

The Turnaround Laboratories: Four Major Districts' Turnaround Strategies

Big-change efforts that reject marginal reform

While Mass Insight's research into existing state strategies for intervention in chronically under-performing schools provides some important lessons for future action, the steps taken have, as noted in the previous section, been fairly tentative so far. While some incorporate promising approaches, most have encountered significant frustrations, and none has produced substantial, enduring change in a scaled-up manner.

Perhaps unsurprisingly – since they are that much closer to the challenge – much of the bolder work on organizing school turnaround to date has happened at the district level, where a handful of entrepreneurial superintendents, driven by extreme performance challenges and political pressures, have jumped in front to create some dramatically different new strategies.

Perhaps most importantly, this research highlights the need for a special, protected space to provide the enabling conditions necessary for turning around under-performing schools.

These turnaround laboratories are two to three years old, so only preliminary indications can be drawn on the effectiveness of their experiments. But it is clear that some of the district experiments are making much more headway in shaking up the status quo than has been the case with more traditional reform strategies focused exclusively on coaching and staff development. It is also clear that these approaches share some critical common elements, though they deliver these elements in a variety of ways.

Mass Insight reviewed the approaches and direction of a number of districts both for this project and for concurrent research on school turnaround for the NewSchools Venture Fund. To these ends, Mass Insight and its consultants conducted more

than 50 structured, protocol-based interviews with district officials, representatives of education management organizations (EMOs) and individuals with detailed direct knowledge of each district. The research team also scoured public sources of data and media reports. They developed a “market factbase” for each geographic area studied, including information about factors such as the scope and scale of the turnaround challenge and current district approaches to restructuring in use in the district.

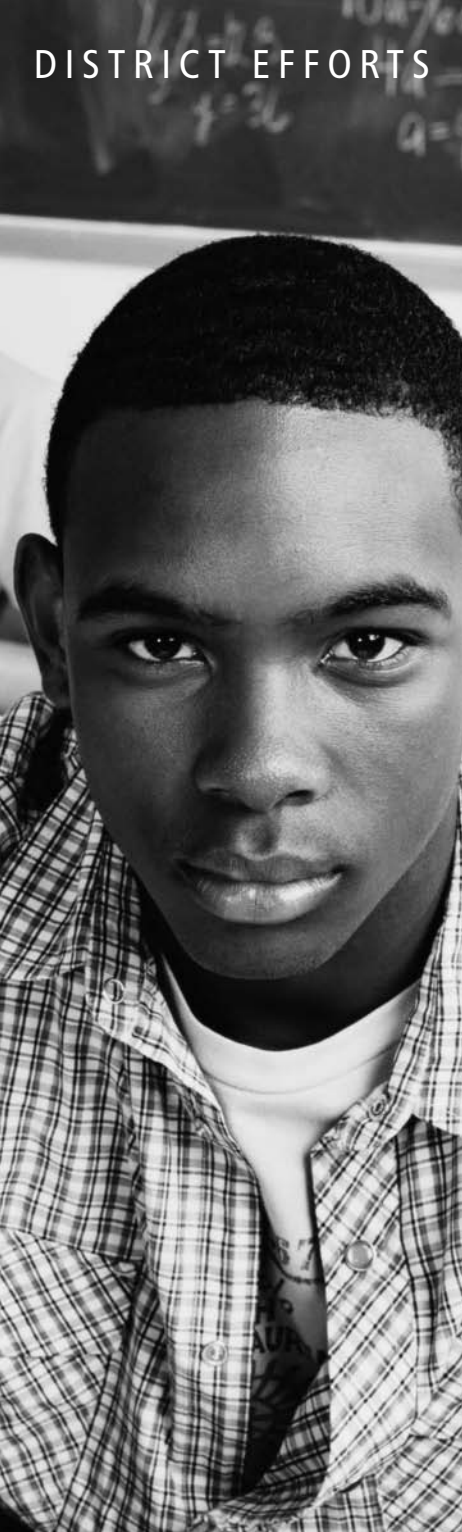
Using these factbases, as well as independent, more in-depth studies on the most promising districts, leading-edge practices were identified in four districts for this report: Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York City, and Philadelphia.

Hallmarks Across All Four Districts

The directions taken by these cities vary, and are greatly influenced by their local circumstances, politics, and capacities. There are, however, a few basic ideas at the heart of all the strategies. All four cities have created initiatives that recognize:

- The need for dramatic, fundamental change, replacing incremental reforms that have not produced results
- The need for changed operating conditions: union-negotiated flexibility in hiring, evaluation, hours and pay, incentives, personnel deployment options, and other work rules
- The need to apply greater capacity to accomplish turnaround, in part through intensive collaboration with external providers
- The need for additional investment.

These hallmarks support, in general, major findings in *The Turnaround Challenge* and some of the principal recommendations in the main report's proposed framework for school turnaround at scale.



Management and Decision-Making Dynamics

These innovative models may share important attributes, but they come to grips in different ways with key implementation questions. For example: the districts vary in their approach to what *The Turnaround Challenge* (among other research reports) calls the “loose-tight” management dynamic. Where does strategic and implementation decision-making reside – at the district/network level (centralized/tight) or at the school level (decentralized/loose)? Taken together, the four districts describe a continuum as follows, from tight to loose:

1. Centralized/Tight: Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone

A single cluster of schools, in one Zone, managed tightly and directly by the district. Miami-Dade, eager to produce results quickly, went with one core set of strategies and applied it across 39 under-performing schools.

2. Portfolio (Mixed) Approach: Chicago's Renaissance 2010 and Philadelphia's “Diverse Provider” model

Creating different clusters of schools that rest at different points on the autonomy continuum. Both districts have experimented with schools managed by partners that can establish, to a degree, their own approaches and operating rules. Both districts have also undertaken turnaround work themselves, on behalf of failing schools that remain under direct district control.

3. Decentralized/Loose: Empowerment Zone and Children First, New York City

New York's Children First initiative differs from the other models profile here because it is a districtwide effort. Its essential idea, though, is the empowerment of the leaders who are closest to the students (i.e., at the school level) to make decisions on school design, budget, management, curriculum, staffing, schedules, and operations, in exchange for fairly tight district control over achievement standards and accountability.

Our aim here was to look for bold steps: districts that are attempting to reinvent the status quo. In New York, strong political leadership has enabled that reinvention process to be brought before the whole district; in the other three districts, it has begun with the failing schools where consensus on the need for fundamental change was most evident. Our guess is that most districts and states may need to follow that path. The longevity, clout, and strong working relationships shared by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and School Chancellor Joel Klein in New York are the exception, not the rule (though Chicago's Richard Daley and Arne Duncan come close). That political strength is what has enabled these school districts to move ahead.

It is also worth reiterating that all of these district programs are still in the experimental stage. It is still too early to measure their full impact on performance, particularly over time and at scale. However, they encompass creative, sometimes dramatic, and often promising approaches to the three 'C' issues Mass Insight identifies in *The Turnaround Challenge* as crucial to state action on turnaround: conditions change, capacity-building, and clustering for efficiency and effectiveness.

Perhaps most importantly, for example, this research highlights the need for a special, protected space to provide the enabling conditions necessary for turning around under-performing schools. The specifics differ, but the main idea is the same across Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone, Chicago's Ren-10 schools, Philadelphia's Creative Action and Results Region and private partnership options, and New York City's Empowerment options within Children First. It is partly from their experience that Mass Insight developed its proposed turnaround framework, designed to help states ensure that such creative, strategic responses to the turnaround challenge are not limited to a few individually entrepreneurial districts, but are more easily accessible to all public school districts statewide.

Much of the bolder work on organizing school turnaround to date has happened at the district level, where a handful of entrepreneurial superintendents have created dramatically different new strategies.



Chicago's Renaissance 2010: A Spectrum of Autonomy-for-Accountability Options

District-Based Turnaround Lab 1: The Renaissance 2010 Story

At its heart, the Renaissance 2010 initiative (or “Ren-10,” as it’s called) is Chicago’s attempt to marry the opportunity for fundamental reform represented by under-performing schools with the changes in authority and governance modeled by the district’s successful charter school movement. To build district and community-wide support, however, it does so through a variety of approaches that offer autonomy in exchange for increased accountability.

Context

Intervention History

Chicago has a long and complex history with school reform. The nation’s third-largest school system, CPS has over 600 schools

The district issues an RFP for each new school, which is then opened under one of three governance structures: Charter School, Contract School, or Performance School.

and serves over 420,000 racially diverse students who are largely from low-income homes. Like many other large urban systems, CPS entered the modern reform era having historically faced up to its difficult challenges with ultimately unsuccessful responses – so unsuccessful, in fact, that in 1987, the U.S. Secretary of Education deemed it “the worst school system in America.”

Thus began the first of three waves of Chicago school reform. The first wave began in 1988 and focused on decentralization,

with the creation of locally elected councils that had the primary task of hiring and firing school principals. This wave of reform successfully gained parental and community investment and fostered site-based innovation, but failed to markedly increase student achievement. The system also struggled with fiscal mismanagement, labor instability, and crumbling infrastructure.

The second wave of reform began in 1995 when Mayor Richard Daley was granted sweeping authority over CPS, including the right to appoint the school board. Under the leadership of CEO Paul Vallas, the district focused on accountability. The new administration improved the district’s financial situation, stabilized labor relations, repaired decaying schools, and built new schools to alleviate overcrowding. The district also experimented with charter schools, supplementary programs, and new curricular initiatives. Student achievement slowly began to rise, most notably in the district’s 15 new charter schools. Overall progress, however, did not result in the broad-based achievement gains necessary to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind.

