness model requires some fundamental changes in the

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

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

A Turning Point for Turnaround

(continued)

- **Waivers** of some collective bargaining requirements and work rules, collaboratively developed with teachers' unions
- **Resources to compensate staff** according to professional norms (i.e., for extra responsibility, duty in high-need areas, or for performance)
- **Resources for additional time** in the school day and/or school year
- **Extensive outside assistance from providers** and intermediary organizations, often supported by foundation grants.

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

The Promise of Growing Urgency Regarding Failing Schools

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

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

At the same time, awareness of the HPHP schools, variously called “Dispelling the Myth schools,” “Vanguard” schools, “90-90-90” schools or any number of other monikers, is undercutting the long-held dogma of education-by-zip-code. “The evidence,” as Tough (2006) concludes in his *New York Times* story, “is becoming difficult to ignore: When educators do succeed at educating poor minority students up to national standards of proficiency, they invariably use methods that

students will succeed to the same high level? And if so, how hard are we willing to work, and what resources are we willing to commit, to achieve that goal?”

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

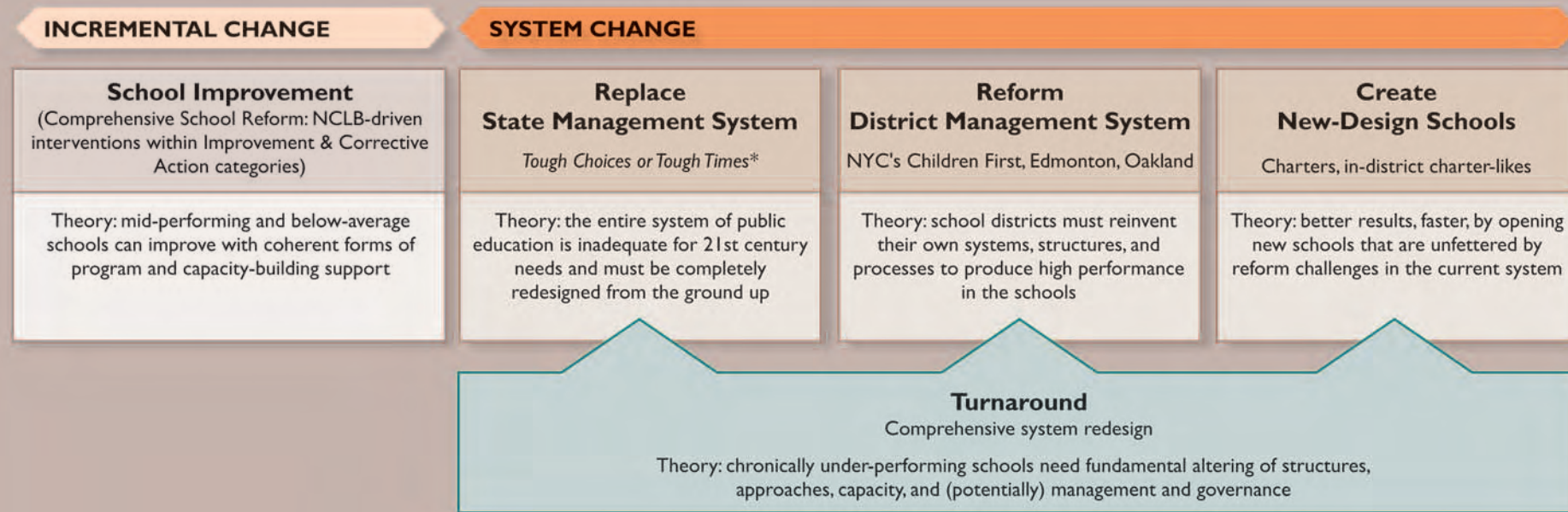
In the challenge represented by America's most poorly performing schools lies an opportunity for dramatic, accessible, and achievable change.

are radically different and more intensive than those employed in most American public schools. So as the No Child Left Behind law comes up for reauthorization, Americans are facing an increasingly stark choice: is the nation really committed to guaranteeing that all of the country's

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

FIGURE 1F

Turnaround Offers an Entry Point to System-Changing Reforms



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

Replace the State Management System: Redesign of the entire state-managed public education system in the United States was the recommendation of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce in its recently released report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. Radical changes of the nature recommended by the Commission – eliminating the school district as we know it now, making states the employers of teachers, creating K-10 “common schools” that send graduates to upper secondary or voc-tech academies – would require a vast rethinking of the current system and enormous rearrangement of resources, people, and organizational structures. While acknowledging that these recommendations merit close consideration, *The Turnaround Challenge* suggests that the crisis in America’s most poorly performing schools provides an even more urgent and a more accessible opportunity for dramatic and achievable change. *Urgent and accessible* because the standards movement has

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

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

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

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

Part 2 examines:

2.1 How High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Ignite Learning Under Adverse Conditions

Understanding the DNA we must replicate at scale

2.2 Patterns of Proficiency: Failing Schools Serve Mostly Poor Children

But: so do some successful schools, proving that school quality can overcome zip code

2.3 Poverty's "Perfect Storm" Impact on Learning

Understanding the deficits is a prerequisite to designing the solutions

2.4 How HPHP Schools Achieve Their Results: *The Readiness Model*

Nine interlocking elements of schools that serve challenged students well

2.5 Applying the Lessons of HPHP Schools

Change begins with the courage to break patterns

2.1 How High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Ignite Learning Under Adverse Conditions

Understanding the DNA we must replicate at scale

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

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

- Researchers studying national databases of school achievement data, indexed with school poverty and minority attributes, are unlocking the black box of school

performance and describing success patterns that are reshaping education reform as well as teaching. (The Education Trust, 2005a; Reeves, 2003; National Center for Educational Accountability/Just for the Kids, 2006)

- Child poverty researchers are pinpointing how a multitude of factors associated with socioeconomic status (SES) affect a child from birth to adulthood, concluding among many findings that even relatively minor mitigations can translate into meaningful improvement in student achievement. (Berliner, 2006; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997)
- Cognitive scientists report that “there is a gulf between low and middle SES children in their performance on just about every test of cognitive development” (Farah et al, 2006), with sweeping implications for early childhood and education policy, but also illuminating key causal mechanisms that might aid remediation.
- Developmental psychologists have begun to focus “on the factors that enable at-risk students to ‘beat the

odds’ against achieving academic success. Borrowing primarily from the field of developmental psychopathology, a growing body of educational research has identified individual attributes that promote academic resiliency.” (Borman & Rachuba, 2001)

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

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

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

We were persuaded by the research of three points:

1 The ecology of high-poverty schools is inherently much more unpredictable, variable, and irregular than that of low-poverty schools. This turbulence is foundational: lying below symptoms like poor teaching and student misbehavior, it reflects the vastly disparate backgrounds and preparedness of students; personal and family crises; the churn of students and staff entering and exiting individual schools; and the shortage of family and community supports. Students and staff in high-poverty schools face more curveballs in a week than their colleagues in low-poverty schools see in a year. Accounting for this turbulence in academic and organizational design, as well as in operations and training, is a prerequisite to successful schools.

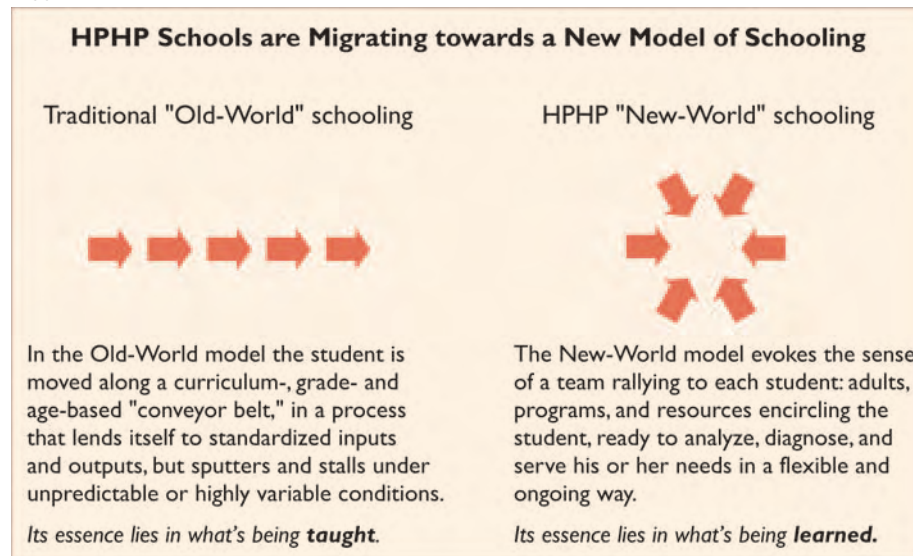
2 Our most common approaches do not help, and in fact sometimes do harm. Not only is our traditional model of public education largely unable to cope with unpredictability and turbulence that disrupts its reliance on grade-by-grade advancement, but in addition, common techniques of teaching, testing, and disciplining frequently “introduce

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

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

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

FIGURE 2A



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

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

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

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

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

2.2 Patterns of Proficiency: Failing Schools Serve Mostly Poor Children

But: so do some successful schools, proving that school quality can overcome zip code

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

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

Here's what the data show.

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

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

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

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

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

Interpreting the Scatterplots (Figure 2B)

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

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

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

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

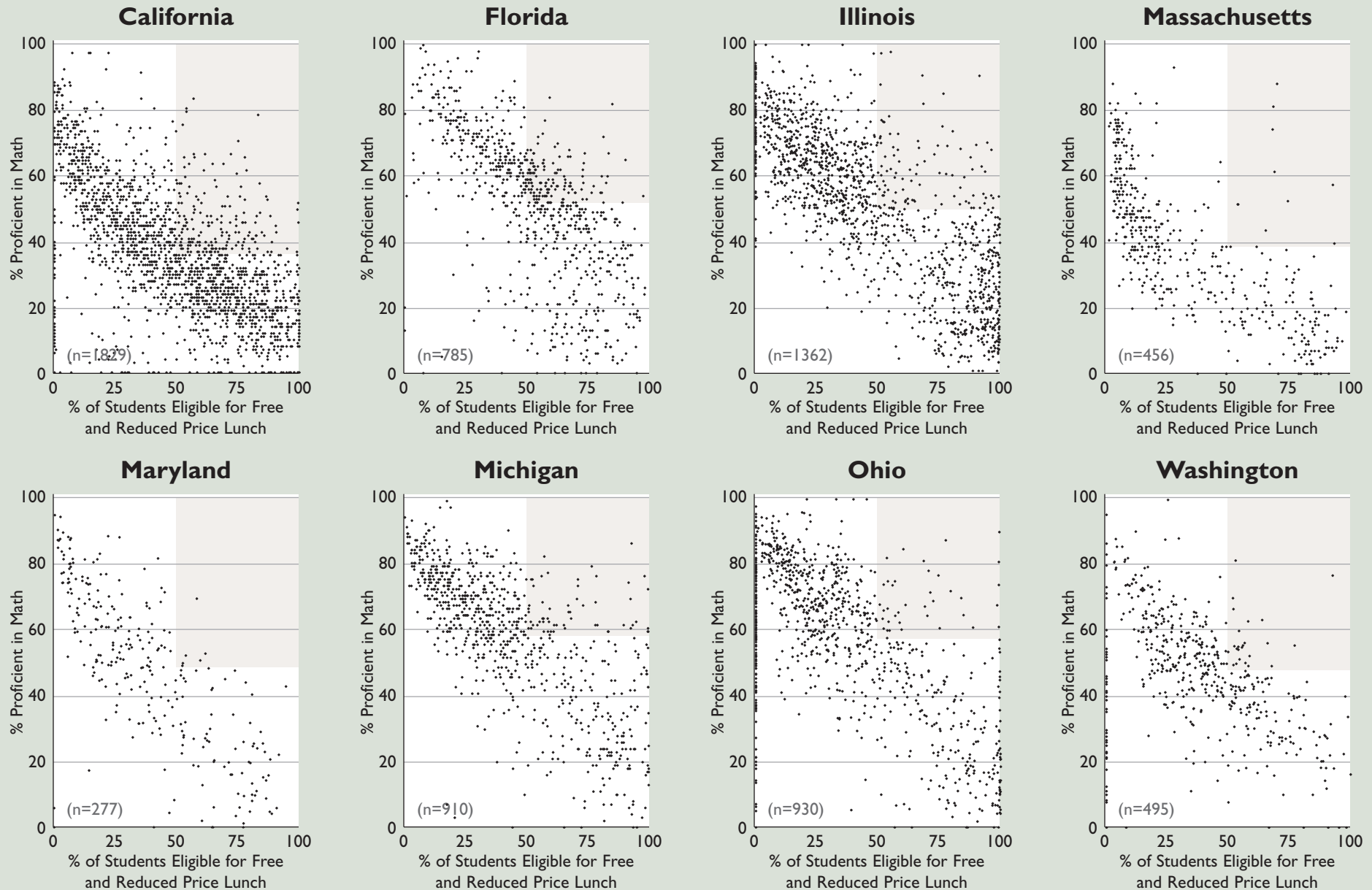
schools: those schools in the lightly shaded box within each plot. These are schools with at least 50 percent poor students who exceeded their state's proficiency median for eighth grade math in 2005. (Each state has a different proficiency median, which is why the height of the box varies – and why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

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

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

In Higher Poverty Schools: Lower Achievement, but Greater Variability, Suggesting Opportunity for Improvement

Each dot plots an individual school's percent proficiency (eighth grade math in 2005) against the percent of students with lunch eligibility. The shaded box indicates the relatively small number of schools with lunch eligibility over 50% and math proficiency over the state median.



Data are from the National Longitudinal School-Level State Assessment Score Database (NLSASD) 2006.

2.3 Poverty's "Perfect Storm" Impact on Learning

Understanding the deficits is a prerequisite to designing the solutions

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

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

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

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

2003) Within 25 years, the U.S. will have more minority students than non-minority (MBDA, 1999) with an equivalent sharp rise in student poverty.