The third wave of reform began when Arne Duncan became CEO in 2001. Beginning in 2004, he attempted to implement a plan to close all schools in four high-poverty neighborhoods on the south side and reopen them under new management. There was huge opposition from the communities, and it was shelved. Duncan’s strategy now centers on a theory of opening new schools – and the Renaissance 2010 plan, unveiled in June 2004.

Current District Approaches to Restructuring

To address the needs of its chronically failing schools, CPS has developed 11 restructuring options, most of which fit into NCLB’s fifth category of “other major restructuring.” By 2005

there were 200 district schools that were either undergoing some form of NCLB-mandated planning for restructuring or in restructuring itself. Of those, 195 chose the “other” category, while one replaced staff and principal, four replaced the principal. None chose to charterize.

CPS has been a proactive charter authorizer, opening close to the maximum allowed by law, and indeed testing the law by allowing high-performing charters to open multiple campuses.

The district emphasizes choice for students and families. Chicago is engaged in multiple, overlapping strands of school restructuring. Major current initiatives include:

- ▶ NCLB Restructuring
- ▶ Magnet Schools: some without attendance boundaries and Magnet Cluster Schools with attendance boundaries
- ▶ Small Schools led by teams of teachers
- ▶ Transformation Project Schools: A new effort for the 2006-2007 school year, the Transformation Project replaces the Chicago High School Redesign Project (CHISRE). CHISRE was an intermediary set up with funding from the Gates Foundation to create 36 small schools. However, these small schools often opened using the same leadership as the schools they replaced. The Transformation High Schools (there are more than a dozen in all) will use new leadership and curricula designed by multiple providers, including Kaplan K-12 Learning Services.

- ▶ Renaissance 2010: Up to 100 new schools are being opened under Renaissance 2010 (or Ren-10); 55 had opened as of 2006-7. See details on this initiative in the remainder of this section.

Highlighted Initiative: Renaissance 2010

Ren-10 Overview

Chicago’s latest reform story, the Renaissance 2010 initiative, aims to shut down approximately 70 district schools, either for under-performance or because of under-utilized space considerations. Ren-10 aims to open 100 schools in their place by 2010 – primarily new starts, along with a smaller number of schools that undergo turnaround or closure and reopening.

The district's Office of New Schools issues an RFP for each new school, which is then opened under one of three governance structures: Charter School, Contract School, or Performance School (see sections and chart below for detailed summary of these options). Most Renaissance schools will be small, enrolling no more than 600 students. All neighborhood students are eligible to attend Renaissance schools, though some will be open to students city-wide; students who attended turnaround schools will have priority when the new school reopens. The number of Renaissance schools selected each year will depend on the quality of the proposals submitted, and accepted proposals will be held accountable for meeting stated student achievement goals in exchange for increased autonomy. Initial contracts will be for five years, and are funded on a per-pupil basis.

Chicago's Renaissance 2010 continued

At the elementary school level, new schools and turnarounds generally affect every grade level at once; at the high school level, in some cases turnaround is conducted (or new schools are opened) grade by grade. In those instances, grade-by-grade phase-in starts with the freshman class, while the remaining grades stay in the school and are phased out as that class advances.

Teachers whose schools have been closed do not, apparently, hold any priority in the hiring process for either the newly opened schools or elsewhere in the district.

In 2006, the district offered two Ren-10 RFPs – one inviting existing operators to replicate successful models, the other open to all. The invited RFP was given to those who currently operate at least two successful schools and who have previously participated in the open RFP process. This gives applicants an opportunity to create up to 2,400 new seats over a four-year period.

Ren-10 schools are chosen for “rebirth” because of federal and state laws, and Chicago Board of Education policies that grant CPS authorization to temporarily close and re-open low performing schools. Public hearings are required before the board acts. Key factors in choosing schools for “rebirth” are academic performance and rate of improvement (or lack thereof). The existence of empty school buildings and the district’s ability to reassign students to under-filled buildings during transition years are vital to this plan.

Renaissance 2010’s portfolio of reform options provides for three levels of management autonomy:

Charter Schools are funded by the Board of Education, but have freedom from many state laws, district initiatives, and board policies and are not required to follow many board regulations. They can set their own policies for curriculum, school hours, and discipline, but are held accountable for student academic achievement. Teachers and staff are either employees of the non-profit organization that governs the charter school or of an education management organization hired by the non-profit.

Teachers may remain covered by the district bargaining agreement, negotiate as a separate unit with the charter school governing body, or work independently. Certification is not required, but uncertified teachers must meet stated requirements (a bachelor’s degree, five years experience in the degree area, passing score on state teacher tests, and evidence of professional growth). Mentoring must also be provided to uncertified teachers. Charters must participate in the state’s retirement system.

CPS has been a proactive charter authorizer, opening the maximum (30) allowed by law, and indeed testing the law by allowing high-performing charters from among the first 15 operators to open multiple campuses. CPS is considered to have one of the most thoughtful approaches to authorizing charters, with their slow-growth, high-quality plan that is selective, transparent, and includes an ongoing rigorous audit process. As of September 2007, there were 56 charter campuses, operated by 28 independent entities. A majority of the charters are part of the Ren-10 initiative.

Contract Schools are managed by independent non-profits in accordance with a five-year Performance Agreement between the organization and the Board of Education. Contract Schools are free from many CPS policies and requirements, but not from

state school laws. Contract School teachers and school staff are employees of the non-profit or company that has the “contract.”

There were some schools called “contract” schools before Ren-10 was officially announced, such as a KIPP school that has since closed. There are now four Ren-10 contract schools; the first was opened by American Quality Schools, in partnership with the Westside Ministers Coalition. The Austin Business and Entrepreneurship Academy opened in fall 2006 with its ninth grade class, as a “school of high standards providing students with a strong academic foundation, business knowledge, social skills, and practical experiences to enable them to pursue economic opportunity for themselves and create economic opportunity for the Austin community.” There are also two contract schools outside of Ren-10 – two elementaries closed for low performance and re-opened in 2003 as contract schools. The district plans to open as many as eight contract schools by the fall of 2008.

Performance Schools are CPS district-run schools exempt from or given additional flexibility on many district initiatives and policies, but subject to state laws. Teachers and school staff are employees of CPS. There are 19 performance schools open as of fall 2007.

For further comparison of the three Ren-10 options, see next section.

Renaissance 2010 Management Dynamics

By giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to launch new schools or turn around existing ones, coupled with strict accountability requirements, the district effectively placed the initiative’s focus on student achievement, rather than on who’s in charge. The flexibility among several design options has generated a combination of unique, locally founded schools as well as privately managed, more easily replicable models. The “*readiness to act*”

factors addressed through Ren-10 include: autonomy, decision-making, governance, and teacher contracts.

Autonomy

The three possible school types under Renaissance 2010 – charter, contract, and performance schools – offer schools differing degrees of freedom from CPS rules and regulations. This range also allows for varied levels of autonomy with respect to staffing, budget, and governance. The main thrust of the Ren-10 policy, however, is that all schools are held accountable for meeting stated goals for student achievement and success in exchange for their increased autonomy. Like failing traditional public schools, Ren-10 schools that are not meeting their student performance markers are subject to closure by the district.

Decision-Making

Renaissance 2010 schools are all offered extensive programmatic and curricular flexibility, which is intended to encourage innovative designs and creative models. Though all school types must meet state learning standards, contract and performance schools also generate a performance agreement as to how they’ll meet CPS standards through a designated series of student outcome measures. Decisions on individual curricular elements are flexible and are agreed upon in the individual school performance plan. Charter schools are not linked to other CPS initiatives, whereas contract and performance schools have the option to participate if they so desire. All three school types are also able to manipulate the academic calendar and traditional school day, provided they meet CPS minimums.

Governance

Governance under Ren-10 also varies depending on school type. Both charter and contract schools are administered by approved independent organizations, whereas performance schools are governed by CPS, but granted specific autonomies. Charters are run by a governing board, but performance schools are managed

Chicago's Renaissance 2010 continued

by a local school council composed of community members, parents, and school leaders. Contract schools can select either a board or a local school council.

Teacher Contracts

Different forms of contracts and differentiated pay scales for teachers are also hallmarks of the Ren-10 schools. Performance schools are most like traditional schools in this arena, in that their teachers must be compensated according to union guidelines and all teachers are members of Chicago Teachers' Union. On the other hand, charter and contract schools can determine their own teacher compensation scale and their teachers can choose whether to unionize. Contract and charter school teachers may join the CTU, but may not participate in the actual bargaining agreement with the district.

Chicago has benefited from the presence of a proactive mayor and superintendent who operate on a very strong political foundation.

Teachers whose schools have been closed do not, apparently, hold any priority in the hiring process for either the newly opened schools or elsewhere in the district (though they will not be "excessed" or laid off). Under Renaissance 2010 guidelines, whether the converted and re-opened schools require their teachers to be certified depends on the school type; all teachers in contract and performance schools must hold appropriate certifications, but only half the teachers in new charter schools are bound to such regulations. Leaders of Ren-10 schools may hail from various non-traditional fields, including business, higher education, and community organizations.

For a summary of the Ren-10 options, see the table on next page.

Results to Date

Given that the Renaissance 2010 schools are only in their first years of operation, it is too soon to judge whether the initiative will be successful. We do know that the average attendance rate at the 22 Cohort One schools is 96 percent, two percentage points higher than that of other CPS schools. There are other early signals of promise; all ten new high schools reporting Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) scores in 2007 did better than their comparison neighborhood high schools in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards. A performance contract has since been incorporated into each school's annual audit. The performance reports will examine three aspects of student test scores: percentage of students meeting standards in current year, how these figures changed from previous year, and how they compare to figures in schools charter students would have attended.