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

student outcomes – in other words, high-poverty schools that achieve gains in student performance engage in systemic change." (CPE/Caliber Associates, 2005)

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

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

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

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

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

Poverty's Force Comes in Three Mutually-Reinforcing Forms

Individual and family risk factors

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

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

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

The effect of community and environment

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

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

Resource inequity

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

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

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



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

2.4 How HPHP Schools Achieve Their Results: The Readiness Model

Nine interlocking elements of schools that serve challenged students well

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

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

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

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

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

The Readiness Triangle

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

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

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

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

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

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

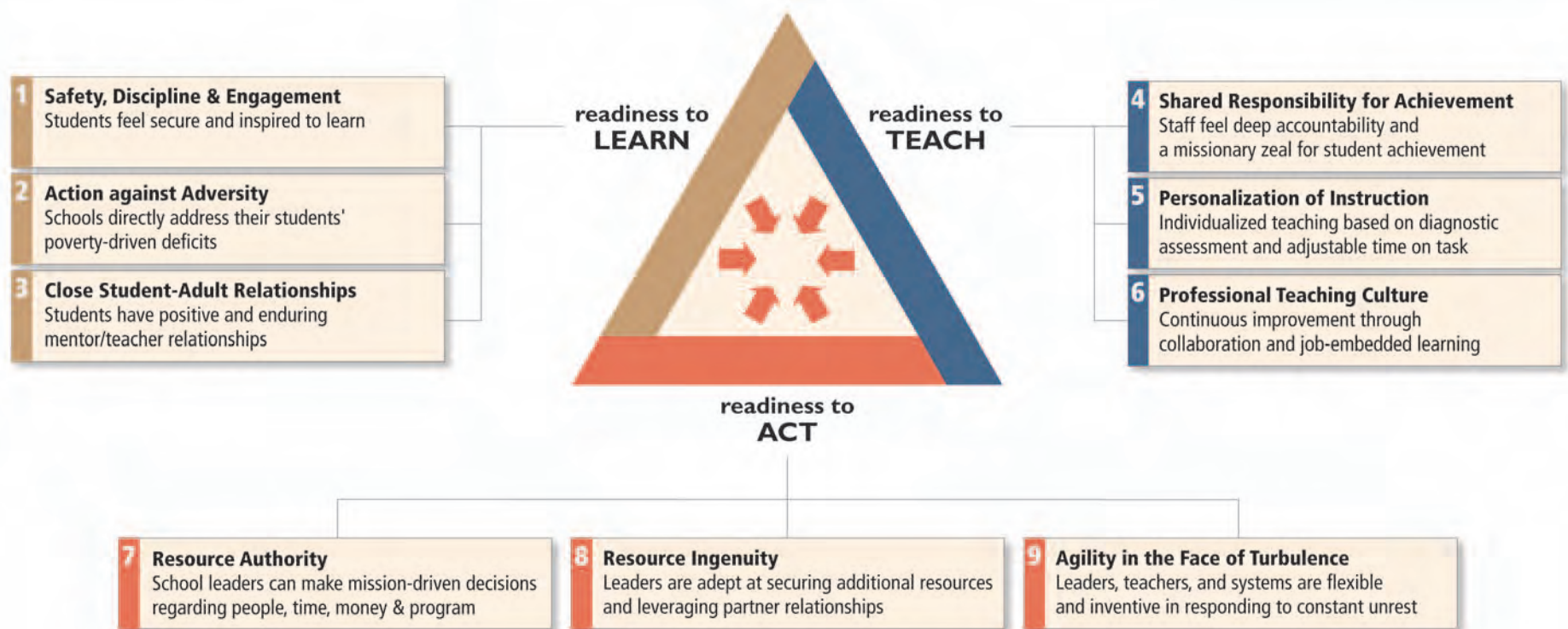
On the next pages, we explore the three Readiness elements and their associated elements in greater detail.

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

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

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

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



Why “Readiness”?

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

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

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

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

The HPHP Readiness Model: *Readiness to Learn*

Readiness to Learn

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

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

1. Safety, Discipline, & Engagement

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

At the same time, HPHP schools also seek ways to engage their students as fully as possible in their learning, using robust, well-rounded curricula, thematic and project-based teaching, collaborative learning, and field trips. While a precise,

laser-like focus on reading, writing, and math forms a vital core of the HPHP approach (see the Personalization of Instruction section under Readiness to Teach), researchers also highlight "explicit involvement of the subjects that are frequently and systematically disregarded in traditional accountability systems – music, art, physical education, world languages, technology, career education... Data reveal that the involvement of these seemingly peripheral subjects in academic achievement is neither serendipitous nor insignificant." (Reeves, 2003) The engagement created in this way produces a virtuous cycle on which the rest of the entire school model depends: where students are first engaged and inspired, then motivated and learning, and finally positive contributors themselves to a safe, orderly, and supportive environment.

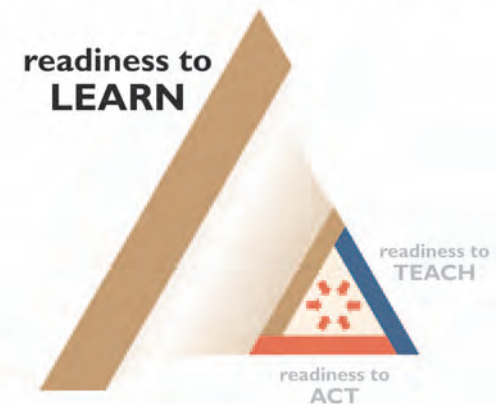
Engagement Pays Dividends

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

Spray Painting Safety

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

HPHP Readiness Model



2. Action Against Adversity

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

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

The School as Gang Replacement

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

Enhancing Student Resilience

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

3. Close Student-Adult Relationships

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

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

The School as Family

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

Establishing Expectations

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

The HPHP Readiness Model: *Readiness to Teach*

Readiness to Teach

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

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

4. Shared Responsibility for Achievement

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

What we saw emerging from the HPHP research can more accurately be described as an explicitly shared responsibility for achievement. This commitment is *intense* and conveys a sense of ownership, more than bar-setting. It is *inclusive*, involving all students and all adults in the building (including custodians and nurses, for example, in school-wide professional development), as well as parents (sometimes involving home-school contracts), and often community members. It is *highly focused on learning* and

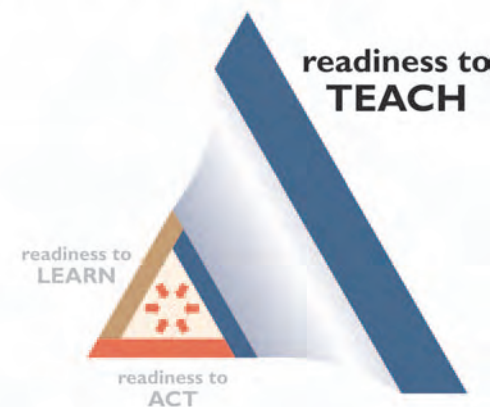
student behaviors that directly affect learning. The 90-90-90 schools analysis of researcher Douglas Reeves, for instance, declared that "first and most importantly, the 90/90/90 schools have a laser-like focus on student achievement." (Reeves, 2003; "90-90-90" refers to schools that score in the 90th percentile, are 90 percent minority, and are 90% free and reduced-price lunch.)

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

Schools Where "Teaching" Means "Learning"

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

HPHP Readiness Model



5. Personalization of Instruction

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

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

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

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

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

6. Professional Teaching Culture

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

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

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

Standing PD on its Head

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

The HPHP Readiness Model: *Readiness to Act*

Readiness to Act

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

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

7. Resource Authority

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

HPHP schools’ resource authority shows up across the full gamut of school operations: the daily schedule, often the annual school calendar, the way teachers collaborate with each other and participate in school decision-making, the allocation of the school’s budget, the very nature of instruction. It also

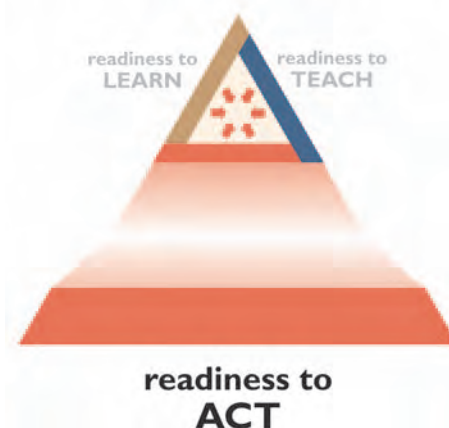
shows up in the extensive care that school leaders put into choosing staff members who are best-suited to the model and their mission. Research overwhelmingly confirms that “teaching quality is the most dominant factor in determining student success.” (Reeves, 2003) But most schools serving high-poverty student populations do not have control over teaching and (to some extent) administrative staff. HPHP schools almost uniformly say that recruiting excellent staff members is the most important thing they do. The charters and the charter-likes have that unquestioned authority; the regular public schools that are both high-performing and high-poverty tend to be led by principals who will stand for nothing less.

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

Open Posting Advantage

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

HPHP Readiness Model



8. Resource Ingenuity

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

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

Affirming the Mission

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

A Virtuous Cycle

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

9. Agility in the Face of Turbulence

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

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

Converting Excuses into Challenges

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

2.5 Applying the Lessons of HPHP Schools

Change begins with the courage to break patterns

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

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

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

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

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

1 The ecology of high-poverty schools is inherently much more unpredictable, variable, and irregular than that of low-poverty schools. Accounting for the constant unsettledness as well as the wide range of stu-

dent challenges and learning deficits induced by poverty is a prerequisite to successful schools.

2 Our most common approaches do not help, and in fact sometimes do harm. Our traditional curriculum-, grade-, and age-based “conveyor belt” is ill-equipped to handle unpredictability and frequently introduces “addi-

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

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

4 The “new-model” of HPHP schooling evokes the sense of a team rallying to each student. Adults, programs, and resources encircle the student, ready to analyze, diagnose,

and serve his or her needs in a flexible and ongoing way.

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

6 Dissecting poverty’s role in exactly why schools fail establishes a partial checklist of design conditions from which solutions and innovations can be forged. Poverty’s “perfect storm” is comprised of three mutually-reinforcing forms: individual and family risk factors, community and environment effects, and resource inequality.

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

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

Reframing Our Thinking: A Precursor to Real Reform

HPHP schools break convention in two pragmatic yet significant ways:

- They are replacing the traditional old-world, conveyor-belt model with a new-world model with each child at the center and designed to counter poverty’s perfect storm; and
- They discard many centralized and bureaucratic management methods in favor of a highly adaptable Readiness to Act, much better suited to the constant unsettledness that marks high-poverty schooling and to targeting precious core resources on real gains in student learning.

What will it take for our education thinking and our education institutions to catch up to these departures?

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

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

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

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

Third, we must reframe our approach to education reform itself. The rest of this report is predicated on the assumption that what HPHP schools are doing today can be replicated. The HPHP Readiness Model is

not only a template for igniting learning in poor students but also a vehicle for fundamental change. However, change will take rethinking our approach to education reform. To that vital task, we turn next.

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

	It's Being Done Chenoweth (2007)	Building Blocks Initiative Mass Insight (2001-2005)	Research Review: HPHP Schools CPE/Caliber Associates (2005)	90/90/90 Schools Reeves (2003)	Inside the Black Box Kannapel & Clements (2005)	Research Synthesis Cotton (1995)	No Excuses Carter (2000)	Expecting Success Ragland et al. (2002)	CA High School Best Practice Springboard/NCEA (2005)	Victory at Buffalo Creek Haberman (1999)	A New Era Marzano (2000)	Scaling Up: Urban HS Lessons Rennie Center (2003)	Gaining Traction Donahue Institute (2007)
Readiness to LEARN													
Safety, Discipline, & Engagement	●	○	○		○	●	○		○	●	○	○	
Action Against Adversity		○			○	○				○	○	○	
Close Student-Adult Relationships	●	●	○		●	●		○	○	○		●	○
Readiness to TEACH													
Shared Responsibility for Achievement	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Personalization of Instruction	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Professional Teaching Culture	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Readiness to ACT													
Resource Authority	●	●		●	●	●	●			○			●
Resource Ingenuity	●	○		○		●	○			○		●	○
Agility in the Face of Turbulence	●					●				○			

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

Part 3 examines:

- 3.1 What Success Requires: Changing the Odds for Turnaround Schools**
Moving beyond marginal to fundamental change
- 3.2 The First C: Conditions that Enable Effective Turnaround**
Reform depends on the context in which it's applied
- 3.3 The Second C: Capacity to Conduct Effective Turnaround**
Urgently needed: broader, deeper turnaround capacity at every corner of the system
- 3.4 The Third C: Clustering for Support**
It's not just about autonomy. Failing schools need strong network support

3.1 What Success Requires: Changing the Odds for Turnaround Schools

Moving beyond marginal to fundamental change

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Not a Theoretical Challenge, but an Engineering One”

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

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

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

Current Intervention Strategies: Four Inadequacies that Must Be Addressed

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

- ▶ **Marginal change yields marginal results. The strategies of most school intervention efforts have been chronically ill-matched with the need.** The vast majority of what passes for intervention in failing schools can be understood as light renovation – the school-reform equivalent of wallpapering and new siding. What’s needed is much more fundamental than repair work on an existing structure: we need instead a thorough rethinking of how the house serves the people who live in it. That much is clear from our study of HPHP schools (see Figure 2E). It’s a big issue for school communities, which tend to think and operate in terms of projects, not strategies.
- ▶ **School intervention strategies generally stop well short of the comprehensiveness of change required.** Our review of the research on state- and district-driven intervention in low-performing schools prompted us to group intervention initiatives in three categories. Most efforts (by far) focus on *program change* – essentially, providing a range of help to improve the quality of instruction within the current model of the school. Some also build in *people change* – installing a new principal or replacing the staff, but rarely as part of a complete turnaround strategy. Very few go further and attempt to *change the context of operating conditions and incentives* in which all of the work (including the reform effort) takes place. Yet it is precisely this conditions context that tends to undercut the impact of reform, particularly in under-performing schools. (See Figure 3C, page 45.)
- ▶ **School intervention tends toward silver bullets instead of fully integrated strategies.** A strong principal; a smaller learning community; a longer school day. Individual elements of turnaround may be critically important, but each by itself is nearly always insufficient to produce major, systemic change – i.e., change that survives even after the strong principal leaves or the longer school day shrinks.
- ▶ **Intervention tends to focus on individual schools, without the intensive outside support that can be obtained through a cluster or network.** Schools fail in part because their central support network (the district) has failed them. Supremely gifted principals may turn around a school, but turnaround at *scale* requires intensive support from a new network, organized within or across district lines.