It is worth noting that student achievement in CPS schools generally rose dramatically in almost all portions of the 2005-2006 Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), with up to 96 percent of schools improving in math and 92 percent improving in both reading and science. These results represent the largest one-year test score gains since Mayor Daley first took office in 1995 and echo the upward trend since the first administration of the ISAT in 2000. Those increases continued in 2007 across the board, for new schools, charters, Ren-10 schools, and for the district as a whole, with grade 3-8 students in new schools and charters slightly outperforming district averages.

It may also be relevant to note the performance of CPS's older CPS charter schools, on which the Ren-10 initiative is broadly based: Chicago's charters perform better than the available neighborhood schools three-quarters of the time. The charters almost all have strong graduation rates, huge waiting lists, higher attendance rates (in all but one), and the models are being replicated by non-charter district schools. Seventy percent of CPS charter elementary schools improved faster than CPS as a whole;

Comparison of Renaissance 2010 School Management Options

	Charter	Contract	Performance
Curriculum	Meets state standards as specified in Plan; not linked to CPS initiatives	Meets CPS and state learning standards as specified in Performance Agreement; may or may not participate in CPS initiatives	Meets CPS and state learning standards as specified in Performance Agreement; may or may not participate in CPS initiatives
School calendar and schedule	Must meet state minimums	Must meet state minimums	Must meet state minimums; may or may not follow CPS, as specified in Plan
School funding	Per pupil	Per pupil	Per pupil
Teacher certification	In schools created prior to 2003, 75% of teachers must be certified; 50% in new schools	100% of teachers must be certified	100% of teachers must be certified
CPS principal eligibility required?	No	No	Yes
Teacher pension fund?	Certified teachers in pension fund. Others covered by Social Security.	CTU teachers in pension fund. Other teachers covered by Social Security	All teachers in pension fund
Teachers and staff employed by:	Charter school board or sub-contracted management organization	Contract school board or sub-contracted management organization	CPS
Teachers' union	May join CTU but not join in CPS agreement	May join CTU but not join in CPS agreement	CTU members
Employee compensation	Determined by school	Determined by school	In accordance with contract

(Table drawn from www.ren2010.cps.il.us)

Chicago's Renaissance 2010 continued

all CPS charter high schools outperformed the district schools students would have otherwise attended. Charters remain, however, a relatively small part of the educational landscape, educating eight percent of Chicago students.

Strengths and Challenges of Chicago's Intervention Experience

Strong Political Foundation

Chicago has benefited from the presence of a proactive mayor and superintendent who operate on a very strong political foundation. Controversial approaches such as Ren-10 appear to require this kind of strong-willed authority – whether provided through state intervention (such as Oakland and Philadelphia) or the ballot box (Chicago and New York).

Substantial Interest from Partners

Renaissance 2010 has generated a substantial amount of interest from community members, private organizations, parents and teachers. More than 50 proposals were received for the very first

Chicago remains, along with New York City, one of the nation's most compelling centers of break-the-mold school reform and a district that deserves close attention.

RFP in 2004, and 22 were accepted. In 2006, CPS offered two further RFPs. (The Ren-10 RFP is a comprehensive, thoughtful document that turnaround policy planners would do well to look over. See the listing in the Resources section.) However, some stakeholders have expressed concern (see below).

The Perils of Closure

Chicago has been in the vanguard for garnering community input into its schools, but the current local political climate suggests this is a double-edged sword. The success of Ren-10 depends upon strong local community support to get past the shock of school closure, so CPS must work hard to address existing community concerns for the policy to gain traction. It is also important that CPS is equally clear about the criteria for school closures as it is for new-school proposals, so that the plan doesn't feel like a covert attack on schools in certain areas or on public education more generally.

Many educators and community members are concerned about the negative impact school closures might have on their former students. According to some reports, violence and behavior issues have increased somewhat in schools that have received large numbers of students from closed failing schools, sparking public concern.

Getting the Oversight Right

Additionally, the performance pressure placed on schools by NCLB and other accountability policies has resulted in the district tightening the reins on many Renaissance schools. The district has created the Office of New Schools to work with the new schools, and has moved towards increasing the amount of support it offers to leaders of the schools. Some of the new-school operators are slightly concerned about a "slippery slope" of district involvement in their schools, while others welcome it as a source of support for schools that may not, in every case, have enough local capacity to address the challenges they face.

On-going Charter Hurdles

While the success of the original generation of Chicago charters provided much of the inspiration for Ren-10 initiatives and chartering represents one of the three options offered, the initiative is not providing a clear victory for charter supporters.

First, the state cap on charters has begun to limit their growth. State law only allows for 60 schools, and Chicago's cap is 30. There was an allowance, originally for each charter to set up multiple campuses; however, this has been changed to allow only the original 15 Chicago charters to open additional campuses – new charters cannot expand.

Second, given that substantial support from private foundations and community organizations was key to the success of Chicago's original charters, many wonder if there is enough private funding for all the proposed new schools. Business community backers originally committed to raising money for 100 new charter schools, but have some concerns about the district's ability to do that, given the charter cap.

Other Hurdles

Other hurdles include resistance within some parts of the CPS bureaucracy, lingering community opposition, and influential, anti-charter teacher unions. (Union leaders and community activists remain skeptical about the educational soundness of charters and the Ren-10 strategy, while appreciative of the “portfolio” aspect of the approach that permits them to be actively engaged in the work.)

An Entrepreneurial Response

Chicago faces all of the same organizational dynamics, funding challenges, and social issues that other big-city districts face. But like New York City, it has responded with energy, creativity, and sustained commitment. Its efforts have made it a hotbed, of sorts, for school reform, drawing significant local and national resources. For example: over the course of the 2007-8 school year, the district is cooperating with NewSchools Venture Fund and Chicago International Charter School, the city's largest charter operator, to “incubate” a new turnaround organization to be called ChicagoRise. The initiative is another signal of the district's readiness, with able partners, to directly address important challenges – in this case, the dearth of high-capacity external partners dedicated to conducting school turnaround. Strategies such as these that are under development in Chicago make it a laboratory of reform that should be of prime interest to urban education reform leaders everywhere.

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Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone: Significant Reform through Central Control and Uniform Design

District-Based Turnaround Lab 2: A Cohort of "Superintendent's Schools"

For policymakers interested in the efficacy of direct, centrally-managed turnaround work, Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone is the initiative to watch. Within a sub-district that acts as an intensive care unit for chronically under-performing schools, Superintendent Rudy Crew is pursuing substantial reform in these schools through centralized control of prescribed interventions focused on (but not limited to) literacy – with promising early success.

Context

Intervention History

When Rudolph "Rudy" Crew became superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools in the summer of 2004, M-DCPS

Crew believes the Zone approach – rapid implementation of a broad strategy within a significant number of schools – was necessary to create critical mass to change the culture across the rest of the district.

was facing severe challenges in several arenas, including personnel issues, school overcrowding, financial mismanagement, and persistent student underperformance. In response, the Florida legislature was seriously considering breaking up the Miami-Dade school district (the fourth largest school system in the country), and some state resources were being redirected to the northern part of Florida where it was hoped they'd have more impact.

Then the district recruited Crew, who had launched the high-profile Chancellor's District for failing schools in New York City. When he arrived, Crew immediately began work on a districtwide overhaul and comprehensive school reform strategy. He and his team pledged that they'd raise the state-issued "letter" grades for at least 10 of the district's lowest performing schools during the first year of their tenure. Further, they promised to raise the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test) scores of over 3,000 M-DCPS students within the same period.

During the first phase of his plan, Crew implemented several blanket reforms by increasing teacher pay, planning to improve school capacity, engaging the local community, and restructuring fiscal and personnel processes.

Current District Approaches to Restructuring

Unlike Chicago and Philadelphia, which have clearly distributed decision-making about how to effect school restructuring to a variety of in- and out-of district agents, Miami-Dade central office has focused on the centrally-directed Improvement Zone turnaround approach in order to achieve maximum impact in a minimum timeframe. However, several of the school options featured in restructuring in the other districts – such as charter and magnet schools – also form part of the landscape in Miami-Dade. In fact, these options are particularly significant in Miami-Dade because the state and district have an extensive history of school choice, started decades ago as a remedy for residential segregation. As described by Jane Hannaway and Sarah Cohodes of the Urban Institute (2007), the current set of choices (some of which comprise different school models, others of which are programs to provide access to a selection of standard district schools) includes:

- ▶ **Magnet schools:** 76 programs running in 67 schools, the first opened in 1973.
- ▶ **Charter schools:** 32 charter schools in the district, including the first opened in the state.
- ▶ **Controlled Choice.** Controlled choice schools have “an enhanced focus on an academic theme.” Currently there are two choice zones containing 19 Controlled Choice schools.
- ▶ **I Choose!** This program is designed to foster voluntary within-district school choice by increasing the number of choice schools available. It creates “All Academy” choice schools at under-enrolled and under-construction schools that will be open to the whole district.
- ▶ **New high school models:** Smaller learning communities in 16 high schools, career academies with business partnerships, satellite learning centers seeking to enable students to attend a public school at their parent’s workplace, etc.
- ▶ **K-8 Centers:** Combining elementary and middle school grade levels
- ▶ **State scholarship-based choice:** The Opportunity Scholarship Program, part of the state’s accountability system: the John M. McKay Scholarship, providing vouchers for special needs students not being appropriately served; and the Corporate Income Tax Credit Program.
- ▶ **NCLB choice options:** Mandated school transfer and supplemental education services.