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

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

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

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

- ▶ **School intervention chronically under-values the importance of recruiting and placing people in the right jobs.** The reasons why are understandable. Changing program strategies and offering in-service training is safe territory, compared to the complexity and controversy inherent in a total human resource strategy. Most intervention initiatives include provisions for professional development, but most often, that is as far as it goes. The choices, changes, and comprehensive “people strategies” that might come from an honest appraisal of current personnel, management, and HR practices including compensation and incentive strategies are set aside for another day.
- ▶ **Turnaround requires special skills from school leaders and external partners, and the resource base in both categories is glaringly weak.** Turnaround is only now becoming appreciated as a special discipline in education. Training for specialized school leaders in turnaround management is in its infancy. The lack of a strong base of outside turnaround partners clearly stems from lack of public investment in this critical resource. What little demand there is has been driven by private grants.

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

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

What Success Requires (continued)

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

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

FIGURE 3A

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

The graphic below summarizes our approach.

- First, it is staked to our analysis of the HPHP schools in Part 2 and the Readiness Model for high-poverty schools that resulted from that analysis.
- Second, it focuses (in Part 3) on the elements of turnaround design we believe are critical to its success at the ground level: Conditions,

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

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

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

For More Analysis of...

- **Current intervention strategies** in general: Appendix A provides an in-depth examination of what’s been tried, organized into the three categories introduced in Figure 3B: Program Change, People Change, and Condition Change. Appendix A also provides an analysis of No Child Left Behind and its impact on turnaround design.
- **State and district intervention initiatives** of particular interest: The Supplemental Report offers profiles of ten representative state intervention efforts and four school district programs of special note – Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York City, and Philadelphia.

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

Engineering the Framework for Turnaround: Key Steps

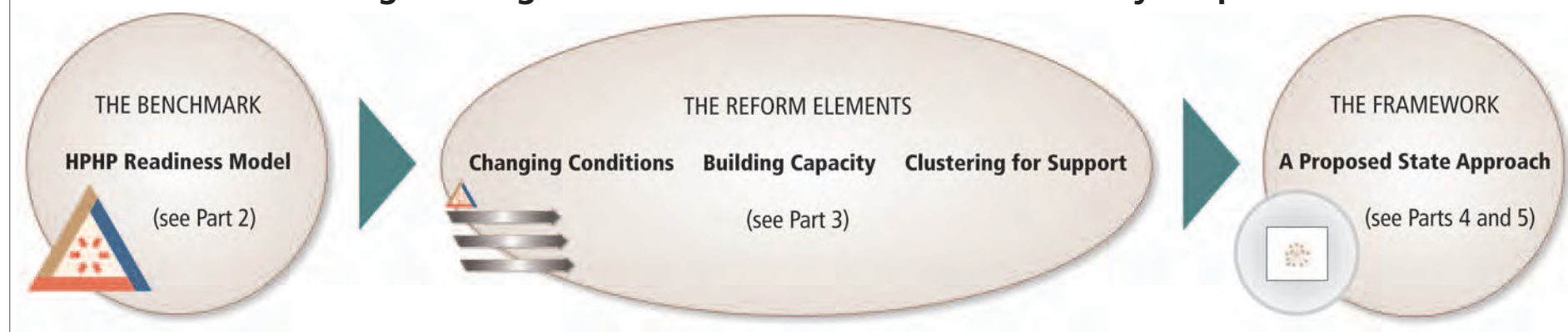
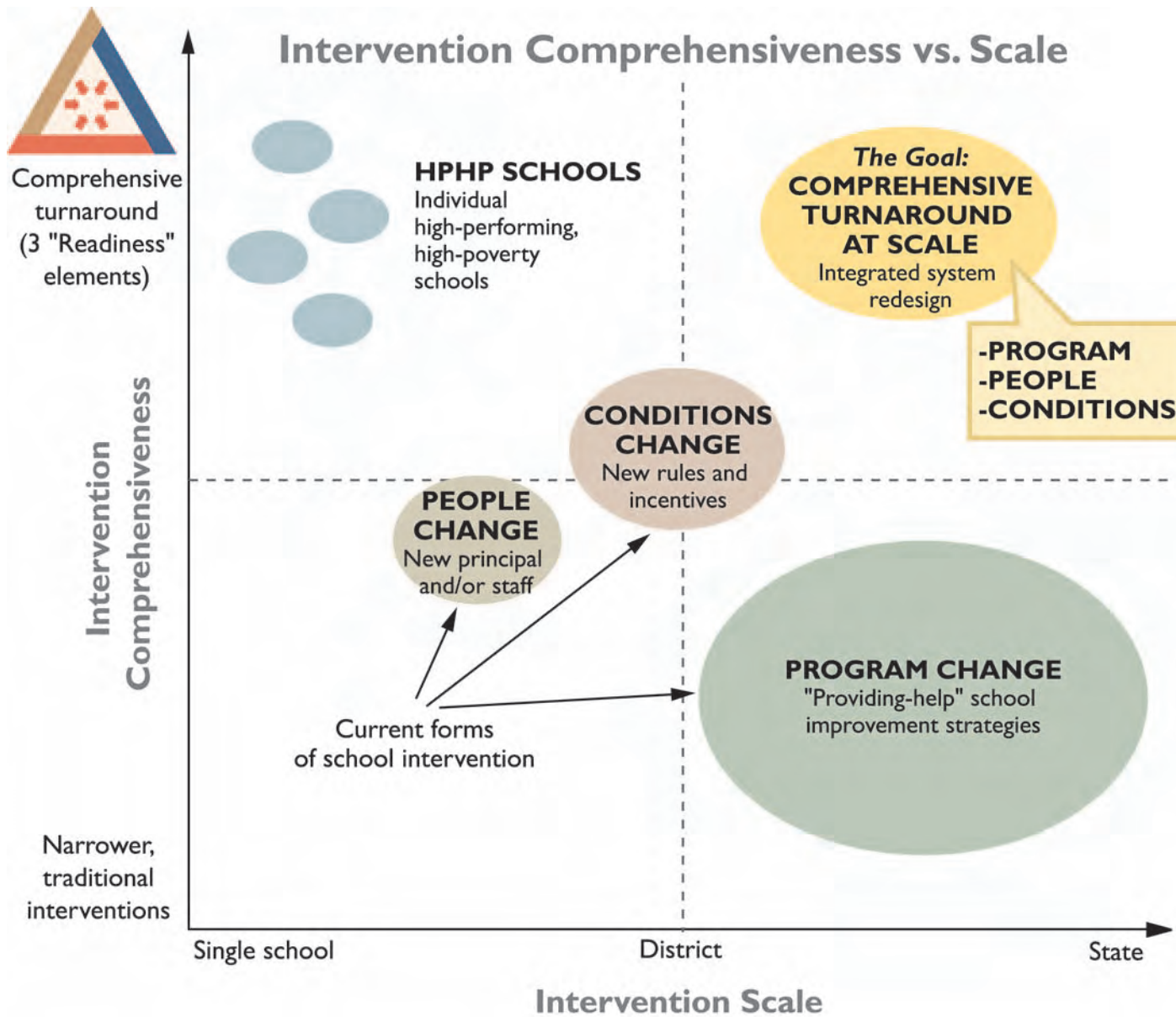


FIGURE 3B

Current Interventions: Some Scale, but Little True Comprehensiveness



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

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

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

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

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

3.2 The First C: Conditions that Enable Effective Turnaround

Reform depends on the context in which it's applied

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

3 'C's of Effective Turnaround

CHANGING CONDITIONS

BUILDING CAPACITY

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT

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

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

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

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

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

Authority to Make Choices

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

- **People:** Abundant research supports the primacy of good teaching in determining student achievement. (Hattie, 2003; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders, Wright, & Horn, 1997) Schools seeking to raise student achievement dramatically put the right people in the right positions to do their most effective work, and then enable that performance with operating conditions and incentives (see below) that support it. Turnaround school leaders must have the ability to shape the staff in their schools, without regard to seniority or other contract bargaining restrictions.
- **Time:** Schools that are effective with previously low-performing
- **Money:** Most intervention program leaders are handcuffed by their lack of control over school budgets, which in turn undercuts their ability to implement the most important elements of their turnaround plan. The charter schools among the HPHP schools we studied have the necessary budget authority; principals at other HPHP schools tend to be mavericks with district

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

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

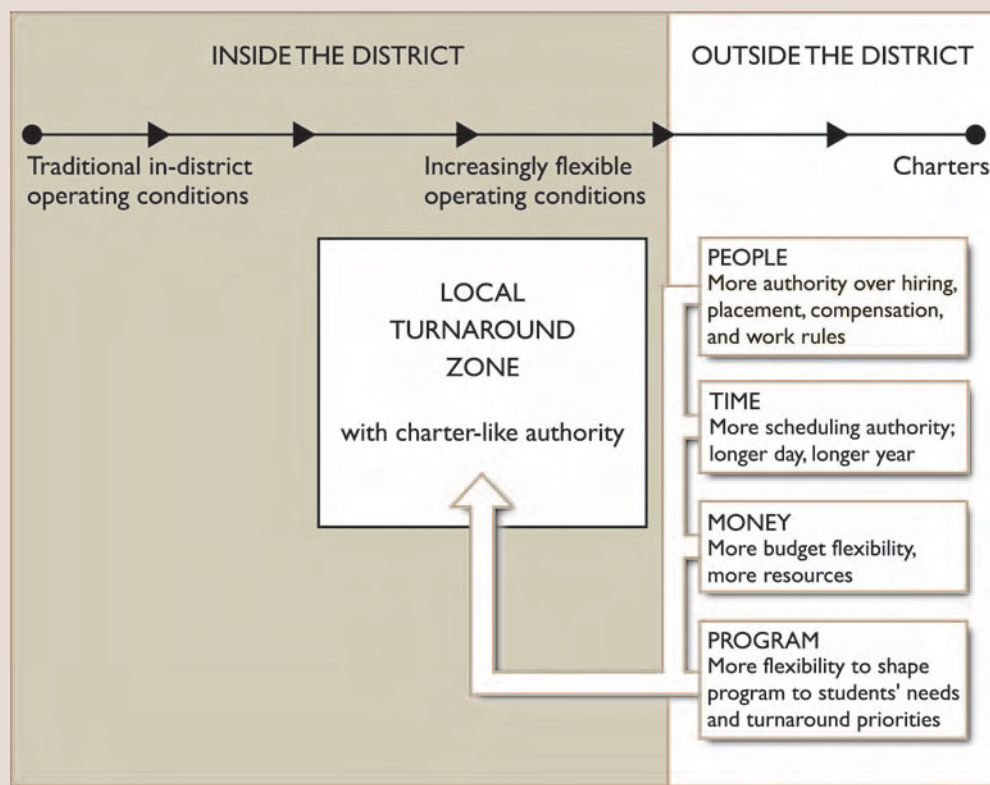
policy and “resource entrepreneurs,” as discussed in Part 2, in order to gain at least a measure of flexibility.

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

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

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

FIGURE 3C



Building the Turnaround Model:

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

Changing Conditions (continued)

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

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

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

Incentives to Take Action

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

First, turnaround leaders at all levels need incentives to act decisively in support of fundamental change.

Over the past two decades, local leaders have shown a marked preference for less dramatic strategies even when there is little or no evidence that such a strategy will improve the education its neediest students receive. (Brady,

2003; McRobbie, 1998; Wong & Shen, 2003) This preference is predictable: dramatic strategies are by definition more likely to upset strong interests, necessitate policy changes, require the reallocation of funding and people, and otherwise disrupt the status quo. Without countervailing incentives to take bold action, district (and school) leaders can scarcely be expected to do so, though there always will be exceptions. As Brady (2003) found: "While

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- ▶ **Resource incentives:** Policymakers can offer additional funding for districts or schools willing to undertake turnaround strategies that are most likely to work, rather than pursuing less promising strategies.
- ▶ **Positioning incentives:** Too often, systems stigmatize schools that are identified for improvement. Instead, policymakers can seek to create an environment in

which being designated a “turn-around school” is valued due to the attention, resources, condition changes, and promise that attach to the status.

- ▶ **Accountability incentives:** Increasingly, No Child Left Behind and state accountability systems are insisting on more dramatic interventions in under-performing schools, providing ample motivation to proactive school and district leaders – including both management and unions – to find solutions or risk loss of control, budget authority, and membership. While these systems are imperfect in various ways, policymakers can use them as levers to induce action at the district and school level.
- ▶ **Parent and community incentives:** Parents and community members can mobilize in support of these efforts or detract from them depending upon how they become organized relative to the change. (Kowal and Hassel, 2005; Arkin and Kowal, 2005; Kowal and Arkin, 2005) If change-oriented policymakers and system leaders can harness that mobilization in support of viable turnaround strategies, these incentives can run

How to Establish the Enabling Conditions: Create a Turnaround Zone

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

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

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

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

Condition change may be the most difficult and contentious of the three ‘C’s we propose as vital ingredients for effective turnaround. It confronts established interests in the form of bureaucratic state and district constraints, teacher unions and, some-

times, parent and professional associations. But altered operating conditions and incentive structures are hallmarks of the HPHP schools, and district/union collaborating around turnaround zones in New York, Chicago, Miami, and elsewhere show that it can be done. Turnaround efforts that continuously require decision-making staked to the best interests of children, instead of adults, will be on the right track.