NCLB and non-NCLB choice are administered through the School Choice and Parental Options Unit. The history and prevalence of choice in the district contributes to a significantly “pro-

In Miami-Dade’s intervention world, turnaround essentially comes in one flavor – but it’s a strong one.

choice” environment. In the 2005-2006 year, 22 percent of the students in Miami attended a “choice” school (a larger number than the entire school districts of Austin, Denver, or Boston). However because of all the other, more longstanding choice options, uptake of the NCLB options is low: less than one-half of one percent of students eligible for NCLB school choice in 2005-2006 requested and used a transfer. (Hannaway and Cohodes, 2007)

Highlighted Initiative: The School Improvement Zone

Zone Overview

Drawing on lessons learned from the NYC Chancellor’s district, Crew and Irving Hamer, then deputy superintendent for school improvement (and a senior advisor on *The Turnaround Challenge*), created a plan to rescue the district’s floundering schools. Using longitudinal data to identify the most acutely struggling schools, the district grouped them into a newly created quasi-district dubbed the “School Improvement Zone.”

The 39 School Improvement Zone schools (20 elementaries, eleven middle schools, and eight high schools) from eight feeder districts were selected based on a combination of factors, including consistently low academic performance and weak leadership

Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone continued

capacity. Many of these schools had received failing grades from the state for over three consecutive academic years, but were not all designated for state takeover under NCLB. All Zone schools remain in the Zone for three years.

Zone reform mandates a high level of conformity among its schools and their leaders on several important levels (discussed below). Though the reforms are not entirely inflexible, Superintendent Crew claims that this tighter, more centralized

Prior to introduction of the Zone, there were as many as eight different reading programs used across the district. Now the Zone mandates the use of common literacy curricula.

reform structure is necessary given persistent, pervasive underperforming conditions. But in parallel with mandated reforms, Zone schools have been enhanced by higher teacher salaries, longer school days and years, more resources, and intensive teacher training for the standards-based curricula.

The Zone also relies on sophisticated data-analysis. Using the same long-term test-score data that helped identify the 39 chronically under-performing schools, the system zeroed in on 3,000 specific students who were struggling, but showed the potential for better performance. Schools were helped to target these students to assist them in improving their scores.

Crew believes the Zone approach – rapid implementation of a broad strategy within a significant number of schools – was necessary to create critical mass to change the culture across the rest of the district. “I learned that you need enough schools so that you can create a conversation about the rest of the system,” Crew says. “You need to be able to put enough energy into these

39 schools so that it impacts the shape and redesign of the district. It has to affect issues of staffing, and major issues like compensation and professional development. You have to have enough size and scope so that you approximate the tipping point of the organization. You need to have a wide enough statistical field so you can look at the concept with some objectivity and get a sense of the range of success.” (Farrell, 2005)

Zone Management Dynamics

In Miami-Dade's intervention world, turnaround essentially comes in one flavor – but it's a strong one. Bucking reform theories holding that decentralization and autonomy at the school level are necessary to achieve success, particularly in urban settings where schools are microcosms of their diverse neighborhoods, Miami's central office retains control and mandates uniform interventions in Zone schools. Crew believes that bottom-up reform efforts are still “very vital,” but he contends that the enormity of the problem calls for centralized control. (Farrell, 2005)

More Structure than Autonomy

Miami-Dade's Zone emphasizes central office mandates rather than school autonomy. There is nothing piecemeal about the turnaround plan formed by the district, or about its implementation. Unlike many previous districtwide urban education reform efforts, Crew's scheme immediately tackled underperformance from a range of different angles. Zone policy mandates everything from uniform curriculum, schedules, compensation and teacher training requirements. (For more on these, see the next section.)

Given this control model, it is not surprising that Crew is strongly opposed to hiring external partners to manage Zone schools that continue to fail. Nor does he support the chartering of chronically failing schools, a suggestion promoted by the school board president.

Local stakeholders like community partners and parents have been involved primarily in support roles. When they first implemented the Zone strategy, district leaders met with strategic community partners such as after-school providers to help support the holistic development of especially vulnerable students. In addition, the Miami-Dade district instituted the (first of its kind) Parent Academy in partnership with local universities and with the financial support of a few large foundations. Though not specifically part of the Zone strategy, development of parent capacity across the district promises to help buttress the success of M-DCPS students both inside and outside the Zone.

Elements of Improvement Zone Reform

Zone schools are required to follow the reform plans set out by the district. These cover most aspects of the “*readiness to teach*” side of the learning triangle discussed in other parts of this report, including:

- ▶ **Uniform core curricula:** Prior to introduction of the Zone, there were as many as eight different reading programs used across the district. Now the Zone mandates the use of common literacy curricula.
- ▶ **Intensive teacher development:** A key component of the Zone strategy was increasing the capacity of its teachers. All of the Zone’s teachers are required to attend 56 hours of professional development per academic year, a much more rigorous requirement than the 120 development hours per five years required for other Florida schoolteachers.
- ▶ **Capacity building for school leaders:** Principals of Zone schools also receive extensive professional development and mentoring. The District hosts two leadership institutes for principals that emphasize literacy and successful instruction techniques and focus on the challenges specific to urban secondary schools.

The Zone reforms go further, requiring:

- ▶ **Longer learning day and learning year:** Zone schools have both an extended academic year (+10 days) and a longer school day (+1 hour), designed to support increased achievement despite challenging circumstances. Schools use the extra time for intensive reading tutoring and test prep for struggling students.
- ▶ **Longer class periods:** In addition, all Zone middle and high schools must implement block scheduling. The 100-minute class periods facilitate the type of intensive small-group literacy remediation required for students who performed at the lowest levels on the state’s standardized FCAT exam.
- ▶ **Support for key student transitions:** To help ease what can often be difficult transitions for students at key points in their schooling, Zone schools introduced sixth and ninth grade Transition Academies that focus on academic planning, study habits, career development, and FCAT preparation. In addition, Zone schools provide personalized support for particularly vulnerable elementary children: third graders who have been retained as well as pre-kindergarten through second grade students who are not performing to capacity.

Zone schools have both an extended academic year (+10 days) and a longer school day (+1 hour), designed to support increased achievement despite challenging circumstances.

In contrast to the central role of the district in other matters, decisions relating to professional development are made at the school level. Each Zone school elects a nine-member in-house professional development team that includes the assistant principal, literacy leader, and union representative. These teams are tasked with creating a set of professional development options they feel will meet the needs of the teachers at their particular school site.

Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone continued

Governance

Miami-Dade has carved out a new associate superintendent position dedicated to running the School Improvement Zone. This position is advised and supported by the School Improvement Zone University and Community Advisory Board. The advisory board, including university presidents, business professionals, elected officials, clergy, and parents, serves as a working group to help the Zone accomplish goals relating to teacher working environments, holistic child supports, and the preparation of students for higher education and work.

Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone was conceived, designed, and implemented within a couple of years – and gives signs of reasonably significant, immediate impact on children's learning.

Teacher Contracts

Like “regular” district teachers, Zone teachers are district employees and union members. However the key elements of the Zone strategy required considerable changes to the conditions of teaching and learning within the sub-district. The United Teachers of Dade (the teachers union) worked relatively cooperatively with Crew and his team in support of these new reforms. Some of this may well have been due to the timing of the reform, which came on the heels of a devastating scandal involving union leadership. Nonetheless, union support helped facilitate the successful implementation of the plan in January 2005, enabling the adoption of several conditions-changing linchpins of the Zone strategy, such as:

- **Increased incentives:** Miami-Dade uses financial as well as other incentives to attract and retain high-quality veteran

teachers. Educator salaries are 20 percent higher in Zone schools to compensate for longer work schedules, increased professional development requirements, and a degree of relinquished autonomy in instructional matters, such as literacy curricula.

- **Personnel changes:** One of the important strategic elements of Zone reforms was that it enabled personnel changes at various levels across the district. Fifteen of the 39 original Zone school principals were replaced. While Zone strategy aimed to attract highly qualified teachers, it did not necessarily involve the strategic replacement of current teachers in Zone schools. Instead, current teachers were offered the option to either accept the new conditions required of Zone teachers (discussed above) or request a transfer to another non-Zone school. Though many teachers initially requested a transfer out of the Zone, a substantial number of them changed their minds when thousands of new applicants from across the country began to lobby for their former jobs.

Results to Date

The School Improvement Zone has been in place a year longer than some of the other district turnaround experiments investigated for this report, so it is possible to get an early picture of progress under the model, which looks promising.

The results of the 2005 FCAT exam, administered just six weeks after the union negotiations ended, were encouraging. At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, Miami's Zone schools also received higher grades from the state than non-Zone schools. The more revealing 2006 results largely extended these trends. FCAT results demonstrated continued improvement both districtwide and in Zone schools. The districtwide third through tenth grade reading proficiency rate rose to 51 percent – a six-percentage-point jump over 2005 that pushed the percentage of

proficient readers in the District above 50 percent for the first time since the start of FCAT. In math, the District's overall proficiency rate rose to 55 percent. Twenty-two of the 39 schools in the Zone earned a higher grade than in the previous year, echoing improvement across the district.

The percentage of Miami-Dade third graders reading at grade level rose to 71 percent in 2006. This collective 10-percentage-point increase over 2005 was fueled by a 17 percent jump in Zone elementary schools. As a result, more than half the Zone's third graders – 55 percent – read at grade level by 2006. (By comparison, about a third of these Zone third graders were reading at grade level when the District launched the initiative.) In math, the percentage of Miami-Dade third graders scoring at grade level rose to 69 percent. This collective six-point increase over 2005 was similarly fueled by a Zone school increase of 10 percent. These gains largely continued with the 2007 scores, with increases in both reading and math scores at all grade levels tested, 3 through 10.