3.3 The Second C: Capacity to Conduct Effective Turnaround

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

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

3 'C's of Effective Turnaround

CHANGING CONDITIONS

BUILDING CAPACITY

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT

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

adopt professional human resource management systems and strategies.

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

- **A fundamental rethinking of internal HR approaches** – including recruitment, induction, development, allocation, and evaluation – in order to enable people currently in the system to perform at the highest levels and to attract highly dedicated, highly skilled newcomers to the mission. This is true not just at the level of the classroom teacher; it's just as true at every level in the system of supports for that teacher, including principals and coaches, district and school managers of turnaround efforts, and framers and implementers of turnaround policy at the state level.
- **A fundamental rethinking of how external capacity is applied** – how schools, districts, and states work with outside partners, who have an important role to play that would not be supported by the nature and structure of most current school/district/provider relationships.
- **A clear understanding of turnaround management as a disci-**

pline with a distinct skill set; the inadequacy of current turnaround management capacity everywhere in the system; and the state's responsibility to address that gap.

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

Revitalizing Internal HR

Leaders of outside-the-system schools such as charters and charter-like schools say that perhaps the most important authority they have – the definer of what's different in their schools from the traditional model – is the ability to shape their school staff into the high-performance team that schooling in high-poverty environments requires. (Mass Insight for the NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007) Principals of regular, in-district public schools generally lack the same kind of authority – a crippling blow to any serious turnaround effort. But as the research presented in Part 2 and the

Supplemental Report shows, principals leading high-performing, high-poverty (HHP) schools find ways to exercise that authority, even when they have to work around contractual requirements and longstanding operating habits. “Effective leaders used all available discretion and opportunity to hire the ‘right’ people,” researchers in Massachusetts found, “and maximized staff effectiveness by placing them in the right roles. This sometimes meant pushing people out of their comfort zones.” (UMass Donahue Institute, 2007)

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

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

Redefining External Partnerships

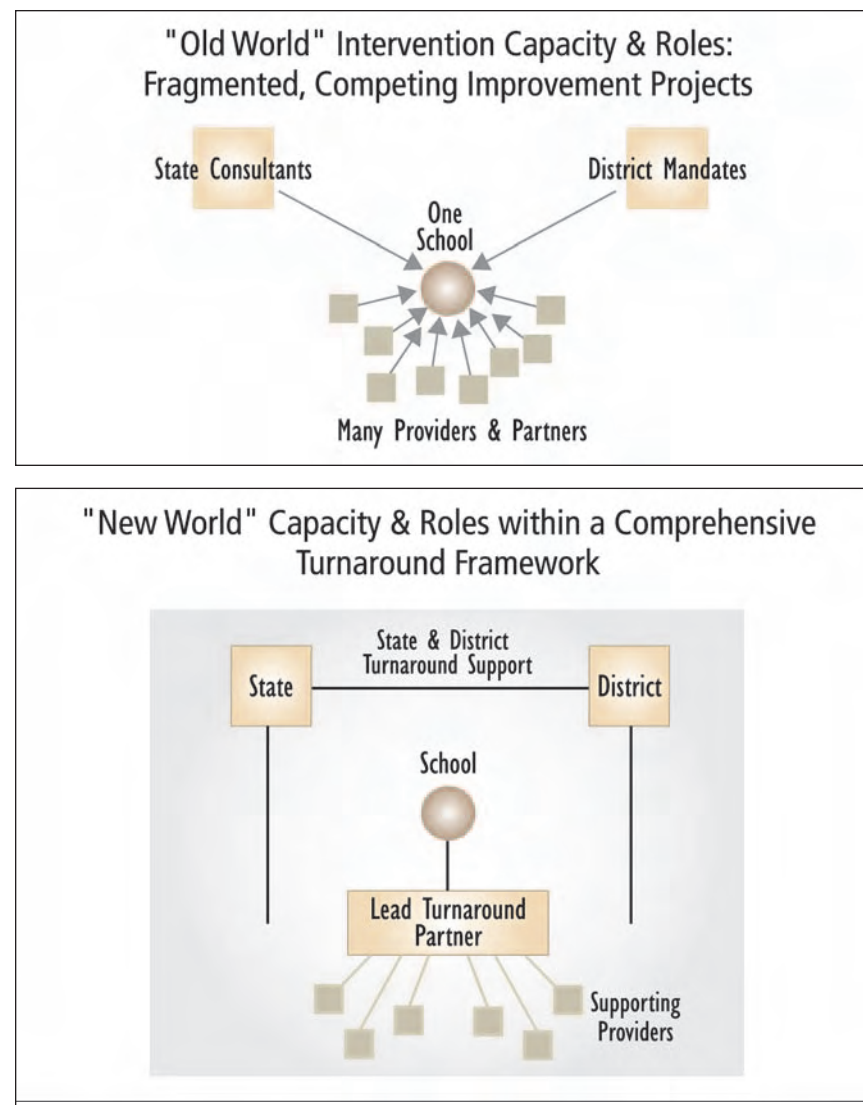
At a meeting of Massachusetts' leading school improvement service providers a couple of years ago, Mass Insight and about twenty other organizations were asked to pin cards describing our initiatives onto separate posters representing the state's largest school districts. This innocent exercise produced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

much “providing” was going on, and nowhere was there any degree of coordination among partners working in the same district.

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

That is the central idea behind Figure 3D: the reorganization of the current, highly fragmented school/partner model into a new one, for turnaround schools, that builds on the “systems-integrator” approach now being used successfully in many other sectors including business and healthcare. In this model, lead turnaround partners take on the responsibility of integrating other providers into a coherent whole. The current model assumes that someone in the school or district will accomplish this integration, but that appears to be more the exception than the rule.

FIGURE 3D



In the “Old-World” model of school/provider partnerships still prevalent today, multiple partners work independently in a fragmented, confusing web of disconnected support. In the “New-World” model most appropriate for turnaround, a lead turnaround partner acts as systems integrator and coordinates the providers. The “New-World” model illustrated here also reflects the greater capacity required for turnaround throughout the system: particularly at the school, but also at the district (through a turnaround zone organized to serve a cluster of schools), partner, and state levels.

Capacity to Conduct Effective Turnaround

(continued)

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

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

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

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

Building Turnaround Management Capacity

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

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

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

States and Districts May Contract with Two Forms of Lead Turnaround Partner

Contract Manager

- Assumes control over all aspects of school management (overall design, curriculum, HR, staff development, budgeting, scheduling, assessment, back-office services) on a contract basis with the district or the state.
- Usually multiple-year contract, renewable on attainment of performance benchmarks.

Consulting Partner

- Control remains with school district, but within turnaround framework and conditions/reform elements required by the state.
- Partner is deeply immersed in all aspects of developing and collaboratively executing the turnaround plan.
- Partner and district are jointly held accountable for fidelity to the plan and attainment of performance benchmarks.

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

For more on governance issues in turnaround schools, see page 81 and related material in Part 5.