Strengths and Challenges of Miami-Dade's Intervention Experience

Urgency/Speed of Turnaround

Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone was conceived, designed, and implemented within a couple of years – and gives signs of reasonably significant, immediate impact on children's learning. The track record in Miami undermines some reformers' arguments that turnaround can take five to seven years to show real progress. (See below for sustainability issues.)

Community Involvement: Important for the Long Term

Critiques of Zone planning and implementation have sometimes focused on the flip side of its rapidly implemented, top-down reform model: lack of local buy-in and limited community involvement. Hamer, architect with Crew of the Zone policy, suggests that while the "fast turnaround" objectives of the initial Zone reform did not allow time or resources for broader consultation and involvement, "this is a crucial piece to sustaining the Zone's success." (School Leadership News, Spring 2006)

Building on Successful Union Partnership for Scale-up

The cooperation of the Dade teachers' union was critical in changing underlying conditions that allow Zone educators and administrators to act in ways that put the interest of students first. One challenge is to extend some of the Zone operating conditions, like the 56 hours of professional development for every Zone teacher, to all Miami-Dade teachers.

*The cooperation of the Dade teachers' union
was critical in changing underlying conditions
that allow Zone educators and administrators to
act in ways that put the interest of students first.*

Sustainability

Besides the issue of scaling up Zone terms and conditions to the rest of the district, Crew also faces the question of how to sustain the progress made in the Zone schools beyond the proposed three-year "sunsetting" of the Zone. The district will need to address how schools will return to their original regional configurations. Will they retain any of the extra professional development, the extended day and year, etc.? What supports can be provided so that they and their students retain the progress they've made?



New York's *Children First*: A Districtwide Empowerment Strategy

District-Based Turnaround Lab 3: Rolling Out Empowerment Across the System

In most cases, a plan as radical as New York City's Empowerment School approach might only be attempted to turn around a small number of schools in response to legal imperatives. But in New York, empowerment to "put children first" developed from the beginning as part of an inventive, comprehensive strategy for changing education system-wide. As New York's Chancellor Joel I. Klein noted, "from the very outset of our work five years ago, we fundamentally rejected 'incrementalism' as a strategy." (Klein, 2007. See box on page 48.)

"*Children First*," as the broad initiative is called, has pursued fundamental change and quickly reached its tipping point. After introducing stability and coherence to the New York City sys-

The new contract ended "bumping" of junior teachers by more senior teachers, involuntary placements of teachers in schools, and other practices that limited principals' power to choose the teams best suited to serve their student population.

tem, and spending a couple of years testing new approaches and systems in its Empowerment Schools, the district is poised to roll out the three pillars of the reform: leadership, empowerment, and accountability to the entire 1.1 million student district. While the other three district-based experiments we analyze in this report focus solely on chronically under-performing

schools, our aim was to look for bold steps, and Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein's recently released update to the *Children First* plan, with its districtwide rollout, is nothing if not bold. If it works, it will certainly be a large scale achievement. In the past, efforts of this nature typically focused on small cohort groups – not an entire school system.

Some of what we review here has been implemented over the past several years, while other aspects have only just been introduced and have yet to be fully rolled out (this is also true of some of our other "turnaround labs"). Keep in mind that the reforms are being applied to schools across a wide range of circumstances, including schools with less entrenched performance issues. This helps to explain why this reform initiative sits at the high-autonomy or "loose" end of the authority spectrum. However, it specifies its own "loose-tight" balance. In addition, its pairing of empowerment with accountability, its fair funding formula and relentless focus on putting "children first" all resonate with our formulations on more targeted turnaround. And the most recent steps to take the plan districtwide persuade us that the idea of using elements of turnaround strategy as an entry point for larger education reform may not require decades to be realized, after all.

Context

Intervention History

For decades, New York City has experienced waves of reform and restructuring initiatives. The creation in the mid-90s of the "Chancellor's District" was noteworthy within this turnaround context. Under then-superintendent Rudy Crew, the Chancellor's District gathered together a large number of low performing schools from across the city for a host of interventions. Within this citywide improvement zone, centralized

management, rather than local control, was the critical variable used to initiate, enforce and ensure the implementation of school improvement. Just as the Chancellor's District was beginning to show some signs of impact, however, yet another wave of change came over the city.

This most recent, particularly intense period of change began in 2002 when the New York state legislature granted Mayor Bloomberg direct control over the New York City public school system. The mayor appointed Joel Klein chancellor, and together they began a two-stage reform process aimed at radically improving the city's schools. (See more on the driving assumptions of Children First, below.) In the first stage, they focused on bringing stability and coherence to the system. In 2003, the city's 32 community school districts were eliminated. In their place, New York City's 1,400 schools were grouped into 10 regions, each led by an instructional superintendent – so fewer layers existed between principals and the top district administrator. The DOE also adopted a coherent system-wide approach for instruction in reading, writing and math. In a controversial move, these changes swept away the Chancellor's District. Klein maintained that he had expanded implementation of many of the Chancellor's District strategies citywide, while critics say it was a mistake to dismantle such a promising initiative. (Indeed, Miami-Dade recruited Rudy Crew in part to create a similar improvement zone there.)

As part of its reform efforts, the department created the Leadership Academy to train new school leaders and worked with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) to bring major changes to the conditions under which New York City public schools operate. The new contract with the UFT increased starting

teachers' salaries by 43% between 2002 and 2007, and ended “bumping” of junior teachers by more senior teachers, involuntary placements of teachers in schools, and other practices that limited

Those with top ratings will receive bonuses for serving as demonstration sites for others. High-performing schools will also be eligible for additional funds for accepting struggling students from poor-performing schools.

principals' power to choose the teams best suited to serve their student population. It also gave the DOE the ability to create lead teacher positions with differential salaries; added a housing incentive for experienced math, science, and special education teachers; and streamlined the discipline and grievance procedure.

The Chancellor also launched a pilot program called the “Autonomy Zone.” Principals of these schools were given additional decision-making power over programs, personnel, and finances in exchange for signing performance contracts. This program was later expanded into the Empowerment Schools initiative.

Current District Approaches to Restructuring

As part of widespread efforts to achieve system-wide change, there are a number of initiatives specifically aimed at chronically under-performing schools and their populations:

- **NCLB Restructuring:** For schools formally in NCLB restructuring, NYC uses a variety of strategies described in *The Turnaround Challenge* as “providing help” approaches – providing a range of assistance including capacity-building,

New York's Children First Empowerment Strategy continued

curricular reform, and data analysis, along with support from external providers, without relinquishing management responsibility for the school.

- ▶ Schools under Registration Review (SURR): New York State has a separate process for identifying failing schools under its own accountability system, one of the earliest, most comprehensive and rigorous of such state identification efforts. As with NCLB restructuring (which overlaps), the SURR initiative is primarily using what we describe in the main report as “providing help” approaches with these schools.
- ▶ Close and re-open/new small schools: NYC has aggressively used close-and-reopen to restructure failing schools, often independent of any federal or state mandates. Sixteen large high schools have closed or are being closed, and 185 new small schools have opened the wake of these closures. The small schools range from academically selective schools (one is modeled after Boston Latin), trade schools, and some that focus on general improvement in the City's lowest-performing high school buildings.

As with NCLB and SURR restructuring, NYC has made heavy use of external partners in this work through intermediaries such as New Visions for Public Schools, which has received substantial Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funding for the high school work. An increasing number of schools are run in conjunction with these school support organizations, which function as a partner to principals, providing instructional support and organizational design, but which are not accountable for performance.

- ▶ Charter conversions: Charters and charter conversions may also be used as alternatives for failing schools. Currently there are 60 charters in the City. A traditional district school can apply to the Chancellor to convert the school to a public charter with parental support. The state has nearly reached its

state charter cap (100), but conversions do not count against the cap. In 2005, Klein called for 50 more NYC charter schools by 2009.

- ▶ Empowerment schools and Children First innovations: In addition to the specific restructuring programs just listed, aspects of NYC's Empowerment schools expansion and the entire Children First initiative can be seen to address aspects of underperformance and radical change that in most districts are limited (if they exist at all) to specific programs aimed at schools already identified as failing. This initiative is highlighted below.

Highlighted Initiative: Children First

Overview: The Three Big Ideas

Having addressed stability and coherence in the first phase of Children First (as described in Intervention History above), phase two has moved on to a more radical set of integrated reforms, which its designers feel are needed to reorient education to put children's needs ahead of everything else. These reforms rest on three big ideas: those closest to the students should get to make the key decisions about what will best help their students succeed; empowered schools must be accountable for results; and schools should be able to count on funding that is fair and transparent.

Empowerment: The Heart of the Strategy

At the start of the 2006-07 school year, NYC already had 332 Empowerment Schools, the most tangible embodiment of the Children First approach. In return for agreeing to become accountable for achieving significant gains in student performance, they have:

- ▶ Greater authority over instructional decisions
- ▶ More resources over the course of a four-year performance agreement) and more discretion over spending

- ▶ Fewer administrative requirements
- ▶ Membership in a network of self-affiliated schools supported by an integrated team of instructional and business staff selected by the schools.

These autonomies and support elements, including the required clusters of Empowerment schools, align fairly closely with the recommendations in *The Turnaround Challenge*.

In January, 2007, Mayor Bloomberg announced a significant three-point expansion of “empowerment”:

- ▶ Starting in 2007-8, all schools were given the power to select from three types of School Support Organization: they can become full Empowerment Schools; partner with a Learning Support Organization (LSO) led and operated by four accomplished educational leaders; or choose to align with a Partnership Support Organization (PSO) -one of a number of not-for-profit organizations with a strong record of supporting schools and communities. (More on this below.)
- ▶ The central bureaucracy is being further reduced and resources are redirected to schools.
- ▶ In order to empower school leaders, the district has launched two additional initiatives to give them flexibility to recruit and keep the best teachers: first, to make tenure an earned and deserved honor rather than a right; and second, to provide school leaders with additional support to address poorly performing teachers.

Accountability: Requirements for Empowerment Schools

The accountability system that is at the core of the Empowerment School concept is now being implemented city-wide. The system includes three components:

- ▶ *Clear performance reporting to parents and all stakeholders.* Schools will receive progress reports with a letter grade. They will be ranked with similar schools and compared to the City's best schools. Over time, a school's progress will be measured and reported. The results of Quality Reviews, conducted by teams of experienced educators, will also be reported to parents and stakeholders.
- ▶ *A broader set of tools to accurately measure and analyze student achievement, enabling teachers and principals to adjust instruction accordingly.* Schools will be provided with diagnostic assessments and an achievement data system to track progress and analyze the results of changes in teaching.

“If we want principals to meet the needs of each and every one of their diverse students, then our funding system also must treat students as individuals.”

— Children First

- ▶ *Rewards for strong performance and consequences for chronic low performance.* Those with top ratings will receive bonuses for serving as demonstration sites for others. High-performing schools will also be eligible for additional funds for accepting struggling students from poor performing schools. Schools with “D” and “F” ratings face a four-year cycle of target setting, planning, leadership changes, and ultimate restructuring or closure. The interventions will, according to the January 2007 Children First report, be “aggressive.”

Fair Student Funding

The Children First plan asserts, “If we want principals to meet the needs of each and every one of their diverse students, then our funding system also must treat students as individuals.” They therefore are joining the growing number of school districts that “fund the child.” Under such a system, all dollars follow the student

New York's Children First Empowerment Strategy continued

to the New York City public school he or she attends. Schools receive a base allocation for each child, and additional dollars follow some students, based on their needs. The system is being phased in to preserve core programs and services. The Fair Student Funding system is meant to be equitable, and also easy to understand. The district promises that about two-thirds of a school's budget will be presented on a simple, single page.

A Fundamental Rejection of "Incrementalism"

Given the departure that the system-wide approach of Children First represents, it is perhaps worth noting the assumptions that underlie the approach. The latest installment to the Children First plan explains it this way: "We call our plan Children First, and we mean it. Our goal is to focus everything we do on the only outcome that really matters: student success." Throughout the report, descriptions of one radical systemic change after another are punctuated, like a drumbeat, with the end goal and justification: "Children First."

In a speech to the Partnership for New York City the day after the plan was published, Chancellor Klein summarized the four "simple beliefs" at the heart of the Children First initiatives, past and projected. According to Klein, the plan's framers:

- "fundamentally reject incrementalism" in favor of bold action
- "fundamentally reject the notion that the challenges of urban education are insurmountable in light of failures endemic to our society or the difficult circumstances surrounding the lives of many students"
- "fundamentally reject the notion that we should ask our great educators to succeed with children but deny them the authority and resources to craft the most effective path to success"
- "fundamentally reject the notion that education" is "not compatible with meaningful accountability at every level."

Children First Management Dynamics

Matching Autonomy with Accountability

Children First devolves far more autonomy and budgetary control to individual schools, and in return demands greater accountability for results. The three main components of the accountability regime have been tested in Empowerment Schools and will be applied citywide during the 2007-8 school year:

- ▶ Schools will be graded on the clarity of student performance information provided to parents through tools such as progress reports and quality reviews.
- ▶ A broader set of diagnostic assessments will be utilized four to five times per year to measure and analyze student achievement, as well as to adjust instruction.
 - A powerful Web-based data management system will allow for additional collaboration and customization of instruction.
 - Intensive citywide support and training in the use of data tools is being provided citywide.

All schools are graded on an A-F scale based on outcomes, including year-to-year progress and how well they are doing compared with schools that serve similar student populations. Schools receiving "D" or "F" grades face aggressive intervention, potentially culminating in closure.

Three Flavors of Decision-Making Control

A key to the entire NYC approach is the three levels of school-based control over decision-making described earlier, and the fact that principals were given, this year, the power to choose their desired "flavor." Once again, they include the following:

- ▶ Become an Empowerment School: These schools maintain authority over key educational decisions including instruction

professional development and scheduling. They also have greater discretion over budget, access to significant additional discretionary funding, authority to select their own administrative support team and fewer administrative requirements in return for more accountability for results.

- ▶ Partner with one of the four internal district Learning Support Organizations – distinct, differentiated support organizations.
- ▶ Partner with an external Partnership Support Organization. An RFP process is being used to develop a market of qualified non-profits to provide support.

The first-year choices of NYC principals were released in 2007. Most principals (54 percent) chose to work with one of the internal LSOs. Thirty-five percent chose to become an Empowerment School, and 11% chose to work with a PSO.

Governance

Despite enhanced autonomy, all schools will remain subject to direct public authority and control. The DOE will set the standards and hold schools accountable for achieving them. Responsibility for all employment decisions regarding professional staff, including principals, remains with the DOE. All collective bargaining agreements continue to apply.

Teacher Contracts

The United Federation of Teachers has challenged a number of aspects of Children First. But the union recently was able to come to agreement with the district around some issues, including seniority, length of the work day, and hiring of principals, in

exchange for a pay raise. The district also replaced bumping and involuntary teacher placement with an “open market hiring system” under which more than 3,000 experienced teachers applied for open jobs and were selected by principals for vacancies across the system. Two new initiatives were launched for the 2007-8 school year:

The union recently was able to come to agreement with the district around some issues, including seniority, length of the work day, and hiring of principals, in exchange for a pay raise.

- ▶ Teacher tenure will no longer be routine and will instead be earned. Principals will be required to focus on how they support the development and evaluate the performance of new teachers. Principals’ judgments will be subject to external review.
- ▶ Increased support will be provided to poorly performing tenured teachers. The UFT has already agreed to a new peer intervention program for struggling teachers, and two new support tools will be added.
 - Teams of expert retired principals will observe and make recommendations to struggling teachers.
 - Where remediation fails, principals will be given additional support to remove the lowest performers.

New York's Children First Empowerment Strategy continued

Results to Date

After four years, results from Children First appear promising: improved academic achievement, higher graduation rates, safer schools, more high-quality school options, less bureaucracy, higher teacher salaries, new buildings, and huge increases in private support. Since Bloomberg and Klein took responsibility for the City's public schools:

- ▶ The percentage of fourth-graders passing state reading exams has increased by about 12 points, compared to 4 points in the rest of the state.
- ▶ The percent of fourth-graders passing state math exams has increased by 22 points, compared to a six-point gain by students in the rest of the state.
- ▶ The graduation rate has increased to the highest level in 20-plus years. 60% of students graduated on time in 2006, up from 50.8% in 2002.

An RFP process is being used to develop a market of qualified non-profits and other entities to provide support and technical assistance.

As the Empowerment schools initiative is in its second year of operation, it is still too early to tell how successful it will be in raising student achievement. Empowerment schools recorded baseline data in fall of 2006 and, like all New York City schools, received their first of a new-style graded Progress Report in summer 2007. According to the DOE, the autonomy zone schools upon which the Empowerment initiative is based outperformed citywide averages in their first year (2004-2005), and further

improved upon their past performance before entering the pilot program. In addition, according to the DOE, 85 percent of schools (22 out of 26 participating schools) in the autonomy zone pilot program met their performance targets. (NYC Council, 2007) The Council briefing paper notes that this statistic only takes into account 26 of the autonomy zone schools (rather than the 48 listed in DOE literature), and it is unclear how the remaining 22 autonomy zone schools fared in evaluations.

In the meantime, a recent survey of the pilot Empowerment schools indicates high levels of satisfaction from Empowerment school principals: 92 percent feel the joining "has had a positive or highly positive impact on their school community," 88 percent say one of the benefits is "the increased time they have in school," 90 percent say that "overall classroom instruction has improved," and 95 percent felt that being an Empowerment School has "improved the use of data by teachers to inform instruction." (NYC Department of Education, Empowerment Schools, 2007)

Strengths and Challenges of New York's Intervention Experience

Strong Political Foundation

Clearly, the Children First initiative has benefited from the work of a proactive mayor and chancellor operating in a political context that is particularly conducive to reform. Thanks to the strength of the mayor's and chancellor's power base following Bloomberg's landslide election, the successful conclusion of the transit strike, and, because of term limits, the lack of need to play for re-election, the team has had more latitude than most civic leaders to implement their plans.

Inventive Approach

The roll-out phase of the most “empowering” parts of the initiative has just begun, but the scene-setting districtwide changes were bold in themselves, and the additional bureaucratic reorganizations and distribution of autonomy will – if they proceed as planned – constitute some of the most significant systemic reform underway in any district in the country. The fact that it is taking place in the nation's single largest school district makes it all the more noteworthy. The district was recognized, in fact, as the 2007 recipient of the Broad Prize for districtwide improvement in urban education.

Challenges of Middle Management

According to district observers, the Chancellor has had challenges with district middle management, which has resisted change. However, the DOE culture is reported to have changed substantially over time. In particular, creation of the Office of New Schools – now called the Office of Portfolio Development – is credited with dealing with schools and outside providers in new ways and running interference for them with the wider bureaucracy. This office could serve as a model, in many ways, for the sub-district cluster and special district turnaround office concepts discussed in the main report.