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

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

Finding the Money for Turnaround

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

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

How Effective School Turnaround Leaders Work

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

Major Actions

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

Support Steps

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

That said: the costs of school turnaround (including money for new staff, incentive and responsibility-based compensation, new program materials, outside partner services and support, and especially additional time in the school day or year) range from \$250,000 to a million dollars per school, per year over three years, with declining investment in subsequent years. (See the “Sample Turnaround Costs” box in Part 5.) On strictly

financial terms, these investments are more than justifiable. It’s probable that successful turnaround, viewed as a percentage increase of overall school spending, would more than pay for itself in terms of savings on social services and the increased productivity of successfully maturing students. We don’t know this for sure only because it hasn’t yet been done.

3.4 The Third C: Clustering for Support

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

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

3 'C's of Effective Turnaround

CHANGING CONDITIONS

BUILDING CAPACITY

CLUSTERING FOR SUPPORT

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

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

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

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

Clustering for Efficiency

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

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

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

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

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

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

from clustering. Many states offer staff and leadership development programs to selected high-need districts and schools; many provide guidance

and change coaches to schools in Restructuring or Corrective Action. But few take a more managed approach to creating networks of schools along strategic lines: **vertically** (focusing on successful transitions for students from their elementary through their high school years), or **horizontally** (by type – for example, urban middle schools or alternative high schools for at-risk students and dropouts). Organization of the work can take several forms, as shown in Figure 3E:

- **Cluster Example 1:** across a larger number of districts, each of which has just one or two chronically under-performing schools, or where the state wants to encourage implementation of particular school models and approaches – for example, grade 6-12 academies.

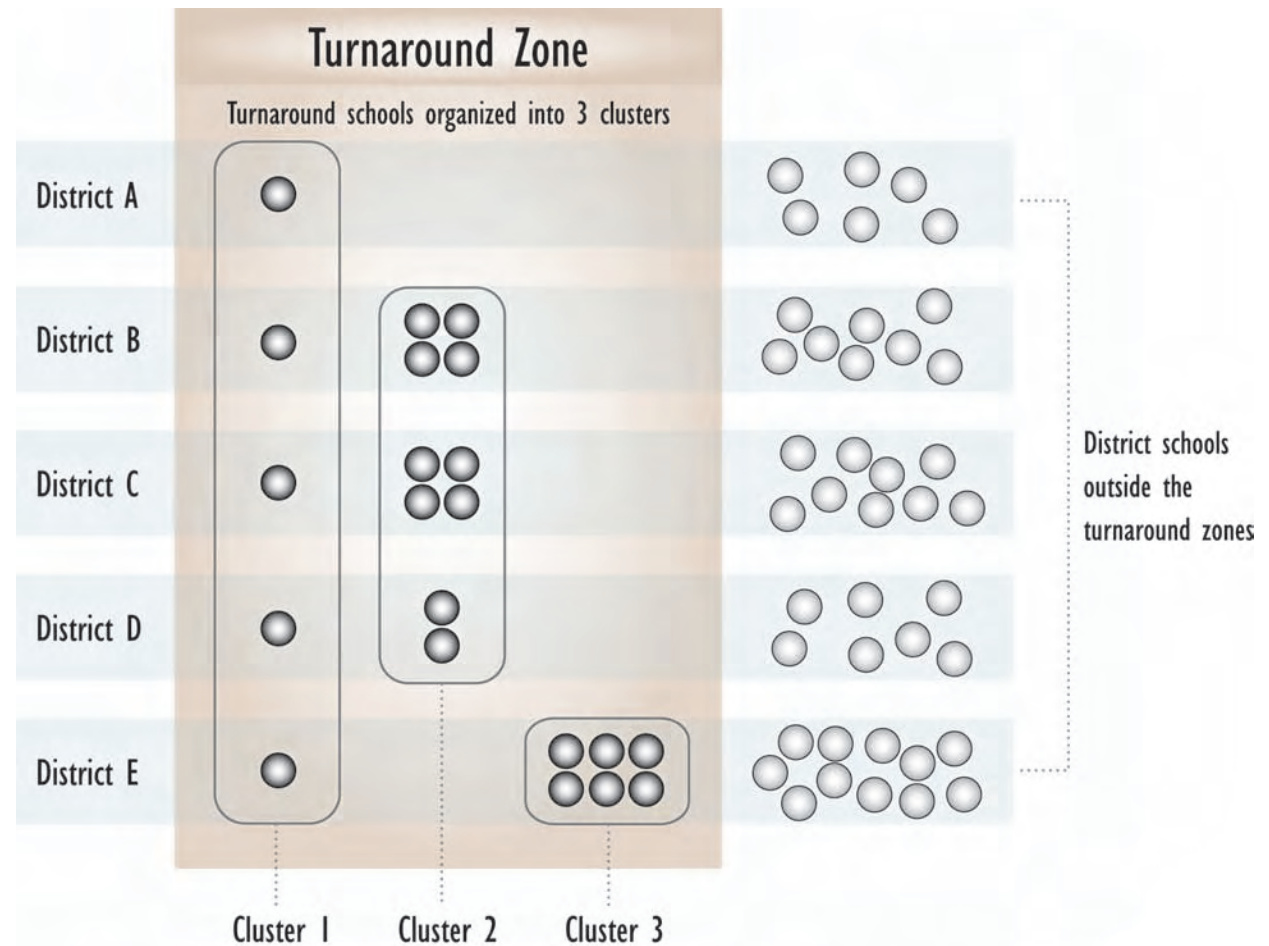
How Different Clusters Support the Work of Turnaround Differently

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

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

- **Cluster 1 (horizontal)** could serve a set of specialty schools – grade 6-12 academies, middle college schools, Montessori elementaries – across several districts
- **Cluster 2 (horizontal)** could serve middle schools in three contiguous, small-city school districts
- **Cluster 3 (vertical)** could represent a special turnaround “carve-out” or zone within a large urban district, serving schools at all K-12 levels and potentially following district feeder patterns

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



Clustering for Support: Organizing the Change

(continued)

- **Cluster Example 2:** two to four districts, organized and supported by the state, where combined turnaround work makes sense because of geographic proximity or because the work focuses on schools that share particular attributes.
- **Cluster Example 3:** within single districts conducting turnaround on behalf of a cohort of under-performing schools (or multiple cohorts, in districts pursuing a portfolio of different approaches with different governance and/or management structures).

Clustering for Effectiveness

Effective turnaround at scale requires a transparent, deliberate blending of

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

on behalf of their schools, in quite often a fairly constant source of organizational tension.

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

Applying the loose/tight dynamic in the turnaround context presents an

immediate contradiction in terms. The changes in operating conditions outlined earlier in this report are necessary to allow the people closest to the work to have a strong say in how it is done. The HPHP schools vividly demonstrate the importance of school-based decision-making authority and school-wide commitment to reform. But leaving all decision-making authority up to the schools – as in the charter model – makes little sense in a turnaround context. Turnaround requires a careful balance that doesn’t undercut the power of site-based decision-making but provides strong support, backed by shared authority, for the work from the cluster-network provider and the state.

FIGURE 3F

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

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

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