Potential Risks of Streamlining

Empowerment and the resources to fund it have been created by streamlining existing bureaucratic support for schools, so there is some concern that the newly empowered schools may find that they spend more time and money replacing the services and supports they had previously than focusing on children's achievement.

Facilities Challenges

New York City has done more than many other districts to make facilities available, with both an active effort to reopen new schools in old buildings and a \$250 million charter school facilities financing program. Facilities issues still represent a central challenge in many of the restructured new schools, however.

All of the elements of Children First represent a risk. In the words of education historian Diane Ravitch, “No one knows what any of this means.” (New York Sun, June 7, 2007) But as district leaders continually point out, the scale and urgency represented by educational failure in New York City are staggering. The numbers make the challenges facing most states look small by comparison. A total of 140,000 16-21 year old students have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out from current high school classes. More than 60 percent of eighth graders are still not reading or doing math at grade level. The average African American, Latino and low-income high school student performs several grade levels below his or her peers and only one in four of them ends up with a Regents Diploma. If nothing else, the district's initiative certainly has shaken the status quo that contributed to this level of under-performance. Reformers and education leaders in districts and states nationwide will be watching the results of New York's efforts closely.

The districtwide changes, bureaucratic reorganizations, and distribution of autonomy will – if they proceed as planned – constitute some of the most significant systemic reform underway in any district in the country.



Philadelphia's Diverse Provider Model: The "Thin-Management" Theory, in Practice

District-Based Turnaround Lab 4: A Blend of District Control and Outsourced School Management

Philadelphia's portfolio of initiatives to turn around its most struggling schools has been closely watched. The early assessment: to date, improvement in general across the range of approaches, with the rate of improvement in the district's cohort of privately managed schools no better than that of the district as a whole, and in fact not as promising as the district's own directly-managed restructured schools.

There are lessons to be learned from what has been called "the nation's largest experiment in the private management of public schools" (Gill, et al, 2007) – but probably not the ones education reformers had wanted to see, at least not yet. Rather than

The district's basic strategy has been to introduce market forces through private contracts, charters, and university partnerships; to provide some intensive district support; and use the state takeover status to increase flexibility from contractual obligations.

providing a true test of "private management," the Philadelphia experience illustrates emerging outcomes of a hybrid governance system in which the district retains significant control over personnel and budgets, while outsourcing to external partners a set of what's been called "thin management" autonomies. The district – spurred by state action after being placed into a form of state receivership – deserves the credit and attention it has

received for conducting some extensive, out-of-the-box experiments. The conclusions that reformers will draw from Philadelphia's portfolio approach will probably differ with their underlying opinions on the outsourcing of school management: proof that it does not work, to some, and proof that the district's hybrid governance model for the outsourced schools was flawed, to others.

Context

Intervention History

Philadelphia's experiment with the private management of public schools began in 2002 when, after years of low achievement and budget crises, the state of Pennsylvania launched a "friendly takeover" of the 200,000-pupil district. District management was turned over to the appointed School Reform Commission (SRC), the chair of which was granted a seven-year term – far exceeding that of the Governor who appointed him. The SRC hired a new chief executive who proceeded to implement wide-ranging reforms, including:

- ▶ Centralized mandatory core curriculum
- ▶ Edison-based system of formative benchmark assessments every six weeks
- ▶ Standardized professional development for teachers based on the formative assessments
- ▶ Extended learning time for struggling students
- ▶ Upgrading the central office human resource function
- ▶ Expanding and rationalizing contractual relationships with fee-for-service providers in professional development and curriculum

In a closely followed move, the SRC also adopted a “mixed provider” model, distributing responsibility for turning around failing schools across a range of partners and sectors, based on the theory that the market forces embedded in this model would improve educational outcomes. (For more on this approach, see below.)

Current District Approaches to Restructuring

A wide range of restructuring initiatives is underway in Philadelphia:

- ▶ K-8 restructuring: Philadelphia is phasing out its middle and junior high schools, creating K-8 schools instead.
- ▶ Small schools: Philadelphia is also opening 66 small high schools (at least 20 of which will be charters).
- ▶ “Sweet 16” schools: 16 schools were provided with additional funding to continue pursuing strategies perceived as successful, but without further intervention or additional support.
- ▶ Charter conversions: 4 schools were designated for conversion to charter status (not all actually became charters).
- ▶ Creative Action and Results (CAR) Region: 21 schools were initially reconstituted and placed into a sub-district called the Office of School Restructuring. This office has been replaced by the CAR region, which contains 12 schools that have not met performance goals for six years and are undergoing a range of district-led interventions, including the appointment of school leaders trained by the University of Virginia’s Darden-Curry School Turnaround Specialist Training Program.

- ▶ The Partnership Model (“private management”): management of 45 schools has been contracted to private managers – see remainder of section.

Highlighted Initiatives: Diverse Provider Options

Diverse Provider Overview

Although not under a single banner like Chicago’s three “Renaissance 2010” models, the last three approaches listed above – the partnership model, charter conversions and the Creative Action and Results Region (CAR) – offer a similar menu of governance options for restructuring chronically underperforming schools.

In general, the partners have “thin” management autonomies. The district still manages each school’s budget, although partnership schools can select services differently than regular district schools.

The district’s basic strategy has been to introduce market forces through private contracts, charters, and university partnerships; to provide some intensive district support; and use the state takeover status to increase flexibility from contractual obligations. The SRC has unequivocal authority to enter into contracts with persons and for-profit or non-profit entities to operate schools and provide educational or other services to schools or to the district. The primary restructuring options pursued include the following:

Philadelphia's Diverse Provider Model continued

Partnership Model

Beginning in 2002, Philadelphia outsourced management of 45 of the district's 264 schools to seven external providers from three different sectors:

- ▶ For-profit education management organizations: Edison Schools, Victory Schools, Chancellor Beacon Academies
- ▶ Local Universities: Temple University (Public) and University of Pennsylvania (Private)
- ▶ Non-profits: Non-profit school management organizations, foundations, etc.

All schools in this original partnership model received additional per-pupil funding.

In reality, however, the Partnership School Model did not constitute the radical privatization experiment envisioned by some. Instead, the emphasis has been on partnership, with the district and each of the multiple private organizations sharing responsibility for academic and operational aspects of low-performing schools. Perhaps not surprisingly, there has been significant confusion about responsibility and flexibility. In 2003, the district's second RFP called for collaborative partnerships, within which external providers, rather than managing whole schools, provide a specific service for approximately \$170 per pupil. (Drexel, Eastern, Franklin, Holy Family, Lock Haven, St. Joseph's, the University of Sciences, and K12 Inc won contracts in this round.) In general, the partners have "thin" management autonomies. The district still manages each school's budget, although partnership schools can select services differently than regular district schools. In addition, the district has exerted increasing control over curriculum choices, time, facilities, special education, etc. (For more on district and provider responsibilities, see Management Dynamics section below.)

The partnership model was originally intended to be a "transitional" arrangement providing a bridge to full private management, but it has not evolved in this direction. In fact, since the schools that were served by the district's own Office of Restructuring Schools more or less outperformed most of the Partnership schools (as detailed below in the results section), the district has continued to require many of its district reform initiatives to apply to partnership schools as well.

Creative Action and Results (CAR) Region

The district had also decided to reconstitute 21 low-performing schools, but retain responsibility for their management. These schools were supposed to act as a control group for the externally run schools. The restructured schools adopted instructional and curricular changes such as block scheduling, a core curriculum, and additional professional development. They reduced class sizes and extended learning hours. Some of the schools were assigned new principals and received additional money. After the Office of Restructured Schools, which managed these

In reality, the Partnership School Model did not constitute the radical privatization experiment envisioned by some.

21 schools, was shut down in 2005, the schools mostly dispersed back to their home regions, and a Creative Action and Results (CAR) Region was opened in its place to run the twelve "regular" district schools that have continued to not meet AYP.

More recently, the district has implemented further managed instructional programs that standardize curriculum and instructional models, use data-driven instruction with six-week bench

marks and assessments, increase and standardize professional development, and increase time in ELA and math. The district has also recently moved to a site-selection process, allowing principals, school staff, and parents an expanded role in teacher selection when positions become available. Three-quarters of a school's staff have to agree to sever ties with the district's traditional hiring process to use site-based selection.

Charter Schools

The district converted one school to charter status and granted three schools "pre-charter" status. In parallel to the district restructured schools, additional per pupil funding was allocated to the full-status charter school to implement a variety of reforms. The three pre-charter schools went to external management organizations. (These Talent Development Middle Schools were in fact told they were going to become independent charters, but their teachers balked because of impending removal from the union. Thus, the district called them "transitional charters," allowing them to remain in the district but be loosely managed.)

While chartering was part of the state's and district's plans for diverse providers, its role in the scale of restructuring is not large. All told, Philadelphia has approximately 53 charter schools, but the rest are all new schools chartered by the local school board, separate from the district's restructuring efforts. In any event, Pennsylvania's charter school law does not grant the level of flexibility that laws in many other states do. For example, 75 percent of a charter school's faculty must be certified.

Alternate routes to certification are lengthy and difficult. Thus, Pennsylvania charter schools are far more constrained in terms of hiring than those in many other states. District teachers, on the other hand, may transfer to a charter school without losing their seniority, right of return, retirement and health benefits. Charter school staff can bargain collectively, but not as part of the district's regular bargaining unit.

Diverse Provider Management Dynamics

In theory, the three options in the diverse provider spectrum (private EMOs, restructured district schools and charter restructures) should have provided a clearly defined spread of governance, autonomy, and decision-making in Philadelphia. In practice, the niches that would have been occupied by the charter schools are underrepresented in the restructuring arena, and the management dynamics for the private partnerships and district managed schools are more overlapping and complex.

Compared to Miami-Dade's district-directed Improvement Zone approach, Philadelphia's partnership initiative provides a set of models that are midway out on the autonomy spectrum.

Autonomy

The restructured CAR schools are still firmly under district control. As mentioned above, the partnership schools only have autonomy in certain areas, characterized as "thin" management autonomies. Compared to Miami-Dade's district-directed Improvement Zone approach, Philadelphia's partnership initiative (along with potential charter reorganizations) provides a set of models that are midway out on the autonomy spectrum, stopping short of the more extensive authorities provided by Chicago to its Ren-10 schools.

Decision-Making

District-restructured CAR schools are subject to district-mandated reforms, ranging from curriculum to scheduling, professional development, and class size. Some were assigned new principals by the central office. Recently, however, they have been offered the option of site-selection, which allows principals, school staff and parents an expanded role in teacher selection. Three quarters

Philadelphia's Diverse Provider Model continued

Delegation of Key Responsibilities for Non-University EMOs In Philadelphia's Partnership Model

Responsibility	Entity Responsible (where responsibility is shared, first entity listed holds primary responsibility)
Provide pre-operating and professional development costs	EMOs
Appropriate operating budget for EMO schools	School District of Philadelphia
Site budget control	EMOs
Provide complete educational model	EMOs
Provide non-curriculum supplies and materials (e.g., paper, pencils, pens, chalk, erasers)	EMOs and School District
Develop school calendar in compliance with district requirements related to number of student days and staff development days	School District
Conduct professional development & in-service training	EMOs and School District
Administer state and local standardized tests	EMOs and School District
Hire, supervise, fire teachers	School District and EMOs
Hire, supervise, fire administrators	School District and EMOs
Provide administrative services (e.g., accounting, payroll, benefits management, human resources)	School District
Conduct capital repairs	School District
Provide security	School District
Supply transportation	School District
Maintain facilities	School District
Abide by all applicable federal, state and local statutes, ordinances, resolutions, and regulations	EMOs and School District
Provide English language learner program	School District
Food service	School District
Furnish/manage technology	School District and EMOs
Enroll all students in home attendance zone (i.e., catchment)	EMOs and School District
Implement district disciplinary policies and procedures (including truancy issues and separate schools and programs for students with discipline problems)	EMOs and School District
Provide special education and related services (except to students labeled "low incidence")	EMOs
Develop and maintain student reports and records (e.g., enrollment, attendance, graduation, dies-enrollment, suspensions, expulsions, transfers)	EMOs and School District
Implement accountability plan	School District and EMOs
Maintain commercial general liability insurance coverage	EMOs

Table from Morando Rim, Lauren, ECS Case Study School Restructuring in Philadelphia: Management Lessons from 2002 to 2005.

of a school's staff must agree to sever ties with the district's traditional hiring process to use site-based selection. Under this option, half the vacancies in a school can be filled by principals instead of the central office.

For EMO partnership schools, decision-making is shared with the district. A summary of how key responsibilities are delegated to non-university EMOs is provided in the table on the opposite page. Many of the university partners actually function as something more akin to professional development providers than whole-school managers.

Governance

The state's takeover of the entire school district is the central feature of the governance picture in Philadelphia. Pennsylvania created the School Reform Commission in place of the school board, and the Governor appoints three of its members. In a unique partnership, the Mayor appoints the other two members. This board then hires the CEO and other district executives.

The district restructuring schools are managed by the district in a regional structure. The partnership schools have shared governance with the EMO responsible for improving outcomes (although they do not have complete control of the factors that contribute to those outcomes) and the district central office ultimately retains responsibility for the schools.

Teacher Contracts

Staff of the 45 partnership schools remain employees of the district. In addition, the 2004 teachers' contract established the option for school-based hiring of new teachers. The SRC won this concession by working hard to gain civic support for hiring and staffing flexibility. State takeover also revoked the union's right to strike. Thus recent reforms have gone a long way toward dismantling cumbersome hiring and seniority rights. The new process may not be completely streamlined and efficient, nor does it

result in equity of staffing quality, but it provides a good deal more hiring flexibility to principals than was the case in the past.

The district also has made impressive gains in hiring and retaining better qualified teachers, according to a range of analyses of the Philadelphia experiments that we reviewed, in part as a result of the introduction of an improved human resources function with a stronger focus on teachers.

Results to Date

Within the district as a whole, performance has improved after four years of effort. The proportion of elementary and middle-school students achieving proficiency in reading and math increased substantially, albeit not spectacularly. From 2001-2002 to 2005-2006, an additional 11 percent of fifth grade students

The new process may not be completely streamlined and efficient, nor does it result in equity of staffing quality, but it provides a good deal more hiring flexibility to principals than was the case in the past.

reached proficiency in reading and 23 percent reached proficiency in math, according to state tests. Similarly, an additional 20 percent of eighth grade students reached proficiency in reading and 19 percent reached proficiency in math.

The four-year gains for Philadelphia's low-achieving schools, however, which include the majority of schools in the district, were generally on par with gains from similar low-achieving schools in the rest of the state (with the exception that Philadelphia's schools out-gained comparison schools in middle-school reading).

Philadelphia's Diverse Provider Model continued

Furthermore, according to an analysis published in February 2007 by the RAND Corporation and Research for Action, improvement among students attending the privately managed schools kept pace with, but did not exceed, the achievement gains of students in the rest of the district. While significant academic gains were made from 2002 to 2006 by students across Philadelphia, the elementary and middle schools contracted out did not achieve gains exceeding districtwide trends.

The state takeover established a nimble School Reform Commission that was able to institute reforms quickly and gave then-CEO Paul Vallas the ability to pursue his reform efforts without noticeable bureaucratic delay.

According to Rand, the major findings relating to achievement effects under the diverse provider model in its first four years can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ Privately managed schools (as a group): There were no statistically significant effects, positive or negative, in reading or math, in any of the four years after takeover. Results by provider type (universities, other non-profits, for-profits) show no statistically significant effects; neither do results for individual providers, except for significantly negative results for one provider in math and ELA and another in math.
- ▶ Sweet 16 schools: There were no statistically significant effects, positive or negative, in reading or math, in any of the four years in which they received additional resources.
- ▶ Restructured schools: There were significantly positive effects in math in all three years of implementation and in reading in the first year. In the fourth year, after the ORS

had been disbanded and the schools ceased receiving additional resources, the former restructured schools maintained a substantial (though only marginally significant statistically) effect in math.

Implications of these results, with caveats, include:

1. “Thin management” does not seem to have provided a lever for improvements above and beyond the norm, at least as it has been implemented in Philadelphia. While Jolley Christman, co-founder of Research for Action, contends “our findings show the investment in private management of schools has not paid the expected dividends,” others argue the real problem is that not enough autonomy was given. Advocates for private management of public schools say the approach works best when private managers have full control of campuses and parents decide where to enroll their children — measures that were not fully implemented in Philadelphia. In addition, some contend that the schools most at risk — those with the very worst scores, leadership, and teaching personnel — were chosen to be contracted out, making comparison with those in district restructuring unfair.
2. Philadelphia’s in-district school restructuring efforts seem to have proven more effective than expected. There is some speculation, as mentioned above, that the reason the district’s scores increased so much is because the district farmed out their worst schools to EMOs, letting the district focus on a smaller number of slightly higher performing schools. Some observers say the district placed its strongest principals in the restructured schools and gave them time to prepare for the initial year of work, as opposed to the EMOs, which didn’t receive their contracts until the summer before the initial school year started.

Strengths and Challenges of Philadelphia's Intervention Experience

Benefits of the State's Initial Push

The state takeover established a nimble School Reform Commission that was able to institute reforms quickly and gave then-CEO Paul Vallas the ability to pursue his reform efforts without noticeable bureaucratic delay. However, political, logistical and local pressures still exert significant pressures that shape how initiatives play out (e.g. the evolution of the thin management model). Vallas recently departed to become head of the New Orleans public schools, a move that many attributed at least partly to constant battling over Philadelphia's significant budget shortfalls.

Special Office for Private Management Support

The district established a development office whose purpose is to clear bureaucratic obstacles for external providers. Philadelphia's experience in contracting has confirmed that if a district chooses to contract out services, it should a) allocate time and financial resources for planning and implementing the process of private management; b) hire professionals who are expert in designing and managing contracts (a skill set that is quite new in many regards for public education;) and c) articulate in detail what it requires of the providers (see next point).

The Challenge of Role Confusion

Significant confusion has occurred in Philadelphia around the roles and responsibility of the external providers. In more recent contracts, the district gives more authority to the contractors, and also spells out performance clauses more clearly. Explicit means of assessing provider performance forms the basis for decisions relating to renewing or terminating contracts, as well as providing evidence of accountability to the broader community – a good step forward.

The Costs of Outsourcing

One lesson from Philadelphia's experience is that contracting out services has not resulted in any cost savings. In Philadelphia, the for-profit and non-profit external management fees have been a source of on-going controversy, and have been caught up in the district's overall financial challenges (the district began 2006-7 with a previously unknown \$80 million deficit).

It is possible that the costs of outsourcing in Philadelphia simply reflect the expense of doing reform work. It is also probable that the marketplace among providers here (as is the case virtually everywhere) was not well enough developed to keep initial costs down. The cost of building capacity among the "resource base" of potential external partners is an issue that state and district reformers will need to keep fully in mind, if they pursue such a strategy.